Faithful Remembering: Constructing Dutch America in the Twentieth Century

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FAITHFUL REMEMBERING: CONSTRUCTING DUTCH AMERICA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by

David E. Zwart

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Advisor: Edwin Martini, Ph.D.

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WE HEREBY APPROVE THE DISSERTATION SUBMITTED BY

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Constructing Dutch America in the Twentieth Century

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The people of the Dutch-American community constructed and maintained a strong ethnoreligion identity in the twentieth despite pressures to join the mainstream of the United States. A strong institutional completeness of congregations and schools resulted from and contributed to this identity. The people in these institutions created a shared identity by demanding the loyalty of members as well as constructing narratives that convinced people of the need for the ethnoreligious institutions.

The narratives of the Dutch-American community reflected and reinforced a shared identity, which relied on a collective memory. The framing, maintaining, altering, and remodeling of the collective memory from the 1920s to the 1970s reflected both dynamics within the community as well as pressures from the outside. The commemorations that were directed at internal audiences, such as congregational commemorations, as well as commemorations directed at external audiences, such as Tulip Time Festivals and town anniversaries reflected these dynamics. This dissertation shows the constructed nature of these narratives and the resulting ethnoreligious community. At the same time acknowledging the common descent of most of the people in the group.

Further, these narratives reflect a particular religious framework of the Dutch-American community. The members of Dutch America interpreted their experience through a Calvinistic theology. For this group, this theology meant they understood
themselves to be God’s covenant people who God blessed if they were faithful. The narratives and institutions constructed by this ethnoreligious group reflected and reinforced this religious framework.

Finally, this dissertation argues that the institutions of Dutch America remained strong from the 1920s to the 1970s because people found them helpful to navigate the changes in the twentieth century. The narratives constructed about these institutions convinced members that the congregations, denominations, and schools needed to be maintained in order to show their faithfulness. As they faithfully remembered their past and constructed a collective memory, they did so in the home of constructing a stronger Dutch America.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Historians can only write about the past because of the archives that have been
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTING AN ETHNORELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Between 1846 and the 1920s, approximately 210,000 to 240,000 Dutch Protestant migrants arrived in the United States.¹ These migrants made up only a small part of a multi-million person movement from Europe yet they and their descendants left a lasting mark on the landscape of the United States far larger and longer than the demographics would suggest. The prolonged strength of the institutions of these migrants and their descendants in the twentieth century suggests a strong, shared ethnoreligious identity that guided their actions. This dissertation asserts that the stories these Dutch Americans constructed about themselves defined the boundaries of the group and reinforced their institutions, resulting in a strong and lasting ethnoreligious identity by the middle of the twentieth century. Both the institutions they built such as congregations, schools, and settlements and the stories they constructed about themselves reflected basic assumptions held by members of this group about themselves and their place in the United States. While these institutions and stories changed through the twentieth century reflecting internal and external dynamics, this dissertation argues that Dutch Americans remembered their past through a particular religious framework. This understanding explains how they

¹ Herbert Brinks, “Introduction,” in Herbert Brinks, Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 1-2. Brinks cites the number 380,000 with 70% being Protestant. Brinks also notes at 75% of all immigrants between 1847 and 1900 settled in a few enclaves in seven states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Wisconsin).
understood themselves and their religious reasons for staying loyal to their institutions.

Dutch Americans constructed narratives about themselves in many forms that helped make sense of and give meaning to their lives. Congregations, denominations, schools, colleges, and settlements all commemorated themselves and constructed a collective, usable past to form a shared identity. These commemorations constructed, reflected, and reinforced beliefs about the migration experience, settlement and institution building, definitions of success and failure, being Dutch and American all while interpreting the past through a faith perspective. These were people who took religion seriously as an organizing belief system for all of their actions. They believed their actions had consequences beyond the immediate setting. The Dutch Americans, who this dissertation interrogates, saw themselves first as “reformed” but often used Dutch American and reformed interchangeably.2

The narratives constructed by Dutch Americans in commemorations had consequences. These narratives spurred people to action, to join and maintain institutions the community had built. Membership in a congregation associated with the Reformed Church in America or the Christian Reformed Church meant you chose to associate and participate in the Dutch-American community and share in the ethnoreligious identity. Attending Hope or Calvin College or Northwestern or Central meant that you shared a common experience and heard narratives that laid out what it meant to be participating in these ethnoreligious institutions. Participating in the institutions and the ongoing narrative construction occurring during

2 In the nomenclature of the group, “reformed” was the short-hand and distinct term for being Calvinistic Protestants. Dutch Catholics also migrated, but their absence in the narratives fits my contention that Dutch American, for those who used it most, meant reformed.
commemorations highlights the symbiotic relationship between membership and identity. Being a member did not require that the person had ancestors from the Netherlands, but Dutch ancestry did help make the narratives personally meaningful.

Dutch American ethnoreligious identity in the twentieth century included both consent and descent. 3 Ethnicity is neither totally a construct nor something “primordial,” rather it provides a way for people to cope and navigate through life. The growing literature on ethnicity as a constructed identity shows that ethnicity in the United States was not automatic, particularly for Americans with Dutch ancestry, but constructed and used by people to make choices in a whole range of ways. 4 People also made choices to claim and identity for a whole host of reasons. Ethnicity was not static but changed over time to reflect the internal and external pressures. Yet, for many Americans with Dutch ancestry, they found the identity useful from the 1920s to the 1970s to help them make sense of their world. Ethnicity, as this dissertation will show, was more than simply symbolic. 5

The process of constructing an ethnoreligious identity took place over time as the community worked with narratives about itself in its commemorations. The narratives the Dutch Americans told about themselves had a framework that provided the base for their understanding of themselves. For their American neighbors and themselves, in the 1920s and 1930s, this meant emphasizing the positive attributes the


migrants brought to the United States. During World War II, it meant highlighting the connection with the Netherlands as an ally during the war. After the war, Dutch Americans emphasized that their distinctive contribution to the United States came because of their ethnic institutions. During the 1960s and 70s, the narratives highlighted how Dutch Americans still contributed to the United States. While this aspect of their narratives emphasized how they fit in the United States, another strand in the narratives emphasized the religious reasons for keeping the separate institutions strong. This aspect of the narrative remained much more static than the other aspects. This change and continuity reflected the reality of living in the twentieth century.

Commemorations were vital to the ethnoreligious identity in the 20th century because they reflected and reinforced the boundaries of the group. They selectively chose from their past the things that they found the most helpful to bolster their identity and ensure group survival. They told their narratives in ways that could be passed on to the next generation. This reconstruction of their past to meet the needs of the contemporary culture helped Dutch Americans weave themselves into the fabric of twentieth century American life. Being part of American culture did not always take the same form, but occurred over time and in different ways. This dissertation seeks to fill in the details of how their identity changed and remained the same over time.

The process of framing, maintaining, adjusting, and remodeling narratives by Dutch Americans resulted in a number of aspects that defined the group and its understanding of itself. For instance, when constructing narratives about the migration experience, the United States was constructed as a land of freedom and opportunity while the Netherlands was constructed as a land of oppression. None of the narratives included harkening back to New Netherlands, but did use Pilgrim and
Puritan imagery. Another example, the pioneer migrants in these narratives succeeded because of their faithfulness to their Calvinistic religious. But the creators of these commemorations selectively chose what would be remembered as not all Dutch migrants were Calvinists yet these narratives did not celebrate the more multi-religious migration from the Netherlands. Dutch America, as reflected and constructed in these commemorations, was a homogenous group of migrants who were faithful to their Calvinistic faith in both the Netherlands and the United States. More important than shared language, lineage, or settlement, a shared religious faith defined the edge of the group. Being Dutch American meant that one was a member of a Calvinistic congregation that traced its roots to the Netherlands. These congregations gathered in ecclesiological union in a number of denominations. Each denomination has its own particular ethos and institutional structure, but the demographics and background of the membership in the congregations in the enclaves had much in common.

Their shared Calvinistic faith not only defined who was in the group but also influenced the way the group remembered the past and constructed its identity. A Calvinistic faith showed in the emphasis in commemorations that started with emphasizing God’s directing hand in the world. It also meant that the shape of the commemoration usually involved religious services whether it was a church, school, or settlement that did the commemorating. However, certain cleavages within the

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group can also be seen in the commemorations. For instance, many more Reformed churches highlighted that they had sons and daughters in church and mission service than did the Christian Reformed churches which had a broader view of Christian service.

For Dutch Americans living through the twentieth century, the overall framework of the story of migration and settlement would have become familiar even if aspects of the narratives might show the fissures in the community. The story of leaving the Netherlands for religious reasons and finding a place of freedom to worship in America convinced many of the need to continue to build ethnic institutions. There seemed to be little dissent from the common story told by this group. However, certain controversial episodes with-in the group received conflicting treatment as each side left competing narratives. For instance, the Christian Reformed Church commemorated its 1857 split from the Reformed Church in America. Individual congregations also crafted distinctive narratives when describing the reasons their founders started their particular congregation. Schools were less likely to describe themselves in adversarial ways yet competition did creep into certain aspects of their commonly held stories. This could clearly be seen on the basketball court when Hope College played Calvin College.

The Dutch American community and its change in the twentieth century in the United States reflect broader trends in the United States. Migrants and their descendants needed to not only deal with coming to the United States, but changing definitions of what it meant to be American. The passing of migration restriction legislation by the federal government was the culmination of a long history of defining Americans as being from northern European stock with a general Protestant religion. As the history of slavery and Jim Crow laws and earlier restriction on Asian
migration showed, many Americans clearly equated whiteness with being American. These restrictions on migration reflected struggles to define who was really American. The Dutch migrants largely benefited from these migration and racial restrictions because of their fair skin, Protestant religion, and relative ease in fitting into America yet they chose to zealously build and maintain their separate institutions.

At the same time as these restrictions were taking shape, America was undergoing profound economic changes that enticed migrants to seek American jobs. Migrants sought to create a better life for themselves in a rapidly industrializing America. Some Dutch Americans struggled with issues of union membership because it required allegiance which their faith said should only be given to God. Profound changes in farming that required larger and larger acreage would push Dutch migrants and their descendants to seek new opportunities in new places. The Great Depression challenged the group as did post-war affluence. With increased wealth, came even greater mobility as Dutch Americans scattered widely; yet most still found the institutions and concomitant ethnoreligious identity useful to navigate these various challenges.

The cultural history of the twentieth century also sets the stage for Dutch America’s construction of itself. Changing cultural definitions of the America forced Dutch immigrants and their descendants to think about themselves and relationship to the United States in new ways. As Michael Kammen showed in *Mystic Chords of Memory*, events in history can have a profound influence on culture. For instance, the Dutch Americans who were part of the Christian Reformed Church only

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cautiously supported American efforts during World War II partly because military
life threatened the loyalty and morality of the soldier. In response to cultural
cleavages of the 1960s, many Dutch Americans turned inward towards to focus new
energy on their ethnic group institutions.

Finally, the importance of the mass media cannot be overlooked during the
middle decades of the twentieth century. The “world” seemed to be more available
and it invaded the home. Instead of having to go to the theater or a dance, the radio
brought the mass media to the home without having to enter the public arena.
Television after the 1950s played a larger and larger role in the lives of Americans.
As Dutch Americans continued to emphasize group cohesion, the mass media
threatened to pull the community apart by reinforcing the ideals and values of the
broader American society.

Key Issues

This investigation into the construction of Dutch American ethnicity through
commemorative activities provides a way to understand how ethnic groups identified
themselves within American culture. I argue that the collective memory of the Dutch
American group shaped their understanding of themselves; this collective memory in
turn was shaped by a shared faith that influenced how they remembered themselves
that resulted in strong institutions. Further, I maintain that collective memory and
identity changed through the twentieth century, reflecting the historical realities faced

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9 Gerald Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the

by Dutch Americans even as they continued to find the ethnoreligious identity useful to navigate these realities.

This dissertation engages and sheds light on a number of key issues. First, its focus is on the twentieth century from the time of the end of the mass migration in the 1920s until the 1970s. Much migration scholarship either ends before World War II or starts again in the 1960s. By bridging these two periods, I show that while ethnic identity changed during World War II and the 1950s, it still had a shaping influence on how the Dutch Americans organized their lives.

Second, I engage the nexus between ethnicity and religion. As scholars have noted, the importance of religion as a set of orienting beliefs has often been overlooked by scholars of migration. Religion and religious institutions too often are dismissed as being motivated by something else such as social need or economic necessity. While not denying the importance of other aspects at play in religion, by taking religion seriously as an organizing set of beliefs—as the Dutch Americans did themselves—I seek to show how important these beliefs were for people who held them. This approach builds off the work of Robert Orsi and the scholars of “lived religion” who are not so interested in what the official theology was but how people’s actions reflected their deepest commitments.¹¹

Third, ethnicity is one of the key issues of this dissertation. As other scholars have noted, the term ethnicity has been used to denote either a primordial connection that people share with others of a similar background or a sense of shared peoplehood based on a cultural construction. Ethnicity, as it worked among Dutch Americans in

the United States in the twentieth century, falls somewhere between these two definitions. While people who claim a common ethnicity generally share common demographic or outward signifiers such as being able to trace their ancestry to a given nation state or continent, much about ethnicity is a construction of a group based on a shared story about common institutions. By looking at the stories the Dutch immigrants and their descendants tell about themselves in public commemorations it is possible to begin to connect these definitions.

Finally, I historicize the collective memory of Dutch Americans and show how it shaped actions. I place the collective memory both in its time and in its particular setting whether that is geographical, congregational, denominational, educational, or civic. While one way to organize this dissertation would have been around various sites of memory, I chose to organize around chronologically in order to show how different sites of memory influenced each other in a temporal context. I also demonstrate that the collective memory had consequences for actions as it built a strong sense of identity that molded people to continue to be part of ethnoreligious institutions.

The Dutch Americans are an ideal group for investigating definitions of ethnicity, the relationship of ethnicity to actions, and the relationship of faith to ethnicity. The definition of ethnicity as a combination of shared demographic traits and a shared story fits the Dutch American experience. While being born in the Netherlands or having ancestry in the Netherlands was important, Dutch Americans considered a shared story just as important to an ethnic identity. Commemorations were important vehicles for reinforcing a common story about the group’s reasons for leaving the Netherlands and success in the United States. Subsequent migrants from the Netherlands continued to participate in this common narrative. The Dutch
American community also exhibited a level of institutional completeness from cradle to grave that allowed them to have their primary social relationships contained within the ethnic group, even in larger metropolitan areas like Chicago.\textsuperscript{12} While many migrant groups such as Eastern European Jews and Roman Catholics built considerable ethnic institutions, few Protestant groups built the kind of institutionalization as the Dutch Americans. Their use a shared ethnic identity to build and maintain these institutions is an important contribution to the field. Finally, this was a group that shared a strong faith commitment that shaped their community. The faith of Dutch Americans dictated how they would interpret their own experience in the United States. How this group of Dutch Americans interacted with not only the broader world but also with the American religious milieu helped to define their ethnicity.

Historiographical Context

The voluminous literature on ethnicity and migration produced since World War II provides the context for this dissertation. In the post-war period, historians of migration focused on how migrants became Americans. As scholars turned away from assimilation models in the 1960s, they focused on how migrants transplanted their culture to American shores. With the subsequent rise of multiculturalism, historians have continued to ask questions about migrants and their lives in the United States. In the last twenty years, new analytical tools have provided historians with

more questions about the migrants and their culture. A concomitant rise in new frameworks for understanding migrants encouraged historians to closely examine how migrants constructed their ethnicity in the United States and made sense of the world in order to navigate it.

Historians writing in the atmosphere of the 1940s and 1950s focused on the way migrants became Americans. In 1951, Oscar Handlin published *The Uprooted* and it quickly became the seminal analysis of the migrant experience. Handlin grouped the various migrant experiences together with little regard for differences between migrant cultures. Handlin downplayed ethnic differences, no matter how ethnicity was defined. Migrants were simply on their way to being Americans and the way station of ethnicity was not important.

In the 1960s, a few historians questioned the basic story Handlin had posited. These scholars reacted to a historiography which had largely ignored ethnic groups as important actors in their own history. Rudolph Vecoli sounded the first loud protest in “Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of *The Uprooted*,” which made the case that migrants came from distinct localized cultures and homelands. The Italian migrants he studied in Chicago held tenaciously to Old World customs. Vecoli’s provocative article encouraged historians to look at the cultures of the homelands of migrants to America as well as the culture they held in America. British historian Frank Thistlethwaite had already implored historians to consider the “anatomy of migration” at an international conference in Sweden in 1960. He called historians to lift the “salt

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water curtain” and understand migrants in both their homeland and in America. These early calls did not capture the attention of the mainstream of American migration historiography, which continued to focus on assimilation, but a few historians did set to work.

The fine grained studies needed to track migrants and their culture from homeland to the United States required years to develop. By the 1980s, these studies were beginning to bear fruit. Historians working with relatively small numbers of migrants from well-defined locales showed the culture of the homeland and the ways it was transplanted to the United States. For instance, Jon Gjerde in 1985 closely examined migrants from Balestrand, Norway to the upper Midwest. He coupled a close study of the homeland situation with the way the migrants adjusted to America. Walter Kamphoefner traced Westfarians from Germany to Missouri and how they transplanted their culture across the ocean. This paradigm of examining the transplanting of cultures was synthesized in John Bodnar’s The Transplanted. Bodnar argued that migrants held their culture much more tenaciously than the general story had said. However helpful these studies were to bringing down the “salt water curtain,” they too easily ossified the migrant culture and defined it as static, something to have and the hold from the homeland.

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In the 1990s and the early 2000s, new analytical tools allowed historians to examine the culture of migrants and their descendants. The emphasis on the culture of migrant groups in the United States created an interest in how immigrants saw themselves. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* became one of the most often cited theoretical bases for this kind of analysis.\(^{19}\) Anderson’s emphasis on the imagined nature of nationalism generated an important stream in migration historiography. Historians launched efforts to understand the culture of immigrant groups and how they understood themselves. These historians also used the work of Clifford Geertz and Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm as the theoretical underpinning for looking at culture.\(^{20}\) Geertz emphasized the fluid and changing nature of culture. Ranger and Hobsbawm noted not societies construct an identity for themselves based on their past but these traditions can change over time.

This cultural turn helped generate work that looked at the role memory and collective memory played in history. Based on the work of Maurice Halbwachs and his ideas of collective memory, scholars have examined how the memories of the past changed over time.\(^{21}\) Pierre Nora defined memory as the way the past lives on in all kinds of ways.\(^{22}\) Memory can be both consensus building when all members agree


with the constructed memory and conflict causing when members use it to argue their distinctive point. The danger with memory studies is when they fail to take into account both the context for the particular way the past is constructed or fail to show the impact of the particular construction of the past for actions. Memory should be seen as another areas of social and culture life that is debated, fought over, and constructed, not the sum total of why people act.

This most recent direction in the historical scholarship has generated new questions about ethnicity focusing on how ethnicity was constructed. In an important 1992 article in the Journal of American Ethnic History, a number of eminent historians of ethnicity showed how migrants invented their ethnicity. 23 April Schultz’s book Ethnicity on Parade argued that ethnicity was “not something to be preserved or lost but rather is a process of identification at a particular moment to cope with historical realities.” 24 Orm Øverland compared how various ethnic groups constructed an identity to help make America their home. 25 These are just two examples of a growing direction in the historiography. 26

There still remain areas in the literature that need more attention. First, much of this scholarship limits the period of study to the years before the 1930s. While


24 April Schultz, Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American through Celebration (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).


26 See also Steven Hoelscher, Heritage on Stage: The Invention of Ethnic Place in America’s Little Switzerland (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) and Beth Wenger, History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
major changes occurred with the slowing of migration and the Great Depression, ethnicity continued to matter for immigrants and their children. For instance, April Schultz only discusses the 1920s and Øverland ends his study in 1930. A few scholars have examined the ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s—most notably Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Roots, Too*—but do not make the historical connection to the earlier period of ethnic construction. I bridge this gap by examining the ebbs and flows of ethnic identity.

This dissertation also contributes to the scholarship on the invented nature of ethnicity by emphasizing the role of faith in the construction of ethnicity. Just as scholarship on ethnicity as examined the culture of immigrant-derived groups, religious historiography has also turned to examine the culture of religion. Shaped by the groundbreaking work of Robert Orsi, this new emphasis connects more traditional areas of religious history that focus on formal theology and denominations to the “lived” or “practiced” religion of the adherents. Orsi examined how adherents actually lived their lives.27 This study examines how faith shaped the lived experience of ethnicity of Dutch Americans as it sees commemorations as one example of the way faith shaped activity.

Finally, this dissertation will contribute to the specific field of Dutch-American scholarship. The relatively small literature befits the relatively small ethnic group. The two foundational, encyclopedic works that attempt to cover the entire sweep of Dutch American communities are Jacob Van Hinte’s 1920s *Netherlanders in America* (translated to English in 1985) and Henry Lucas’s 1955 *Netherlanders in America*. Both seek to follow the immigrant generation as they establish Dutch

enclaves around the country. This narrative was enhanced and focused by the work of Robert Swierenga over his distinguished career. He took down the “salt-water curtain” and traced Dutch immigrants from their local situation in the Netherlands to their landing point in the United States. Swierenga’s focus on social history provides important background for this study. Two other key studies include James Bratt’s *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*. Bratt examined the intellectual history of Dutch Calvinists in America. He showed the importance of theological debates in shaping Dutch America. Suzanne Sinke’s *Dutch Immigrant Women* filled the much overlooked gender aspect of Dutch America. Sinke examined the experience of women who migrated from the Netherlands and showed how important faith was to the shaping of their experience.

This dissertation engages the scholarship on Dutch America by questioning some of the assumptions scholars have made about ethnicity and being Dutch in America. Too often the moniker Dutch is used to stand for a whole host of characteristics such as thrift, religious piety, and cleanliness. However, how these

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characteristics became associated with being Dutch in America is generally overlooked. By looking at commemorations, I will show that Dutch America was a construction that served the purposes of the group and reflected the faith of the group that used this term.

Methods and Sources

This study relies on the insights of social history and cultural history to illuminate how Dutch Americans understood their place in America in the twentieth century and acted on it. Social history provides the setting for the cultural history. Social historians have enthusiastically sought to tell the stories of people from the “bottom-up.” The insights gained from a careful analysis of the experience of people generally not associated with the traditional narrative provides new understanding of the past, especially the migrant past. Relying on approaches borrowed from disciplines such as anthropology and literary analysis, cultural historians have worked to understand the way people understood their experience. Cultural history could be defined as the intellectual history of the general population. Both social and cultural history approaches are key for this study.

My working definition of Dutch Americans are those who traced their lineage to the Netherlands in one way or another. Another key sociological determining one’s membership in Dutch America was being a part of one of the key institutions. These included churches, schools, and settlements dominated by Dutch Americans. It is important to understand these institutions and how they grew and changed in the twentieth century. It is equally important to understand how Dutch America produced a collective memory in the twentieth century and its relationship to these institutions. The collective memory was produced largely in public events such as anniversary
celebrations of churches, schools, and communities. Therefore, it will be imperative to understand the relationship between the key institutions and the stories told by the community.

It just as important to understand how collective memory was constructed and its relationship to actions in supporting these institutions. Collective memory was produced in a number of places such as historical pageants and anniversary religious services. Dutch Americans celebrating their churches produced anniversary books and other commemorative publications. Colleges often included a “history” section in the catalogs which would help interpret the past for the students and alumni. Settlements celebrated centennials and other national holidays in public spectacles. These places of commemoration provided a selective retelling of the community’s past. The stories told and received were an important part of the group working to keep its members in the group.

Reading these commemorations as texts provides insights into the cultural history of Dutch Americans. These commemorations were time bound as the story changed over time to reflect a different understanding of themselves. For instance, anniversaries celebrated during World War II included tributes to servicemen, therefore placing themselves squarely in America’s “good” war. The Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church regularly included a list of important dates in the development of the denomination but these dates changed regularly throughout the twentieth century. These places of commemoration reflected the concerns and hopes of the individuals who produced them.

It was impossible to examine all commemorations produced by Dutch Americans during the twentieth century. I focused on the commemorations of institutions of Dutch America in three different geographic areas with substantial
Dutch American concentrations during the twentieth century. West Michigan is the first area due to its size, institutional completeness, and importance for other Dutch American settlements. The settlement area stretched from Muskegon to Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo and includes both larger metropolitan areas and rural churches. It also included two denominational colleges and seminaries, the settlement of Van Raalte at Holland, and the headquarters of the Christian Reformed Church. Holland also hosted the world-famous Tulip Time Festival as well as an office of the Netherlands Information Bureau, an agency of the Netherlands government. The second and third areas are in rural Iowa. The Pella colony in Marion County started in the same year as Van Raalte’s under the leadership of Rev. Hendrik Scholte. This community included a college of the Reformed Church in America and a Tulip Time Festival. Sioux County in Northwest Iowa was founded as a daughter colony of Pella. It includes two colleges, and celebrates a Tulip Time festival. After World War II, a few sections make comparisons across the Canadian border with the post-war Dutch Canadian community to highlight the influence of the Dutch Canadians on the Dutch Americans.

The first large group of primary sources is church anniversary books and documents. These largely serve as the archives of the local congregation and important parts of the anniversary celebrations themselves. They were both an archive and narrative produced with considerable effort. Usually produced by individual congregations, some of the first were produced in Dutch while later ones were bilingual before English became the only language used for these books. Certain patterns emerge even though no two follow the exact same layout. These books usually included pictures and descriptions of the preachers that served the congregation as well as pictures and descriptions of the building or buildings the
congregation occupied over its history. The written history section in most of the books emphasized the founding of the congregation with the subsequent years focused on preachers and buildings. The books also regularly included the liturgy for anniversary celebration itself, most often as a worship service. Thanks to attentive archivist and churches, hundreds of these books have been preserved in the archives at Calvin College, Hope College, Northwestern College, Central College, and by the local congregations.

Larger ecclesiastical bodies of churches also commissioned the production of anniversary books. Both the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America commemorated their anniversaries. The Christian Reformed Church celebrated its centennial in 1957 with books, pageants, and other celebratory events. The Reformed Church in America, with its eastern roots and western immigration, held major celebrations in 1928, 1947, and 1978. Comparing the local anniversary celebrations and the larger regional celebrations provides insights into the local and national identity of Dutch Americans.

Schools of Dutch Americans also told their stories in commemorations. College catalogs and anniversaries reveal how the college saw its history and role in the community. The schools of the Dutch Americans were an important place for the larger community to come together in joint endeavors. School commemorations are important places of commemorations of ethnicity. Christian day schools, generally associated with the Christian Reformed Church, tell their own stories about why they began. Again, college archives and specifically Calvin College which houses the archives of the association of the private Christian schools, are the main repositories.

Finally, towns and settlements commemorated themselves. Emanating from local history groups or the business community, these celebrations set the broader
context that institutions constructed their narratives. These included centennials and other anniversaries which some communities did produce anniversary books that told the local story in great detail. Some of these settlements also celebrated their ethnicity through Tulip Time festivals. These festivals were produced for visitors but in the process they reinforced and shaped how the community members understood themselves.

By examining the Dutch American community in the twentieth century through its commemorations, this dissertation shows the importance of an ethnoreligious identity for shaping actions despite the perception that it might be little more than symbolic ethnicity. And for Dutch Americans, ethnicity mattered because it came with a very particular religious understanding of themselves and the world. To be a faithful remembered and construct an ethnic identity was seen as religious work in itself.
CHAPTER II

THE INSTITUTED DUTCH-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The Dutch-American community that started in the middle of the nineteenth century began when few ministers and followers arrived in the Midwest. These early and subsequent migrants established settlements and built institutions from the 1850s to the 1920s that lasted throughout the twentieth century. The social and religious characteristics of these migrants from the Netherlands shaped the institutional patterns established in the first seventy years of the community in the Midwest.

The instituted life centered around a few settlements with other organized colonies radiating from these. The enclaves that survived revolved around congregations as part of two main denominations, the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church.\(^1\) The Reformed Church in America had been established in 1628 in New Netherlands and reached out to the nineteenth century migrants in the Midwest. The Christian Reformed Church started when a number of congregations separated from the Reformed Church in America in 1857. These

\(^1\) I use Reformed Church in America and Christian Reformed Church throughout even though the names of these denominations changed over time. Prior to 1867, the Reformed Church in America had the name Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in America. The Christian Reformed Church took its name Holland Reformed Church in 1859, changed it to Free Dutch Reformed Church in 1861 and True Dutch Reformed Church in 1863, followed by Holland Christian Reformed Church in 1880. The name Christian Reformed Church was used starting in 1904. The official name since 1974 has been Christian Reformed Church in North America. Richard H. Harms, ed. *Historical Directory of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Historical Committee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2004), vii.
denominations also supported secondary schools, colleges, and seminaries that would provide the intellectual leadership for the community.

Migration Patterns Prior to the 1920s

The migration of approximately 210,000 to 240,000 Dutch to the United States between 1846 and the 1920s created a distinct ethnic group in the United States. While this number is very small compared to the large-scale movement of other Europeans to the United States in those same year, the Dutch migration sticks out because of a few particular patterns. Historians of migration have noted the patterned nature of the movement of Europeans to the United States since at least 1960, when of Frank Thistlethwaite called for historians to understand the anatomy of the migration. The migration of Dutch created particular communities and affected the assimilation that shaped ethnic communities and the United States during the twentieth century. Many fine grained studies of the European migration have proliferated since the 1980s with the use of computer databases. These studies traced

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4 Robert Swierenga is often credited with this path-breaking work. See, among others, his early articles published on the use of computers: “Clio and
migrants from Europe to the United States in order to understand the anatomy of migration and differentiate the characteristics of the people who migrated. Some of the best research resulted in books that traced small numbers of migrants who migrated sequentially, like links in a chain, from well-defined locales in Europe to settle in specific places in the United States. Chain migration relied on tangible efforts to remain connected through such means as letters and pamphlets, printing newspaper reports, and sending remittances to continue the chain. For example, John Gjerde examined migrants who left Balestrand, Norway, and settled in the upper Midwest. Walter Kamphoefner traced migrants from Westfalia, Germany to Missouri. Robert Ostergren did the same with Swedish immigrants to the upper middle West.⁵

As one of the pioneers in this research, Robert Swierenga set about to work on history “from the bottom up.” He blazed a path not only in migration history generally, but also within Dutch-American history. According to Swierenga himself, much of the history about Dutch Americans had emphasized “theological and religious affairs and personalities” and had given less attention to economic and social forces that shaped the migration and subsequent community. His dogged determination eventually led to breaking the “saltwater curtain” of Dutch migration on both sides of the Atlantic and changed how he and others would tell the story of

the Dutch migration. Constructing a computer database of the names of all the migrants from the Netherlands listed on ship manifests and in the United States Census in the nineteenth century, Swierenga showed the demographic details of the migration. This research resulted in a number of articles throughout the 1980s and 1990s collected in a book entitled *Faith and Family*.  

Swierenga noted a number of characteristics and patterns of the Dutch migration. By examining closely the economic and demographic situation of migrants in the 19th century, Swierenga gave a detailed picture of the motivations for migration. Approximately 200,000 Dutch peasants and rural artisans resettled in the United States between 1820 and 1914 and only later did migrants come from urban areas. The migration moved through various stages based on the economic and political situation in the United States and the Netherlands, affected a relatively small number of locations on both sides of the Atlantic, included a high percentage of family units, and was shaped by religious commitments. The characteristics of the migrants played a key role in pattern formation for the subculture throughout the twentieth century.

**Phases**

The migration to the United States fell into distinct phases with peak periods

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7 A full bibliography of his work through the year 2000 can be found in Hans Krabbendam and Larry J. Wagenaar, eds., *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000).

from 1847 to 1857, 1865 to 1873, 1880 to 1893, and 1903 to 1913. These phases corresponded with the economic and political situation on both sides of the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{9}

Swierenga noted that, like much of the European migration to the United States,

\begin{quote}
The causes of the Dutch transatlantic migration are complex and derive from underlying structural problems and specific historical events in the homeland. . . . The moderate degree of Dutch emigration indicates that rational choice and pragmatic preference, rather than dire want, led most Dutch to depart.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

Stagnation characterized the economic and related social situation of the Netherlands in the mid-nineteenth century. Agricultural production could not keep up with a growing population. The population grew from two million in 1815 to three million in 1850. A potato crisis in the 1840s hit the growing rural population particularly hard as it brought increased food prices and led parts of the countryside to the brink of famine. Even with these problems, until 1860, the Netherlands was the second richest country in Europe after the United Kingdom, based on per capita income statistics.\textsuperscript{11}

While the economic problems did not spur the kind of massive migration as happened in Ireland, it did provide one reason for some Dutch to leave the Netherlands. As Swierenga wrote, “it was a feeling of relative deprivation and the prospect of lowered expectations and a declining living standard, rather than the actual fact of poverty and suffering, that prompted many to consider the alternative of emigrating to the United States.”\textsuperscript{12} In the period from the 1850s to 1880s agriculture in the Netherlands had benefited from renewed trade and success. Agriculture then

\begin{footnotes}
\item[9] Ibid., 3.
\item[10] Ibid., 14.
\item[12] Ibid., 26.
\end{footnotes}
suffered a set-back in the 1880s and 1890s when it faced dropping wheat prices in the face of cheap imported wheat. Other crop prices also dropped as production grew in those areas as wheat production dropped. Grain farmers particularly suffered and laid off their laborers. These laborers could not all be absorbed by manufacturing that focused on small-scale industries with off-season farm laborers. These farm laborers made up the bulk of migrants in the period from 1880-1893, the high point of Dutch migration to the United States.\textsuperscript{13}

The economy as a whole industrialized very slowly because of relatively high wages and low capital investment. The transition to large industrial firms finally took root by 1909 when almost one half of the labor force found work within these companies. Prior to the 1890s, the migration consisted mostly of families from rural areas seeking land in the United States; only after that did it move “to a labor migration of single young men and women.”\textsuperscript{14} This relatively late transition from rural to urban, farming to industrial migrants helps explain many of the characteristics of the settlement patterns in the United States as migrants sought land for farming.

Approximately seventy-five percent of all Dutch overseas migrants between 1820 and 1920 chose the United States and in the first three high phases the percentage usually exceeded ninety-five percent.\textsuperscript{15} While the United States always dominated as the destination prior to 1920, other options started to gain favor particularly after 1900. From 1901-1920, only 56 percent of Dutch emigrants chose the United States. The other choices included the Dutch East Indies, South Africa, and

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 38-39.
Canada. Between 1915 and 1920, half of the emigrants went to Asia. Migration also took place within Europe. Of the nearly 285,000 emigrants from the Netherlands between 1901 and 1920, 175,000 stayed within Europe, mainly going to Germany and Belgium. Canada attracted almost 11,000, Argentina attracted a few thousand as did Brazil. Australia had approximately 1000. South Africa claimed about 5,000 Dutch migrants. The choice of the United States both before and after 1900 helped define the characteristics of the community of Dutch that formed in the United States.

The United States had many features which appealed to Dutch migrants, particularly for farm laborers. The first migrants in the 1840s saw an opportunity in the West to found new colonies. New opportunities for land helped create another strong migration phase from 1865 to 1873 when the economy of the United States grew rapidly following the end of the Civil War. The growth of railroads and the Homestead Law of 1862 helped more and more Dutch take up more and more land. In the years of highest migration from 1880-1893, land-hungry Dutch to migrated to the United States where they still could find opportunity for economic advancement. The economic depression of 1893 ended that bulge of migration until 1903 when another rise in migration occurred. The final high phase of migration settled in established communities and in more urban areas.

16 Ibid., 38-40, 50.


The world situation also affected the ability of Dutch to migrate. The Franco-Prussian War in 1871 depressed the number of migrants. The Spanish-American War had a similar affect. Clearly, however, World War One had the biggest impact. The years between 1915 and 1919 cut the number of migrants in the world generally. In the Netherlands, the rate of overseas migration fell in half.\(^{19}\) The condition of war made movement difficult and dangerous.

**Enclaves**

Beyond the chronological patterns shaped by economics and politics, Dutch migration to the United States also followed geographical patterns from certain locations in the Netherlands to particular enclaves in the United States. Swierenga pointed out that less than one-third of the “municipalities experienced notable overseas out-migration” from the Netherlands.\(^ {20}\) His research revealed that “only 134 [municipalities], or 12 percent [of 1156], provided nearly three quarters of all emigrants in the period from 1820 through 1880; 55 municipalities (5 percent) sent out one half of all emigrants; and a mere 22 municipalities (2 percent) furnished one third of all emigrants.”\(^ {21}\) This kind of concentration of sending locations showed the kind of migration fever that could grip certain localities. These municipalities were mainly in rural areas where the economy was based on agriculture. These rural migrants looked to the United States largely because of the availability of land in the American West. When migrants headed to the United States, they sought out the

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\(^{19}\) Swierenga, *Faith and Family*, 49.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 76.
same kind of rural situation they had left. Even if they at first settled in urban areas such as Chicago or Grand Rapids, hopes for a farm were never out of the question as the example of Sipke Hoekstra demonstrates. He migrated to Chicago area in 1893 and his teaming business so quickly grew he sold it in 1910 for a very good profit. He used the proceeds to purchase a large tract of land, the goal of many Dutch migrants, in Texas. However, he abandoned the property and had returned to Chicago by the summer of 1912.22 The rural and concentrated origins of the migration helped shaped the kinds of ethnic culture that developed in the United States.

The kind of chain migration precipitated by the migration cycles and migration tradition would funnel migrants to established enclaves and churches where they would first encounter the new culture, mediated by familiar faces and institutions. Swierenga noted that in 1870, the main settlement locations were “within a fifty-mile radius of southern Lake Michigan shoreline from Muskegon [Michigan] . . . to . . . Green Bay on the West side. Secondary settlement areas were in central Iowa, southeastern Minnesota, and New York City region including northern New Jersey.” In fact, Herb Brinks estimated that seventy-four percent of foreign-born Dutch living in the United States between 1850 and 1900 concentrated in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Wisconsin.23 Later, Dutch spread farther West in search of cheap land. As the number of immigrants grew and spread out from the original colonies of Pella, Iowa and Holland, Michigan, they looked for land. According to Henry Lucas, a “colony fever” raged in Pella in


1867 and 1868. The goal was to move to where land was cheaper.\textsuperscript{24} One of the most organized movements took place in 1870 when a group under the leadership of Henry Hopers left the Pella colony and founded another one in Sioux County, Iowa. This group sought cheaper land but still the opportunity to live together. Sioux County soon attracted both new migrants and migrants from the older settlements. As Sioux County grew, many again looked to the western horizon and soon a thriving colony existed in Charles Mix and Douglas counties in South Dakota.\textsuperscript{25} This kind of colony formation would continue, particularly throughout the West. Settlements sprang up in, among other places, Minnesota,\textsuperscript{26} Montana,\textsuperscript{27} Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and Washington, particularly Lynden.\textsuperscript{28} Michigan also saw the growth of the original colony around Holland as well as a spreading out of migrants and their descendants. This spreading out took place to both more urban areas such as Grand Rapids\textsuperscript{29} and Kalamazoo but also the rural north. This movement and settlement in new places

\textsuperscript{24} Lucas, \textit{Netherlanders in America}, 351.


\textsuperscript{28} See Lucas, \textit{Netherlanders in America}, 351-444.

\textsuperscript{29} David W. Vander Stel, “The Dutch of Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1848-1900: Immigrant Neighborhood and Community Development in a Nineteenth Century City” (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1986).
extended the edges of Van Raalte’s original idea of a colony. The growth of these new communities followed a pattern of establishing enclaves in the United States similar to the rural villages they had left.

Settling together became the norm for the Dutch migrants prior to the 1920s. The close clustering of the Dutch in a few locations helped develop a distinct identity. As Swierenga noted, “few immigrant groups, if any, have clustered more than the Dutch. Thus, despite a relatively low number of overseas migrants, the Dutch single-mindedness for the United States and their clannish settlement behavior created a choice environment in which to nurture and sustain a strong sense of ‘Dutchness’ for many generations.”

The chain migration shaped the kind of life and culture these migrants constructed in the nineteenth century and it became the defining paradigm for how Dutch-Americans would think about their community in the twentieth century.

Families

Not only did the migration fall into particular phases and flow from a few locations to a limited number of enclaves, it consisted of migrants from particular family situations. A high level family migration characterized the Dutch migration compared to many European migration groups in the nineteenth century. In fact, Swierenga noted that “over 80 percent of all emigrating couples or singles were accompanied by children, mostly of school age” making it “a ‘family affair’ to a greater degree than that of any other nationality.”

These migrants had made a


31 Ibid., 4, 57.
calculated decision to migrate as a family. Very few were “birds of passage” as some other groups would be labeled. Swierenga noted how they “carried a traditional familism and localism to America as part of their cultural baggage.” The rural immigrants from a few particular places “valued an ordered, traditional society based on kinship, village, and church.” They sought to translate these institutions to the new world as they were mostly “conservatives intending to maintain their culture in a new environment. Group identity and the desire for religious and cultural maintenance dictated settlement in segregated communities on the frontier or in urban neighborhoods.”

The dominance of family unit migration had a lasting impact on the desire to establish and preserve enclaves and churches and schools. While institutions clearly mattered to those who left the Netherlands, those institutions would gain importance for the group of migrants who now had more cultural power to establish their own institutions in the United States. Migrants formed religious and ethnic institutions worth starting and preserving.

The family centeredness of the Dutch migration also affected the way women would experience the transition. Dutch women generally migrated as married women or with their parents and siblings. A few migrated with other relatives. The work of translating old world realities to the new world situation has most carefully been analyzed by Suzanne Sinke in *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880-1920*. She examined how migration rearranged gender roles and how Dutch migrants in the United States “put those roles back together, sometimes replicating, sometimes revising, sometimes totally reformulating their ideas of what women and men should

32 Ibid., 80.
do.” Sinke described the Dutch women as “relatively conservative in adjusting gender roles,” particularly for those who came with families compared to the few single young women who tended to be less conservative. While the family migration shaped the way women would adjust to migrating, Sinke also noted, “The family was the most important institution in turn-of-the-century Dutch America, even more important than the church.” This family centeredness would influence the kinds of institutions they would form because “the Dutch Calvinist view of the world in this period was a corporatist one in which family and community intervened between state and individual.” The institutions were more than just a collection of individuals, but existed as entities in their own way.

Religious Convictions

These migrants moved not only with certain economic, community, and family expectations, they also arrived in the United States with particular religious beliefs. These beliefs took shape within the Netherlands of the nineteenth century and directed developments within the Dutch-American community. The leaders of the 1840s migration had left the national Hervormde church. This Calvinist church had become too “modern” for some and led to a secession in the 1830s. This secession led to a modest level of persecution for the leaders and parishioners. These Seceders


34 Ibid., 4.

35 Ibid., 12.

36 Ibid., 50.
would set the direction of developments in the United States.\textsuperscript{37}

Many historians of Dutch America have noted the importance of religion as a motivation for migration. Henry Lucas, in his massive 1955 tome *Netherlanders in America*, wrote that the causes of migration were “partly social and economic, but predominantly religious.”\textsuperscript{38} The religious cause as the preeminent explanation for migration stemmed at least partly from the reasons reported by the original migrants from the 1840s. Since the early migrant leaders had come from a secession in the church in the Netherlands, they viewed their actions through a religious lens. Migrating for simply economic or social reasons would not be enough for a group that had endured religious persecution. As Rev. Hendrik P. Scholte, the leader of the 1847 migration to Pella, Iowa, noted, “if temporal advantage is the sole or the most important incentive, we can with certainty advise such people against emigration.”\textsuperscript{39} Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte, who led a group of Seceders to West Michigan, used similar rhetoric to demonstrate that God was behind the movement of migrants.\textsuperscript{40} Since these earliest migrants had interpreted the migration process in religious terms, much of the following scholarship emphasized this aspect for migration even if there were other, less pious reasons for migration.


\textsuperscript{38} Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 42.

\textsuperscript{39} Hendrik P. Scholte, “Aankondiging,” *De Reformatie* (November 1845); quote in Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 151.

\textsuperscript{40} A. C. Van Raalte’s speech at the September 17, 1872 commemoration of the founding of the city of Holland in Henry S. Lucas, *Ebenezer* (New York: Netherlands Information Bureau, 1947), 21-30.
While religion may not have been the primary reason for migrating, it played a role in shaping the subsequent community. As Robert Swierenga has noted, “economics explain the ‘why’ of immigration but religion largely determines the ‘how’ of immigration and its effects.” The migrants arrived in the United States with certain expectations for practicing and implementing their religious convictions. This included everything from the kind of ecclesiastical organizations they would find, ecumenical relations they maintained, the schisms perpetrated within their own churches, and how they dealt with America. The Dutch Protestant migrants in the United States encountered and interpreted their world through a particular religious understanding.

The overwhelming majority of Dutch migrants to the United States were Calvinists who fell into two main categories, either Hervormd or Seceder/Gereformeerd. The split in the Calvinist church in the Netherlands took institutional form in the Secession of 1834, which revolved around a number of pastors and lay people who left the official, Hervormd, church in what they called the Afscheiding. They wanted to return to a more orthodox Calvinist theology passed on from the oude schrivers or “ancient writers” and the confession of the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619). They believed the Hervormd church had too closely aligned itself with Enlightenment ideas and was too hierarchical in its organization. According to James Bratt, these mainly rural people “wanted Christianity to be made full and deep.” The political situation in the early and middle nineteenth century in the Netherlands made it hard for dissenting groups to carve out a place for

41 Swierenga, Faith and Family, 6.

themselves, particularly in the 1830s. For groups like the Seceders, this meant their clerics suffered from stiff fines and the breaking-up unauthorized religious services. Many Seceders were not hired and or their businesses were shunned. The official persecution ended in 1841 with a more moderate king but the un-official harassment continued.

For many Seceders, migration seemed a viable alternative to the pressure they felt in their homeland. In the years from 1846 to 1850, the number of Seceders who migrated was disproportionately large compared to the overall population. Eight out of every 1000 Seceders migrated to the United States in those years while only four out of 1000 Hervormde Kerk members migrated. Seceders contributed 57 percent of all Dutch migrants in those years but were only a minuscule 1.3 percent of the population in the Netherlands in 1849 while the Hervormde made-up 57 percent of the population. In fact, while Seceders claimed only 3 percent of the population by 1869, they sent a total of 20 percent of migrants from the Netherlands in the years 1831-1880.

Though the Secession grew, many with the same leanings stayed within the official church until the 1880s when Abraham Kuyper led another secession known as the Doleantie. Kuyper’s impact was to create a brand of Calvinism that “did not stop at [changing] the church order, but . . . created a life-and-world-view, and such a one as was, and still is, able to fit itself to the needs of every stage of human development,

43 Swierenga, Faith and Family, 16. See also ten Zythoff, Sources of Secession and Bruins and Swierenga, Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Nineteenth Century.

in every department of life." Kuyper pastored a church, edited a newspaper, started a university, founded a labor union, and organized a political party in addition to being a church leader. In 1892, some of the Afscheiding group of churches and the churches of the Doleantie joined to form the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk. Even after these secessions and unions, many conservative Calvinists stayed within the Hervormde Kerk.

This brief look at the religious situation obviously tells only part of the story. The many twists and turns within the ecclesiastical bodies and in the lives of the migrants themselves have been described by others in great detail. One major issue for this dissertation involves the differences between the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America. James Bratt illuminated many of the differences between the more insular Christian Reformed Church and the more Americanized Reformed Church in America. Other specific literature examines the history of each of these church bodies, some with more scholarly focus than others. A related issue is the level of church attendance and participation for the migrants from the Netherlands to the United States. Migration often heightened or changed the level of being involved in the church as a center of social engagement.

45 Abraham Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 171. The lectures were originally delivered in 1898 at Princeton University under the auspices of the L.P. Stone Foundation.

The Duyst Family

The story of the migration of the Duyst family illustrates several of these patterns. The migration of Jan and Gijsbertje Duyst and their seven children followed a circuitous path but with characteristic motivations. The family left the Netherlands in 1910 in search of a more secure economic future in Chile. The family found economic security in Chile by working on various farms. However, they felt isolated from the Chilean culture and longed for the security a transplanted community of Dutch migrants could provide. The family moved in two stages to the United States beginning in 1920 in search of such a community. When the whole family finally reunited in Kings County, California in 1923, they found a community based on shared religious beliefs that Dutch migrants had brought from the Netherlands to the Central Valley of California starting in the early 1900s. Though the path was unique, the motivations that guided the Duyst family also guided many other Dutch migrants who would eventually settle in the United States.

Gijsbertje Zijl-Duyst was not happy with her life in the small fishing village of Spakenburg located on the Zuider Zee. According to the Duyst family historian Everett Vande Beek, Gijsbertje Duyst’s brother died in a fishing accident in the Zuider Sea “causing her to hate and fear the sea for the rest of her life.” Even with this hatred, she married the fisherman Jan Duyst in 1884. They lived the precarious life of a fisherman’s family with boats leaving at 12:01 A.M. on Monday (to avoid working on the Sabbath) and returning on Saturday afternoon in time for worship services the next day. Fishermen risked their lives on the shallow, wind-swept inland

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47 Everett Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures (n.p.,[1995]), 24.
sea for negligible economic returns. The young mother Gijsbertje feared her husband would not return from the fickle sea and leave her destitute.

Gijsbertje also worried about the prospects for her seven children. She worried her four boys would take up the same precarious fishing life and her three daughters would marry fishermen. Spakenburg offered few other economic opportunities at the beginning of the twentieth century. The oldest boy, Cornelius, had accompanied his father on the boat starting already in 1904. Gijsbertje also agonized about the threat of war coming from Germany. She did not want her boys swept away by either the sea or the powerful German army. Gijsbertje would do everything in her power to protect her children.\textsuperscript{48}

To remedy the situation, talk in the Duyst family turned to migration. The family considered Canada and the United States. Gijsbertje, the driving force behind migration, exchanged letters with a former Spakenburger in Pella, Iowa and the family knew others who lived in Canada. However, Chile became their target destination in 1909. According to Cornelius Duyst, the fourth child and oldest son, Gijsbertje’s brother, Jan Zijl, had heard about alluring opportunities in Chile. A widower, Zijl always looked for new opportunities to make money. The family decided to migrate to Chile on very sketchy information. A land company planned to bring Dutch settlers to undeveloped land they had bought from the Chilean government in the southern part of the country. They would establish a colony of Hollanders.\textsuperscript{49} The Duyst family headed for this settlement with high economic and religious expectations.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 24-25.

\textsuperscript{49} Cornelius Duyst to Klaas de Graaf, in Vande Beek, \textit{To Lie in Green Pastures}, 22, 29-30.
An advance party consisting of Jan Zijl, Jan’s son Klaas, and Dirk van de Beek, the husband of the second daughter Margaretha, set sail in August of 1910. Upon arrival in Valdivia, Chile, they realized the colony in southern Chile would not be an appropriate place for them because it’s remote location. Dirk van de Beek telegraphed his family telling them not to come but the family had sold all their belongings, packed thirty-six crates of building supplies they were told they would need, and made all other necessary preparations. They could not turn back. Thankfully, Dirk secured work on a dairy farm with the help of another Dutch immigrant, Mr. Disselkoon. Dirk telegraphed again to tell the family to come. The whole family would eventually work on the same dairy farm. On 14 November 1910, the rest of the family arrived in Valdivia.

The Duyst family enjoyed some economic success in their new home. While their jobs on the first farm lasted only one season, work was plentiful for hard-working Dutch migrants in Chile as they either rented farms or worked for wages on farms. They also ate a larger variety of foods and in larger amounts than they had in Spakenburg. Cornelius Duyst recalled, “We were richly blessed from the very beginning and our daily needs were always amply provided for. We were always able to buy whatever we needed. Our coming to South America seemed like a dream-adventure to us!” Their economic success did not translate into contentment with the situation.

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50 Ibid. 34-35.
51 Cornelius Duyst to Klaas de Graaf, in Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 44.
52 Cornelius Duyst to Klaas de Graaf, in Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 52.
The Duyst family never felt at home in Chile as they longed for other Hollanders. Already when they docked at Montevideo, Uruguay on their trip to Chile, they thought about settling with the Dutch colony they knew existed in nearby Buenos Aires. While in Chile, the Duyst family largely remained alienated from both the German migrants they encountered and the Spanish speakers whom the family called “natives” even as they learned to speak Spanish and ride horses from their Chilean neighbors. Cornelius Duyst recalled,

The natives who lived in those areas were a seemingly uncivilized people to us, enslaved to drink, living a hand-to-mouth existence, never planning for the future. Those who managed to own any land at all soon lost it to the wealthy landowners, selling it for small sums of money which they desperately needed or wanted at that moment. They practiced little or no religion and lived like pagans.

The Duyst family steered clear of the churches in Chile because they did not match the family’s expectations and beliefs. The Germans in their town had started a Lutheran Church but the family only saw the women attending. The Roman Catholic Church also attracted mainly women. A small missionary church, founded by North American Baptists, held services in Spanish but few attended. Not only did attendance at these churches not meet their expectations, none of them matched the Calvinistic theology of the family’s church in Spakenburg. The Duyst family hoped that the few fellow Dutch migrants widely scattered across Chile would have the same beliefs but they perceived them to have “little or no interest in religious matters”

53 Cornelius Duyst to Klaas de Graaf, in Vande Beek, *To Lie in Green Pastures*, 43. This was after being on a ship with no other Dutch passengers.

54 Cornelius Duyst to Klaas de Graaf, in Vande Beek, *To Lie in Green Pastures*, 47-49.
According to Jan Zijl, “the Hollanders you happen to meet in this country are usually the worst. They are often drunkards – and from them you hear Dutch profanity. You must know how to speak Dutch to be really profane.” The Disselkoons, fellow Dutch immigrants who had helped the family when they first arrived, became close friends. However, the Duyst family felt the Disselkoons did not have much in common religiously because “they were very liberal in their beliefs.”

The religious isolation caused great consternation for the Duyst family. They felt things would have been much better if they had settled with a larger group of Dutch immigrants who could have built a community around a Calvinistic church. By 1916, they decided a second migration to find such a community in the United States would be the only remedy. However, the family waited to leave Chile because they needed to save enough money and allow for the resumption of ocean transportation after World War I. Only the Duyst family migrated as Jan Zijl and his children assimilated with little trace of the family’s Dutch roots.

The Duyst family migrated to the United States in two stages. Gijsbertje worried about marriage prospects for her five unmarried children, especially her third daughter Lutje who was approaching age thirty. Marrying any of the locals was out of

55 Cornelius Duyst to Klaas de Graaf, in Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 53.

56 Jan Zijl to Esteemed Friends, May 11, 1913 in Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pasture, 80.

57 Cornelius Duyst to Klaas de Graaf, in Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 53.

58 Cornelius Duyst to Klaas de Graaf, in Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 57.

59 Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 84-86.
the question. Lutje began corresponding with a childhood acquaintance from Spakenburg, Steven Koelewyn, who had moved to Minnesota. Correspondence developed into a marriage proposal and Lutje with her brother Cornelius, age twenty-seven, traveled to Minnesota in April and May of 1920 and as Cornelius noted in his diary, “realized as soon as we stepped out of the train that we were at a place where Hollanders lived.” Lutje and Steven married almost immediately upon her arrival in 1920 and lived in Edgerton, Minnesota. Not only was Dutch spoken generally, but there were also two Christian Reformed Churches that conducted services in Dutch. The Dutch migrants from Chile had found a religious community where they felt comfortable. The oldest daughter Gerritje and her husband Teunis Koelewyn (no relation to Steven Koelewyn) arrived in Minnesota from Chile two years later in the spring of 1922.

The three Duyst children had found a secure community, but Gerritje and Teunis Koelewyn despised the climate of Minnesota, which bore no resemblance to the climate they had enjoyed in Chile. An article appeared in the 1920 De Wachter, the official Dutch-language periodical of the Christian Reformed Church denomination alerting them to the “paradise” of Kings County, California. The pastor of the Dutch-speaking Christian Reformed Church in Hanford, Rev. John De Jonge, wrote the article to encourage people of Dutch descent to settle there to help the Christian Reformed Church congregation grow. Climate and an established religious community convinced Teunis and Gerritje Koelewyn to move quickly to Kings County in November of 1922. They invited the rest of the family still in Chile to come to California. When the rest of the Duyst family arrived at San Pedro,

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60 Diary of Cornelius Duyst in Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 154.

61 Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 159-169.
California from Chile on 24 May 1923, they realized again that they had come to a foreign land as they only spoke Dutch and Spanish and not English. After traveling by bus in Kings County, a local “Good Samaritan” introduced them to a Dutch-speaking acquaintance. He called the Dutch-speaking Christian Reformed Church which eventually led to a reunion with Teunis and Gerritje Koelewyn.

Finally, the Duyst family felt at home, as they had found the transplanted religious community they longed for in Chile. Lutje and Steven Koelewyn and Cornelius Duyst and his fiancée joined them in Kings County in 1923. The family quickly became members of the Hanford Christian Reformed Church and immersed fully into this religious community. They took leadership positions and the younger children found marriage partners. All the children shortly owned their own farms and the family grew and prospered. Mrs. Gijsbertje Duyst was said to have found “green pastures” before she died on 25 November 1923.62

By the time the Duyst family arrived in Kings County, California, Dutch migrants had been living there for nearly thirty years and had integrated themselves into the network of Dutch-American institutions through their ties in the Christian Reformed Church. The church there had sought the Christian Reformed Church for guidance as they organized in 1912 and used the denomination’s periodicals to stay connected and attract others. The Duyst family had been an island in Chile, but in Kings County, they connected with a group who shared similar religious beliefs and expectations.

62 Vande Beek, To Lie in Green Pastures, 171.
Institutional Patterns Prior to the 1920s

Those who arrived in the United States from the Netherlands migrated because of economic reasons from a limited number of locales with their families to a limited number of enclaves with intensely held religious ideas and a history of faithful participation in church life. These migrants established institutions which would help them reproduce their Old World lives and ameliorate their transition in the United States prior to the 1920s. The first colonies became the model for subsequent settlements. As Herb Brinks noted,

The structure of these first colonies . . . became paradigmatic for those that followed, and the model persisted into the twentieth century. Each new community dominated a chosen landscape of contiguous farms and a village center with Reformed churches and district schools. Successful settlements attracted successive waves of new immigrants and, in all, absorbed nearly three-quarters of the Netherlanders who arrived between 1847 and 1900.63

These paradigmatic settlements centered around the church as the key institution.

The importance of the church as foundational to Dutch ethnic identity and shape of the community cannot be overstated. Hans Krabbendam recently noted that “without exaggeration one can conclude that churches were the most important shaping force of the Dutch-American subculture. They provided a center, homogeneity, continuity, social resources, and networks of communities.”64 Suzanne

63 Brinks, Dutch American Voices, 2.

64 Hans Krabbendam, Freedom on the Horizon: Dutch Immigration to America, 1840-1940 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 146.
Sinke observed that “churches were the bedrock of community, which made an ethnic culture possible for many. It took critical mass as well as the desire to maintain ethnic identity, and for a group as small as the Dutch, a church congregation often fulfilled these roles.” Dutch migrants took with them a theology that placed the church as an important aspect of all of life. In their Calvinistic, covenant theology, the church served not only to unify beliefs about the transcendent, but also served as the hands of feet of Christ working in the world. The church as an institution was set apart by God, a holy communion of God’s elect.

An ethnic identity keyed to religious beliefs was not unique to Dutch migrants in the nineteenth century. Scholars of migration and ethnicity in the United States have noted the importance of the religion for ethnic identity among many groups. Will Herberg in 1955 already began examining the role religion played in creating an American identity. He examined how migrants assimilated into one of three groups—Protestant, Catholic or Jewish—based on their religion. Herberg’s emphasis on religion as key to ethnic identity continued through the 1970s. Flipping the equation, Martin Marty called on religious scholars to acknowledge ethnicity as the skeleton of religion in America that provided the framework and shape of religious associations. Harry Stout in 1975 wanted to provide a “coherent framework” for discussing the relationship between ethnicity and religion. He noted that ethnicity

65 Sinke, Dutch Immigrant Women, 196.


67 Martin E. Marty, “Ethnicity: The Skeleton of Religion in America,” Church History 41, no. 1 (March 1972): 5-21. This was originally delivered as the Presidential Address at a meeting of The American Society of Church History in December 1971.
could become a religion, which he called an ethnoreligion. In fact, “if ethnoreligious faith is an expression of ultimate allegiance, and the ‘church’ represents an institution conceived to maintain and perpetuate that allegiance, then the churches, sects, and denominations become as important as symbols of ethnic allegiance as they are for themselves.”\textsuperscript{68} For Stout, the church played such a large role in ethnic identity formation that “religion and ethnicity in America realized identical expression.”\textsuperscript{69} Timothy Smith’s influential article in 1978 called on historians to note the dynamic relationship between religion and ethnicity. He wanted historians to view religion and ethnicity as more fluid than they had, examine their interaction more closely, and study how the American experience had altered the relationship between religion and ethnicity.\textsuperscript{70} 

A number of scholars took up the calls of Marty, Stout, and Smith. A number of scholars working on the relationship of religion and ethnicity in the 1970s contributed chapters to *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America* edited by Randall Miller and Thomas Marzik. The authors focused on the particular experience of migrants in urban America with chapters by Thomas Barton’s on Czech immigrants and William Galush’s on Polish immigrants, among others.\textsuperscript{71} These studies showed the importance of the religion and the church as an institution for ethnic identity in an urban setting. In rural areas, as Robert Swierenga pointed out in 1997 in his

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Harry S. Stout, “Ethnicity: The Vital Center of Religion in America,” *Ethnicity* 2 (1975): 207.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 219.
  \item \textsuperscript{70} Timothy L. Smith, “Religion and Ethnicity in America,” *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 5 (December 1978): 1155-1185.
\end{itemize}
presidential address to the Agriculture History Society, “the church was more than a religious meeting place, it was a cultural nest, integrating families, social classes and nationality groups. It gave members a cultural identity and status and socialized them into the community.”72 For migrants to the Midwest, this was particularly true. Robert Ostergren noted that “there can be little doubt that the church as an institution played a major role in the organization and development of community on nineteenth-century American frontiers, especially in the Middle West.” This activity created what he called a “heavily churched landscape” with a high level of “religious intensity.”73 Jon Gjerde’s authoritative *The Minds of the West* noted how the West served as an area for immigrants from Europe to have the space and freedom to establish their own institutions, particularly churches.74 Dutch migrants in the middle of the nineteenth century who had broken with the official church in the Netherlands had experience starting their own church institutions and they took advantage of the freedom of the American West.

From their first settlements in the nineteenth century, the Dutch Protestant migrants emphasized the need to establish church congregations. Henry Lucas wrote in 1955 that “without offering the opportunity for religious services, it was practically impossible to start a new Dutch community.”75 James Bratt also noted that “those


75 Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 496.
[Dutch] individuals and settlements lacking a religious confirmation of ethnic identity have mostly melted away without significant trace. As congregations became the heart of each locality, so denominations have been the networks binding together the Dutch communities across the country, and church-related colleges and periodicals have provided the main forums of intellectual activity."\(^{76}\) This emphasis started in the Netherlands. The nineteenth century had brought about a surge in associational life. There were many voluntary associations such as professional and Christian service organizations. For those who planned to migrate, this took the shape of societies to help ease the logistical burden. The emigration societies of Albertus Van Raalte and Hendrik Scholte were open to adult males and did not have exclusively church membership. One group, from the province of Zeeland, organized loosely as a congregation so they could bring a minister with them.\(^ {77}\)

The members and leaders of the 1834 *Afschieding* had left the *Hervormde* church over issues about the way the church was organized and a more liberal theology. The leaders of this movement included both pioneer leaders Van Raalte and Scholte. They did not like being forced to do things based on the wishes of the government which they felt went against the church order that the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618 and 1619 had established.\(^ {78}\) Scholte had left the *Hervormde* church while Van Raalte had not been allowed to be ordained in the established church because of

\(^{76}\) Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 37-38.

\(^{77}\) Krabben, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 31-33. In the nomenclature of Dutch Protestantism, the congregation “called” a minister to serve them.

\(^{78}\) Church order is nomenclature for the protocol the church followed. ten Zythoff, *Sources of Secession*, 43-57.
his sympathies. This willingness to establish un-authorized churches allowed these two pastors to apply their ideas about the church to the new situation in the United States. The religious situation European migrants found, as Mark Noll and others have noted, was characterized by the lack of an official state church. The “freedom” to establish churches as they saw fit was one of the noticeable differences between Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century.

For the first Dutch migrants in the nineteenth century, worshipping together was their primary consideration. The story is told of Van Raalte meeting with congregants in the Holland, Michigan, area under a forest canopy in the winter of 1847. Throughout 1847, the small number of migrants regularly held services in the various shanties. They built their first log church building in the summer of 1847. In the other small outposts of Dutch migrants in West Michigan besides Holland itself, the compulsion for Sunday worship services offered a semblance of routine. In Zeeland, Michigan, under the direction of Rev. Cornelius Van der Meulen, the open sky provided the setting for the first services in the summer of 1847. In Pella, the impulse was the same even if Rev. Hendrick Scholte himself, given his congregational and free-church leanings, resisted being the minister. As migrants settled in other places, like Orange City, Iowa in 1870, they would start with worship services as soon as possible.

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82 Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 87-147.
There were generally two services held on Sunday and attendance was expected and looked forward to. Sermons were generally doctrinal in nature and one usually covered the Heidelberg Catechism as the Church Order had instructed. The liturgy of the service included Psalm singing, often with a song leader, reading a portion of the Bible, and the sermon. The sermon was the key aspect of the service as Communion was generally only served four times per year. Usually a minister was needed to preach the sermon but if no minister was available, reading a prepared sermon from an approved set was taken on by a leader. This could happen even when a very few migrants gathered and showed the importance of hearing a sermon as part of the worship service.\(^83\)

Besides being a the center of worship, the congregation for the Dutch migrants was an institution to ensure right doctrine and living. The congregation attempted to hold members on the right path in beliefs and action. Entrusted mainly to the elders and pastor of the church, these men undertook a practice of visiting each family in the church prior to Communion in a practice called house visitation (\textit{huisbezoek}). This was a testing of each member of the family on their worthiness of partaking in Communion. The doctrinal parameters prescribed by the confessions needed to be adhered to and the elders and pastors were held to a high standards.\(^84\) The elders and pastor could also intervene in disputes within the congregation and larger community. The minutes of the consistory (elders and deacons) meetings of the Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan contained much information about the disputes in the mid-

\(^83\) Ibid., 492-496.

\(^84\) The confession of the Dutch protestant churches as established as the Synod of Dortrecht in 1618 and 1619 were the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort. Together they are referred to as the three forms of unity.
nineteenth century that the elders and ministers became involved in. Elders and pastors received this power based on the idea that they were given the “keys of the kingdom” by God. They were the shepherds of the congregation and it was their duty to watch over the congregation. The congregation chose these men by vote but with the understanding it was God doing the real choosing.

Thirdly, the congregation served as an institution to connect migrants to a network of churches who shared doctrine and ecclesiastical culture. For churches in the Dutch Reformed tradition, the church order governed the relationship between congregations as well as the way the individual congregation functioned. The congregation followed rules and protocols which required constant attention in the life of the congregation. This order laid out how individual congregations in the Calvinistic Reformed churches governed themselves, the proper calling of ministers, the role of elders and deacons and many other aspects of congregational life. One of the original reasons for the Afschieding in the Netherlands was the changes made to the Hervormde church order in 1816. The church order used by the migrants in the United States had rules about who could be a minister and the protocol for their appointment. It also laid out the protocol for forming new churches both in new locations and deciding when a church became too large in a particular location and a new one needed to form. In Holland, Michigan, this splitting of churches took place already in 1862 when Hope Reformed was formed as an English-speaking


87 See ten Zythoff, *Sources of Secession* about changes in the church order.
congregation mostly made up of Hope Academy and College faculty. The Third Reformed Church began in 1867 when First Reformed had grown too large. In Pella, Iowa, the first migrants had separated into four different congregations by 1856 with no official connections between them. Only in 1856 did two of these groups unite to form a congregation and affiliate with a larger body, the Reformed Church in America. A second church affiliated with the Reformed Church in America (using English as its main language) in 1863 and a third in 1869. In addition to their similar doctrines, the church order brought these churches into contact with each other.

The church order bound congregations in networks where they held each other accountable in both geographically based groups of churches called a classis and a national network called a synod. A classis was a meeting of representatives of the various churches. The first classis of the migrants was formed almost immediately in 1848 in Holland, Michigan area in what was known as the Kolonie. The congregations of Holland, Zeeland, Graafschap, and Vriesland met together in April 1848. The names and number of classes grew and changed over time to reflect the changing geography of the settlement and religious schisms, but the commitment to


89 “Seventy-Fifth Anniversary” First Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa, 1931. Available at the Joint Archives of Holland, Church Files. Hereafter the Joint Archives.


91 *Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858*, translated by a Joint Committee of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Company, 1943), 18.
the church order remained steadfast.

Classis Holland reached out to be part of a larger group almost immediately in 1848. At first, they tried to stay united with their brothers in the Netherlands, but also sought out help from the Reformed Church of America in the East. This denomination dated back to 1628 when the first Dutch arrived in New Netherland. It had a strong base in New York and New Jersey whose members formed a group called the “Holland Emigration Society” to help the new migrants as they passed through the east coast ports in the nineteenth century. When one of their members, Rev. Wyckoff, visited Holland, Michigan in 1849, he invited Classis Holland to join the established denomination. Classis Holland did this in 1850 and established ties to the Reformed Church in America that both groups found mutually advantageous. The Eastern section of the church had tried to start churches into the West with limited success. The migrants in Michigan particularly welcomed the economic support they received in building institutions.

However, not all of the Dutch migrants to West Michigan appreciated these ties to the Reformed Church in America. If the church order provided a way to properly establish relationships, its application also could lead to schism as had occurred in the Netherlands. The start of another ecclesiastical organization in 1857 by ten percent of the Dutch migrants in West Michigan left a lasting mark on the community. When the Christian Reformed Church started in 1857, it began as a loose group of churches from Graafschap, Polkton, Nordeloos, and Grand Rapids (all in Michigan). These churches wrote a letter to Classis Holland in April 1857 notifying

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93 The manner in which this merger took place eventually became a source of contention.
the classis that they were leaving with only two ministers, Koene Vanden Bosch and H.G. Klyn. People from Vriesland joined the secession a few days later.\textsuperscript{94} They left partly, at least, because they felt the church order and the agreement to join the Reformed Church in America allowed them to leave at any time. Those who left perceived the Reformed Church in America as not being orthodox enough. The secessionist churches itemized these issues including allowing non-Reformed Protestants at communion, hymns being sung, and neglecting preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism and regular family visits.\textsuperscript{95}

While the secessionists enumerated the above issues, historians have written much about the causes of the split from both sides. Robert Swierenga tried to determine if they came from one particular place or another or if they were mainly twice seceders, meaning they had left the \textit{Hervormde} church and now left the Reformed Church in America. He found that the greater percentage of Seceders came from more traditional areas of the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{96} Herbert Brinks noted how differences already present among Seceders in the Netherlands drove the two groups apart. Those migrants who followed Van Raalte and Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp (sometimes called Gelderse Richting) in the \textit{Afschieding} were more willing to join the Reformed Church in America while the followers of Rev. De Cock and Rev. Van Velzen (sometimes called the Drenthse Richting) were more likely to go to the Christian Reformed Church, particularly the pastors who were trained by these men in


\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Classic Holland Minutes}, 242.

\textsuperscript{96} Swierenga, \textit{Faith and Family}, 175.
their parsonages. The most recent full discussion was by James A. De Jong. He wanted to emphasize the continuities between the two groups and how it was mutually beneficial, in the end, for both denominations. These studies point to the way religious explanations sometimes either obscured or justified other fissures within the community. This would not be the last time the community appropriated religious language to justify institutional actions that also stemmed from other factors.

Whatever the causes of the schism, it is clear that the Christian Reformed Church struggled as a church body. With only 750 people at its beginning, it attracted few new members. In fact, the Polkton congregation returned to the Reformed Church in America. The churches of the Christian Reformed Church sought connections with broader ecclesiastical bodies. They first reached out to their mother church in the Netherlands, the Christelijke Afgescheiden Gereformeerde Kerken but that group did not want to take sides in a dispute across the ocean since Van Raalte had also been part of their denomination. A proposal to join the Old School Presbyterian Church in 1863 failed when they discovered those congregations used hymns. Another pastor suggested joined the Associate Reformed Church but that did not work either. Even choosing a name was not a simple task as it was only after at least 4 meetings of their classis that they decided on Holland Reformed

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97 Brinks, “Religious Continuities in Europe and the New World,” in The Dutch in America: Immigration Settlement, and Cultural Change


99 The best explanation of this early stuff, particularly the particulars of the churches is in Bruins and Swierenga, Family Quarrels.

100 Bruins and Swierenga, Family Quarrels, 92.
Church which was then changed in 1863 to True Holland Reformed Church to differentiate more clearly from the Reformed Church in America then known as the Dutch Protestant Reformed Church. They decided on Holland Christian Reformed Church in 1880.101

Denominational Growth

The Christian Reformed Church grew slowly as it struggled to gain recognition from the mother church the *Christelijke Afgescheiden Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands so subsequent migrants would join the Christian Reformed Church. Fourteen new churches joined between 1864 and 1870, half having tried affiliations with other groups. These new congregations spread from Paterson, New Jersey, to Wellsburg, Iowa, but struggled to attract and keep ministers. Even the training of ministers in the parsonage of Rev. Douwe Vander Werp, one of the few ministers, could not do enough to keep up with the need for ministers.102

The Christian Reformed Church finally saw significant growth in the 1880s driven by two related phenomenon. First, another group within the Reformed Church in America in West Michigan became concerned about developments within the denomination. This time some grew concerned over eastern churches allowing Masons to serve in the consistory. Some churches petitioned the Synod of the Reformed Church in America between 1880 and 1882 wanting the synod to take a strong stand against the practice. When they did not receive the answer they hoped


102 Ibid., 189-205.
for, many left the denomination. While only a few full congregations left to the Christian Reformed Church, eleven new Christian Reformed Churches were formed in the area around Holland, Michigan, and in Alto, Wisconsin. The larger implication for the growth of the Christian Reformed Church came from gaining the endorsement of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland in 1882 on the eve of a spike in the migration. The new migrants coming to the United States following this endorsement swelled the ranks of the Christian Reformed Church. From its small start in 1857, the denomination grew to 12,201 members and 39 congregations in 1880 then exploded to 37,834 members and 96 congregations in 1890 and 47,349 members and 144 congregations in 1900. The Christian Reformed Church formed one synod with 13 classes and 245 congregations in 1920. By 1920, the Christian Reformed Church had established itself with a viable network of congregations and classes, and as a denomination with a distinct identity.

The Reformed Church in America also grew prior to 1920. This denomination had two distinct sections with one being centered in New York and New Jersey and the other in the Midwest with the new migrants. The Reformed


104 Bruins and Swierenga, Family Quarrels, 131 provides a summary of these statistics.

105 Jaarboekeje ten dienste der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord Amerika (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1920), 21. This includes the immigrant congregations in New Jersey. Bratt noted in Dutch Calvinism in Modern America that “Religion . . . showed itself strong than ethnicity technically defined. From the start, ‘Dutch’ America incorporated immigrants from east Frisia and Bentheim, both across the German border.” (38). See also George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, eds., Breaches and Bridges: Reformed Subcultures in the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000).
Church in America had been working to extend itself to the West but had limited success until the migration starting in the 1850s. From 1850 to 1920, the number of members in the Reformed Church in America grew from 34,500 to 136,000, mostly as the result of migration to the Midwest and from a higher birthrate. However, Luidens and Nemeth pointed out that the growth rate of the RCA in the years prior to 1880 was quicker than the years after the 1880s when the Christian Reformed Church captured more of the migration following the decision on Masons. When Classis Holland joined the RCA in 1850, it started the seed in the west that by 1920 included the Particular Synod of Chicago and the Particular Synod of Iowa. The Particular Synod of Chicago had six classes with a total of 125 congregations. The Particular Synod of Iowa had seven classes and a total of 128 congregations.

By the 1920s, the two denominations also developed distinct identities. The Christian Reformed Church coalesced around trying to stay separate from the

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107 The Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Fourteenth Regular Session of the General Synod of The Reformed Church in America (New York: The Board of Publication and Bible School Work, 1920), 225-269. It should also be noted that there were a number of churches in these synods that had been started prior to the 1850 merger and a number of German speaking congregations, particularly the Classis of Germania and the Classis of Pleasant Prairie. It also does not include immigrant congregations in New Jersey.

American culture as much as they could by relying on its migrant character. Krabbendam attributed this to a clearly articulated worldview for those “who were very conscious of their identity.” The congregations of the Reformed Church in America, which had brought the Dutch migrants in the Midwest in contact with the older Eastern churches, had much more affinity for joining the American culture.

These similar yet separate denominations allowed migrants and their descendants to choose between two options. Members of the denominational identities could share a community and live in a shared space while at the same time having their worldviews confirmed.

Denominations and classes served as the primary networks for Dutch migrants, but not all migrants joined these two denominations. Migrants on the edge of the core settlement areas or in cities like Chicago or Grand Rapids could slip away from the grasp of the network. Dutch migrants in Wisconsin (and some in Michigan) joined the Presbyterians as others also flirted with this ecclesiastical arrangement.

The denominations established networks uniting disparate geographic areas through regular meetings of the leaders. Classes met regularly with the leadership of the churches meeting to hold each other to the orthodox life and doctrine. The synod meetings also served as a network of ministers and leaders. These meetings were the

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110 Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* makes this argument throughout the book.

most public expression of the kind of shared experience the migrants who chose to join in the Dutch-American community. Denominational newspapers and magazines such as the Reformed Church in America’s *Christian Intelligencer* and the Christian Reformed Church’s *De Wachter* and *The Banner* created a community among the readers. These publications offered a way for the faithful to stay up to date on the debates and issues the churches faced. They told the people how to think about themselves and gave them ammunition in thinking about their life in the new situation. The denomination also focused members on shared programs such as missions and schools. Behind only the church, the schools of the Dutch migrants provided a way to knit the group together. The growth of these denominations as networks prior to the 1920s built ethnic institutions that helped migrants stay together.

**Educational Institutions**

Schools provided a foundation for sharing culture with the next generation. They also served as a focus of institution building and group effort. For the students, the shared educational experience, particularly at the secondary and higher education levels, brought them into contact with a wider geographic distribution of Dutch migrants. They learned about the broader group of Dutch migrants by interacting at the schools. Establishing academies and colleges was a fundamental aspect of ethnic building as it trained the young within the culture. The effort to build colleges and seminaries also functioned as another network of shared effort and the common experience among the graduates. The culture of the group would develop and build on itself. As Henry Lucas noted, “from the beginning of their settlement, Dutch

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immigrants sought to implement the concepts of education traditional among
members of the Reformed faith.”

The schools started virtually simultaneously with the churches. The migrants from the Netherlands, though not from the most well off classes, had benefited from a general emphasis on education in the Netherlands, particularly after the school law of 1806 created a public educational system. Learning to read was imperative for Protestants who needed to be able to read the Bible. The people of the Netherlands also emphasized education in an Enlightenment sense of human improvement, good citizenship, patriotism, and virtue. However, education and control of schools became issues for the Seceders before leaving the Netherlands.

One of the reasons for the first wave of migration by Seceders was for the opportunity to have schools outside the control of the state authorities. They wanted schools that emphasized their doctrine and understanding of the world, not what they perceived as the goals of the state schools. When he started the Kolonie in West Michigan, Van Raalte hoped to be able to accomplish the kind of control the Seceders

113 Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 598.


desired by working thought the established school system in America. By settling
together in a colony, these migrants would be able to control the public, common
schools, which they started in 1848. Van Raalte believed that the elementary
education needed to transmit the three R’s, religious doctrines, and moral integrity
could be accomplished under the aegis of the public schools.\textsuperscript{116} When he established
his Pioneer School in 1851, perhaps Van Raalte’s hope for a public school had
changed. The Pioneer School also included a secondary school under church control
and therefore could emphasize Bible and catechism teaching even more. This Pioneer
School received support from the Reformed Church in America “to prepare sons of
the colonists from Holland to be educated in Rutgers College.”\textsuperscript{117} It took the name
the Holland Academy in 1857 and in 1858 had its first building. It expanded into a
college starting in 1862 with a freshmen level under the leadership of Philip Phelps.
It received the endorsement in 1863 from the General Synod of the Reformed Church
in America to become a college named Hope. By 1866, the Academy had added a
complete four-year program and taken the name Hope College.\textsuperscript{118} This fledgling
institution required the help of the more financially secure Eastern sections of the

College} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

\textsuperscript{117} Lucas, \textit{Netherlanders in America}, 599.

\textsuperscript{118} Elton J. Bruins, “Early Hope College History as Reflected in the
Correspondence of Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte to Rev. Philip Phelps Jr 1857-1875”
in \textit{The Dutch Adapting in North America: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth
Biennial Conference for the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American
Studies}, ed. Richard H. Harms (Grand Rapids: AADAS, 2001), 1-3. See also Elton J.
Bruins and Karen G. Schakel, eds., \textit{Envisioning Hope: Letters Written by Albuertus
C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps Jr, 1857-1875} (Holland, Mich.: Van Raalte Press;
Reformed Church in America to maintain itself and provide teachers and professors.  

Under the leadership of Phelps, Hope College also added theological education in 1866 because 7 or the first 8 graduates wanted to continue in their preparation to be ministers in the Reformed Church in America. The General Synod again gave its approval with the hope for continued growth in the West and concomitant need for ministers. Phelps, however, perhaps a man before his time, also wanted to extend Hope to a full university with law and medical faculties. This ambitious plan strained both financial and organizational resources, which eventually caused the closing of the theological education in 1877 by the General Synod. The causes of the closing were debated at the time between those who said it was money and others who said the East feared the growing power of the West in the Reformed Church in America. Theological training in Holland, Michigan started again in 1884 when Nicholas M. Steffens was installed as a professor of theology. Assistance from college professors filled out the course schedule. This time, the Theological Department was essentially a separate institution from Hope College. It finally received the name Western Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in America in 1885.  

The preparatory, or secondary school, school continued as a department of Hope College until 1928 when it became the College High School (also

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called Hope High School) until it closed in 1937.\textsuperscript{121}

Hope College continued despite its early struggles. The leaders needed to continually convince those not in West Michigan that Hope was the concern of the wider denomination. They asked the denomination for more financial support, but received relatively little requiring them to turn to individual donors, including Andrew Carnegie, to keep the doors open.\textsuperscript{122} The leaders also changed the composition of the Council of Hope (Board of Trustees) to more broadly represent of the denomination and not just local members. In 1922, it consisted of 2 members from each of the classis of the synods of Chicago and Iowa. It also carried on despite its small student body. The number of graduates stayed between a low of 1 in 1872 and high totals of 52 in 1920 and 96 in 1930. The average number of graduates between 1866 and 1924 was 14.5 per year. The years from 1866-1875 had 5.2, the years 1876-1885 had 6.1, the years 1886-1895 had 7.3, the years from 1896-1905 had 14.8, the years from 1906-1915 had 21.1, the years from 1916 to 1924 had 47.2 graduates. The first women graduated in 1882. The overwhelming number of graduates went on to seminary and served as pastors and missionaries with many becoming teachers as well.\textsuperscript{123}

Hope College and Western Theological Seminary were not the only education institutions of the Reformed Church in America. Besides Rutgers and New Brunswick Seminary in the East, Central College in Pella, Iowa, and Northwestern

\textsuperscript{121} Stegenga, Anchor of Hope, 243.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 130-144.

\textsuperscript{123} Willard Wichers, ed., The Hope Milestone of 1930 (Holland, Mich.: Hope College, 1930). This year book of the college included an alumni directory filling over 120 pages.
College in Orange City, Iowa, belonged to the constellation of Reformed Church in America educational institutions. Central College in Pella, Iowa only came under the direct control of the Reformed Church in America in 1913 but had started already in the 1850s. The Baptist State Convention of Iowa in 1853 sought to start “an institution of liberal and sacred learning, under the control of the Baptist denomination” and chose Pella with the support and encouragement of Pella founder Rev. Hendrick Scholte. He provided the land for the campus as well as 160 acres as an endowment. He also served as the first president of the Board of Trustees. Scholte’s outreach to Baptist neighbors fit with his more congregational ecclesiastical stance and some of his theology. While controlled by the Baptists in Iowa, it did attract a number of children of Dutch Protestant migrants. The college began with big aspirations to expand into a university with a medical, law, and divinity schools but by 1898 had given up those hopes and officially changed its name from Central University of Iowa to Central College. The college struggled to keep the support of the Iowa Baptists, insure adequate funding, and retain faculty members. The competition between another Baptist college, Des Moines University, and Central for scarce resource eventually led to the Baptists throwing their support to the Des Moines institution while Pella’s would be transferred to Reformed Church in America ownership in 1913. This transfer meant the Reformed Church in America, which also controlled Hope College, would be responsible for the control and maintenance of the college. At the time of transfer, the Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America reported that one third of the total enrollment of 166 were students from

Reformed Church in America families. It had 21 faculty members and expenses of $20,000 with an income of $7000 from tuition.\textsuperscript{125} Clearly the support of the local congregations not only played a decisive role in supporting the transfer of ownership of the college to Reformed Church in America but also perpetuating the mission of the college as a “nonsectarian, but Christian in the broadest sense possible.”\textsuperscript{126} The transfer did result in new faculty and administration being appointed by the board including the president, Dr. M.J. Hoffman, who had served at Hope College as professor of Latin. It also included an attached secondary school, Central Academy, which closed in 1928. It was not a large institution as its student population shrank to only 50 students in 1917-1918 (some had left for World War I) but grew slowly to serve 200 students in 1926-1927.

The migrants in the congregations of Reformed Church in America in other parts of the country also showed interest in education. While Hope College included a preparatory school at the secondary level, other locations worked at starting their own secondary institutions to prepare students to enter colleges and from there into church work. The founders of Orange City, Iowa started plans for a secondary school almost immediately after arrived in the 1870s. The Sioux County Dutch population grew rapidly in the 1870s both in numbers of settlers and in development of farms and villages.\textsuperscript{127} In 1875, Rev. Seine Bolks, who had helped in the founding of Hope

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.,” 26-29.


\textsuperscript{127} Brian Beltman, “Ethnic Territoriality and the Persistence of Identity: Dutch Settlers in Northwest Iowa, 1869-1880” The Annals of Iowa 55, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 101-137. This is an excellent analysis of this time period and the importance of territoriality of Dutch settlers in Sioux County.
College, arrived in Orange City and began plans for a secondary school. With growing economic prosperity in the area, a group of preachers and businessmen finally established Northwestern Classical Academy in 1882. It opened with just 25 students but grew to 74 by 1889. Northwestern Classical Academy had an average enrollment in the seventies during the 1890s, in the eighties during the 1900s and was at its largest with 116 in 1922. Girls made up one third of its students on average.128 Most of these students came from a small geographic area. For instance, in 1892, 50 of the 66 students came from Iowa. Northwestern Classical Academy suffered from the same precarious financial footing as Hope and Central. While it did seek aid from the Reformed Church in America and received some, it never received what it thought it should. One of the reasons for this lack of denominational support was the narrow geographic focus of Northwestern. Not only were its students from a restricted area, its Board of Trustees was comprised of members of Reformed Church in America congregations nominated by the Board itself and approved by the local classis. This led to a very small pool of candidates. For instance, in 1927, all the members of the Board resided in Sioux County.129

The emphasis on secondary education also showed itself in the founding of other academies to start the training of future ministers and church leaders and serve as feeders for the colleges. The Harrison Academy in South Dakota began in 1902 when the Dakota Classis started the school following the movement of Dutch immigrants from Sioux County. It was a one man operation of Rev. B.D. Dykstra. It


129 Ibid., 74-76.
lasted only four years and was briefly re-organized in the 1920s. Dutch immigrants in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, started the Memorial Academy in 1901 and lasted until 1937 as a prep-school for Hope College. Ostfrisians within the RCA in Iowa and Illinois formed their own German language classis in 1893 and immediately set to work starting an academy and junior college in Pleasant Valley, Illinois. It began with forty students and lasted for three years from 1894 to 1897 to prepare students to serve in the churches particularly. It closed for two years before restarting as only an academy in 1899 with both boarding-school and day-school students. Many of the graduates went on to serve as ministers and returned to the churches of the classis that started the school. Of these secondary academies, only Northwestern grew to a college, starting in that direction in 1928 when it added a junior college program.

These Reformed Church in America educational institutions united the efforts of the Dutch migrants together in important ways. All had some relationship with the Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America, even if none received the support they hoped. Faculty served variously in the different schools. For instance, the first president of Northwestern Classical Academy and Junior College in 1928 had been a professor at Central College. Many of the academy faculty at Northwestern were Hope College graduates and many of the graduates of Northwestern Academy went on to Hope College for their college education. In fact, of the nine graduates


131 Krabbendam, Freedom on the Horizon, 241.

132 The History of Pleasant Prairie Classis and Pleasant Prairie Academy (1943). Available at the Joint Archives.

133 De Jong, From Strength to Strength, 74-76.
from Northwestern in 1891 who went on to college, five went to Hope and in 1892, eight of the eleven who continued their education went to Hope. Central College became an integrated part of this network after its transfer to Reformed Church in America control in 1913.

While the members of the Reformed Church in America concentrated on a series of institutions at the secondary and collegiate levels largely to prepare their own leaders, the members of the Christian Reformed Church had a more expansive goal in education. They focused not only on preparing leaders at the college level, but also on education in private, Christian schools at the primary and secondary levels. These divergent paths started to clearly differentiate the two denominations in many communities and in the ethos of the denominations. Many of the Christian schools started as primary schools under the authority of individual churches, but after the 1890s they became parent run schools, separate but still closely associated with the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church.

From almost the start of the denomination in 1857, the synods of the Christian Reformed Church called for each and every congregations to start a separate school for instruction in Dutch language and Calvinist doctrines. However, by 1870, parochial schools had only been started in Kalamazoo, Grand Haven, Grand Rapids, and Muskegon in urban areas where control of the public schools could not be gained. Many within the Christian Reformed Church felt that public schools taught a Christianity that was acceptable to the members of the Christian Reformed Church just as these community schools were sufficient for members of the Reformed Church in America. The effort required to start and maintain separate, Christian schools produced a continual debate about their worth and purpose. Harro Van Brummelen has shown that these early attempts for Christian schools promoted isolation through
Dutch language instruction. He said, the “rationale for Christian schools focused on preserving Dutch Calvinism as an enclave in American society.” The first Christian schools were parochial and often poorly organized with large classes and teachers chosen more for their piety than training or skill in teaching. Some only operated during summer vacations, largely as language schools so children could understand church services in Dutch. The growth of these schools was slow until the 1890s when the Christian Reformed Church gained many new migrants. In 1885, there were only 400 students enrolled (4 schools in West Michigan and one in the Chicago area) but by 1890, the number of students had risen to over 1500.

These primary schools (grades 1-8) not only grew, but also changed their organizational structure from being parochial to private in the 1890s and early 1900s. Usually made up almost exclusively of Christian Reformed Church parents, the separate societies took control of the schools. In fact, the Christian Reformed Church synod in 1892 encouraged the formation of societies to run the schools instead of the church itself through the consistory. This change came from the influence of Abraham Kuyper and the many of the migrants in the 1880s who had been influenced by the school struggle he had led in the Netherlands. These societies worked feverously to start their own Christian schools. The Dutch language no longer served as the main justification for the schools, but the idea of Christian instruction set them

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134 Van Brummelen, *Telling the Next Generation*, 49. Van Brummelen noted that in 1880, 3 of the 4 rural “school districts in a township next to Holland gave six to nine months of English instruction. In the remaining months those teachers not speaking Dutch were laid off so that Dutch instruction could be given.”

135 Christian Reformed Church Centennial Committee, *One Hundred Years in the New World*, (Grand Rapids: Centennial Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 1957), 140.

apart from public schools. However, most of the schools still taught the younger grades in Dutch and were bilingual after that. By 1920, this new effort to start society-run Christian schools resulted in 80 different primary schools spread from New Jersey to California. It also included Christian secondary schools in Chicago, Illinois; Hull, Iowa; Grand Rapids and Holland, Michigan; and Paterson, New Jersey. Van Brummelen estimated that the percentage of Christian Reformed Church children attending the Christian schools rose from 21% in 1890 to 52% in 1920.\textsuperscript{137} By 1920, many of these schools joined together to form the National Union of Christian Schools (NCUS). The NCUS became an umbrella organization organized in Chicago to aid member schools with the hopes of adding a normal training program in the future.\textsuperscript{138}

While the members of the Reformed Church in America had focused on secondary and collegiate education, the Christian Reformed Church’s endeavors in this area took longer to develop. The first secondary education was provided as a pre-sermonary program attached to seminary training provided by ministers. Begun in 1863 when the churches of the Christian Reformed Church appointed Rev. H. Van Leeuwen to train future ministers, he had only one student 1864. When he left West Michigan, Rev. D. J. Vander Werp took over the assignment.\textsuperscript{139} Ill health cut his tenure short so Rev. G. E. Boer filled the role starting in 1875 at the same time serving as the pastor of Spring Street Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. In

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 72

\textsuperscript{138} A Survey of Our Free Christian Schools in America (Chicago: National Union of Christian Schools, 1922). Available at at Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{139} Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).
1876, the Synod appointed Boer as a full-time teacher and so the beginning of Calvin College and Seminary is usually dated to this appointment.\textsuperscript{140}

The growth of what became Calvin College and Seminary proceeded slowly. Boer conducted the first classes in the second floor of the Williams Street Christian school. The curriculum consisted of four years of “literary” training and two years of theological studies to which a third year of theological instruction was added in 1888. Other instructors eventually took some of the burden off of Boer, including Geerhardus Vos.\textsuperscript{141} The school began with 7 students in 1876, grew to 10 in 1880 and had 40 in late 1880s, all preparing to be ministers. The denomination dedicated a new three-story building of its own in 1892.

In 1894, for the first time, students other than those preparing for the ministry were allowed in the literary, or preparatory, department, though none did.\textsuperscript{142} This created a controversy as to whether or not a church denomination should provide education to non-pre-seminarians. This issue would continue to garner attention throughout the twentieth century though the more expansive view of church-owned colleges came to dominate.\textsuperscript{143} In 1900, the school’s preparatory curriculum grew to prepare students for university education. The “Academy,” as it came to be called, had a four year general preparatory curriculum followed by a one year transition curriculum for the seminary students. This year was the beginning of the college as a


\textsuperscript{141} Vos eventually had a career at Princeton Seminary.


\textsuperscript{143} See Harry Boonstra, \textit{Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).
stand-alone entity. The entire preparatory through seminary enrolled a total of 72 in 1900. Women were allowed to enroll in 1901. In 1907, the one year of college curriculum became a 2 year program named John Calvin Junior College. The preparatory department grew rapidly after 1900 from only 55 in 1900 to 131 in 1904, particularly after the University of Michigan accredited its curriculum so students could be admitted there following preparation in Grand Rapids. By 1918 the preparatory department had 283 students, mostly from the Grand Rapids area. The Junior College included three curriculum tracts: a seminary preparatory, a classical, and a modern classical and added a third year in 1910 and a fourth year in seminary preparation and a general BA in 1919 but kept shorter two and three year pre-professional programs. In 1918, the Junior College enrolled 80 students and the seminary (usually called the theological school) had 42 students.

Preparing teachers for the growing Christian schools became an issue of principle and practicality at the turn of the century for the educational institutions associated with the Christian Reformed Church. Calvin had added a pedagogy program to its preparatory program already in 1900 with some controversy because some thought a church college should only prepare ministers. By 1910, of the 173 students in the Preparatory School, 43 were, according to A. J. Rooks, “young women, all of whom doubtless look forward to teach, and are taking a required four-


146 Ryskamp, Offering Hearts, Shaping Lives, 38.

year course.” Of the remaining 130 men, Rooks noted that 81 were training to be ministers and the remaining 49 would most likely become ministers or teachers. For Rooks, these teachers served “our Church indirectly and help to preserve and disseminate our cherished Reformed principles” so teacher training clearly fit within the mandate of a church college.  

The addition and placement of teacher training at Calvin stirred an argument about the relationship between church and school. Some questioned whether a denomination should own and fund a school for non-church purposes or if a separate society of concerned individual should be organized for such an endeavor. Some thought that the church should focus on its own sphere and the school its own sphere, which were mutually supportive but separate. There was even an attempt to organize a separate society between 1900 and 1908 for the purpose of running Calvin, but it could not gain enough support to ever seriously consider taking over ownership of the college. Others questioned what kind of training teachers needed for the primary level. Some faculty members thought that the college should focus on the liberal arts and not on the practical aspects of training. Others believed that the best preparation for teaching the primary grades was a thoroughly academic training with

148 A.J. Rooks, “Retrospect of the School Year,” The Banner, 24 July 1911. This quote may also show some of the gender issue as work in the spirit of the community at the time. Women were in the school, but not allowed to be ministers, only teachers which was a very gendered career at the time as women would teach for a few years before marriage and then they would hang up the chalk. One of the issues in the Christian schools of the 1920s was to attract more male teachers to education as a career. See Van Brummelen, Telling the Next Generation, 83.


150 Boonstra, Our School, 50-53.
only very limited “normal” training. The proponents of increased normal training organized their own school in Grand Rapids in 1917 called the Christian Normal School. It opened its doors in 1919 with only 3 full-time students and number of part-time evening students. These part-time students already had jobs as teacher but with limited formal training as many had only an academy education. The influence of state standards for teacher training and the certification of teachers also influenced the debate about adding teacher training at Calvin. In Michigan, the standards for teachers became more rigorous following 1900 with the rise of normal training which occurred at the same time as the growth of private, Christian schools. The rise of state standards influenced the thinking of leaders of the Christian school movement who found teacher training and certification an important issue.

Because the Christian Reformed Church owned and operated Calvin, the denominational and Calvin leaders did not encourage other institutions of higher learning that drew support from within the membership of the denomination. These leaders argued that Calvin produced a sense of unity in the denomination and needed the support of the entire denomination to stay financially solvent. When Grundy Center College was started in 1916 by East Friesian migrants in North-Central Iowa, it received continual resistance from Calvin’s leaders. While it started with the intended purpose of preparing German-speaking pastors for their Christian Reformed Church congregations, its preparatory and college division seemed to compete with

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151 DeBoer, Origins of Teacher Education at Calvin College, 1900-1930, 49-55.

Calvin for students at a time when Calvin struggled to keep its doors open.\textsuperscript{153} Leaders of the Christian Reformed Church and Calvin in West Michigan feared divided loyalties whenever new institutions eroded Calvin’s monopoly on higher education in the Christian Reformed Church. When Christian secondary schools in Hull, Iowa; Chicago, Illinois; and Patterson, New Jersey started, leaders hoped they could all coordinate their curriculum and policies so that the students could easily matriculate at Calvin.\textsuperscript{154}

The institutions of higher education in both the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America prior to the 1920s relied heavily on support from the congregations. This meant that most of their income came from donations. For the Reformed Church in America institutions, this came particularly through support from classes, from the Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America, and individual member contributions. The money from the Board of Education, though, could be paltry. For instance, in 1910, the denomination contributed only $151.33 to Hope College’s total operating budget of around $35,000.\textsuperscript{155} When the Reformed Church in America acquired Central College in 1913, $7000 of the $20,000 budget came from tuition, leaving gifts to make up the rest.\textsuperscript{156} For the Christian Reformed Church and Calvin, support from the congregations came through a system of quotas. Quotas were assessed to individual congregations on a per-family basis to support the


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{154} DeBoer, Origins of Teacher Education at Calvin College, 68-69.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{155} Stegenga, Anchor of Hope, 137.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{156} Thostenson, A History of Central, 28.}
work of the denomination by the annual synod. Many could accept that direct church
support for higher education should go to prepare ministers for the church but
questioned this support for other students.157 No matter the funding issues and
structure, both denominations and the Dutch-American community as a whole saw
higher education as a shared responsibility of the greater community, not just of the
parents or students who attended.

Conclusion

The settlement and institutional patterns of the Dutch-American community
established prior to the 1920s lasted for at least the next fifty years. The migration of
largely rural, conservative Calvinist families from the Netherlands prior to the 1920s
provided the background for these patterns. These migrants wanted the freedom of
the United States to provide them a place to raise their families and live their life in
the way they desired and build settlements, churches, and educational institutions that
shared and supported their ideals for religion and life. The ideals of these migrants
showed in the numerous ways the community organized itself.

The community radiated out from core enclaves in Iowa and Michigan where
the first and strongest institutions existed. The congregations and schools in these
places provided the anchor for the ever expanding community. The congregations of
the community provided the focus for much of the life of the migrant. These
congregations started classes and denominations to unite the far-flung settlements.
The educational institutions started in the core settlements provided a shared identity
and training for the leadership of the community.

One of the striking aspects of this institution building was the amount of

157 Boonstra, Our School, 29-69.
capital congregations, denominations, and educational institutions required. While many struggled to find a way to finance operations prior to the 1920s as the migrants established themselves, the founders laid the groundwork for later generations to benefit from. The economic progress of this community showed in the amount of resources they could put into their institutions. Krabbendam pointed out that “advancement was possible for each generation. But its success depended on the economic circumstances in America, the skills acquired in the old country, ambition, and the time of arrival.”\textsuperscript{158} For most Dutch migrants, the United States provided more than freedom to established institutions, it also provided the economic resources to start separate institutions. At least part of their economic success must be attributed to their ability to fit into the American hierarchy of race. They did not face the same racial barriers as many other migrants and African-Americans in the United States.

While much united the community around shared experiences, by the 1920s, two strong, competing denominations vied for membership among the Dutch Americans. The competition between the two denominations benefited both and strengthened the community as a whole. Swierenga and Bruins noted that “conflicts were very useful to immigrants . . . for the debates enabled them to build walls and define boundaries against the outside world.”\textsuperscript{159} Robert Schoone-Jongen noted the same in his study of small Dutch migrant communities in Minnesota.\textsuperscript{160} Rob Kroes

\textsuperscript{158} Krabbendam, \textit{Freedom on the Horizon}, 219.

\textsuperscript{159} Swierenga and Bruins, \textit{Family Quarrels}. 63.

highlighted the competition as key to a stable community in Montana as well. The differences between the outlooks of the two denominations allowed migrants different options for how they would identify themselves religiously and their posture towards the United States. The differences between the two denominations did not always take the same manifestations in all the communities where both were found. While competition between the churches could be severe, especially as new churches of the Christian Reformed Church tried to establish themselves, there were times of joint endeavors. For instance, while Northwestern was clearly a Reformed Church in America institution, it enrolled approximately 25% of its students in the 1920s from Christian Reformed Church families.

The Dutch-American ethnic identity prior to the 1920s centered on a shared migration experience and building institutions with others that shared that experience. These institutions, and particularly the congregations, provided for the primary social relationships of those who chose to be a part of the institutions. Ethnic identity, for Dutch Americans, was not just symbolic but about being part of the institutions of the community. While these institutions were created with much sweat, it would take the next generations to maintain them if they found them useful and purposeful. To keep these institutions intact and strong, the next generations needed to be convinced that the institutions were worth maintaining in the face of a changing United States. The commemorations of these institutions throughout the twentieth century reflected and reinforced the distinct characteristics of this group. The people who identified with the narratives told in these commemorations found them helpful in navigating the


162 De Jong, *From Strength to Strength*, 29.
United States in the twentieth century and continued to stay a part of the institutions of Dutch America.
CHAPTER III

FRAMING THE NARRATIVES OF DUTCH-AMERICAN IDENTITY PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

With the slowing of Dutch migration to the United States in the late 1920s and 1930s, Dutch-American institutions could no longer rely on migration for their maintenance and growth. However, the congregations, schools, and enclaves continued to thrive in spite of declining migration. Dutch migrants and their descendants continued supporting these institutions in the face of internal and external forces pulling at the bonds that held them together. The community framed narratives during these years that reinforced the purpose of the institutions that answered both these internal and external pressures. Commemorating key anniversaries and starting Tulip Time Festivals allowed the community to tell its story about being Dutch American.

The narratives constructed during these years consisted of emphasizing the faithfulness of the first migrants as they established institutions and enclaves. These founders had succeeded despite hardships and setbacks because of their faith in God. These narratives reinforced a sense of identity that emphasized Dutch protestants as God’s chosen people. This theology allowed the community to construct stories that reflected and supported this Calvinistic theology all as a migrant group living in the United States. The community would continue to modify and adjust a basic framework of the story over the next fifty years, but the outlines of the story started in the particular context of the 1920s and 1930.
Internal dynamics of this group shaped the framing of the narratives in the 1920s and 1930s. As migration slowed, the community worked hard to maintain and grow its institutions even as the immediate language and cultural need subsided. What had been institutions of necessity for migrants, now became institutions of consent for subsequent generations. The use of the Dutch language continued its decline, particularly following the experience of World War I. At the same time, new networks of institutions developed such as the National Union of Christian Schools that united parent-run Christian schools in the various enclaves to provide a hedge against outside pressures and a connection across dispersed migrant communities.

The broader context of framing these narratives also played an important role in understanding the ways Dutch Americans thought about themselves for the next fifty years. American society during the 1920s and 1930s pulled at the community and its cohesion and structure. Economic factors of life in the Midwest, specifically in rural locations, affected the community as it framed its narratives. But for migrant groups, the context of Americanization and anti-immigrant rhetoric of the post-World War I era played a larger cultural role in their identity formation. Mass communication brought the broader world of American culture more and more into these isolated enclaves and threatened their cohesion. Finally, the religious debates within Protestant churches and denominations had a profound impact on how the community thought of itself religiously.

The start of Tulip Time festivals in Holland, Michigan; Pella, Iowa; and Orange City, Iowa opened a new chapter on ethnic identity formation for Dutch Americans in the late 1920s and 1930s. While there had always been commemorations of the past in these communities, these new festivals had the direct purpose of engaging an outside audience with an acceptable image of the Dutchness
to attract yearly visitors. The founders and subsequent organizers presented the Dutch in as non-offensive a way as possible to attract patrons to the festivals. While often overlapping with the story told to internal audiences prior to the 1920s and 1930s, the influence of the Tulip Time image of the Dutch on the broader Dutch-American identity can be seen in a number of ways in other community and institution commemorations.

The community also staged other community commemorations that shaped the continuing story that constructed a Dutch-American identity. These took place within towns and enclaves that had started in the mid-nineteenth century and continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. These celebrations included pageants and speeches which told the story of migration and settlement within the context of America. The patterns of these town and enclave celebrations clearly showed the influence of broader cultural trends. These larger social and cultural forces included an emphasis on civilizing the landscape as well as the freedom found in the United States.

The institutions of Dutch America commemorated themselves as leaders of these organizations put on elaborate celebrations where current and former pastors and presidents, members and alumni participated in worship services and banquets. These celebrations also saw the publication of books with photos of former pastors and leaders and a narrative history of the institution. These institutional histories emphasized to those who read them the importance of the institution as well as the way God had blessed them. The entire production of the commemoration left the participant with a sense that God had blessed them because they had been faithful so the next generation needed to stay faithful even in a changing world.

These various commemorations shaped the identity in these years by framing the basic narratives of what it meant to be Dutch American. Under these pressures,
the community took advantage of many occasions to frame stories about themselves. The forms varied from Tulip Time festivals for an outside audience to congregational anniversaries for inside audiences but all told of a faithful people who had succeeded in a new land despite hardships. These narratives could adapt to particular locations and circumstances, but for the next fifty years, the overall framework remained the same. This narrative helped give the group a common identity that reinforced who was in and out of the community and what community membership meant.

Migration and Institutional Patterns

The context of changing migration patterns had a clear influence on how the Dutch-American community imagined itself and navigated the 1920s and 1930s. The number of Dutch migrants to the United States dropped dramatically in the 1930s. Between 1932 and 1938, the number entering the United States averaged only 379 per year. The previous seven years (from 1925 to 1931) had averaged 1,810 migrants per year from the Netherlands.\(^1\) A brief spike in the number of migrants in 1939 and 1940 reflected the world situation and migrants leaving Europe in flight from Hitler and the Nazis followed by an almost complete lack of migration during World War II.\(^2\) This slowing of migration was not only a Dutch phenomenon but reflected the trends in migration in the world. The drop can be attributed to both the world economic situation and to the change in American migration laws. With the passage of the Emergency Quota Act in 1921, the United States federal government began


\(^2\) Ibid., 641, table I.
setting immigration quotas based on nationality and then national origin. When the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act was finally implemented in 1929, the number of Dutch immigrants allowed into the United States was set at 3,136.3 This quota remained in place until the 1965 Immigration Act even though special legislation in the 1950s opened a few more spaces for Dutch migrants to move to the United States.

The Census of 1920, 1930, and 1940 showed the effects of this slowing migration on the number of Dutch migrants and their children in the United States. In the 1920 Census, the enumerators counted 381,105 Dutch migrants and children of at least one parent from the Netherlands. This number grew to 413,966 in 1930 and fell to 372,384 in 1940. This made up only a fraction of the number of so-called total foreign stock in the United States as the Dutch made up only about 1% of all foreign stock in these census years.4 However, these raw numbers are deceptive since they do not consider the third and fourth generation of Dutch Americans who continued to maintain their Dutch identity by staying within the institutions of the community. The Dutch enclaves in Michigan and Iowa were important locations of settlement for migrants and their descendants with a higher concentration than the country as a whole. The number of people born in the Netherlands or who had parents born there averaged between 4.5% and 5% of the foreign stock in Iowa and Michigan compared to the 1% in the United States. Counties of highest Dutch settlement in Michigan continued around the original Kolonie established by Van Raalte. Of the total of


106,426 Dutch born and their children, 85,793 were located in Allegan, Ottawa, Muskegon, and Kent counties.\(^5\) In Iowa, the same kind of pattern existed with heavy concentration of Dutch migrants and their children in Sioux and Lyon counties in northwest Iowa around Orange City and in Mahasak, Marion, and Jasper counties in south-central Iowa around Pella. In 1930, out of the total of 36,319 Iowans who were born in the Netherlands or their children, 23,607 lived in these five counties of Iowa.\(^6\)

The Dutch found comfort and strength by staying together.

While heavily concentrated in these counties, the community did grow geographically in the years prior to World War II. Rural areas in western states attracted colonization attempts by Dutch migrants and their descendants. Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Montana, and Washington all hosted colonies. While some of these colonies would succeed, others failed for a variety of reasons.\(^7\) California attracted more and more migrants as well as Dutch Americans from older enclaves in the 1920s and 1930s. Washington also pulled a sizeable number of Dutch migrants after 1900, especially to Lynden in the far northwest corner of the state.\(^8\) Even as they spread West, they continued to draw together in


\(^7\) A good analysis of some of the reasons for success and failure of these attempts is in Robert P. Schoone-Jongen, “A Time to Gather, A Time to Scatter: Dutch-American Settlement in Minnesota, 1885-1910” (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2007).

\(^8\) For overviews of these movements and settlement patterns, see Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America*, edited by Robert Swierenga, trans. by Adriaan de Wit, (Grand
congregations whenever possible.

While migration slowed from the Netherlands, the religious institutions of Dutch America remained strong. Membership in both the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America continued grew in the 1920s and 1930s mostly from members having large families and keeping those children in the churches and schools. As a whole, the Christian Reformed Church grew from 245 congregations with 94,843 “souls” (the official term for all members at the time) in 1920 to 298 congregations with 121,755 “total members” in 1940.\(^9\) The Reformed Church in America in the Midwest and West (organized in the Particular Synod of Chicago and Particular Synod of Iowa) also increased from 253 congregations with 73,616 members in 1920 to 271 congregations and 105,259 members in 1940.\(^10\)

This growth not only came from spreading out and founding new congregations, but also within established settlement areas as well. Congregations and classes of Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America in western Michigan, south-central Iowa, and northwestern Iowa grew in size and number proportionally as well. The number of congregations around Holland, Michigan gives a good example. Classis Holland of the Reformed Church in America grew from 25 individual congregations in 1920 to 27 in 1930 and 1940. This also included a re-organization as some churches joined other classes such as Classis

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\(^9\) Numbers compiled from *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House), years as noted. The term soul was changed in the 1940 yearbook to “total members”.

\(^10\) Numbers compiled from *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Church* (New York: Board of Publication and Bible-School), years noted.
Michigan. The number of congregants grew within the classis from 8,864 in 1920 to 12,477 in 1930 to 13,428 in 1940. Most congregations showed an increase in membership over these twenty years.\(^{11}\) The Christian Reformed Church congregations around Holland, Michigan also grew. Classis Holland had 13 congregations in 1920 and 7,891 “souls.” Classis Zeeland had 13 congregations with 6861 “souls” in 1920. In 1930, Classis Holland remained at 13 congregations but grew to 8,719 “souls” while Classis Zeeland grew to 14 congregations with 7,230 “souls.” By 1940, Classis Holland grew slightly to 8,824 “total members” and Classis Zeeland added members to a total membership of 7,574.

Congregations grew in Iowa as well. Classis Pella of the Christian Reformed Church had 23 congregations in 1920 spread across south-central Iowa but also stretching all the way to California, Kansas, New Mexico and Colorado. By 1940, it had split off the California churches and was down to 17 congregations. The congregations located around Pella went from having 3,185 members in 1920 to 3,911 in 1940. In Orange City and the surrounding area, the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church fell within Classis Orange City and Classis Sioux Center. In 1920, together they had 40 congregations with 16 being in the immediate Orange City vicinity. The number of congregants in those immediate Orange City congregations rose from 6,473 in 1920 to 8,006 in 1940 in 19 congregations. This growth does not reflect the number of settlers who maintained strong bonds with northwest Iowa even as they spread across the Great Plains and the West. The

\(^{11}\) Numbers compiled from *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Church* (New York: Board of Publication and Bible-School), years noted. Total number of members equals the number of communicants plus the number of baptized. In the Dutch Reformed churches, baptism of infants was the norm (paedobaptism) and one become a communicate member when one made a public profession of faith in order to participate in communion.
congregations in places like southwestern Minnesota around Edgerton, south-central South Dakota around New Holland and Platte fell within the network of ecclesiastical organizations tied to northwest Iowa.\textsuperscript{12}

The Reformed Church in America also grew in Iowa between the 1920s and 1940s. Classis Pella had 13 congregations and 3,894 members in close proximity to Pella. By 1940, it had grown to 4,069 members but had shrunk to 9 congregations as smaller, rural congregations had closed between 1930 and 1940. In northwest Iowa, the congregations split between Classis of East Sioux and Classis of West Sioux and numbered 24 congregations out of a combined total of 48. These congregations had 8,471 members in 1920 and 11,832 members in 27 congregations in 1940. These classes also had connections with Classis Dakota since English speaking congregations in Maurice, Hull, and Orange City belonged to this classis which stretched throughout North and South Dakota. Also, the congregations of the Classis of Dakota would have included many migrants who had moved west looking for land from the more established enclaves of the Dutch-American community.\textsuperscript{13}

The settlement and growth a Dutch-American enclave in Lynden, Washington followed a similar pattern. Settlers started the first Christian Reformed Church in Lynden in 1900 and had grown to 950 “souls” in 1920. Part of the Classis Pacific which included five Washington congregations but also stretched east to Montana, \textsuperscript{12} For descriptions of specific connections, see Brian Beltman, \textit{Dutch Farmer in the Missouri Valley: the Life and Letters of Ulbe Eringa, 1866-1950} (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

Alberta, and Saskatchewan, Lynden Christian Reformed Church was the largest congregation, making up over 25% of the classis total of 3,578 members and being the largest congregation by almost 400 “souls.” By 1940, Lynden had three Christian Reformed Church congregations with 2,081 “total members” out of a classis of 22 congregations and 5,709 total members resulting in Lynden members making up 37% of the classis membership. The Reformed Church in America congregations also experienced the same kind of growth in Lynden. The Reformed Church in America in Lynden had organized in 1910 and grown to 267 total members in 1920. It had 23% of the membership of the Classis of the Cascades made up of nine congregations stretching east to Montana and Alberta. By 1940, Lynden Reformed Church had grown to 702 total members. Lynden’s Reformed Church in America dominated this classis statistically even more in 1940 with 43% of the members. Lynden served as an important node in the Dutch-American community because of its growth in these years and the opportunities it provided to be a member of a thriving Dutch-American enclave for those who found their opportunities limited in other Dutch-American enclaves.

Sticking together was both a hope and goal for many Dutch Americans and the numerical growth of congregational and denominational membership shows that the community remained strong during these years despite the slowing of migration and a schism in the Christian Reformed Church. A theological dispute exacerbated by strong personalities led to a number of congregations starting another denomination called the Protestant Reformed Church.14 While never a large denomination, even by

14 For the theological background, see James D. Bratt, Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 93-119. The Protestant Reformed Church and its preachers have produced a number of histories of their denomination beginning in 1936 when their founding preacher, Herman Hoeksema published The Protestant Reformed Churches in
their own admission, the members of the church defined themselves as being faithful to the true theology which they said the Christian Reformed Church had abandoned. Their negative stance towards the Christian Reformed Church gave the members of the Protestant Reformed Church their reason for existence and problematized a neat, singular narrative about the whole community being faithful, just as the 1857 founding of the Christian Reformed Church had for the Reformed Church in America. This schism led to the founding congregations in the western Michigan, south-central Iowa, and northwest Iowa.¹⁵

The strength of the congregations and denominations of the Dutch-American community provided sufficient means and numbers to maintain a variety of educational institutions from elementary schools to colleges and seminaries that reinforced the congregations and denominations. They allowed members to stay safely within the community’s institutions in order to engage the United States in the twentieth century. While elementary and secondary schools consisted of local congregations working together, specifically for people in Christian Reformed Church, colleges and seminaries provided a way to connect across larger geographical distances. Colleges and seminaries also instilled denominational and group loyalty in students who would be the leaders of the community in the future. The colleges and seminaries of the community all experienced significant changes in the 1920s and 1930s that shaped the stories and narratives they would tell about themselves in these pivotal years. Maintaining loyalty to these shared endeavors in a time of internal and

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external changes motivated the leaders and members of the community to work more
diligently at constructing an identity around a usable past.

The Reformed Church in America supported Hope College in Holland, Central College in Pella, and Northwestern Academy and Jr. College in Orange City through its education committee. In 1922, Hope College amended its constitutions to have a wider representation of the denomination on its Council.\textsuperscript{16} One of the motivations for this change at Hope might have been to raise more funds from the denomination. Of a total operating budget of about $98,000 for the 1922-1923 academic year, only about $16,000 came from the denomination as a whole and individual congregation contributions. This underwhelming giving caused annual deficits between 1920 and 1930.\textsuperscript{17} Even though it struggled for funds from the denomination, it provided a valuable service for the Reformed Church in America, something the college regularly cited in appeals for funds as one of its main services for the denomination was training pastors. In fact, by 1941, the General Synod counted 340 ministers in the Reformed Church in America as Hope Alumni or approximately 40% of its total ministers.\textsuperscript{18} The college surpassed 500 alumni as pastors in the Reformed Church in America for the first time in 1928.\textsuperscript{19} While the Great Depression of the 1930s required significant financial restraint on the part of the college, including cutting faculty salaries repeatedly, the number of students remained

\textsuperscript{16} Preston J. Stegenga, \textit{Anchor of Hope: The History of an American Denominational Institution, Hope College} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 117.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 139.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 170.

\textsuperscript{19} Wynand Wichers, \textit{A Century of Hope, 1866-1966} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 189.
relatively steady.\textsuperscript{20} The one casualty of the 1930s for the Hope campus was the closing of the secondary school, Hope Academy, in 1934. However, this move was also strategic for the college as it helped their application to the American Association of Universities.\textsuperscript{21}

While Hope received attention from the entire Reformed Church in America denomination, particularly with gifts and students from New York and New Jersey (the “East” section of the denomination) the two institutions in Iowa, Northwestern and Central, continued in the 1920s and 1930s to serve a more regional constituency. In fact, all the members of the Board of Trustees of Northwestern in 1927 came from Sioux County.\textsuperscript{22} As Northwestern began moving to add a junior college program to the academy in the 1920s, it hoped to draw support from a larger region of churches in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota. Many supports of Northwestern felt that they had too long been “hewers of wood and drawers of water” for Central and Hope and should have their own college in northwest Iowa.\textsuperscript{23} The local classes of the Reformed Church in America threw their support behind the effort to add a junior college but also sought the approval of the Reformed Church in America General Synod.\textsuperscript{24}

Northwestern’s addition of a junior college program in 1928 proved to be a daunting task even as it tried to become a more regional institution. The enrollment of the college fluctuated during the 1930s from a low freshmen class of 30 to a high

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 204.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 211.

\textsuperscript{22} Gerald F. De Jong, From Strength to Strength: A History of Northwestern, 1882-1982 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 17.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 71.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 73-77.
of 84 in the freshmen class. The fluctuation in the number of college students made planning and meeting basic budget needs difficult. The economic depression hit the small institution particularly hard because it relied on so many gifts to meet its obligations. Its revenues dropped from $34,000 in 1929-1930 to $15,000 in 1931-1932 when donations dropped from $15,000 to only $2,000. Faculty not only had late paychecks, they also saw their pay cut year after year during the 1930s. The school turned to borrowing money to meet its obligations and worked hard to collect tuition and other gifts.\(^\text{25}\) Declining enrollment in the academy throughout the 1930s, to a low of only 37 students in 1941, did not help the overall budget of the institution. The difficult farm economy as well as a growth in public high schools lead to the decline in enrollment. While the academy had pulled students from a wider geographic region than just Sioux County from a Reformed Church constituency, during the 1930s it lost more regional students at the same time more Christian Reformed Church students from the immediate area enrolled. About one-third or more of the students in the academy being from Christian Reformed Church homes in the 1930s.\(^\text{26}\) Only with the end of the depression did the financial difficulties of the academy and junior college change. Despite the struggles of the 1930s, a foundation had been laid for another college in the Reformed Church in America to unify a region of Dutch-American congregations around a joint endeavor. The college told its story about its past in this period that needed to convince its supporters that the struggle was worth the effort. The unifying role of Northwestern extended to the shared experience of the students who then spread through the rest of the Dutch-American community.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 94-96.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 84-85
Central College, having only been taken over by the Reformed Church in America in 1916, worked to build loyalty with its new constituency. The Board of Education of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America supported the college by allowing it raise funds from the churches of the denomination in 1923. Central closed its academy in 1928 as public high schools took more students. The 1930s economy proved challenging for Central just with decreasing pay for faculty but its student enrollment continued to grow. In 1926-1927 the number of students was 200 and grew with some fluctuations to 275 students in 1936-1937. Willingness to accept produce and services in place of tuition helped many students attend. An innovative program called Central College Student Industries manufactured and assembled various products to provide income for the college and a way for students to pay their tuition. Central’s connection and support from the Board of Education proved instrumental in helping the college survive during the 1930s. The close connection between all the Reformed Church in America schools and the denomination helped these institutions during the economic struggles of the 1930s.

As the only college owned by the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin College and Seminary underwent major changes during the 1920s and 1930s. Calvin had added a BA degree in 1919 with the first graduates in 1921 but retained two and three year programs as well. The preparatory department and theological school also fell under the umbrella of Calvin College with a total enrollment in all three divisions of


28 Thostenson, *One Hundred Years of Service*, 37.
366 in 1918-1919 school year. With the opening of Grand Rapids Christian High School in the fall of 1920, the end of the preparatory department was only a matter of time. It closed in 1925. This change alone started to create a more “typical” four-year liberal arts college. During the 1920s, the number of college students rose from 94 in the spring of 1920 to 353 in the fall of 1929. The college also moved to seek accreditation from the North Central Association. Overall the 1920s for Calvin College was a decade of prosperity.

The 1930s would be years of struggle for Calvin College just as most institutions of higher education struggled during the economic depression. Grundy College, another institution started by Christian Reformed Churches in north-central Iowa, closed its doors due to financial problems. While the number of students remained consistent at Calvin, at least partly due to the fact that more Grand Rapids students stayed in Grand Rapids and attended Calvin College, faculty endured a 40% pay cut. The number of “outside students” also rose during the 1930s which caused concern for the board of trustees which saw Calvin as purely as a school for the Christian Reformed Church. This concern stemmed at least in part from the symbiotic relationship between the school and denomination. As Henry Ryskamp noted in his history of Calvin College, the loyalty of the members of the denomination was “constantly matched by loyalty of the faculty to the religious principles which led


30 Ibid., 82-84.


to the establishment of the school and to which the trustees have been consistently
loyal in their administration of the school.” However, this did not mean the
relationship was without its difficulties. Differences over how to be “Reformed” in
teaching and lifestyle took much of the time of the faculty and administration during
the 1930s. These issues could quickly escalate to financial issues since Calvin never
had an endowment, but relied on the regular giving of the members of the Christian
Reformed Church throughout the country. This kind of structure required a high
degree of shared purpose across the denomination. The members had to see the worth
of these separate institutions as a way to live in the United States.

The number of private elementary and secondary schools supported by Dutch
Americans grew in the 1920s. While generally associated with Christian Reformed
Church congregations, these schools regularly attracted students from Reformed
Church in America congregations. These schools required a sizeable number of
families in a concentrated geographic area as well as the economic resources to
operate independently through gifts and tuition. While many argued the necessity of
these private schools, only 52% of Christian Reformed Church children attended 80
different Christian schools with a total enrollment of approximately 11,000 in 1920.

An association of these schools called the National Union of Christian Schools
(NUCS) formed in 1920 in Chicago’s south side neighborhood of Roseland out of the

33 Ibid., 99.

34 Harry Boonstra, Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed
Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 40.

35 Harro W. Van Brummelen, Telling the Next Generation: Educational
Development in North American Calvinist Christian Schools (Lanham, Md.:
various regional groups. The first field agent, A. J. Visser, noted in the 1922 yearbook that the schools faced problems such as “inadequate training opportunities and poorly trained teachers resulting there from, the unsatisfactory character of our present textbooks, and the almost total absence of supervision in our Christian schools” that needed united action. He also mentioned the “pseudo-American spirit of the war-time period” as a reason the schools needed to unite to stand-up for each other as some were feeling the pressure of groups who did not want to allow private schools. They understood themselves to be building barriers against the world.

Schools in Iowa and Michigan were well represented in this group in 1922. Northwestern Iowa claimed 13 elementary schools with 1,107 pupils and Western Academy in Hull, Iowa had 92 students. South Central Iowa had two elementary schools with 208 students. The schools of western Michigan stretched from Muskegon to Kalamazoo. In the near vicinity of Holland, there were five elementary schools with 1,120 pupils and Holland Christian High with 100 students. Lynden had two Christian schools, one named Ebenezer with 44 pupils and the other in Lynden itself with 180 pupils in 1922.

During the 1920s, the number of students in the schools of the NUCS had

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36 Ibid., 74. B.J. Bennink compiled and edited a Yearbook of Schools for Christian Instruction in 1919 that listed three groups, the Alliance of Christian Primary School Societies in the State of Michigan, Alliance of Christian School Societies in the State of Iowa, and “Schoolraad”—Northwestern Iowa. He also listed three teachers’ organizations: Michigan Christian Teachers’ Institute, Chicago Christian Teachers’ Association, and Eastern Christian Teacher’s Association.


38 Ibid., 22-23,30-32, 48, 51.
risen to almost 14,000 in 88 schools spread from New Jersey to Washington and California. However, the number of students in the schools in northwest Iowa actually shrank by over 100 students over the same time. The schools in the Pella area decreased by 40 students as well even though a new school had started in Peoria. In the Holland area, the story was a bit better when the elementary and high schools increased by 100 students. Lynden had the most growth both in numbers and percentage when it grew from only 224 students in 1922 to 339 in 1930. The lack of growth was a large enough concern for leaders of the NUCS that they studied the problem in-depth in 1930. They particularly showed concern over the low percentage of Christian Reformed Church parents who sent their children to the Christian school. The authors estimated that 50% of families in the Christian Reformed Church sent their children to public schools and 50% sent them to Christian schools, but acknowledged that Christian schools did not exist in all locations so many parents did not have a choice. The assumption of the study authors was clear: if the child belonged to a family of the Christian Reformed Church, that child should be in a Christian school. The study also investigated differences in Christian school attendance from congregations using the Dutch language and their “daughter” churches which used English. It found that the “mother” churches more faithfully sent their children to the Christian school.39

By 1940, the Christian schools had endured the economic pressures of the 1930s. For instance, the number of Christian schools in Northwest Iowa fell by three schools and the number of students had decreased again by 100 students. In the Pella

area, the number of schools rose by one as a high school was added along with about ninety students. In the near vicinity of Holland, there were still five elementary schools and Holland Christian High but the number of students slipped down by 30 students. Clearly, the toll of the Great Depression hurt the ability of these schools to attract students whose families could pay tuition. However, the authors of the decennial census of Christian schools in 1940 argued that the “‘economic determinism’ is not born out by the facts.” Instead, the writer argued that

the presence or absence of a Christian school is largely a question of the spiritual outlook of the community. Not physical wealth but spiritual health is a matter of first consideration. . . The greatest boon for the Christian school movement is not a return to prosperity but a return to the faith of our fathers who, under financial circumstances far less favorable than those of their children of today, established and maintained the schools to which we in God’s goodness have fallen heir.40

These strong words reflected how the schools thought of themselves as a sure sign of the strength of their faith and if families would simply sacrifice more and be more faithful, Christian schools would succeed despite the external pressures.

On the eve of World War II, Dutch migrants and their descendants had spread geographically across the United States. The overall number of congregations and members as well as Christian schools and students grew during the 1920s and 1930s even as the numbers in the enclaves in Michigan and Iowa grew more slowly. However, the Michigan and Iowa settlements continued to hold a significant place within the overall Dutch-American community. Their longer history and role in hosting key institutions of the community helped coalesce Dutch-American ethnic

identity around these places. Western Michigan had Hope and Calvin College as well as Western Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in America and Calvin Seminary of the Christian Reformed Church. Pella, Iowa accommodated Central College and Orange City, Iowa had Northwestern College. These institutions provided the focus of much energy of scattered Dutch Americans and gave them a common purpose and background. Also, many of the leaders, particularly of churches and schools, in distant geographic enclaves had been trained at these central institutions. The Michigan and Iowa settlements also became important interpreters of being Dutch American in the late 1920s and early 1930s with the beginnings of Tulip Time Festivals in Holland, Michigan, and Pella and Orange City, Iowa.

By most measures, the Dutch-American community and its institutions continued to thrive during the 1920s and 1930s despite decreased migration and the economic strains. The members of the community stayed loyal to the institutions started in the nineteenth century even as the direct need for these institutions waned with transitions in language and overall economic integration. They continued to find them helpful as they lived in the United States. Though this success seemed clear, the leaders and members of the community felt threatened on a number of fronts. Both real and perceived threats to continuing their institutional completeness pressed on them internally and externally. Centrifugal forces such as moving to more geographically dispersed settlements both in the rural west and in cities required the community to redouble its efforts to tell stories that would keep these far flung places united behind common institutions. The Americanization push coming out of World War I had consequences for all migrants and their descendants. The threat of religious “modernism” demanded a response from religious groups, including Dutch-American congregations and denominations.
The pressures of Americanization during and after World War I presented a real threat for Dutch Americans as hyphenated Americans using a foreign language and supporting separate institutions. As historian John Higham pointed out, World War I saw the “most strenuous nationalism and the most pervasive nativism that the United States had ever known.” Dutch migrants and their descendants living in the Pella area were caught in the intense nativism and anti-German hysteria. In 1918, the governor of Iowa banned the use of all other languages in public meetings except English. Churches could preach in a foreign language as long as they provided a translation prior to the service. The Christian Reformed Church at Peoria and the Christian schools at Peoria and Sully felt the wrath of neighbors who did not distinguish between “Dutch” and “Deutsch.” When the pastor of the Peoria Christian Reformed Church questioned certain government actions, a mob chased him and other leaders out of town as well as burning the Peoria church and school and the neighboring Sully Christian school. The disparagement of foreign languages quickened the pace of language transition not only in Iowa, but throughout Dutch America. While the direct attack in Iowa provided plenty of reasons to feel threatened, nativism would shape the kind of narrative the community would tell about itself in the 1920s and 1930s.


The threat posed by religious “modernism” particularly affected conservative Dutch-American Protestants. Conservative Christians of all kinds dealt with changing ideas coming out of World War I. Conservative Christians felt threatened by new ideas about evolution and society that questioned their basic ideas about society. These conservative Christians, often called fundamentalists, had lost their position as the controlling sector of the American society and culture. As fundamentalists felt themselves losing their prominent place, they retreated from society into their congregations and religious sub-cultures. Feeling threatened by theological modernism as well, some Dutch Americans reacted to theological controversies by retreating into a more insular position. The separation of congregations to start the Protestant Reformed Church in the 1920s for what they considered theological modernism in the Christian Reformed Church is one example. These complicated internal theological disputes showed fault lines over how the community should acculturate to the American religious scene. As James Bratt noted, “the relationship of God’s people to the world [was] the issue of the day” for Dutch Americans just as it was for other conservative Christians of the time. These internal struggles about true religion also helped keep the community together because the discourse of the debates had particular phrases that only insiders could understand.

The institutional completeness of enclaves, congregations, and schools set the


45 Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 113.

context for the way the Dutch-American community framed its story in the 1920s and 1930s. The congregations and denominations provided the key institution around which life for Dutch Americans centered. Without a congregation, the ability to have a shared Dutch identity almost disappeared. Out of the congregations came the desire for educational institutions at the college level in order to have an educated pastorate. The colleges eventually opened to a broader student body, but the shared experience formed an identity for alumni who would then be the leaders of the separate institutions. For many members of the Christian Reformed Church, the private Christian school also played a key role in how the community defined itself. The other context for framing the story in the 1920s and 1930s was the internal and external threats, both real and perceived. While institutions were strong, the fear of losing them and what that said about their faith and a place in the United States lay behind narrative of the stories told and retold in these years.

**Tulip Time Festivals**

While being a member of the community’s institutions identified someone as being Dutch American, during the 1920s and 1930s some enclaves started using their shared migration experience for more than just building institutions. The start of Tulip Time Festivals in the late 1920s and early 1930s in Holland, Michigan; Pella, Iowa; and Orange City, Iowa added a significant component to the Dutch-American community in the twentieth century. These festivals not only provided a community celebration, but now these enclaves actively performed their Dutch identity for a broader, external audience. The image of Dutchness they presented appealed to an American audience at the same time it reinforced aspects of Dutchness for themselves. These festivals used the Dutch aspect of the community identity to
attract an outside audience to a community celebration. From the beginning, these celebration wanted to prove their American identity by presenting a Dutch identity acceptable to their visitors. Terrance Schoone-Jongen has argued that these festivals worked to “clean-up” Dutch America for not only external audiences but also for the community itself. These festivals selectively constructed a shared narrative that insiders and outsiders found acceptable.\textsuperscript{47}

The use of celebration by ethnic communities to prove their dual identity was not unique to Dutch Americans in the 1920s and 1930s. As Orm Øverland has argued, ethnic celebrations were “primarily a celebration of American identity of immigrants and their descendants” trying to prove their worth to Americans. They created these “homemaking myths . . . in the face of Anglo-American denials of such an identity.”\textsuperscript{48} One clear example of this kind of mythmaking took place in St. Paul, Minnesota in June 1925 among Norwegians living there. As April Schultz clearly shows, these Norwegians reacted to World War I and the Americanization crisis by working hard in this celebration to prove they were surely part of the American story. The “Pageant of the Northmen” followed a story line that would prove to anybody that saw it that Norwegian migrants clearly fell within the American story of conquering the land and contributing to the United States.\textsuperscript{49}

Similarly, residents in New Glarus, Wisconsin cultivated a Swiss identity with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Terrance G. Schoone-Jongen, \textit{The Dutch American Identity: Staging Memory and Ethnicity in Community Celebrations} (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 166-7.
\item \textsuperscript{49} April Schultz, \textit{Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American Through Celebration} (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).
\end{itemize}
its yearly performance of *William Tell*. Steven Hoelscher showed how the town of New Glarus consciously worked to create a Swiss identity that Americans found acceptable in order to attract tourists.\(^5^0\) According to one commentator discussing these kinds of ethnic festivals, “The cultural contents of such folk festivals often owed more to the inspiration of romantic nationalism than to the actual traditions of peasant immigrants.”\(^5^1\) Dutch Americans staging Tulip Time festivals were performing a kind of romanticized Dutch nationalism for a receptive American audience.

From the first Tulip Time Festival in 1929 in Holland, Michigan, these celebrations highlighted tulips, “traditional” costumes, wooden shoes, cleanliness, and other representations of the Netherlands familiar and acceptable to Americans. The image cultivated in these celebrations appealed to an American audience and their own ideas about what it meant to be Dutch. These images received such a warm reception, at least partly, because of a period of expanding American interest in Dutch art and architecture in what Annette Stott has called “Holland Mania” from the 1880s to the 1920s. This interest in the Netherlands developed when some Americans wanted to emphasize a narrative that highlighted a deeply rooted cultural relationship between the Netherlands and the United States. This “discovery” of Dutch culture resulted in Americans constructing an image of the Netherlands as a pastoral, antique landscape and place.\(^5^2\) The movement created an image of the Netherlands that

\(^5^0\) Steven D. Hoelscher, *Heritage on Stage: The Invention of Ethnic Place in America’s Little Switzerland* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).


traded in traditional Dutch life and Tulip Time Festival organizers clearly geared their version of the Netherlands to this vision.53 According to Terrance Schoone-Jongen, Tulip Time Festivals clearly appealed to the idyllic image of the Netherlands popularized by Holland Mania with its “wooden shoes and windmills.” These images also fit the Dutch-American community’s own sense of itself. Many of the migrants and their descendants had left the more “traditional” and rural areas of the Netherlands. These nostalgic, pastoral images of their homeland felt appropriate for the Dutch Americans themselves.

Tulip Time Festivals also allowed Dutch Americans to prove their Americaness to an outside audience. They presented the Dutch as “non-threatening” particularly after Americanization campaigns of World War I and the 1920s. As Schoone-Jongen pointed out, “the staging of Tulip festivals can be viewed as a strategy Dutch Americans used to display their own loyalty and patriotism while helping to continue to promote a sense of separate identity.”54 The organizers and participants projected an image in these festivals of a people who were fully American even as they celebrated their migrant roots. This meant that the parades included American Legion floats and the brochures always noted how Dutch migrants had broken the wilderness and turned the land into a garden. These festivals showed the American audience that the Dutch Americans were good Americans and their loyalty should not be questioned. At the same time, constructing a narrative of

53 Also see Suzanne Sinke, “Tulips are Blooming in Holland, Michigan: Analysis of a Dutch American Festival,” in Michael Sínocenzo, et. al., Immigration and Ethnicity: American Society- “Melting Pot” or “Salad Bowl” (Westport 1992), 3-14; and Janet S. Sheeres, “Klompendancing through America,” Origins Vol. 18, no. 1 (2000), 23-29. Sheeres points out that the Holland Tulip Time Festival was copied in Pella and Orange City, Iowa as well as other settlements in the West.

54 Schoone-Jongen, The Dutch American Identity, 164.
themselves as loyal Americans through the Tulip Time festivals shaped how Dutch Americans came to understand themselves as reflected in other commemorations.

Holland, Michigan began its festival in 1929 when the city government and individuals planted thousands of tulip bulbs. However, what started as mainly a flower show changed within its first decade to an event that more intentionally used Dutch imagery. The festival expanded to include parades consisting of street scrubbing (including the use of Old Dutch Cleanser in the one of the first few years), groups of children parading in traditional costumes and wooden shoes, folk dancing in wooden shoes, and the performance of the operetta Tulip Time by Holland High School.\(^{55}\) The 1937 program, published in the Holland City News, lasted for seven days from May 15 to 23, starting on a Saturday and lasting until the next Sunday with no official events scheduled on the Sundays of the calendar. Each day included a “Made in Holland” exhibition, Tulip Tours, open hours of the Netherlands Museum, and the Dutch Village hours. Evening entertainment varied from a Legion Band Concert to a “Village Green Program.” Using pastoral and “typical” Dutch image of Holland Mania, the paper noted that compared to other groups, the Dutch had treasured the “quaint customs of the fatherland” more than other groups. It also claimed that the Tulip Time had “attained international note because of its adherence to the authentic.”\(^{56}\)

The Pella, Iowa festival started in 1935 after a successful presentation by the Pella High School Glee Club’s Tulip Time in April of the same year. Published by the


\(^{56}\) Holland City News, 13 May 1937, pg. 1.
H.T. FitzSimons Company, Holland Tulip Time Festival had featured the operetta in 1930. The title implied a glimpse into Dutch culture, but the light comedy actually revolved around two American biology students that happened to be set in the Netherlands.\(^{57}\) A group of Pella businessmen decided to build off the success of the operetta and start a festival in May as the Chamber of Commerce bureaucracy moved quickly. However, since Pella residents had no tradition of planting tulips and none had been planted the previous fall, the planning committee had 125 4-foot tall wooden tulips made.\(^{58}\) The deep irony of having a tulip festival with wooden, fake tulips did not appear to trouble those at the time.

Just as in Holland, the local Chamber of Commerce started the Pella, Iowa festival but the leadership soon fell to the Pella Historical Society. That group also started the Pella Historical Society Museum to display the antiques that downtown businesses had displayed from the start of the festival in 1935. These window displays of antiques resulted from newspaper ads asking for donations and loans in order to give the festival a “historical” feel. After the success of the 1935 event, leaders immediately made plans for the next celebration and organized the planting of 85,000 imported tulip bulbs the fall of 1935.\(^{59}\) Beginning in 1936, the Pella Tulip Time Festival also included the election of a Tulip Queen and court.\(^{60}\) By 1936, a


\(^{59}\) Ibid., 87-89.

\(^{60}\) “Leonora Gaass is Selected as Tulip Queen,” *The Pella Chronicle*, 23 April 1936. Leonora Gaass was the great-granddaughter of the H.P. Scholte, the founder of Pella.
miniature Dutch Village offered visitors a “glimpse of this ‘wonderland of old Europe.’” Built by George Heeren, the village depicted no particular place in the Netherlands, but instead a composite of what Heeren remembered from his childhood and two subsequent trips. The organizers of the first Tulip Time Festivals in Pella had to appreciate the assessment provided by *The Pella Chronicle* in 1935 that the event “brought Holland to Pella as it has not been in this generation.” Clearly the newspaper writer recognized the changing dimension within the community that sought to tell a story about itself in a historical way.

Not only did the narrative constructed by the Tulip Time Festival shape the community’s identity, the effort to stage the festival in Pella became a significant community event. For instance, already in 1936, the financing of the festival took a high level of organization and cooperation. In March 1936, the Chairman of the Finance Committee, P.H. Kuyper, sent a letter to ‘old Pella Friends.’ In this letter, he appealed for membership in the Holland Historical society in order to support the purchase and remodeling of the museum. His call centered around reasons why someone would want to give money to such an endeavor. He noted that the preservation of history was important so that “our children and children’s children can come back to the old town and see for themselves just what our forefathers were forced to go through and what hardships were endured in the cause of religious freedom and liberty, and to learn to know the staunch and sturdy background from

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which their generation has come.” The letter continued in the same vein by emphasizing the “Christian atmosphere of the deeply religious and educational town.” While the Tulip Time Festival would appeal to a broad American audience, the leaders also envisioned it as a way to create a shared and useable past for the Dutch-American participants themselves by building a local history museum.

By 1937, the Board of Directors of the Pella Historical Society worked out the logistics with multiple committees in the hopes that Tulip Time could “present fine entertainment at the least possible expenses.” The General Chairman of the Committee, Lon. B. Wormhoudt, tried to convince various members of the community to serve as chairpersons by appealing to their civic pride. He noted that Pella’s Tulip Time had become one of our community’s greatest assets and it is up to each one of us to cooperate wholeheartedly and do our best to make each ensuing celebration more effective and elaborate. We have in Pella THE unique event of the entire Middle West and one for which many other communities would pay thousands of dollars had they the background and setting of Pella. It is up to us—all of us—to drive this fact home so that our citizens will realize the importance of any sacrifice they may be called upon to make in order to promote the Tulip Festival.

Pella’s organizers from the beginning recognized the possibility of using the Tulip Time Festival for multiple purposes, including preserving a shared heritage for the community itself.

63 Letter from finance chairman to Old Pella Friends, [18 March 1936], Old Correspondence Folder, Pella Historical Society.

64 Letter from General Chairman to Fellow Members, [1937], Old Correspondence Folder, Pella Historical Society.

65 Letter from General Chairman to Fellow Members, [1937], Old Correspondence Folder, Pella Historical Society.
The Orange City Tulip Festival started in 1936 on the coattails of the other two, particularly Pella’s. But, unlike Pella, Orange City had a tradition of planting tulips and did have a tulip growing contest already in 1933.\textsuperscript{66} The final push to start a festival came in 1935 when a few local residents recognized the possibilities for Orange City to use its tulip growing tradition and Dutch heritage the way Pella had starting using it. The first festival occurred on May 14, 1936, under the name “May Festival.” This celebration attracted 3,500 visitors to the one-day event. It grew to two days by 1938 with the coronation of a queen starting in 1937. It also began immediately to not only have the requisite parades, street scrubbing, and tulips, but also had a number of carnival rides but no carnival games.\textsuperscript{67} From the first celebration in Orange City, costumes played a major role with contests for the best ones and a newspaper headline in 1938 boasted “Dutch Costumes Are Improving.”\textsuperscript{68} However, many of the earliest costumes took their inspiration from advertising images of Dutch Cleanser and Dutch Cocoa rather than from heirloom costumes, though a few of these did exist.\textsuperscript{69}

The organizers of the festivals in all three towns marketed their events heavily as they projected an image of their Dutchness to attract visitors. For instance, in 1931, two Holland High School students, dressed in Dutch costumes, handed out

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{66}
Schoone-Jonge, \emph{Dutch American Identity}, 140.

\bibitem{67}
Arie Vander Stoep, “History of the Orange City Tulip Festival.” Available at Ramaker Library, Dutch Heritage Collection, Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa. Hereafter Ramaker Library.

\bibitem{68}
Clipping of with a date of June 2, 1938 on it but no other information in Leona Vander Stoep Scrapbooks, Box 1936-1951, Scrapbook 1936-1938, Ramaker Library.

\bibitem{69}
Schoone-Jonge, \emph{Dutch American Identity}, 180-194.
\end{thebibliography}
tulips to passengers on trains as they stopped at the Pere Marquette railroad station in Holland.⁷⁰ A postcard for the 1939 festival was sent to media outlets around the country. It pictured women in Dutch costumes in front of a field of tulips. The souvenir program from the same year had small pictures of women in Dutch costumes and wooden shoes.⁷¹ The organizers used images of the Netherlands that reinforced images their American audience had of the Netherlands in order to attract visitors.

The planners in Pella recognized the attraction of their celebration from the beginning. For the second event in Pella in 1936, 200 residents “consisting mostly of pretty girls,” paraded through Iowa’s capital city of Des Moines to invite the governor to the festival.⁷² Throughout the 1930s, the newspaper consistently highlighted any mention of the festival in regional and national radio broadcasts. The newspaper boasted in 1937 that visitors from all 99 counties in Iowa and from at least seven other states had attended that year’s festival.⁷³ Yet, Pella organizers also wanted to emphasize the non-commercial aspects of their festival. They boasted about how they had kept the carnival aspects out of the festival even as concern for the economic aspects and counting the number of visitors received much coverage. Pella’s organizers highlighted the role of the Pella Historical Society as the manager of the festival and not the Chamber of Commerce. By 1937, the newspaper told readers that “the theme of Tuliptime is NOT commercialism—it is a sacred event and holds much

⁷⁰ Vande Water, Tulip Time Treasures, 16.

⁷¹ Ibid., 17.

⁷² “Pella Invades Des Moines in Real Fashion,” The Pella Chronicle, 30 April 1936, pg. 1.

deeper significance, in that we live again as it were the traditions a faith of our Fathers calling to mind those fundamentals upon which Dominie Scholte and his 700 Holland Colonists founded Pella in 1847.\textsuperscript{74} The images of the Netherlands used in these festivals influenced the community as it became more self-conscious about its identity in the shifting American culture. These same people used these images in their institutional commemorations and the shared identity of the community. In all three communities, the organizers worked hard to present a Dutch atmosphere as they understood it. For instance, \textit{The Pella Chronicle} noted already before the first Tulip Time festival in Pella in April 1935, “Every effort should be made to create a Dutch atmosphere and pass this spirit down to even unborn generations.”\textsuperscript{75} The mayor of Pella annually put a call in the newspaper to encourage cleaning up yards and alleys as many visitors visited Pella and expected a clean town built on a Dutch reputation.

By World War II the paradigm for the Tulip Time Festivals had been set. These Tulip Time Festivals had coalesced around certain tropes and themes of cleanliness, and “Old Holland” pastoralism of costumes, wooden shoes, and windmills that attracted visitors. The overall schedule also varied little after World War II as each festival became routinized. This routine showed that these festivals met a need and continued to attract visitors and keep the attention of the residents who staged the festivals. Residents presented a clean and acceptable version of the Netherlands and what it meant to be Dutch American to an outside audience.

\textsuperscript{74} “‘Tulip Time’ is a Community Enterprise,” \textit{The Pella Chronicle}, 15 April 1937, pg. 1.

However, this acting the part for others came to shape the community’s identity itself. The people who only yearly dressed in Dutch costumes and wore wooden shoes started to think of themselves as being a separate group. What had started as a way to boost the image of the community, now started to define the community’s image of itself.

Other Community Celebrations

The work of framing a Dutch-American narrative went beyond the Tulip Time Festivals. Other celebrations and commemorative events during the 1920s and 1930s also presented a narrative of what it meant to be Dutch American. Some celebrations, like Tulip Time Festivals, did not celebrate only institutions, but a more general sense of community identity. While the primary audience of the Tulip Time Festivals was for outsiders, the primary audience for these other community events was Dutch Americans themselves. These activities fit larger patterns of the time between World War I and World War II that Michael Kammen noted was “permeated by both modernism and nostalgia in a manner that may best be described as perversely symbiotic.” As he pointed out, the rapid modernizing resulted in some people becoming nostalgic for a mythical, simpler past. The Dutch-American community fit this pattern as they responded to the changes they experienced by emphasizing their faithful past as a way to function in the twentieth century.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Dutch-Americans told their history in a number of forms. In particular, books framed a story for a new generation that had an

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awakened interest in the past. These stories had been told in previous publications, mostly in Dutch, but set the narratives that other venues reinforced. One of the more comprehensive and oft cited works by later authors was Aleida J. Pieters’ *A Dutch Settlement in Michigan* published in 1923. This book laid out in over 200 pages, with endnotes, the reasons for emigration, the establishment of the colony under Van Raalte, the daily and religious life, as well as a chapter on “Today.” Pieters noted that “The Dutch emigrants of 1847 reacted toward state coercion in matters of religion in the same way that the Pilgrims and Puritans had done.” The trope of equating Dutch migrants to Michigan and Pilgrims and Puritans recurred regularly. She also pointed out how the pioneers “were willing to endure hardships to secure for their children the advantages of a free country.”

Throughout the twentieth century commemorations, the veneration of the founders would be a consistent theme even as the reasons for their veneration changed. For Pieters, they needed to be honored for struggling against hardships. Institutional histories repeated these themes and tropes set down by Pieters.

Anna Kramer Keppel also wrote a book in the 1920s focusing on Zeeland, Michigan, just outside of Holland. Keppel’s book commemorated the 75th Anniversary of the first house built in Zeeland in 1847. She noted that she wrote the book because “we cherish the memory of these heroes, show faith and courage

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77 Aleida J. Pieters, *A Dutch Settlement in Michigan* (Grand Rapids: The Reformed Press, 1923), 7. Aleida Pieters wrote the book as her Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia University which she completed in 1921. Prior to and after her Ph.D., she was an active educator in Wisconsin having grown up in Holland, Michigan. Her brother was Albertus Pieters who was a member of the faculty at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary.
conquered the wilderness and caused it to blossom as the rose.” Five of her eleven chapters focused on the religious circumstances in the Netherlands prior to migration. The interpretation of the religious situation by Keppel helped coalesce part of the framework for the community as other writers and commemorators would repeat her interpretation.

The Dutch Americans in Iowa also had a few publications that helped set the frame of their story that later writers referred to often. One of the first books in English about the Dutch migration to Iowa came out in 1912 written by Jacob Van Der Zee. This comprehensive study published by the State Historical Society of Iowa included an editor’s introduction touting the credentials of Van Der Zee as an insider and scholar so that “his book is in no respect an overdrawn, eulogistic account of Dutch people.” In forty chapters, he comprehensively covers the history of the Dutch migrants in Iowa over seventy-five years. Van Der Zee emphasized how the story of the Dutch was the story of the civilizing of the West and contributing to the best aspects of America government and society. His detailed account emphasized a narrative of overall success despite some setbacks as part of the typical American story. Future commemorators rarely strayed from the interpretive framework Van Der Zee established.

When Pella celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding in 1922, a local booster published A Souvenir History of Pella, Iowa. It included a short article by Cyrenus Cole about the history of Pella written in 1895 for The Midland Monthly

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79 Jacob Van Der Zee, The Hollanders of Iowa (Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1912), 5.
where he stressed how the Dutch migrants to Iowa easily fit into America because of the contribution of earlier Dutch to the founding of the United States. The publisher, G. A. Stout, also included biographies of the founders, lists of migrants, and other short articles about the institutions of Pella.  

These publications framed the narrative not only for those who read the books but also for the more public, community-oriented events. The staging of pageants by community leaders for the community and with community participation was one site where both the narrative presented and participation itself shaped a shared identity. Americans found historical pageants a popular form of public theater in the first half of the twentieth century. Historical pageants, as defined by David Glassberg in *American Historical Pageantry*, are “a dramatic public ritual chronicling local community development.” Pageant writers and producers selectively represented the community’s history. Glassberg points out that beginning during the Progressive Era in the United States, pageants functioned as both popular entertainment and as a way to bring about social transformation. The organizers of pageants intended them to uplift and inspire the participating community and serve as a unifying experience of putting the production together. The examples of pageants among Dutch migrants and their descendants in West Michigan conform to broader trends in American historical pageantry in a number of ways yet exhibit distinctive features that suggest the Dutch were appropriating this form of theater for their purposes.

Pella, Iowa staged a substantial seventy-fifth anniversary celebration in 1922

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complete with a pageant entitled “All Epfos Red Nall Oh.” The three days of festivities also included parades, athletic events, band concerts, choir anthems, and religious services in both Dutch and English which addressed the migration experience. All these events and many, many advertisements could be found listed in the Souvenir Program published. The pageant, presented on the second evening of the event, had its own program with an portrait engraving of “Dominie Scholte” on the title page with the epithet “Founder of Pella 1847” below the portrait. The staging required vast amounts of organization under the general chairmanship of F.M. Frush with over 300 people listed as participants. Prepared and directed by Julia Watson of Central College, the pageants had originally been staged at the college in June for its commencement. The four episodes included “Primitive Iowa,” “Settlement of Pella,” “Founding and Early History of Central College,” and “Pella Today.” The opening episode included a scene where the Spirit of the Prairie warned the Indians of the approach of strangers while the Spirit of Indian Days led them to new hunting grounds. The second episode focused on the Spirit of America offering the Dutch migrants a flag and citizenship which they gladly received. An interlude in this episode included a “Dutch Drill” that an accompanying photo showed girls in a kind of folk dress kicking up their heals. The episode concluded with a scene in “Dominie Scholtes’ Church” with Psalms singing and extracts from Scholte’s sermons read. The episode about Central College centered on the “War” and how it interrupted the life of the college. The final episode included the Spirit of Patriotism that Pella

82 “Souvenir Program, 1847-1922,” Historical Society Folder, Pella Historical Society.

83 “Pageant Setting Most Impressive,” The Pella Chronicle, 14 September 1922, pg. 1.
embodied. This two-hour pageant attracted an estimated 3,000 people.\textsuperscript{84} It showed the community the civilizing character of the Dutch migrants to Pella and how they were fully patriotic in the end through their church and college.\textsuperscript{85}

The American Legion took the lead in 1927 in Pella when it decided to celebrate the 4\textsuperscript{th} of July with amusements of many kind and the climax of the day being a pageant entitled “Pageant of Progress.” Produced by the John B. Rogers Production company under the staging of Larry Drinard, this program included nine episodes. The episodes started with Christopher Columbus, included the Puritans and the Revolution, highlighted the Civil War and the Great War, and concluded with the wealth and prosperity of the present.\textsuperscript{86} This generic, off-the-shelf pageant fit Pella’s story within a broader American story of progress but the script did not mention the Dutch migration. However, the pageant still functioned as an important event to unit the town around a shared endeavor. The production included over 300 cast members from the community, the pageant’s program included advertisements for businesses in Pella, it drew a large audience (the newspaper reported 4,000), and the community voted for a “Miss Pella” character. The newspaper compared it to the 1922 pageant as being more polished but overall “not equal” because of its lack of local focus.\textsuperscript{87} This event and pageant shows the way people in Pella thought about themselves as very American and willing to celebrate their community in very American ways.

\textsuperscript{84} “Pageant Setting Most Impressive,” \textit{The Pella Chronicle}, 14 September 1922, pg. 1.

\textsuperscript{85} “Program of the Pageant of All Epfos Red Nall Oh,” Historical Society Folder, Pella Historical Society.

\textsuperscript{86} “Official Program of the ‘Pageant of Progress,’” Pella Anniversary—75\textsuperscript{th} Folder, Pella Historical Society.

\textsuperscript{87} “Pageant Draws Mighty Crowd,” \textit{The Pella Chronicle}, 7 July 1927, pg. 1.
Orange City commemorated its “Golden Jubilee” in 1920 with a pageant written by local resident Andrew J. Kolyn. As the “Announcement” at the beginning of the program noted, “A Pageant has for its primary purpose the teaching of history by the actual living of it . . . [where] the community is the hero and the community’s history the plot.”\(^88\) The plot began in the Netherlands with Scholte leading the way and convincing others to join because of the persecution suffered. The story shifted to Pella and the migration to Orange City for more land when the plot arrived at 1869. “Act Second” focused on “Indians” and their life prior to the arrival of “four pioneers with prairie schooner” and the Indians quickly exiting the scene. The migrants to the Orange City area, as the pageant noted, faced various forces of nature and other maladies until “Faith and Christian Service” entered the plot assuring listeners that “we are greater than them all.”\(^89\) The pageant continued with various episodes of the events of the first fifty years of the town, from the first school and church to the grasshopper years and “stealing” the county seat. The message of Kolyn in the pageant clearly focused on the success of the community. As the narrator noted at the conclusion of the pageant, “the past calls to you faithfully to carry forward work so well begun.” This locally written and produced pageant on the heels of World War I made it clear that Dutch settlers had civilized the west in America. Orange City fit the mold of other settlements in the West that built a narrative of itself as a truly American town as the pageant concluded with singing of the Star Spangled Banner.

Holland, Michigan also staged a pageant in the 1920s. The city leaders and Hope College worked closely together to produce pageants that appealed to and

\(^{88}\) “Golden Jubilee Pageant,” History: Anniversaries, Ramaker Library.

\(^{89}\) Ibid.
formed a narrative for both the city and the college. While as large as the production in Pella, the student body of Hope College presented “The Pageant of 1926” to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the college. They hoped to have a “successful historical pageant” because of their “glow of love for our Alma Mater and a patriotic pride in the achievements of the past.”90 The students also showed a keen awareness of the memorializing aspect of the pageant as the introduction noted “It is the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the eightieth year since the first settlement in the city of Holland and the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Hope College.” Each of the three episodes highlighted an anniversary with the majority of the pageant’s script recounting the story of faithful Dutch migrants under Van Raalte settling and clearing the trees and Indians. A telling scene occurs when two engineers arrived on a Sunday to look at the harbor but found no one on the streets. Only upon hearing singing from the church did the engineers realize that the streets were empty because, as one of them said, “Everyone in Holland goes to church!”91 The pageant concluded with “singing America in the Hope College way.”92 The juxtaposition of the American anniversary of the Declaration of Independence as well as the more local, Dutch events helps demonstrate the way they thought of themselves as they built an ethnoreligious identity in the United States. Written and produced by students for a local audience, this pageant fit within the narrative of being Dutch American while also reinforcing the foundation story for the city and college.


91 Ibid., 12.

92 Ibid., 16.
In 1936, Hope College students again presented a pageant, this time to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the founding of Holland. Simply called “The Pageant of 1936” and written by Florence Vis, the pageant started in the Netherlands with Dutch who were “staunch champions of liberty.” However, because the narrative of the community had emphasized how Van Raalte and his follower had left an intolerant homeland, the pageant’s script abruptly shifted its narrative about the Netherlands. The narrator noted that the Netherlands government “infringed upon the liberty which they had fought so hard to secure. . . . The history of Holland, Mich., therefore, is directly connected with the persecution inflicted by William I, since the first settlers . . . were the recipients of his injustices.” In the United States, the writers of the pageant made clear, the migrants found they could be “free from all restraint.” The narrative retold by the pageant’s authors emphasized the “spirit of the Dutch” as liberty loving people who found that liberty in western Michigan after the Netherlands had abandoned it. Compared to the 1926 pageant, the 1936 pageant more clearly highlighted the contribution of Dutch migrants and their descendants to America. This heightened sense of pride in their Dutch roots encouraged by the pageant’s author followed the establishment of the Tulip Time Festival. The 1936 pageant noted that the festival was considered “one of the three largest festivals in America.” The 1936 pageant also took place at a more distant time from Americanization efforts of World War I and the 1920s when some progressives

93 “The Pageant of 1936,” pg. 4. Available at Anniversaries of Hope Box, Joint Archives.

94 Ibid., 5.

95 Ibid., 6.
emphasized the cultural gifts of different migrant groups.⁹⁶

The telling of the story of the Dutch-American community took place in books and pageants during the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, a heightened historical sense led some leaders in the community to start historical organizations that provided the organizational structures for the community commemorations for the next fifty years. In Pella, the Historical Society, as already noted, had direct control of the Tulip Time Festival. The museum, started by this organization, emerged from store-front displays of antiques that had been part of the festival since 1935. The beginnings of a formal history organization in Holland, Michigan began at a meeting in January 1937 when a group of West Michigan men decided it would be appropriate to celebrate the 1847 founding of the city. The general sentiments of those present, including members of the city council, was that a “Dutch feeling of patriotism and Dutch ideas will be stirred up and out of that will grow other things.”⁹⁷ What they meant by patriotism and “other things” was not precisely delineated, but the sentiment to memorialize the migrants and their contributions to the area motivated these men to organize the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation. The constitution of the organization made it clear that the main purpose of the group was “to commemorate the colonization of Midwestern America by people from the Netherlands and to perpetuate the memory of these pioneers and their accomplishments.”⁹⁸ While the Tulip Time Festival attracted tourists, the men who organized the Netherlands Pioneer

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⁹⁷ 6 January 1937 Minutes. Willard Wichers Papers Box 1, Holland Museum.

⁹⁸ “Articles of Association of the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation.” Willard Wichers Papers Box 1, Holland Museum.
and Historical Foundation wanted it to concentrate on interpreting the past for the Dutch Americans themselves.

One of the projects of the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation was to begin holding yearly “Commemorative Exercises” beginning on February 9, 1937 that highlighted the founding of the Dutch-American community in West Michigan and the reasons for leaving the homeland. Since February 9, 1847 was the date Van Raalte had first arrived in the Holland area, choosing February 9 for the event pointed out the significance of remaining as faithful to the story of Dutch settlement as possible. The celebration had echoes of a religious service, with singing, an offering, and an address. The festivity also incorporated “dramatic features.” The program from the Ninetieth Anniversary, the first such event, included a “March of Events” that re-enacted the 1847 migration to West Michigan by emphasizing the religious reasons for leaving the Netherlands.

As stated in the background notes for the march, “The Holland immigration of 1847 was the work of Christian Hollanders. Therefore it has for a background all the Christian centuries.” The march opened with Christianity arriving in the Netherlands. It emphasized the “Period of Persecution” from 1836-1846 as the reason for Van Raalte and his followers to leave the homeland. In this recounting of the story of migration, the Netherlands played the role of a religious country that became repressive to the true adherents of Calvinism. In the “March of Events,” Michigan, in contrast, became the place where the oppressed immigrants found freedom.

The Ninety-First Anniversary event also included a “dramatic feature” where actors staged a scene that compared the early settlers of West Michigan with the Pilgrims who “turned to America, which alone of the western nations promises

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99 March of Events Notes, Willard Wichers Papers Box 1, Holland Museum.
religious freedom." Instead of stressing the religious character of the Netherlands gone astray, this dramatization started with the “little band of English Pilgrims” fleeing across the North Sea to the Dutch Republic in 1609. This scene highlighted how the Dutch Republic offered the Pilgrims a safe haven and “their first steps in politics” which shaped the American political culture. The brief performance did not recount why the Pilgrims left the Netherlands nor emphasize the Dutch Golden Age; instead, the Dutch migrants were compared to the Pilgrims who had left a religiously repressive homeland. The focus of this story was how the Netherlands lost its way under the rule of monarchs which forced the migrants to leave in 1847.

Also at the 1938 event, Albert Hyma, professor of history at the University of Michigan, gave an address. Hyma was an immigrant from the Netherlands himself and had attended Calvin College in Grand Rapids. In his speech, he stressed the “desire on the part of the [Dutch] pioneers to worship God as they saw fit.” He also connected the Dutch pioneers with English Puritans and Pilgrims who sought religious toleration. By implication, the Netherlands was being constructed as a place where people left because it did not offer religious toleration as only the United States could instead of interrogating the historical changes in the Netherlands.

Another project of the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation was to

100 “The Netherlands in America” by Metta Ross. Willard Wichers Papers Box 1, Holland Museum.

101 Hyma went on to write a biography of Van Raalte in 1947. Albert Hyma, Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1947)

102 “Albert Hyma,” Contemporary Authors Online (n.p., Gale, 2002).

create the Netherlands Museum which they hoped would be a “memorial, a permanent monument to a heroic purpose fulfilled in America.” The popularity of historical museums during the 1930s may have contributed to their desire for a museum. Both Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village and J.D. Rockefeller Jr.’s Colonial Williamsburg opened in the 1930s. The core of the Netherlands Museum’s collection came through the work of Willard Wichers who had been the local supervisor of the Work’s Progress Administration’s project to collect historical artifacts and papers during the Great Depression. A pamphlet soliciting money for a permanent museum building in 1938 used pictures of a family in an “authentic kitchen from the Province of Zeeland” and an “ancient spinning wheel” to illustrate how the Netherlands was a pastoral, pre-industrial country at the time of migration in the 1840s. These domestic scenes froze the image of the material Netherlands in the past as the Tulip Time Festival had been doing. While the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation had portrayed the Netherlands as repressive in its commemorative exercises, its museum focused on the material culture of a quaint Netherlands.


105 Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 341-374.


107 Museum Brochure, [1938], Willard Wichers Papers Box 1, Holland Museum.
The public celebrations of the past in western Michigan and in Iowa memorialized for an interested, local, insider audience what the narrative of the Dutch in America would contain. Dutch immigrants left a country that provided few opportunities religiously for one that had endless possibilities. While not all the migrants left the Netherlands because of religious persecution, this came to be the dominant motif of the story for the next fifty years. This narrative also helped justify the migration because the United States allowed Dutch migrants to establish institutions which were so vital to their community formation and identity. It allowed them to have a sense of a stake and contribute on their own terms to the surrounding culture.

Denomination, Congregation, and School Commemorations

While community celebrations and Tulip Time Festivals constructed an ethnic identity that emphasized how Dutch migrants and descendants fit into the American story of civilizing and conquering the West by Protestants, the congregations and schools emphasized other aspects of the past that helped these institutions navigate the twentieth century. Since congregations and schools served as the key social institutions for community formation, the way the people in these institutions framed their story in the 1920s and 1930s set the framework for the ethnoreligious identity and the continued strength of the institutions for the next 50 years. In the context of perceived and real internal and external threats, in a growing sense of nostalgia and memorialization within and outside the community, the members of these institutions used the opportunity provided by important anniversaries to frame their narrative for the next generation and to explain to themselves why the institutions mattered even when no longer necessary for basic survival. The narratives of particular institutions
followed specific patterns but with some variations based on the local need and history. Being part of these congregations and schools, finding oneself in the narratives they told, meant the Dutch migrant or descendant accepted the ethos of these institutions which created and took their identity from as being Dutch American. Institutions also had competing narratives as they justified their existence within the context of Dutch-American identity.

Denominational commemorations of the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America within the Dutch-American community told a story through a self-consciously Calvinistic framework. These denominations, in books and commemorative activities, made it their goal to maintain a faithful, pure Calvinism that they believed their honored forbearers transplanted from the Netherlands. The Calvinism which arrived had taken its shape in a very specific context in the Netherlands. As noted in Chapter 2, the Afsheiding of 1834 set the tone for the migrants’ understanding of Calvinism in the Netherlands.108 This Calvinism opposed what its adherents saw as “rational religion” in the national church and wanted a “warm and experiential Christianity.”109 The Calvinism brought by the founders of the colonies and which provided the shape of the religious tenor of the community emphasized an all-powerful God who actively worked in the world on behalf of his chosen, covenanted people. In the case of the Dutch migrants, they saw


109 Elton J. Bruins and Robert P. Swierenga, Family Quarrels In the Dutch Reformed Churches of the 19th Century (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 8, 16.
themselves as those chosen people.\textsuperscript{110}

While the ecclesiastical cultures of the Reformed Church in America and Christian Reformed Church differed in the twentieth century, Calvinism was the driving force both in words and structures of the remembering in both denominations. The common story of migration and common theology meant a similar narrative at the denominational level. Directed by the leaders of the denominations, these commemorative narratives focused on producing books and denomination-wide events. At the same time, the different cultures of the denominations were reflected in the tone of the celebrations and reflected the different “minds” as James Bratt called them.\textsuperscript{111}

The Reformed Church in America celebrated the tercentenary of its founding in 1928. The Tercentenary Committee on Research and Publication produced a book as one of a number of “permanent memorials.” They wrote that their book, with 30 essays, was the most appropriate and important of these memorials because it assembled “in permanent form studies setting forth the events and circumstances of the foundation so significant in the life of the Christian Church and of America.”\textsuperscript{112}

This book and commemoration of an important event in the life of the Reformed Church in America pointed out fissures within the denomination. While the denomination started in New Netherlands in 1628, its most dynamic wing in the 1920s was the western areas where the migrants had settled in Iowa and Michigan.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Michale Fallon, “People of the Covenant: Dutch Reformed Immigration Into Canada after World War II” (Ph.D. diss., University of Guelph, 2000), 12-19.}
\footnote{Bratt, \textit{Dutch Calvinism in Modern America}, 37-54.}
\footnote{Tercentenary Studies, 1928, \textit{Reformed Church in America; A Record of Beginnings} ([New York]: Reformed Church in America, 1928), iii.}
\end{footnotes}
The story of the denomination in this book emphasized churches that were founded in the earliest period and their story confined to the pre-Revolution era. These choices made by the committee show the power of the denomination, in leadership, finances, and numbers, still laid in the east in the 1920s even as the western areas grew. Realizing the western growth must have convinced the committee to include chapters on Dutch migration and starting Reformed churches Michigan, Iowa, and Sioux County in the nineteenth century. This concession did require the authors of these chapters to make analogies of migration with the earliest Dutch migrants in the colonial era both in their American and Netherlands experience, naturally emphasizing religious similarities. Clergy in the denomination wrote twenty-five of the thirty essays, showing their control of the official narrative. These clergy themselves emphasized the decisive role, in their estimation, of the early clergy in both New Netherlands as well as the nineteenth century migration. However, even though Calvinism as a unifying factor is somewhat muted in this collection, it still framed the narrative. For instance, in discussion the settlement in Michigan, Rev. Siebe C. Nettinga noted that the Dutch migrants “took the great doctrines of grace in all their Calvinistic implications, and knew how to apply them to daily life.” The authors of this collection of essays in 1928 also showed the beginnings of thinking about the community as more than just recreating the Netherlands in America. As Nettinga wrote, the members of the Reformed Church in America in the Michigan had started to “identify themselves with American ideals and customs and language

113 The chapter on the Church in Iowa by Rev. Milton J. Hoffman provides many details about the Netherlands during the age of Napoleon and its impact on the church.

and all that belongs to true Americanism."\textsuperscript{115} The authors of these essays emphasized how fully Americanized the members of the Reformed Church in America had become over the years. For these authors, the identity of the denomination was found most clearly in the American story.

The Tercentenary Studies had a certain amount of legitimacy because a denominational committee had produced it and its pastors had written it. However, this book was over five hundred pages of rather dense prose. Another committee of the denomination, the Board of Publication and Bible School Work, produced a more accessible volume simply titled \textit{A History of the Reformed Church in America} by Willard Dayton Brown, the committee’s secretary. This slim volume of barely 125 pages was dedicated “to those of the pioneer spirit whether of the past or present.”\textsuperscript{116} Brown hoped that the constituency and friends of the church would read “at least the outlines of the story of steadfast faith and undiscouraged adventure which brought our fathers to these shores, inspired and guided the leaders of the Church for three centuries and still persists in the heart of the latest recruit in the ranks of the Kingdom.”\textsuperscript{117} Brown hoped it would unite the denomination around a shared story that study groups (study questions provided) could use in local congregations. The seven chapters included five on the years prior to 1792 and only a brief mention of the migration in the nineteenth century in Michigan and Iowa. This shows the dual purpose of the book. The eastern sections of the denomination needed their loyalty to the denomination strengthened and the audience in the Midwest could see their

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 458.

\textsuperscript{116} Willard Dayton Brown, \textit{A History of The Reformed Church in America} (New York: Board of Publication and Bible School Work, 1928), dedication.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 5.
denomination’s American roots. As Brown eagerly pointed out to both audiences, their shared endeavor of Hope College defined its objectives in the 1920s as “a purposeful Christianity, a strong, loyal Americanism, and a vigorous, cultured personality.” Brown put the migrant institutions within the broader, American story of the Reformed Church in America with ease and purpose in the 1920s commemoration.

Also, the leaders of the Reformed Church in America produced a pageant for the 1928 tercentenary as a “dramatic representation of the history of the Reformed Church in America. Organized by another committee, the pageant committee, Elisabeth Edland wrote the script that put “history into vivid and reproducible form” as the foreword noted. The committee expected local congregations to produce the pageant and even add a few episodes about the local situation. This public representation offered the story of the denomination to anyone who would listen for a few hours to the pageant. The pageant emphasized the contributions the Dutch made to the United States, not as migrants leaving under persecution but to make new homes. As one character stated boldly in the prologue, “They came from a land tolerant to religions and so their tolerance here was but natural. They came with their teachers, their household furnishings, seeds, agricultural implements—everything necessary for making of a colony of homes. . . .And the laws of this country, our very Constitution, are largely modeled from their old codes.”

The contribution of the Dutch not only stemmed from the colonial period, but by Scene IX, the nineteenth

118 Ibid., 104.


120 Ibid., 5-6.
century migrants got in on the act. America was the place of freedom as a character named Mrs. Grootenhuis noted, “Here there is absolute freedom of worship and education without any restricting laws against the word of God, and there is opportunity on all sides.”¹²¹ The author used the Van Raalte character in this scene to show the audience that these migrants thought of themselves as contributing to the American project of settling the wilderness and civilizing it with churches and schools. The pageant made the case even stronger in Pella where the pageant pointed out that within a year the migrants were “full-fledged American citizens.”¹²²

These denominational commemorations in books and pageants of the Reformed Church in America made it clear that the migrants of the nineteenth century contributed to the denomination in specific ways.¹²³ First, they took their role in America and the Reformed Church in America very seriously. They did not aspire to a separate existence but wanted to be part of the mainstream, even if the historical record was that Van Raalte and Scholte attempted to build colonies. Second, the main contribution of the migrants to the Reformed Church in America was in the colleges they started and maintained. From the academic Tercentenary Studies, to Brown’s History of the Reformed Church in America, to the pageant, all focused on

¹²¹ Ibid., 69.
¹²² Ibid., 73.
¹²³ The official status of the commemorative activities was compiled in 1929 at the request of the 1928 General Synod, R.C.A. The resulting book had over 500 pages compiled by Edgar Franklin Romig, chairman of the Tercentenary Committee. This compilation establishes the elaborate nature of the remembering of the denomination in 1928. The Tercentenary Year: A Record of the Celebration of the Three Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of the First Church in New Netherlands, Now New York, and the Beginning of Organized Religious Life under the Reformed (Dutch) Church in America (New York: The Church, 1929).
the educational institutions. Specifically, how these institutions produced ministers for the denomination and missionaries the serve abroad. Thirdly, this denominational celebration worked to unite a geographically and culturally disparate denomination. While the eastern section had a long history, the Midwest section of migrants and their descendants was a growing force with educational institutions and zeal for the denomination’s work. Finally, the theological underpinnings of this celebration reflected and muted Calvinism of the east more than the zealous Calvinism of the west.

The importance of Calvinism for the Midwest section of the Reformed Church in America and the migrants showed itself in the more local commemorations. The Hope College Alumni Association sponsored a pageant in 1928 titled “Pageant of the Word.” According to the executive committee, they aimed to “stimulate a greater knowledge of our church history, to inspire a holy reverence for the church, and to secure a lasting patriotism and enthusiasm in the church.”¹²⁴ The much more allegorical pageant with various “spirits” symbolically representing such things as light and truth as well as the church and pioneers revolved around a struggle between the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error. Compared with the Tercentenary Pageant organized for the entire denomination, this presentation of church history clearly emphasized God’s directing hand. Starting with the migration of settlers for New Netherlands, the pageant made it clear God had directed the migrants and guided them to start congregations. The active hand of God in the events of the history of the Reformed Church in America more clearly guided this presentation of history than the denomination-wide commemorations, which barely mentioned God.

in America in 1928 worked to unite a divided denomination around a shared history and a common vision for the way forward. However, the migrants and their descendants in the Midwest section of the Reformed Church in America also told their history apart from the eastern section. In 1925 at the 75th anniversary of the admission of the Midwest congregations into the Reformed Church in America, a program was held in Holland, Michigan. The four addresses given at the two “services” on October 13, 1925, revealed the Calvinism in the Midwestern churches as the addresses played to an audience willing to accept the basic premise of God’s control of the world. For instance, Rev. G. De Jonge commented about whether the union of 1850 was right. He noted that “In answering this question we have to do with nothing except the will of Christ and the leadings of divine providence. . . . In the providence of God there existed in their new home a Reformed Church that had preserved the truth as contained in their standards.” The emphasis on God working in their situation as people of the covenant was a basic tenant of Calvinism as interpreted by the Reformed Church in America congregations in the western areas where a majority of the membership had migrated in the years prior to the 1920s.

The other major denomination of the Dutch Americans, the Christian Reformed Church, also commemorated itself in the 1920s and 1930s. As a denomination started in protest to the Reformed Church in America in 1857, the leaders consistently justified the split and told a story about the past that would build a shared denominational identity as a buffer against outside and inside forces. The person most responsible for framing the narrative in the first half of the 20th century was Rev. Henry Beets. Born in 1869 in the Netherlands, he migrated with his family...

125 Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Exercises Celebrating the Admission of the Western Churches into the Reformed Church (Holland, Mich.: n.p., 1925), 17.
to settle in Luctor, Kansas in 1886 before graduating from Theological School of the
Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids in 1895. Beets served as the pastor for
congregations in Sioux Center, Iowa and Grand Rapids, Michigan before becoming
director of missions for the Christian Reformed Church from 1920 to 1939.126 His
leadership extended beyond missions, to denominational ecumenical relations and to
a prodigious output of historical writing in both Dutch and English. His historical
interpretations carried extra weight because of his various leadership positions
including serving as editor of The Banner from 1904 to 1929.127 His 1918 De Chr.
Church in North America: Sixty Years of Struggle and Blessing] provided the most
extensive and interpretive history of the Christian Reformed Church up to that
time.128 Focused mostly on justifying the founding of the Christian Reformed Church
in 1857, Beets enumerated and defended the reasons for secession. However, by 1923
and an English language history of the Christian Reformed Church, his polemical tone
had softened. Beets wrote The Christian Reformed Church in North America: Its
History, Schools, Missions, Creed and Liturgy, Distinctive Principles and Practices
and its Church Government “with the distinct purpose of enabling our people,
particularly our young people to know and to appreciate their denomination, and

126 “Beets, Henry,” in Richard H. Harms, ed. Historical Directory of the
Christian Reformed Church in North America (Grand Rapids: Historical Committee

Reformed Church,” in Breaches and Bridges; Reformed Subcultures in the
Netherlands, Germany, and the United States, edited by George Harinck and Hans
Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 129-130.

Zegen (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Co., 1918).
willingly to devote their prayers, their means, and their services to the promotion of its highest and best interest.” In fact, Beets apologized for the more polemical nature of the section dealing with the arguments about the right of the Christian Reformed Church to exist. Clearly, as Beets laid out in four reasons, he intended this book to keep the next generation loyal to the Christian Reformed Church and put its best foot forward and not rehash old arguments between the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America. He starts his story in the Netherlands in the 600s with the conversion of the “pagans” and moved quickly to 1834 always with an eye on the church’s constant need to have right doctrines. The book then moves chapter by chapter with periods from 1847 to 1857, 1857 to 1880, 1880-1900, and 1900 to 1920 followed by chapters on schools and missionary activity, concluding with chapters on creeds, liturgy, distinctives, and church government. Beets clearly intended the book to be studied in groups as he included study questions and further reading sections. The resonances of his periodization, overall argument about the Christian Reformed Church being in a long line of sticking up for “true” Calvinistic doctrine against heresy, and its right to exist within the understanding of the true church would play a role in the way the Christian Reformed Church created a distinct identity for itself through retelling the story in numerous places at the denominational and congregational level.

Subsequent to the publication of Beet’s book in 1923, the Christian Reformed Church denomination celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary of its beginnings in 1932. While a relatively subdued celebration in the midst of the Great Depression,

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organizers put together a program in Grand Rapids that attracted over 3500 people but no commemorative book was produced. The celebration on June 7 included a “Diamond Jubilee Hymn” as well as addresses by Henry Beets and Louis Berkof of the Christian Reformed Church and by S.O. Los of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. As reported by editor Henry Kuiper in The Banner, Beets had seven themes that all celebrated the struggles of the founders of the denomination but acknowledge that God had provided for remarkable growth. Berkof, a seminary professor and noted theologian of the time in Reformed and Presbyterian circles, argued that the church needed to be loyal to its rich heritage. The only lasting record came in the way of a special “Diamond Jubilee Number” of The Banner dated June 3, 1932. It included a special meditation by J.M.Ghysels entitled “Hitherto Hath the Lord Helped Us,” emphasizing how “through the grace of God, we have weathered every storm, we have achieve many a victory.” Ghysels delineated the distinguishing characteristics of the denomination as the high view of the Bible, devotion to Calvinism, and moral living. Editor Kuiper put it in more blunt terms noting that the Christian Reformed Church held “to all the fundamental principles of the World of God. . . . Among the truths we emphasize, God’s sovereign predestination ranks first. . . . We place equally strong emphasis on the fact that God has included not only believers but also their children in his covenant of grace.” The writers in the official church publication highlighted the aspects of the past that presented the Christian Reformed Church and the denomination that stood up for Calvinism as the


131 J. M. Ghysels, “Hitherto Hath the Lord Helped Us,” The Banner, 3 June 1932, 531.

best sect of Christianity. For these writers, it was better to be faithful and adhere to principles, like the founders, than to be big and successful in the eyes of the world. In another article in the same issue of The Banner, the writer defended the separation of 1857 and justified the continued existence as a separate denomination. D.H. Kromminga framed the separation in terms of an issue in church government because members of congregations had not sufficiently agreed to the union of 1850 so they had the right to separate. For Kromminga, the original secession in 1857 allowed the Christian Reformed Church to maintain “a strictly Reformed church life.”133 In a time of rapid change, the members of the Christian Reformed Church clung to a justified past.

The differences in commemorating the past show some of the different narratives and cultures of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America, even in the Midwest. While both claimed Calvinism and being faithful to its tenets, as the secessionist and schismatic denomination in the United States, the Christian Reformed Church justified its separate existence. It needed to hold itself as being more faithful, more Calvinistic, and more in line with the 1834 secession in the Netherlands. However, the 1934 centennial of that secession, the one that started the movement of Dutch migrants to North America, barely was mentioned in that year. The Synod of Christian Reformed Church sent a representative to the seceded church in the Netherlands, recommended that churches mention it on their own or with other churches in the area, and the editor of The Banner had a brief editorial called the Christian Reformed Church the “sons of the secession of 1834.”134


134 Acts of Synod, 1934 (Grand Rapids: Office of the Stated Clerk, 1934), 16, 81; Henry Kuiper, “sons of the Secession of 1834,” The Banner, 19 October 1934,
The religious context in the 1920s and 1930s helps explain the framework of these narratives constructed for commemorative events. While neither the Reformed Church in America or Christian Reformed Church could be characterized as falling squarely within the evangelical camp, the broader implication as they understood it had to do with the infiltrating of modernism into the churches. In fact, the Christian Reformed Church worked in the 1930s for close relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Standing on the side of the fundamentalists in the controversy, this context helped give the Christian Reformed Church purpose in the religious world as they stood up for fundamentals. It was at the more national level where the leaders were apprised of broader trends in Protestantism that the dispute between modernism and fundamentalism could be seen.

Just as the denomination level of celebration emphasized the Calvinistic faith, the local congregations also held to this emphasis. Local congregations told the story of being faithful Calvinists in their own story. Whether the congregations tied their story into the larger framework the leaders constructed in published books or commemorating only the very local story of their congregation, these stories helped create an ethnic identity through institutional loyalty. The framework for future stories were set as these English language commemorations laid the foundation for future retelling of the story as many future congregational books simply copied the story as it was first told in English in these books and just added the next set of years to the already established narrative. Sometimes, there were telling changes to the

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884. The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1934 also appointed a permanent Historical Committee made up of Beets and Kromminga to collect and keep the documents of the church that were of “special significance.” Acts of Synod, 1934 (Grand Rapids: Office of the Stated Clerk, 1934), 82.

135 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 195, 314.
story as things were added or subtracted or smoothed over as the story needed updating to fit current sensibilities.

Part of the ethnic identity formation, as seen in the denominational commemorations but also filtered down to local congregations, was the emphasis on the being God’s chosen people. Built on a Calvinistic theology of covenant, this tenant came through the way the local congregations told their story. The narrative structure almost always started with acknowledging God as the reason behind all things and then enumerating the success and struggles of the congregation before ending with acknowledgement of God’s hand in the eventual success. For instance, the Eighth Reformed Church in Grand Rapids noted in its 40th anniversary book in 1931 that “Throughout the forty years of its existence, God has blessed the Eighth Reformed Church in a wonderful way. From very small beginnings as a mission station, our church has grown until now it is the second largest Reformed church in Grand Rapids.”136 This aspect of the narrative framework reveals how the group thought of itself.

Another important and consistent feature of the narrative framework was a heavy emphasis on the faithfulness of the founders of the congregation. These men, and men were the ones given all the credit, had bravely set out on a path of faithfully establishing a new congregation whether the congregation started in the 1840s or in the 1900s. Congregations commemorating themselves in the 1920s and 1930s that had started in the 1840s such as the First Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland (1937), the First Reformed Church of Zeeland (1937), and the Second Reformed Church of Pella (1938). The commemoration of the Zeeland churches both connected

136 Eighth Reformed Church, Historical Review, 1891-1931 (Grand Rapids, 1931), 6. Available Joint Archives.
to earliest migrants who had started the community in 1847. The First Reformed Church of Zeeland paid a particular eloquent homage to its founders.

May her sons and daughters ever remain true to the faith of our fathers. . . In faith, they braved the ocean. By faith they were led to Zeeland’s wooded soil. With faith they felled the trees and prepared themselves a habitation. Homes were built, but first a church of logs. It was the center of worship and life. It kept the flames of devotion and truth alive. Around this church our memories now gather. Our noble forebears sowed their scanty seed generously; we reap the harvest. They laid the foundation; we build on it. They blazed a path through forest and difficulties; we walk it. Such history is not dead. It is vocal with accomplishments and melody. God gave it life.137

The founders of these congregations, while always acknowledging God, received high praise for their faith and God had blessed that faith with success. The narrative framework continued in future commemorations of institutions in the community.

Churches that had started after the 1860s and were commemorated in the 1920s and 1930s also found reasons to exalt their forbearers. While no longer the great civilizers of the earliest churches, these founders had stepped out in faith. For instance, Borculo Christian Reformed Church in Michigan started in 1883 and commemorated itself in 1933. In the narrative in the commemorative book, the writers acclaimed the founders as “heroic” men who had overcome “many obstacles” such as no pastor, few members, and theological disputes.138 Starting English-speaking congregations required particular courage as the Second Reformed Church in Pella noted in its 1938 narrative. When founded in 1863, it required “pioneers who

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137 First Reformed Church, Ninetieth Anniversary (Zeeland, Mich., 1937), 6. Available Joint Archives.

had the vision of the spiritual needs of this community, who had the courage to organize the first English-speaking church of the Reformed Church in America west of the Mississippi River.”

The first Christian Reformed Church congregation to start as an English-speaking was la Grave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids in 1887. As noted in its 50th anniversary book in 1937, “the more farsighted among our leaders . . . clearly perceived that [the English language] would come to prevail more and more.”

The seeming contradiction between God giving success and the founders having heroic courage to start the institution shaped the rest of the narrative as well as how they acted going forward. Each and every narrative was organized around the coming and going of pastors and the construction of buildings. This pattern fit the idea of celebrating the accomplishments of previous generations and calling the current members of the congregations to continued faithfulness and worth of the congregation. In one stark example from 1921, the First Christian Reformed Church of Orange City, Iowa only had pictures of the pastors with the years they served followed by pictures of the church buildings with only a brief narrative in Dutch.

The success of the church usually meant bigger and bigger buildings visually portrayed in pictures of the various building. The accompanying narrative usually mentioned how much of a struggle it was for the congregation to finance these impressive buildings but, as the South Olive Christian Reformed Church in Michigan

139 Second Reformed Church, Seventy-Fifth Anniversary (Pella, Iowa, 1938), 4. Available Joint Archives.

140 LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Souvenir of the Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary (Grand Rapids, 1937), 17. Available Heritage Hall.

141 First Christian Reformed Church, Souvenir (Orange City, Iowa, 1921). In possession of the author.
noted in its 50th anniversary book in 1935, the building project “clearly demonstrates the zeal with which our fathers labored for the extension of his kingdom.”

The periodization using pastors demonstrates the importance of the leader within the migrant community and continued reverence for the minister. Sometimes the narrative would note where the pastor came from and where they went too showing the connections to other enclaves of Dutch migrants and their descendants. The success of the pastor meant growth in number of members and activities as well as mission giving and failure meant discord and splits. Particularly long pastorates, such as the one of James de Pree in the First Reformed Church of Sioux Center, Iowa from 1880 to 1910 were fondly remembered as the 1927 anniversary book noted “He saved this church from many and sometimes perplexing difficulties which often accompany short pastorates and frequent changes.”

One other note about telling the story of pastors and congregations demonstrates the differences between the Reformed Church in America and Christian Reformed Church culture. While most of the Reformed Church in America anniversary books listed sons of the congregation who became ministers and entered “full-time kingdom service,” very few of the Christian Reformed Church books did the same. The Christian Reformed Church’s culture in the 1920s and 1930s had been influenced enough by neo-Calvinism that service for the Kingdom of God could take place anywhere and was not confined to church work.

Of particular note in the 1920s and 1930s commemoration of individual

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143 First Reformed Church, Semi-Centennial Historical Sketch (Sioux Center, Iowa, 1927). Available Joint Archives.
congregations was how they handled the language shift. Congregations published anniversary books exclusively English in the 1930s after mainly Dutch or bilingual books in the 1920s. The emphasis on telling the story for the next generation probably drove the language decision as congregations used Dutch less and less after 1930. The language of the services held at the commemorative events varied from church to church but mirrored the language situation generally in the congregation. Congregations that only used English such as LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids or Second Reformed Church of Pella also only English services. The other congregations had some combination of English and Dutch services with former and current pastors providing the addresses and sermons. In the narrative presented at these occasions and in the books, the language transition was usually mentioned as a relatively easy one, even if it masked the reality of bitter feelings. In some congregations, the movement to English for a time was solved by starting a daughter congregation such as in Grand Rapids when Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church started in 1906 from Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church.\textsuperscript{144} At Eighth Reformed in Grand Rapids, the story emphasized the slow, deliberate transition. Borculo Christian Reformed Church called it peaceful.\textsuperscript{145}

These congregational commemorations not only created a shared story about the institutions themselves, but also interpreted the overall experience of being a congregation founded for a particular group of migrants and their descendants and

\textsuperscript{144} Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, \textit{Semi-Centennial Celebration} (Grand Rapids, 1929), 23. Available Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{145} Eighth Reformed Church, \textit{Historical Review} (Grand Rapids, 1931) [Available at the Joint Archives]; Borculo Christian Reformed Church, \textit{Fiftieth Anniversary of the Borculo Christian Reformed Church, 1883-1933} (Borculo, Mich., 1933). Available Heritage Hall.
what it meant for them in the present context. These local institutional stories worked within the community that continually reminded itself of its characteristics. One of the most repeated aspects of the narrative was leaving the Netherlands for religious reasons. This often took the form of defining the Netherlands as a place they could hardly wait to leave because it had lost its way in persecuting true Calvinism; but Calvinism could flourish in the United States. According to these commemorations, migrants left the Netherlands because of the persecution they suffered following the secession of 1834 and the problems of the state supported church. This framework for the story leaves out the fact that the persecution had all but ended by the 1840s and by the time the bulk of migrants arrived in the 1880s to 1920s, the religious situation in the Netherlands had stabilized. The First Reformed Church of Zeeland in 1937 summarized the causes of migration succinctly “liberty to serve God according to conscience.”\footnote{First Reformed Church, \textit{Ninetieth Anniversary} (Zeeland, Mich., 1937), 8. Available Joint Archives.} However, few congregational commemorations mentioned the larger narrative of Dutch-American migration and settlement but focused on their own, local narrative.

While overall the narrative worked to smooth out tensions and downplay bitterness, wounds remained fresh over some of the controversies within the community, particularly in the splits and schism which led to competing narratives. At the congregational level, where feelings and tensions could still be raw, the commemorations demonstrated how people in the pews felt about the relationship between the two denominations at the local level. The Zeeland First Christian Reformed Church in 1937 commemorated its seventy-fifth anniversary of its start in 1862, though they also made sure to highlight that their congregation was a branch of
Noordeloos Christian Reformed Church which was one of the original Christian Reformed Church congregations. The authors of this book pointed out that “From the very beginning there was dissatisfaction on the part of some of the Dutch settlers in West Michigan with the union of their churches with the Dutch Reformed denomination in the East. As soon as they learned that their ministers and elders had decided upon union, they began to grumble. However, this discontent was at first only a smouldering [sic] fire.”

Commemorating the 1857 split by congregations was more prevalent in West Michigan. It only became an issue in Pella, which had its own unique ecclesiastical issues with Scholte, when the First Reformed Church was vacant and some leaders wanted to ask a Christian Reformed Church pastor to preach in 1866. According to the 1931 commemorative book of the First Reformed Church, the consistory did not allow it but a group still invited the pastor and formed a Christian Reformed Church congregation. Some of the bitterness that crept into the commemorations in West Michigan did not seem to exist in the Pella commemorations. In fact, the First Reformed Church had nice things to say about the First Christian Reformed Church in 1931, acknowledging that it “has flourished, and under the present leadership of Rev. R.J. Danhof . .[and] . is a blessing to the community.”

These issues were barely mentioned in Orange City or Lynden, Washington, seemingly noting that the split of 1857 had happened and they simply accepted the results.

Showing the close connection between the churches and schools, many of the


148 First Reformed Church, Seventy-Fifth Anniversary, (Pella, Iowa, 1931), 14. Available Joint Archives.
congregational commemorations mentioned the support for these institutions. It was something the authors wanted to highlight, just as the denominational stories usually included them. For instance, the First Reformed Church of Sioux Center in 1927 reminded its readers that, “very early in its history did this church begin to support these school.”  

The authors of the Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids book in 1930 noted that the congregation had started a parochial school until it had moved to become a parent society that controlled the school.  

The opposite could be true as well. The author of the Prairie City, Iowa Christian Reformed Church anniversary book bemoaned the lack of support for Christian schools.  

The First Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland wanted to make sure the next generation realized its importance within the sphere of Christian education in the Christian Reformed Church reminding their readers that “the congregation was not successful in its attempt to bring the Theological School to Zeeland” two times.

The schools of the community were somewhat slower to commemorate themselves during this period but did set the framework for future commemorations. For Hope, the commemoration of their institution had occurred in more public pageants that clearly tied the college to the community of Holland. One other form of commemoration of Hope was the 1930 *Milestone*, the yearbook of the college.

149 First Reformed Church, *Historical Sketch* (Sioux Center, Iowa, 1927). Available Joint Archives.


151 Prairie City Christian Reformed Church, *Silver Anniversary* (Prairie City, Iowa, 1929). Available Heritage Hall.

Williard Wichers, the editor-in-chief took an extra year to produce the impressive book. Over twice as long as other yearbooks from the same era at 455 pages, Wichers wanted it to commemorate the first 75 years of the college. Beyond the regular yearbook material, he included over 100 pages of alumni information, listing each alumni and their present situation. Wichers also put the historical nature of the school in focus by beginning each section with a brief quote about the founding of the city and college. It also included woodcuts of historical scenes in Holland.\footnote{Willard Wichers, ed. \textit{The Hope Milestone of 1930} (Hope College, 1930). Available Joint Archives.}

Northwestern Academy and Junior College commemorated its fiftieth anniversary in 1933 with a celebration. The “Spirit of Northwestern” pageant provided the narrative of Northwestern for a public audience. Starting in Pella with the meeting of “pioneers,” the pageant praised the progress made by these men so that within fifteen years of founding Orange City, they had started an academy. In fact, the story of the pageant never explained why the pioneers left Pella nor settled in Orange City. The allegorical aspects of the pageant provided the broader context of the actions taking place with the movement to Orange City and founding of Northwestern. The early “spirit of Northwestern” in the hearts of the pioneers needed to overcome the spirits of water, cold, prairies, fire, wind, disease, and death through the help of God. Perhaps trying to show the courage and determination of the pioneers, an odd scene recreated how Orange City took the courthouse records from Calliope and established the courthouse in Orange City. One scene explained that the purpose of Northwestern was to train leaders for the church, specifically ministers and missionaries. The final scene showed the various departments of Northwestern led by the Bible Department as the narrator explained “The Bibles is the only source of all
Christian truth; the only rule for the Christian life; the only book that unfolds to us the realities of eternity.” The commemoration of Northwestern in 1933 emphasized the movement of faithful men to Orange City who wanted an education for the next generation of leaders and overcame great obstacles. The next generation clearly needed to hear the message that they needed to keep the “Spirit of Northwestern” strong.

The commemorations of schools more closely associated with the Christian Reformed Church had many of the same themes. The Theological School and Calvin College celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1926 with a published book. The rather dense volume included twelve chapters in English and one in Dutch written by professors at the schools and pastors in the denomination. The foreword by the Semi-Centennial Committee hoped the books would “give some account of the principles that led to the establishing of the School, to portray something of its life and influence, and to indicate the ideals which should determine its future development.” As Rev. Noordewier made clear in the opening Dutch chapter on the origins of the theological school that the young denomination was having problems getting ministers from the Netherlands so it would be better to train their own ministers. They began a kind of apprenticeship training in the parsonage of experienced pastors already in the 1860s but it was not until Geerts Egbert Boer was appointed “docent” apart from being a pastor in 1875 with classes starting in 1876 in Grand Rapids. Other chapters also emphasized the heavy burden of the first

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154 Spirit of Northwestern, 1933. History-Anniversaries Box, Ramaker Library. Marginal notes in the script noted that the section on the various spirits were courtesy of the “Pageant of Hope.”

155 Semi-Centennial Volume: Theological School and Calvin College, 1876-1926 (Grand Rapids: The Semi-Centennial Committee, 1926), 3.
professors of the seminary and academy that prepared pastors for the church with long hours and broad course load. The other part of the story was the gradual opening up of an academy in 1894 instead of simply a literary or preparatory department. Like congregational anniversary books, the only images were of buildings and leaders. The professors at the seminary, college, and preparatory department all played a major role in the narrative. Calvinism also shaped the narrative as each chapter emphasized that God had been behind the school’s success. By the end of the book, a reader would have been told that Calvin stood for Calvinism and on the side of fundamental Christianity.

The private Christian schools largely supported by families in the Christian Reformed Church that had started in urban areas as parochial schools transitioned to parent run societies. The commemorations of these efforts in the 1920s and 1930s in a few places echo many of the themes of congregations and denominations. For instance, the West Side Christian School in Grand Rapids at a dedication of a new building in 1924 reminded its readers that the growth and stability of the school was “the fruit of many ardent prayers, faithful efforts and sacrifices on the part of the friends of Christian Education on the West Side. God has blessed us thus far.”

Both the acclimation of forbearers as well God showed itself in this quote. The Holland Christian School commemorated its 1901 founding in 1936 with a program and banquet with a number of “five minute talks.” The Christian School of Sully, Iowa near Pella in 1923 published an impressive anniversary book commemorating only ten years. This book published the requisite pictures of buildings, school board members, and teachers. The Dutch historical narrative stretched ten pages listing the

various school board members and other developments with great care.\(^{157}\)

These institutional commemorations of denomination, congregations, and schools also fit a pattern of telling the story of the particular institution within the broader narrative of Calvinistic faith, faith of the founders, success of the community, and at the same defending their right to exist. The institutions mattered to their members as a way to organized their lives and encounter the twentieth century and it showed in how they commemorated them. The leaders wanted to make sure the institutions and what they believed the stood for would continue to be a reason for their existence going forward as a bulwark against losing the faith.

**Conclusion**

The members of the Dutch-American community took an active interest in their past during the 1920s and 1930s. As the community experienced the changes brought by slowed migration, the maturation of their institutions, and the decrease of the Dutch language, the community framed a story of a shared past. The interaction between the image of Dutch America constructed for the Tulip Time Festivals in the late 1920s and 1930s and other commemorative narratives shows the complexity of narrative construction. Dutch migrants and their descendants sought a useable past for both external and internal audiences but these narratives could often be at odds with each other.

The narrative of the Tulip Time Festivals framed the Dutch Americans as fulfilling the stereotypes other Americans had for them. Tropes of windmills, wooden

shoes, and cleanliness all invited visitors to visit these “neat” little villages year after year. The narrative framed for institutional commemorations emphasized the Calvinistic religious trope of God’s control and covenant theology. Dutch America in this context meant being faithful to the Calvinistic faith.

These years set the narratives that continued for the next fifty years. The overlapping narratives for insider and outsider audiences interacted in fascinating ways already in the 1920s and 1930s. The coming together and overlapping of these visions of being Dutch American can be seen in the pageant presented by the Hope Student Body in 1936 called simply “The Pageant of 1936” during Tulip Time Festival “on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the settlement of the city of Holland.” An institution presented a story about the enclave during Tulip Time Festival and the students and staff of Hope College did not note the competing purposes of the two events. These competing narratives were not incongruous for the participants who swung back and forth between the two based on the need of the moment. For Dutch migrants and their descendants in the 1920s and 1930s, these narratives altogether formed them as Dutch Americans. They exhibited themselves as enthusiastic Americans where they had found physical and metaphorical room as whites and Protestants to practice their religion as they saw fit. They also had the freedom to construct an identity as they saw fit built around a shared story of migration and success.

\[158\] “The Pageant of 1936 Presented by the Student Body of Hope College,” Anniversaries Papers Box, Joint Archives.
CHAPTER IV

MAINTAINING THE NARRATIVES OF DUTCH-AMERICAN IDENTITY DURING THE WORLD WAR II ERA

World War II had a profound impact on the Dutch-American community. What had been a relatively isolated ethnic group—despite effects of Americanization, the Great Depression, and religious debates—now encountered American culture in new ways. The military experience of men and women from the community shaped their view of their ethnic community and America in general. Those on the homefront united around a shared American patriotism in the face of a common enemy. At the same time, the community worried about what would happen to their institutions and ethnic group after the war. Even with the emphasis on American identity, contacts with and empathy for the Netherlands grew, and many in Dutch America reached across the Atlantic to renew ties with the homeland.

The centrifugal forces of World War II worked to pull the Dutch-American community apart. From the armed forces, to moving for defense jobs, to a push for more ecumenical relations, the members of the ethnoreligious institutions of congregations, denominations, and schools made a concerted effort keep them intact and strong, particularly as the war ended. No one seemed quite sure if the institutions would hold or if they still served a purpose. One of the reactions, exemplified by H.J. Kuiper, was to argue more vehemently to stay out of the broader culture and find
strength in isolation to encounter the challenges of the times.¹ As James Bratt explained, this mentality could especially be seen in the Christian Reformed Church as certain leaders came to the fore and their ideas about maintaining a strong ethnic isolation carried the day.² No longer needing to prove to America that Dutch migrants had contributed to the American experience because they had participated fully in the war effort, some in the Dutch-American community redoubled their isolationist mentality. Other voices, also relying on theological arguments, questioned the kind of isolation Kuiper advocated. These theological divisions within the community shaped the narratives told by members about themselves which in turn shaped their actions and willingness to continue building institutions. The religious dimension of the Dutch-American identity shaped how institutions continued to justify themselves in this new context as seen in their commemorations.

While migration slowed to a standstill from 1941 to 1946, renewed ties to the Netherlands played a role in the way the community imagined itself and acted. A visit from Princess Juliana in 1941 to Holland, Michigan and the opening of a public relations office of the Netherlands in Holland would shape how the community connected to the homeland. Immediately after the liberation of the Netherlands, efforts to assist the Netherlands and even helping migrants leave the Netherlands occurred in the various Dutch-American enclaves. Though these connections increased with the Netherlands, the image of the Netherlands and its use in identity formation continued within the established narrative framework. They kept the basic


framework that had been constructed prior to World War II but now with a clearer connection to the actual Netherlands. The members of the community created a more distinctly a Dutch-American identity that was not quite Dutch (as they came to realize with the increased connections) and neither fully embracing being part of the American mainstream. With the world made safe, these Dutch Americans reveled in the defeat of evil, the liberation of the homeland, and their freedom to construct an identity for themselves in the United States.

The impact of World War II on American culture has been a prominent twentieth century American history. The war ended the Great Depression and helped America leap to the front of the industrial world. It moved the United States from being isolationist in foreign policy to engaging in the Cold War. The power of the United States was felt in the Netherlands as well. In American culture, the war was a watershed moment: all Americans who experienced it would remember it as a defining event. As David Kennedy noted in his seminal book *The American People in World War II*, while the war had a high cost socially and culturally, this reality did not describe the war that Americans remembered. . . . [Instead] it was the ‘good war,’ maybe the last good war. . . . Americans remembered World War II as a just war waged by a peaceful people aroused to anger only after intolerable provocation, a war stoically endured by those at home and fought in far-away places by brave and wholesome young men with dedicated women standing behind them on the production liens, a war whose justice and necessity were clinched by the public revelations of Nazi genocide in 1945, a war fought for democracy and freedom and, let the world beware, fought

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with unstinting industrial might and unequaled technological prowess.\(^4\)

The importance of World War II for American history in the twentieth century can hardly be overstated.

The war also played a key role for ethnic groups. As Doris Kearns Goodwin noted “The war had been both a catalyst of unity and a disrupter of communities. More than ever, citizens sought their identity not through ethnic bonds but as Americans.”\(^5\) Yet, because it played such a defining role, few studies of ethnic groups cross what seems to be an insurmountable line to examine continuities and discontinuities for ethnic groups on both sides of the war. Historians have too quickly accepted the conventional wisdom of Goodwin’s assertion. Clearly some aspects of their experience and identity had changed, yet continuity existed as well. Much scholarship on migration and ethnicity ends in 1940, thereby reinforcing this understanding. For instance, the two most recent scholarly books on Dutch America end in 1940 or earlier.\(^6\) Many other studies of other ethnic groups also end at World War II.\(^7\) A few studies of ethnic groups have noted the transformative impact of

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World War II but also note the consistencies of the ethnic group on both sides of the World War II divide. For instance, John Bukowczyk’s *A History of the Polish Americans* showed how the war had a profound impact on Polish immigrants and their descendants at the same time aspects of the ethnic group remained the same.\(^8\) Deborah Dash Moore discussed the changes World War II brought to the Jewish community because of contacts with others in the military.\(^9\) Despite these exceptions, the paucity of studies that offer more than a perfunctory chapter on the post-war period shows the need for understanding the continuity of ethnicity during and after World War II.

**Migration and Institutional Patterns**

The international situation clearly had an impact on the migration of Dutch to the United States. Migration had slowed in the 1930s and came to a virtual standstill during World War II. Prior to the Nazi’s invasion of the Netherlands in May of 1940, almost 2,100 Dutch migrants arrived in the United States. Only 823 arrived in 1941 prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The number of migrants from 1942 to 1945 totaled only 337 and a mere 255 migrants settled in the


United States in 1946. Finally the number rebounded to over 2900 in 1947. However, in 1947, Dutch migrants also chose other destinations. Of the 6,800 migrants who left the Netherlands in 1947, 2,361 moved to Canada and 1,062 traveled to South Africa.

Just as in the 1930s, despite virtually no new migrants arriving during World War II, the institutions of the Dutch-American community continued to maintain their size and stature and even grow. The denominations of the community grew in overall members during these years. The Christian Reformed Church grew from a total membership of 121,755 in 1940 to 134,608 in 1947 with seventeen new congregations added. New congregations and the growth of older ones came specifically in California and other areas of the west coast as people moved for wartime jobs. The other growth areas included Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Chicago, where people moved for industrial jobs. The Reformed Church in America in the West, made up of the Particular Synods of Chicago and Iowa had 104,982 members and grew to 114,455 in 1945 at the same time remaining basically the same percentage of the Reformed Church in America growing only from 48% to 49%. Like the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in America grew most quickly in Chicago and Grand Rapids and on the west coast. The Classis of California of the


Particular Synod of Iowa (which included all points west) doubled in size from 1940 to 1947.\textsuperscript{13}

The schools of the community had a tougher time during the war. Since so many men of college age either volunteered or were drafted, the number of students dropped. Hope College’s enrollment dropped from 555 students in 1941 to only 288 students in 1943. This drop in students and changes in the curriculum such as an accelerated three year bachelor’s degree led to financial concerns at Hope. A special appeal to the Reformed Church in America denomination provided the college with approximately 35\% of its total revenue between 1942 and 1945. Hope also contracted with the federal government for army training programs such as the War Training Service for pilots and the Army Specialized Training Program. Following the end of the war, the exact opposite problem occurred, as it did on so many campuses. Hope dealt with a bursting enrollment of 1,152 students in 1946. The growth resulted from returning G.I.’s who made up half of the students population. The college added 25 faculty to accommodate the new students.\textsuperscript{14}

Northwestern Academy and Junior College also experienced uncertainties during World War II. While the Academy’s enrollment remained stable at around fifty students, enrollment in the Junior College fell by 75\% from a high of 128 in 1939 to a low of 33 in 1943. The faculty shrank from 14 to 10 and had high turnover with 6 new instructors in 1943 and 5 new ones in 1945. The turnover in faculty

\textsuperscript{13} Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed church (New York: Board of Publication and Bible-School, year stated).

resulted from the poor financial picture. Since Northwestern relied heavily on tuition, when that revenue stream dropped sharply, the resources available to pay wages did as well. While the institution did receive some money from the denominational coffers, it never amounted to the support given Central and Hope. The end of the war helped Northwestern get back on solid footing as its enrollment jumped in the Junior College from 49 in the fall of 1945 to 125 (with 1/3 being veterans) in 1946 with the attendant shortage of classroom space, dormitories, and faculty that all needed to be remedied.\(^\text{15}\) Central College also followed the pattern of war-time stresses. In 1940, it could boast of having grown during the previous seven years from 191 students to 371 students. But the war caused a further dip before growing to 518 in the fall of 1946 with the returning veterans. During the war the college relied on training military personal to supplement its income just as Hope had done.\(^\text{16}\)

Calvin College had grown through the 1930s and expected to continue growing because of growing programs and strong demand for a college education among members of the Christian Reformed Church until World War II interrupted those plans. Its enrollment stood at 499 in 1940 and at 520 in 1941 before dropping to 420 in 1944. A slight increase in 1945 could not have predicted the massive growth when 1245 students enrolled in 1946.\(^\text{17}\) The war also decidedly changed the gender ratio of what had been a male dominated student body with women

\[^{15}\text{Gerald F. De Jong, From Strength to Strength: A History of Northwestern, 1882-1982 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 107-122.}\]

\[^{16}\text{Josephine E. Thostenson, One Hundred Years of Service: A History of Central, 1853-1953 (Pella, Iowa: Central College, 1953), 39-42.}\]

comprising 67% of the student body in 1943. However, unlike Hope and Central, the war years did not see Calvin reaching out to train military students. Also, while financial troubles seemed to plague the Reformed Church in America campuses during the war, not one of the histories of Calvin mentions any dire situation.

The private, Christian schools associated mainly with Christian Reformed Church families continued to grow during the war. Across the country, the number of pupils enrolled in National Union of Christian Schools members rose from 13,930 in 1940 to 15,629 in 1942. The organization also added 8 new schools in that time to number a total of 94. The number of students and schools slowly grew around Orange City, Pella, and Holland, each growing under 10% over those three years. The biggest growth, just as with congregations, came in California and in the cities, not in rural Iowa. The number of pupils in Christian schools nearly doubled in California as the number of pupils increased in the established schools as well as starting two new schools. By 1947, another 29 communities started Christian schools that affiliated with the NUCS so that by 1950 the total number of pupils in all 142 schools numbered 25,025. While most of the schools were small, a majority of the students attended the larger systems in the Grand Rapids and Chicago areas. This kind of growth demonstrated the pent-up desire in many places to have Christian schools, but financial issues prevented them until after World War II.

Overall, the institutions of Dutch America endured World War II. The congregations grew and new congregations started in locations where a number of

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Dutch American settled. The emergency situation of war caused problems for the colleges in the short term but those quickly passed after the war when veterans poured onto campuses. The Christian schools grew during the war and then exploded after the war. This social reality did not, however, preclude a feeling of threat and doom from hanging over the community. The world seemed a dangerous place during the war, even if their institutions remained intact. Their religious understanding of the situation guided them to worry about the world as a whole, as well as and the future of their institutions and ethnic identity. This rearranged society and the dangers felt by the community revealed themselves in how the community responded when its young men and women received the call for military service. Particularly for the leaders of the Christian Reformed Church, they feared the young people would lose their morality and loyalty to the ethnoreligious institutions.

A Rearranged Society

The members of the Dutch-American community felt the challenges as the war forced them out of the isolation they had experienced. The lure of new opportunities regularly seemed to entice members of the community away. The military life for enlistees and draftees, as well as the rearranged homefront, proved to be disorientating for many who had grown up in Dutch-American enclaves. The institutions of the Dutch-American community had to deal with the fact that many of their young people had entered military service or had moved to find jobs in defense industries. These new realities required the leaders of institutions to think about their institutions in new ways. Many felt the institutions were the key to remaining faithful to their religion in a changed world and the commemorations during these war years reflected this desire.
To better understand the challenges, a case study of the Christian Reformed Church’s reaction to the war will demonstrate how one section of the Dutch-American community dealt with the rearranged society. Like other segments of society, American churches responded to an altered culture. One of the few scholars to examine the impact of the war on churches is Gerald Sittser, with his *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War*. He examined articles and books by church leaders, the public resolutions of church assemblies, and the actions of the churches to get a sense of “the public posture of church groups.” He took a broad sweep of American churches during the war and noted their “cautious patriotism.” Churches were neither hyper-patriotic, as they had been during World War I, nor were they un-patriotic.

Sittser’s comprehensive view is helpful, but such a large view misses how churches dealt with the cultural changes. While he does include the Christian Reformed Church in his research (which is very surprising for such a small denomination), he does not fully explain why the Christian Reformed Church did not fit the broad pattern of American churches in regards to its view of pacifism or its view on chaplains administering communion. A detailed study of the actions of the Christian Reformed Church during World War II helps explain the effects of the war on religious groups. The war forced some the members of the small, ethnic Christian Reformed Church denomination to question its isolation.

A few other studies have examined the impact of World War II on specific

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21 Ibid., 15.

22 Ibid., 43-46, 165-167.
ethnic and religious groups. Deborah Dash Moore looked at the impact on Jews in *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation*. Marianne Sanua looked at the Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn. This group tried to stay connected with its soldiers by publishing the *Victory Bulletin*. The Jewish experience as a distinct minority in a predominately-Christian country shows how World War II challenged and changed ethnic and religious groups. Most of the information about Christian churches’ response to World War II and military service is descriptive only. For instance, Wayne Warner wrote a series of articles about the Assemblies of God response, but provided no analysis of their actions.

Scholars of Dutch America have argued that the war challenged community and things changed after the war, but few and been very specific. In a book about ecumenicity in the Christian Reformed Church, Henry Zwaanstra noted changing patterns after the war but did not assess the war’s influence on that change. James Bratt noted that the intellectual outlook of the Christian Reformed Church changed after the war, but does not specifically explore the impact of the war on this outlook.

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23 Moore, *GI Jews*.


In *Our Family Album: The Unfinished Story of the Christian Reformed Church*, James Schaap offered a popular history of the Christian Reformed Church. He devoted an entire chapter to World War II but provided little analysis.\(^{28}\) These scholars noted things changed after the war, but did not specifically point to the challenges of the war as the cause.

The Christian Reformed Church and its congregations particularly felt the brunt of World War II as an institution. This denomination had built itself as a fortress to keep its members loyal and moral through the way it told its story and the network of institutions is built from elementary schools to colleges and seminaries. It also built old-age homes and sanitariums. So it was always the part of the community that more cautiously dealt with its American context. As the Christian Reformed Church and its congregation entered World War II, questions about the church’s place in America continued. As Americanization pressed in on the denomination in the early twentieth century, the denomination moved deliberately toward isolation. Henry Zwaanstra said, “It became more self-consciously Reformed and more articulate in expressing the implication of its faith in a new environment.”\(^{29}\) Zwaanstra argued the members believed God had a “providential purpose” for the denomination in America. They believed God had made a covenant that “bound them to God and one another, and further obliged them as a particular people to a certain style of living.”\(^{30}\)

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\(^{30}\) Ibid., 32.
Their job in America was to maintain the reformed principles because they believed the Reformed faith offered the best and most comprehensive interpretation of the Bible. Rev. H.J. Kuiper, editor of The Banner from 1928 until 1956, repeatedly called for the denomination to remain religiously distinctive.31 Distinctive meant remaining true to the Reformed faith of the Calvinistic church in the Netherlands.

By the time World War II began, the members of the Christian Reformed Church had built a strong isolationist identity around their separate institutions even as they acknowledged their freedom in America. As their commemorations showed during the 1920s and 1930s, they built an identity around being God’s chosen people even in the United States. The whole focus of the missions in the United States was to keep as many people as possible within the denomination no matter where they lived. The stories of churches trying to start when a few Christian Reformed Church families moved to a new area filled the minutes of the Home Missions Committee.32 The denominational leaders feared people would not remain loyal and would fall away from true theology. It was a very grave and serious threat to the future of the denomination which some people too quickly equated with the Kingdom of God.

Even the younger generation perpetuated this isolation prior to World War II. In 1919, young men’s groups in a few Christian Reformed Churches came together to form the American Federation of Reformed Young Men’s Societies.33 A separate

31 Bratt, Dutch Calvinism in American America, 127. See also DeJong, Henry J. Kuiper.


33 The Association of Reformed Young Women was also established before World War II.
American Federation of Reformed Young Women’s Societies formed in the 1920s. Both groups held separate, annual conventions. The purpose of these groups was not to lead youth to Christ as other national youth organizations, but to train those already in the church for active participation. They emphasized their theological distinctiveness. While they never defined exactly what they meant by “Reformed,” it was clear those inside the group knew its meaning.\textsuperscript{34} Even with these groups, the denomination was still concerned these efforts were not enough to keep the young people in the institutions. The 1941 Synod of the denomination commissioned a study of the effectiveness of the youth organizations. One of the main reasons for such a study was “our youth show a tendency to become affiliated with youth organizations which are not Reformed.”\textsuperscript{35} Separate, ethnoreligious institutions were their solution to the challenges of the world.

A shared identity, built in theology and told in commemorations, guided the Christian Reformed Church congregations and the denomination during World War II. When members entered military camps, the denomination was confronted with even greater dispersal than when families moved to new communities. By October 1942, 3000 members were in the armed services.\textsuperscript{36} Rev. Henry Baker of Home Missions Committee noted in 1942 that service members were located in nearly 350 camps.\textsuperscript{37} By the end of the war, nearly 11,000 members had served in various

\textsuperscript{34} “A Seed That Grew,” \textit{The Young Calvinist}, October 1948, 19.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{1941 Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church} (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 1941), 20.


branches of the military. The challenges of military life were many for the members of the Christian Reformed Church. They faced being out of their community, many for the first time. After visiting defense camps in Louisiana in 1941, a Christian Reformed Church commentator said, “It is a complete change in the habits and living customs of these boys. They have been used to their own church and community functions and entertainments. When they get to camp, they are ‘lonesome’ in the real sense of the word, even though they do have good lodging places, good wholesome food, and government provided recreations. These boys long for Christian fellowship.”

A letter from a young man published in The Banner underscored this point when he complained, “I was in this fort for five months without meeting one single person who shared my views on clean living and religion.” The letters show how disorienting the military was for many of the young service members from the Christian Reformed Church who had been raised in relative isolation.

Early experiences of the armed services members with chaplains also challenged the Christian Reformed Church. In letters to The Banner, soldiers complained the sermons in regiment chapels consisted of nothing more than morality pep talks or patriotic speeches. They missed the Christian Reformed Church, as one private wrote, “I . . . surely long for the good old Christian Reformed services.” Accustomed to heavy doses of doctrine, the soldiers struggled to deal with the mainstream Christianity they encountered, not their isolated ethnic version.

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38 Martin Bouwma, “A Worth Cause,” The Banner, 13 June 1941.

39 Private G.J.S., “Another Soldier Writes,” The Banner, 11 July 1941, 672


Dealing with homesickness and tolerating weak theology made military life difficult; the lack of morality made it almost intolerable for many armed services members from the Christian Reformed Church. The military life was viewed as one of moral depravity and letters from service members confirmed the dire situation. Private First Class Nick Schoon wrote, “I find conditions at Fort Knox about like other Christian Reformed boys find them in their different camps. Cursing, drinking, gambling and loose living seem to be the popular things with the American soldiers.”

After observing life in a few defense camps, Rev. J.H. Schaal noted that many members of the Christian Reformed Church “had never had a first-hand acquaintance with the blatant form of evil as it manifested itself to them in their new life.” The denomination had a history of being concerned about morality. In 1928, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church admonished its members to avoid the worldly amusements of theater and movie attendance, gambling, and dancing. The denomination felt these activities corrupted a Christian. Morality was a defining characteristic of a true Christian according to Calvinistic theology. The denomination feared its service members would be corrupted by military life.

The Christian Reformed Church’s isolationist identity built prior to World War II required that it do everything it could do to hold the youth in the denomination and guard them from immorality. The denomination used two main methods to stay

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44 “Worldly Amusements in the Light of Scripture: Report of Committee and Decisions of Synod of Christian Reformed Church” (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 1945). Interesting to note that this report and decision was republished during World War II.
connected in the hope the youth would stay loyal and moral. First, the Home Missions Committee established contacts with as many of the service members as they could through service men’s homes, service pastors, and traveling pastors. Second, service members received the magazines of the denomination to make sure they stayed up-to-date on activities within the network of congregations. These lines of communication between the community and its scattered members demonstrated how the ethnic identity shaped actions.

The Home Missions Committee took it upon itself to keep track of the servicemen in the armed forces. Rev. Henry Baker served as the missionary-at-large and acted as the director of the effort. He submitted a report to the Home Missions Committee on December 12, 1940 where he outlined the effort to collect addresses of service members. He sent letters to all the congregations of the denomination and received responses from 125. He found that nearly 300 members were already in the military with 75 in Camp Beauregard in Louisiana and the rest scattered throughout the country. During the course of the war, Baker repeatedly expressed frustration in getting addresses from local congregations. The first request appeared in the January 31, 1941 issue of The Banner. Baker complained, “Some congregations are very slow in complying with our request for information.” The Synod of 1942 heard a report from Baker that chastised local congregations for not forwarding addresses. The issue continued to be a problem throughout the war. In the September 22, 1944 issue


of *The Banner*, a notice appeared requesting prompt changes of addresses. It stated, “In one case *The Banner* has been sent to a soldier who was dead for a year and a half, because no one notified us.”\(^48\) The effort to coordinate and regularize the list of service members demonstrated the sense that these men and women were “ours” and the whole denomination shared responsibility for them, not just the local congregation.

The compiled list served a number of purposes. First, home missionaries serving near defense camps received names and addresses with instructions to establish personal contact. Second, if an established church was in the vicinity, it was asked to make the contact. Third, service members received the names and address of other Christian Reformed members in the same camp. Fourth, *The Banner* published a list of names and addresses from January 1941 until February 1942. Publication of the list was intended to encourage networking. Finally, the list served as a subscription list for *The Young Calvinist* which the Home Missions Committee sent to all service members. By knowing where all the service men were stationed, the Christian Reformed Church could establish ministries for them and remind them of their identity.

The Home Missions Committee assigned various pastors to use the list to visit the camps. A report to the Synod of 1942 recorded thirteen different pastors assigned to various camps.\(^49\) The Home Missions Report of 1943 to the Synod listed twenty-six different pastors visiting various camps.\(^50\) These pastors were both home

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\(^{48}\) “Soldiers’ Parents,” *The Banner*, 22 September 1944, 906.


\(^{50}\) *1943 Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 1943), 204-205.
missionaries and those serving congregations near the camps. Meetings could be
difficult to arrange due to inaccurate addresses and irregular training schedules.
When meetings did occur, the pastors encouraged the service members to stay faithful
and continue meeting with each other from the ethnic group.  

The circumstances in Louisiana necessitated a different response. Camps
Livingston, Beauregard, and Claiborne contained men primarily from Michigan,
Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota where the majority of
Christian Reformed Churches were located. Because so many members of the
Christian Reformed Church were stationed there, the Home Missions Committee
decided to send a “service pastor” to establish a “servicemen’s home.”  

Rev. Ed Boeve, a Christian Reformed pastor from Michigan and his wife staffed this
servicemen’s home for the first six months beginning in January 1941.  

Rev. Boeve invited the soldiers to the home after the morning worship service of a Calvinistic
Presbyterian church. Following an afternoon of food and fellowship, Rev. Boeve led
an evening service for Christian Reformed service members and any guests. Another
pastor replaced Rev. Boeve after six months. Different pastors rotated through the
home every few months for the duration of the war.  

A reminder of home and the
patterns of Sundays within the ethnic community drew members to the pastor’s work.

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51 Rev. H. Blystra, “Report to the Executive Committee for Home Missions,”
[n.d.], Executive Committee Reports and Correspondence of Home Missions,
Heritage Hall.

The Banner, 28 March 1941, 309.

53 Rev. Henry Baker, “Missions at Home and Abroad: Camp Beauregard,” The
Banner, 24, January 1941, 88. The cover of the 14 February 1941 issues printed a
picture of “Christian Reformed Boys at Camp Beauregard, La.”

54 These included Rev. A. Poel, Rev. J.M. Vande Kieft and Rev. Netz.
As the number of Christian Reformed service members grew, the Home Missions Committee adjusted its tactics. They re-allocated home missionaries from trying to establish churches to serving the military personnel full-time as “service pastors.” Rev. Harry A. Dykstra served as service pastor in California. He lived in Redlands, near a Christian Reformed Church so his kids would have the advantage of the community. He traveled throughout the state making as many contacts as possible and reporting his journeys in *The Banner*. His family also maintained a servicemen’s home in Redlands.\(^{55}\) Rev. John M. Vande Kieft served in North and South Carolina. He established a servicemen’s home in Raleigh, North Carolina.\(^{56}\) Rev. Herman Moes served in Georgia and Florida from a servicemen’s home in Gainesville, Florida. He used Gainesville as a base for a radius of three hundred miles with at least ten different defense camps.\(^{57}\) Rev. Gerrit Boerefyn served in San Diego, California. He not only acted as service pastor for the San Diego area, but also served as pastor for the San Diego Christian Reformed Church which supported a servicemen’s home.\(^{58}\) Rev. Harold Dekker served as an itinerant service pastor in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri until he became a chaplain in late 1943.


when Rev. Albert H. Bratt took over the area.\textsuperscript{59} He eventually established a servicemen’s home in Oklahoma City.\textsuperscript{60} Rev. Joseph Van de Kieft took over Texas in November of 1943.\textsuperscript{61} He established a servicemen’s home in Austin, Texas in late 1944.\textsuperscript{62} The Christian Reformed Church of Alameda, California started a servicemen’s home without the aid of a service pastor. A couple from the congregation managed the home with the congregation’s pastor providing spiritual leadership.\textsuperscript{63} This effort organized the denominational efforts around a shared effort to keep the service members within the institutions controlled by the denomination. The service members would also connect with others from the Dutch-American enclaves spread around the country.

The service pastors served as a personal connection to the Christian Reformed Church. The servicemen’s homes they established welcomed those from outside the denomination, but they were intended to be an oasis from military life and a connection to the denomination. The servicemen’s homes provided a place to sleep if they were on leave. The homes also provided meals. In most instances, this fell to the service pastor’s wife. Service men might also use them as a meeting place for wives and girlfriends.\textsuperscript{64} They even hosted weddings. Gerrit Van Adel and Marie


\textsuperscript{60} “Service Homes and Pastors,” \textit{The Banner}, 22 December 1944, 1217.


\textsuperscript{62} “Service Homes and Pastors,” \textit{The Banner}, 5 January 1945, 19.


\textsuperscript{64} Pictures in various issues of \textit{The Young Calvinist} 1943 and following.
Rooms from Lynden, Washington were married on Christmas 1943 at the San Diego servicemen’s home. Other homes also hosted weddings throughout 1944 and 1945. The homes in California were especially strategic when the war ended in the Pacific and soldiers returned. The homes hosted many joyful reunions of returning soldiers and their families.

In order to pay for the service pastors and the servicemen’s homes, the Synod of 1941 decided to pay for all these expenses out of Home Missions Emergency Fund. The Synod changed the name of the fund to Soldiers Fund to explain more clearly its use in 1942. It was supported by congregations and individuals on a free-will donation basis. The Home Missions Committee spent nearly $50,000 per year on these activities by the end of the war.

The service members also took some of the responsibility on themselves to stay connected with fellow Christian Reformed service members. When pastors made personal visits, they encouraged the service members to organize into clubs as they had back in their home churches. Many such clubs started and continued despite transfers. The October 16, 1942 edition of The Banner published the first notices of “Christian Reformed Clubs” at seven different camps. They met every Sunday

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65 Rev. Gerrit B. Boerefyn, “San Diego Center Hears ‘Here Comes the Bride,’” The Young Calvinist, April 1944, 19.

66 1941 Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 1941), 38.

67 1942 Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 1942), 204.

afternoon at 2 o’clock. The Young Calvinist eventually published the list which
grew to twenty-five. A group of service men even called a meeting in Berlin,
Germany in August of 1945. This reaction to the war showed how strong the sense
of belonging to the denomination and ethnic group was for both those at home as well
as many service members. They longed for the close connections they knew in their
home congregation and tried to recreate it with others who shared the same kind of
ethnic and religious background.

While personal contact was much preferred, for those not able to be contacted,
periodicals were often the only contact with the denomination. For service members
overseas, this usually constituted the only means of contact with the denomination. Many service members received both The Banner and The Young Calvinist. The
main motivation was to provide good reading material and keep them informed. The
Young Calvinist editor was especially concerned about the service members
remaining “Reformed” and moral. The editors of both magazines published “open
letters” encouraging the service members to “be good soldiers of the Lord Jesus
Christ.” Nearly every issue of The Young Calvinist from April 1941 until the end of
1942 included a “Letter to the Boys in Camp” by Richard Postma, the editor of the
magazine. He encouraged the soldiers to be faithful which meant staying strong in
their Calvinistic faith.

69 “Service Men, Note,” The Banner, 16 October 1942, 937.
70 “Invitations,” The Young Calvinist, November 1945, 28.
71 “Meeting in Berlin,” The Banner, 24 August 1945, 787.
72 Of course, letter from the home church were common. However,
denominational contacts were limited to the magazines.
The Banner was the official publication of the Christian Reformed Church.\textsuperscript{74} It was only sent to the service members who had a paid subscription. The Home Missions Committee encouraged local congregations to pay the subscription because “if you knew how much they enjoy receiving The Banner . . . you would put forth earnest effort to supply them with our valuable weekly.”\textsuperscript{75} Service member Gerald L. Bronsink wrote, “It is no doubt hard for one to realize how much a person can really appreciate this fine church paper, until one is deprived of it for a short while.”\textsuperscript{76} The Banner was generally about denomination life and issues of the denomination. It included articles concerning doctrine and departments such as “The World Today,” “Missions: Home and Abroad,” and “Voices in the Church.” The Banner had over 31,000 subscribers with nearly 8,500 going to service members.\textsuperscript{77} This kind of reading culture united the service members to the broader conversation The Banner fostered as a shared experience emerged from the stories and information published in the magazine.

The Banner also published the list of Christian Reformed Church service members. Beginning in January 1941 with the address of the service members, the

\textsuperscript{74} The Christian Reformed Church also published De Wachter. This was the Dutch language publication. They had separate editors and writers. De Wachter gave much less attention to the efforts of the denomination to stay connected with the service members.

\textsuperscript{75} Rev. Henry Baker, “Home Mission Briefs,” The Banner, 29 August 1941. Baker encouraged the members of the local church to support the soldiers by sending them The Banner.

\textsuperscript{76} Gerald L. Bronsink, “Buddies Ask for Banner,” The Banner, 14 January 1944, 41.

list added the home church of the service member in June 1941. Starting in the September 12, 1941 issue, the list was organized by camp enabling the soldiers to get together more easily. Publishing the list stopped in February of 1942 because the editor determined it took too much space. Instead, *The Banner* publicized when the clubs would meet in the various defense camps, where service pastors were located, and invitations from churches near defense camps. Throughout the war, nearly 30 different churches advertised their location and Sunday worship times in *The Banner*. It was hoped that the service members would use this information to stay connected to the Christian Reformed Church wherever they were located.

*The Young Calvinist* was written for the youth specifically. The American Federation of Reformed Young Men’s Societies and the American Federation of Reformed Young Women’s Societies published it monthly. While the Federations were not officially run by the Christian Reformed Church, the societies were almost exclusively organized in Christian Reformed Churches. *The Young Calvinist* cooperated with the Home Missions Committee to become the official publication for Christian Reformed service members. The Executive Committee of Home Missions had wanted to send a bulletin to all the service members and decided to use *The Young Calvinist* to provide quality-reading material and to “stimulate the organization of Young Men’s Clubs.” After November 1941, all Christian Reformed service members received *The Young Calvinist* at no cost to them. At first, the periodical devoted four pages to the service members. By the end of the war, nearly the entire

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78 “Young Men in Service,” *The Banner*, 20 June 1941, 593.

79 “Home Mission Briefs,” *The Banner*, 20 February 1942, 188.

issue was focused on the service members. It usually included reports from the servicemen’s homes, letters from those in defense camps and overseas, and pictures. Each issue also printed an extended list of where Young Men’s Clubs met, invitations from individual churches and individuals near camps. Obituaries of the nearly 270 Christian Reformed Church service members were also published. This periodical worked hard at keeping service members connected to the Christian Reformed Church by serving their particular needs at the same time reminding them of home and their ethnic community.

All these efforts showed the service members that people at home cared about them no matter their location. Denominational efforts and the efforts of individual congregations all demonstrated how the community understood itself. Its history and theology that supported this isolation caused them to worry about the encounters of their young men and women in military service. The fear of the outside world and encounters both by those at home, but also the service members themselves showed how they imagined themselves and the importance and safety they saw in their institutional patterns. Many service members appreciated such efforts and voiced their thanks in numerous letters in the magazines. While some Christian Reformed service members refused such efforts, they were rarely mentioned. The pastors who commented on this lack of reciprocity by some realized that many of these service members had already been hostile to the denomination and Christianity before the war began. The ability of some to slip out of their ethnic identity when they joined the military led some to never look back or return to the institutions of Dutch America.

81 Rev. Ed Boeve to Board of Home Missions of the Christian Reformed Church, [n.d.] Executive Committee Reports and Correspondence of Home Missions, Heritage Hall.
The experience of the Christian Reformed Church in trying to keep its members loyal and moral during World War II demonstrated the way their understanding about themselves resulted in certain actions. While never neatly connecting the dots themselves as to the purpose of the efforts that went into keeping their military personal close to the denomination, it was clear they had a strong view of the covenant and a strong view of being a special people. This self-identity set their sons and daughters apart and they needed to be kept in the fold and not lost to the world, even if that could mean for some leaders just another denomination or set of institutions. Losing them to the world, even other denominations, was interpreted as a sign of unfaithfulness.

Connecting with the Netherlands

At the same time that some in the Dutch-American community worked to close ranks during World War II, the connections between the Netherlands and the Dutch Americans actually increased. While the personal connections and letter correspondence had decreased prior to the war, the official contacts of the Dutch government in exile and the House of Orange with the Dutch in America increased. The most conspicuous contact was the establishment of the Netherlands Information Bureau (NIB) in Holland, Michigan in 1942. The other major connection came when Princess Juliana visited Holland and Hope College in 1941 and Pella and Central College in 1942. The NIB’s presence and the visits of the House of Orange brought the constructed nature of the Dutch identity into focus.

Part of the construction of the Dutch-American identity included a particular image of the Netherlands. The community had constructed an image of their homeland that was both quaint and repressive. In such events as the yearly Tulip
Time Festival, tulips, windmills, and wooden-shoes harkened back to a quaint homeland of yesteryear and the way Americans wanted to think about the Netherlands. Alongside this image, a religiously repressive Netherlands was remembered as a homeland the founders of Dutch America had left for good reasons. The Netherlands was a place to the heroic founders left so they could keep the true Calvinistic faith in their new homeland. Even in the face of one-hundred years of changes in the Netherlands, the community continued to circulate an antiquated image of the Netherlands. The Dutch-American community encountered a much different Netherlands during World War II with the Netherlands government projecting a much different version of the nationa. This competing definitions of the Netherlands can most clearly be seen in Holland, Michigan.

As Nazi Germany occupied the Netherlands and the Japanese military threatened the Netherlands East Indies in the summer of 1941, the Netherlands government in exile in London and the government of the Netherlands East Indies officially established the Netherlands Information Bureau in New York City to keep news of the Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies in front of the American public. Under the direction of Dr. N.A.C. Slotemaker de Bruine, the office in New York City grew and within a year included a library and research department, press department, photo and film department, and a broadcast department. In order to

82 From time to time other concerns gave rise to further, less enduring constructions of the images of the Netherlands. In the 1880s, for instance, some writers condemned the Netherlands as secular and socialistic, using it as a negative examples of what the United State might become if it did not stay true to its Christian roots. See “Hollanders in Nederland en in Amerika,” Grondwet, 26 April 1887 and “Waroom is de Nederlandsche Staat Godsdienstloos en de Amerikaansche Niet?” Gorndwet, 24 April 1888.

83 Memo, 8 September 1941, Willard Wichers Papers Box 1, The Holland Museum Archives and Research Library, Holland, Michigan. Hereafter Holland
extend its reach across the United States, the NIB established two division offices by the summer of 1942. The office in San Francisco, California, covered the western United States and an office in Holland, Michigan, served the Midwest.84

Holland, Michigan seems out of place on a list with New York and San Francisco but hosted an NIB office for at least two reasons. Clearly, Holland had a Dutch heritage which was attractive to the government of the Netherlands. The second reason was the work of Willard Wichers. Wichers grew up in the Holland area with intimate knowledge of Dutch America, had shown a keen interest in history while a student at Hope, and worked as a community promoter. He had served as a District Supervisor of the Survey of Historical Records as part of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s and actively sought the NIB’s Midwest office in 1942 in the belief that Holland’s Dutch heritage could help amplify the message of the NIB (instead of being lost in the cacophony of Chicago) and help publicize the small Museum. One Year Old: The Inside Story of an Ugly Duckling (New York: Netherlands Information Bureau, 1942). For more information about the Netherlands Information Bureau, in Dutch see, Marja Wagenaar, De Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst: Geheimhouden, Toedekken, en Operbaren (Amsterdam: Sdu Uitgevers, 1997) and Marja Roholl, “To Put Holland on the Map: Voorlichting als Instrument van Buitenlands Beleid van Nederland, 1900-1950,” paper presented to Conferentie Media en Sociaal-Culturele Veranderingen, International Institute for Society History, Amsterdam, 24 May 1991. In English see David Snyder “Representing Indonesia Democracy in the U.S., 1945-1949: Dutch Public Diplomacy and Exception to Self-Determination,” in Democracy and Culture in the Transatlantic World, ed. Charlotte Wallin and Daniel Silander (Maastricht, The Netherlands: The Maastricht Center for Transatlantic Studies, 2004), 35-48.

84 “Memorandum on a Conference Attended by Dr. Slotemaker, Mr. Huizinga, Dr. Pelt, Mr. Wichers and Mr. Ochse, 18 March 1942, Willard Wichers Papers, Box 18, Holland Museum. One Year Old: The Inside Story of an Ugly Duckling. Dr. N.A.C. Slotemaker de Bruine to Willard C. Wichers, “Report on Meeting,” 3 August 1944, Willard Wichers Papers Box 18, Holland Museum. Other early offices were established in Boston, Massachusetts and in Washington, D.C. but had started after Holland and San Francisco and had ceased by 1945.
While the NIB did not seek connections primarily with Dutch migrants, by placing a division office in Holland it intentionally entered a Dutch-American community that had constructed an image of the Netherlands, the homeland, at odds with the NIB’s message. The NIB put forth an image of the Netherlands as a contemporary and imperial country. This construction was meant to convince the American people the Netherlands was a faithful ally during World War II. It presented its message through the mass media of films, print journalism, and radio. 

The records left by the NIB’s Midwest division in the Holland, Michigan reveal a contemporary and imperial image of the Netherlands. While the Netherlands of the 1940s surely did not have the same power as other imperial nations of the time, the NIB presented the Netherlands as a kingdom that stretched around the world.

The films produced during World War II by the NIB stressed the Netherlands’ imperial presence around the world and its position as a faithful ally. For instance, in *Netherlands America*, the NIB stressed the Netherlands West Indies as an important ally in World War II because of its location in relationship to the Panama Canal as well as the fine harbors of Paramaribo and Willemstad. Other films, such as “Holland Michigan,” *Andere Tijden*, http://geschiedenis.vpro.nl/programmas/2899536/fleveringen/23970657/ (accessed April 10, 2007). In an interview for this television documentary, J. Heldring, a director of the Netherlands Information Bureau in New York City recounts how Wichers urged the NIB to place an office in Holland, Michigan instead of Chicago, Illinois.

The exact dates were not on the films. However, using film usage reports and the information in the films themselves, a general sequence of the release of the films is possible.

*Netherlands America*, Holland Museum. All films cited are in the possession of The Holland Museum. More information on production is unavailable. For film analysis, see John E. O’Connor, *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis*
as *The Dutch Tradition*, stressed the continued resistance of the Dutch against the Japanese military in Netherlands East Indies. Beyond just fighting in still free areas, the people of the Netherlands were presented as strong allies because of their steadfast character even in the face of occupation. The film, *Holland Carries On*, posited that the patience needed for the dike building tradition carried over into the Dutch war experience so that the Dutch “never lost faith and carried on in the Dutch tradition.” The slogan “God made the world, but the Dutch made Holland,” summarized for many the tenacity of the Dutch people in the face of great obstacles during the war.

The films produced and distributed during World War II emphasized the Netherlands as a strong, resilient people shaped by their constant struggle with the sea which prepared them to take on the Germans. Two of the most popular were *The New Earth* and *Landbuilders*. Both of these films noted how the dike building tradition of the Netherlands made the Dutch a strong fighting nation. In the words of *The New Earth*, “we have made our own country, physically and spiritually.” Instead of attacking neighbors, they attacked the sea to create more living space demonstrating “how a peaceful people gains land.” *Landbuilders* portrayed an idyllic life destroyed by the Germans.

The NIB was also concerned with presenting a positive image of the Netherlands as an imperial power even while German Nazis occupied the Netherlands.

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88 Popularity is based on the viewing reports kept by the NIB-Holland office in Holland, Michigan. Willard Wichers Papers Box 1, Holland Museum. Most of the films have no dates on them. I dated the films by noting the first time the film was distributed by the NIB-Holland in its records and the content of the films.
in print as well. The press department in the New York office produced *Netherlands News* and *Netherlands News Digest* twice per month. These publications were sent to major American papers as well as smaller papers in West Michigan with the intention of providing copy for the print media. Over half of the sections in *Netherlands News* and *Netherlands News Digest* focused on the global reach of the homeland. Catering to American stereotypes about Japanese, many press releases from the war years denigrated the Japanese who occupied the Netherlands East Indies. For instance, a press release from the NIB in December of 1944 highlighted the “Japanese brutality” in labor camps where “men were not allowed to share their meager rations with comrades who had fallen ill.”

Finally, the NIB also disseminated its message through the radio. This included both “Netherlands Radio News Weekly” as well as a program targeted to women in the United States. The bureau hoped to reach more women when it launched “Women’s Commentary” in August 1943. These short programs contained

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89 Confidential Memorandum to the Staff: Post-War Plans N.E.I., 14 July 1942, Willard Wichers Papers Box 18, Holland Museum. Memorandum to the Staff in Regard to the “Indies” and the Other Sections of the Netherlands Information Bureau, 16 November 1942, Willard Wichers Papers Box 5, Holland Museum.

90 See, for instance, Willard C. Wichers to Dr. N.A.C. Slotemaker de Bruine, 7 September 1945, Willard Wichers Papers Box 92, Holland Museum.


news of interest “especially for women.” The program eventually was named “Feminine Vignettes” in August 1949. Titles of sections from the 1950s included “Dutch Laundromats,” “New Winter Coats,” and “New Apartment Houses.” Each program also consisted of a recipe such as *uitsmijter* (fried eggs and ham served on slices of bread), *spekpannokoeken* (pancakes with bacon), and “farm breakfasts.” The “Feminine Vignettes” presented an image of the Netherlands as a country that valued domesticity. The number of segments having to do with family and home far outnumbered any other category. Even though many contained traditional images of women as the centerpiece of the vignettes, they highlighted aspects of the Netherlands which were very “modern.” In an episode from February 23, 1950, the Dutch electronics company, Philips, and railways are touted as improvements in the Netherlands.

The NIB was very concerned with how its messages were being received. Weekly Press Reports abstracted any mention of the Netherlands in the American press. For example, the Weekly Press Report from February 15 to 21, 1946, noted everything from Johannes de Jong becoming a Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church to discussions about re-opening the Amsterdam Stock Exchange. Midwest Division director Willard Wichers always highlighted in his monthly reports when the Netherlands received positive attention in the local Dutch American presses. Monthly usage reports from the NIB Midwest division cataloged the names of people who

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94 Netherlands Women’s Commentary: Release Date and Table of Contents, Administration Box 3, Netherlands Information Service Collection, Holland Museum.

95 *One Year Old: Story of the Ugly Duckling*, 2.
requested information from the office. A section on film usage usually constituted the largest part of the report.

The NIB even commissioned a public opinion poll in late 1947 to determine its effectiveness. As laid out in the “Survey Problem,” the survey was to determine “the state of current popular feeling toward the Dutch, the foundations of American public opinion toward the Dutch, the extent to which the American public is aware of the Dutch-Indonesian situation and where American voters stand on the basic issues involved in the dispute.”\(^96\) The results established three basic facts, according to the report writers. First, the Netherlands was held in high regard because of legend or myth, not anything the Dutch had actually done. Second, the American public knew very little about post-war colonial issues but was likely to be favorably disposed toward the Dutch side. Third, the results of the survey suggested that “more current information regarding Dutch plans and policies” should be disseminated.\(^97\) The survey confirmed the usefulness of the NIB even if it had not been extremely effective in the 1940s.

Even as the NIB tried to control the discourse about the Netherlands in America, it encountered a different image of the homeland in Holland, Michigan. The quaint Netherlands of wooden shoes and windmills only served the NIB’s purposes if it elicited positive feelings about the Netherlands. The people of Holland, Michigan were using it to attract tourists to their city. When the two reinforced each other, both felt they benefited. Most of these intersections hinged around the multiple

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\(^96\) “Views of U.S. Voters on The Netherlands and Indonesia,” January 1948, Feltus Associates, Dutch East Indies Box 5, Netherlands Information Service Collection, Holland Museum.

\(^97\) Ibid.
positions held by Willard Wichers. As both an advocate for Holland, Michigan and Dutch Americans and Director of the Midwest Division of the NIB, he often was responsible for cross promotion.

Wichers served as the secretary of the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation in addition to his duties with the NIB. The duties of these positions overlapped in ways that could alter the message of both. For instance, at the Ninety-Seventh Commemoration organized by the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation in February 8, 1944, the NIB film *The Dutch Tradition* headlined the program. According to a press release from Wichers on behalf of the NIB (not the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation) to the *Holland Evening Sentinel*, the film included “scenes showing the transplantation of the Dutch tradition to the United States. In this portion of the film are local views and local persons, including shots made in and around Holland.”98 Wichers touted the showing at the anniversary as the first public showing in the Midwest though the Office of War Information planned to circulate 300 copies and other groups also planned to circulate the copies. Wichers had actively sought the inclusion of Holland, Michigan in the film.99 However, the film’s main message was about the strong Dutch character that made the small country a faithful ally. It used almost identical footage as *Holland Carries On*.

As director of the Netherlands Museum in Holland, Michigan, Wichers often used information and resources of the NIB to construct exhibitions.100 For instance,

98 January 28 or 29, Willard Wichers Papers Box 4, Holland Museum.

99 Willard C. Wichers to Dr. Wichers, 8 February 1944, Willard Wichers Papers Box 4, Holland Museum.

100 Willard C. Wichers to Dr. N.A.C. Slotemaker de Bruine, 7 September 1945, Willard Wichers Papers Box 92, Holland Museum.
the Netherlands Museum hosted a photographic exhibit in November 1943 that
highlighted the imperial reach of the Netherlands. According to a press release from
Wichers, the exhibition included “nearly 300 photographs of Balinese life and
culture” taken by Phillip Hanson Hiss.101 Hiss had taken the photos prior to the
occupation of the Netherlands East Indies by the Japanese military in 1939 and 1940
while traveling in Bali for the Netherlands East Indies government administration.
The photos portrayed what government regarded as the positive aspects of the
colonial rule. Hiss planned to visit the area and give a talk entitled “Imperialism in
Reverse” that would describe the “governmental problems and policies of the
Netherlands East Indies and West Indies.”102 While museum exhibits tended to focus
on a quaint Netherlands, Hiss’s photographs would show the Dutch Americans the
possessions of the Netherlands as an imperial power.

From 1946 to 1952, Wichers also served as Director of the annual Tulip Time
Festival in Holland. He proposed the idea to his superiors in the NIB by arguing that
“Netherlands interests will be advanced through the Festival while the latter event
should gain a more traditional Dutch character. . . . No event or promotion undertaken
in the United States thus far has been more important in popularizing and reviving
Dutch customs or traditions.”103 While it is unclear exactly what Wichers meant by a
“more traditional Dutch character,” his experience with the NIB and a contemporary
Netherlands shaped his leadership of the festival and the image of the Netherlands it
cultivated.

101 9 November 1943, Willard Wichers Papers Box 2, Holland Museum.

102 Ibid.

103 Willard C. Wichers to Nico, [Dr. N.A.C. Slotemaker de Bruine] 13 January
1946, Willard Wichers Papers Box 18, Holland Museum.
Even with this crossover of images, institutions within the Dutch-American community that had constructed and used an image of a religiously repressive homeland in their narrative rarely used the information from the NIB as evidenced by the usage reports. For instance, film reports showed the limited appeal among Dutch-American church groups.\textsuperscript{104} None of the publications that served the Dutch-American religious community had significant sections devoted to the modern Netherlands. In fact, when Wichers first started the office of the NIB in Holland, he found that the \textit{Netherlands News} was not being sent to either \textit{The Banner} or the \textit{Intelligencer Leader}, both important publications to reach a Dutch-American audience. Wichers also criticized the original New York office for not sending the \textit{Netherlands News Digest} to the clergy of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America.\textsuperscript{105}

Another direct connection between the Netherlands and the Dutch Americans came when Princess Juliana visited Holland and Pella in 1941 and 1942 respectively. These visits while Juliana was living in Ottawa, Canada during the war brought the contemporary Netherlands in direct contact with the image constructed by the Dutch-American community. In the narrative, the King of the Netherlands at the time of migration in the 1940s had not heard the special pleadings of the persecuted religious minority which left and often received a bit of blame for forcing the migrants to make the choice to leave.

The Princess’s visit to Holland occurred in June 1941 and occasioned a

\textsuperscript{104} Willard C. Wichers to Dr. N.A.C. Slotemaker de Bruine, 13 July 1946, Willard Wichers Papers Box 92, Holland Museum. Willard C. Wichers to J. L. Heldring, 10 July 1953, Willard Wichers Papers Box 92, Holland Museum.

\textsuperscript{105} Willard C. Wichers to Dr. Slotemaker and Mr. Huizinga [n.d.], Willard Wichers Papers Box 18, Holland Museum.
Special Convocation at Hope College. The Princess received an honorary Doctorate of Laws. Wynand Wichers, the president of Hope College, provided the introductory remarks that showed the way the narrative needed to be shaped to fit the occasion. He opened his remarks by emphasizing the contributions the Dutch migrants made to the westward expansion of the United States. The Dutch that founded Holland, Michigan, according to Wichers, had inherited “ideals of freedom, education, and religion” from “a little but great country in western Europe” where “these ideals were imbedded deep in the structure of our [forebears’] life with the same fortitude and untiring zeal that marked the efforts of the people in the Low Countries to win for themselves a place of great honor among the nations.” Wichers also made sure to show respect and honor for the royal family “which has always been the symbol of the greatest ideals of religion and human freedom.”

This retelling of the story conveniently left out the reasons why the migrants had felt they needed to leave in the 1840s. For this audience in the context of World War II and a visiting monarch, the story shifted to highlight the contributions the Dutch made to the United States and the country from which that “zeal” had sprung.

The Princess’s visit to Pella, Iowa in May of 1942 showed the same kind of cooperation between the college and city as did the Holland visit. While receiving an honorary degree from Central College, Princess Juliana also visited the “Home for the Aged” and enjoyed a special program in the city park. The newspaper report of the introduction of the Princess as the commencement ceremonies where she received the honorary degree noted how Milton Hoffman, a former president of Central College

\[106\] Wynand Wichers, “Introductory Statement by President Wynand Wichers,” Folder 1941 Hope College Special Convocation, Box 1 Collection H88-0082.1 Royal Family of the Netherlands, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, Holland, Michigan. Hereafter Joint Archives.
and current professor of church history at New Brunswick Seminary, had stressed “the invincible Dutch, of their love for order and decency, their regard for the social amenities, of life and their love of liberty and justice.” The dichotomous nature of the image of the Netherlands, the embodiment in Juliana as both part of a line of monarchs as well as next in line for being queen of a colonial power, with the image of the Netherlands as a decrepit but pastoral place that Pella had been trading in, did not seem to bother the organizers.

The image of the Netherlands circulating in the United States during World War II presented a challenge for the Netherlands Information Bureau. The image that Dutch-American community had built could not easily be synthesized with the modern one of the NIB even when the princess came calling. The story of the Netherlands as a place to leave never really left the way Dutch Americans constructed the Netherlands in their narratives even as the NIB entered the discourse during World War II. World War II, however, did place the Netherlands as an ally against the German aggression which created a common enemy for Dutch Americans and the Netherlands with which the Dutch Americans could sympathize.

**Tulip Time during a Time of War**

Even though the context of World War II challenged the isolation of Dutch Americans and their image of the Netherlands, the members of the community remained loyal to their institutions. Dutch Americans continued to maintain their identity through constructing a collective memory about the past. The

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commemorations and festivals during World War II reflected both the framework established prior to the war as well as the context of the war years. For instance, the community honored the military through their commemorations to show that they were fully American. Additionally, while still centered around shared religious tenets of Calvinism, the manifestation of the Calvinism changed as the sense of being the chosen people of God needed to be moderated to fit American culture that called for unity in a war effort. Finally, the community used a different image of the Netherlands in its institutional commemorations. By 1947, being Dutch American still meant participating in institutions started prior to the war but the exact reasons to maintain these institutions changed to reflect the reality of the war experience.

Tulip Time festivals did not feel the effects of World War II until the United States entered the war ahead of the 1942 festivals. A heightened awareness of the Netherlands already in 1940 led participants in the Pella festival to seek more “authentic” Dutch costumes. This meant the committee established an exchange of costumes to keep down the expense, providing locations to purchase patterns, and listing the names of seamstresses in the newspaper. At the same time, The Pella Chronicle did not mention the invasion of the Netherlands but only a general appeal by the Red Cross for relief funds. For the organizers of the festival, despite the storm clouds hanging over the actual Netherlands, the festival continued to “perpetuate the historic traditions of the founders and to give the people of Pella a chance to have a good time. . . . Pella’s Festival is not commercialized. . . . No


109 “American Red Cross in Appeal for Relief Fund,” The Pella Chronicle, 16 May 1940, 1.
carnival spirit prevails and there are not stands or hawkers purveying their wares.”

With these goals in mind, very little changed from year to year.

The organizers worked hard to present the city of Pella in the best light, which included the major calling for a “spotless town at Tulip Time . . . that Pella may present a clean back door as well as a bright and shining face.”

The 1941 festival also included a brief historical production in the nightly program by Leonora Scholte entitled “A Stranger in a Strange Land” that added to the historical nature of the festival for the seventh annual festival. The continual concern about costumes, the state of the tulips themselves, and the question of who would be queen dominated the run-up to the actual festival. By 1942, very little changed in the program of events yet patriotic sentiments clearly shaped how people thought about themselves and the festival. For instance, the city presented a pageant titled “Defenders of the Flag” that paid “tribute to the men of the armed forces, soldiers, sailors and marines and to those at home, the mothers, business men, professional men, laborers, teachers, church workers and from all walks of life who try to do their part in winning the war.”

The front page of the April 30, 1942 issue of *The Pella Chronicle* advertised the Eighth Annual Tulip Time with a depiction of Uncle Sam being honored by children in Dutch costumes.

The impact of World War II showed itself clearly in the 1943 Pella Tulip

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113 *The Pella Chronicle*, 30 April 1942, 1.
Time Festival as the organizers cut the three-day festival to one day. The Tulip Time Festival brochure for that year urged visitors to celebrate not only the memory of the founders of Pella but also “to honor those who have served and those who are serving to defend the American way of life.” In addition, the official “Tulip Time Edition” of The Pella Chronicle in 1943 included a photograph of the Tulip Time Queen and her attendants. The caption remarked “It was in May of 1940, the week of Tulip Time, that the grim news of the rape of Holland and the bombing of Rotterdam came to a shocked world. Tulip Time took on a new meaning—Holland enslaved must be free again.” Since the paper gave no coverage at the time of the invasion of Netherlands, this caption suggests that the community’s sense of the Netherlands had changed partly because Princess Juliana had visited in 1942. That event awakened a renewed interest in the plight of the Netherlands in Pella. The authors of the caption also hint that they needed to keep the Dutch ways because “the flowers, no longer blooming in Holland, bloom here.” The community also emphasized their connection to the Netherlands as a bond drive in Pella encouraged residents to buy extra bonds to build “Pella’s Own Bomber: the Pella Flying Dutchman.” The advertisement noted that the name would be painted on the bomber’s nose and the plane “may play a great part in liberating the Netherlands.” As Pella prepared for the 1944 festival, newspaper hoped that by May of 1944 “the Dutch will be on the point of liberation when the Festival is on and undoubtedly such a circumstance would raise the spirits


116 The Pella Chronicle, 13 May 1943, 8.
of everyone of Dutch ancestry and be reflected in the Festival.”

The cancellation of 1945 and 1946 Tulip Time Festival in Pella because of war shortages did not diminish the awareness of the Netherlands. The work of the Netherlands Information Bureau of Holland, Michigan showed up in Pella in May 1945 when the NIB helped bring a member of the Dutch underground to Pella. The speech was to tell the audience “about Holland, how her people and towns fared under Nazi rule.” Instead of a festival in 1946, The Netherlands Relief Auction Committee held a benefit auction where everyone with a Dutch costume was asked to wear it to the event “to bring home the need of the Hollanders for aid.” It was believed that people would support it and help “worthy people of our own blood in The Netherlands.” The event raised over $7000. This connection with the actual Netherlands developed over the course of the war but would play a bigger role in the construction of Dutch-American identity in the future.

In Orange City, the Chamber of Commerce scaled the Tulip Festival back to a one day event in 1942. That year, the event took the involvement of the United States in World War II into consideration. It included a special speech by an American Legion official as well as a pageant entitled “America Points the Way” with flags and costumes from around culminated with singing the national anthem. In both 1943


118 “Jacob Van Berkel to Talk Tuesday Night at College,” *The Pella Chronicle*, 26 April 1945, 1.

119 “Great Holland Relief Auction Coming May 9,” *The Pella Chronicle*, 4 April 1946, 1.

120 “Plans Completed For Tulip Day; Weather Uncertain,” *The Sioux County Capital*, 14 May 1942, 1.
and 1944, the Orange City Chamber of Commerce replaced the spring festival of Tulip Time with a “Victory Day.” The one day program still included tulips and wearing Dutch costumes but also featured Army and Iowa State Guard drills and concerts. An auction of war bonds also accompanied the program that raised $44,000 in 1943.¹²¹ No festivals took place in 1945 nor in 1946 because of the shortages caused by the war. The 1947 celebration resumed with a full festival but also included a memorial ceremony for “the boys who did not return.”¹²² The second day of the 1947 festival was designated “Veteran’s Day” with a list of the members of the American Legion post and World War II veterans printed in the newspaper.¹²³ However, compared to Pella, Orange City’s contact with the actual Netherlands during the war received less attention.

In Holland, Michigan, the war had a negligible impact on the festival from 1940 to 1942. The 1942 festival did include a new opening night program with the title “Americans by Choice” that included “some 200 foreign costumed immigrants and their children [who] will give the exciting and colorful dances of their native lands” such as Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and the Netherlands.¹²⁴ The festival continued during the duration of the war but with a subdued tone, but with the NIB right in town and the visit of Princess Juliana in 1941, the connections with the Netherlands increased. The local newspapers during the war regularly covered events in the Netherlands based on the information provided by the NIB. The reinvigorated


¹²³ *The Sioux County Capital*, 8 May 1947, Veteran’s Section.

¹²⁴ 1942 Tulip Time at Holland, Michigan Brochure, Holland Museum.
Tulip Time festival in 1946 under the leadership of Willard Wichers of the NIB had many connections with the Netherlands including organizing visits from the consul general and publicity for the Netherlands Bulb Industry. With Wichers at the helm, the Tulip Time Festival in Holland would continue to be an opportunity to build a bridge to the Netherlands and rediscover the actual country.

One of the clearest connections with the Netherlands for all three festivals was the need for imported tulip bulbs. Organizers showed concern about importing bulbs from the Netherlands already in 1940. While the actual capitulation of the Netherlands did not warrant attention in the newspapers of the towns, concern about the availability of bulbs prompted the “tulip experts” in Orange City to advise people to “clip the seed pods and heads from their tulips before the strength is sapped from the bulbs. It will be impossible this year to obtain new tulips from Holland.” The official Tulip Time brochure for the festival in Holland in 1941 had a special section on the “Bulb Situation.” It noted that “before the invasion of the Netherlands, nine-tenths of America’s tulips were imported. Now, Michigan’s Dutchmen are the mainstay of domestic production of flower bulbs.” The bulbs continued to be an issue even after the war as requirement of tulips for Tulip Time festivals was clear. Orange City’s organizers cancelled the 1946 festivals because of the unavailability of tulips from the Netherlands. However, the city announced in the spring of 1946 that a


126 “Clip Your Tulips, The Sioux County Capital, 6 June 1940, 1.

127 1941 Tulip Time at Holland, Michigan Brochure, Holland Museum.
special salesman would be available in June to take orders for the imported bulbs.128

As the Tulip Festival restarted in Orange City in 1947, The Sioux County Capital lamented that “the tulip plantings in Orange City are ragged and not up to their former beauty” because bulbs still could not be imported.129 So while the homeland was occupied, the tulip festivals could continue because the Dutch Americans made special arrangements.

The Tulip Time Festivals’ organizers during World War II dealt with the realities of the war situation. The war not only caused shortages that eventually caused the cancellation of the festivals but also increased the level of American patriotism exhibited. At the same time, a renewed interest in the actual Netherlands through the NIB and the loss of imported tulips shaped the subsequent Tulip Time Festivals. The war experience heightened the connection with the Netherlands for Dutch Americans, which resulted in a renewed emphasis on the Dutch aspects of the Dutch-American identity.

Institutional Commemorations

Despite how World War II shaped the experience of Dutch Americans, congregations and schools of the community continued to receive the allegiance of members. The strength of the community’s ethnic identity shaped the actions of the members who contributed money and remained loyal to the institutions. The members worked together for a common purpose of building buildings, giving to

128 “Concerted Spring Clean-Up During Coming Week,” The Sioux County Capital, 28 March 1946, 1.

129 “Our Seventh Tulip Festival,” The Sioux County Capital, 8 May 1947, 2.
mission, teaching their children, and caring for one another in times of need. The stories the denominations, congregations, and schools told about themselves during World War II helped shaped actions as people stayed within the institutions. At the denominational level, the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America cooperated on a translation and publishing project. Authors in the Christian Reformed Church published a number of books about the denomination. Congregations commemorated themselves in the midst of the war while other delayed anniversary celebrations until after the war. The colleges continued telling their story even in the face of reduced enrollments. The stories told by elementary and secondary Christian schools reflected their optimism despite the war. Altogether, while the Netherlands worked its way into the community story of Tulip Time, the Netherlands played a smaller and smaller role in the story the institutions told about themselves. The narrative of the institutions focused on how the Dutch Americans were active participants in the American way of life.

While differences and competition between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church did not disappear during World War II, the intensity of the rivalry diminished. Both denominations cooperated on a joint project of translating and publishing the minutes of Classis of Holland of the Reformed Church in America from the years 1848 to 1857. These crucial years, and the minutes of the classis, provided the background the Christian Reformed Church used to defend its start in 1857. Henry Beets and D. H. Kromminga of the Christian Reformed Church and Albertus Pieters and Lester Kuyper of the Reformed Church in America worked as a committee to agree on the translation. Their goal, as stated in the translator’s preface, was to “lead to a fuller understanding and deeper appreciation of the work of the pioneers who laid the foundation for the subsequent development
of church life among Americans of Holland descent.\textsuperscript{130} The project did not solve the interpretive issues of whether or not the Christian Reformed Church schism had justification but showed a united effort nonetheless.

While the minutes of the classis allowed a certain level of interpretive freedom for the reader, Christian Reformed Church leaders produced books during World War II that told the story as they interpreted it. Both Beets and Kromminga of the Christian Reformed Church on the joint historical committee wrote and published books in the 1940s. Henry Beets updated his Dutch language 1918 history of the Christian Reformed Church and his 1924 book on the history same subject because both had sold out, which demonstrated the demand for the history of the denomination. Beets wrote the 1946 edition out of “a sense of obligation to our beloved NATION. . . . We owe it an account of our origin and history. . . . We owe it to our present adult membership to KNOW its denomination. . . . There is an urgent need of a book of this kind as we think of FUTURE GENERATIONS.”\textsuperscript{131} These reasons provided the motivation for Beets who believed the Christian Reformed Church had a right to its separate existence, even if he worked with the Reformed Church in America to publish the Classis of Holland minutes. Compared to his 1924 book, this book had a more ecumenical and less polemic tone. Its narrative shortened and smoothed out, it left the reader proud of the Christian Reformed Church but not as adamant about what the Christian Reformed Church offered. Perhaps it was the wisdom of old age for Beets or the ecumenical spirit of World War II; either way, the

\textsuperscript{130} Classis Holland Minutes, 1848-1948 (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Company, 1943), 6.

story of the Christian Reformed Church was altered to be less separatist and isolationist for Beets.

The other member of the historical committee also published a book on the history of the Christian Reformed Church. D.H. Kromminga’s book, *The Christian Reformed Tradition*, had added weight because he served as the professor of church history at Calvin Seminary. This book took a more strident approach than Beets’s. Kromminga traced the history of the Christian Reformed Church to the Reformation because the Christian Reformed Church’s history “cannot be properly appreciated without an understanding of the distinctly Reformed religious heritage which has come to the denomination out of the past.”

For Kromminga, the Christian Reformed Church was the embodiment and the faithful remnant of the Reformation. Half of his book dealt with the Reformed church developments in the Netherlands and half with developments in the United States. This organization showed that he understood the denomination’s identity could be found in the Netherlands and it needed to be faithful to the original.

The hope of these publishing efforts clearly centered on keeping and growing a faithful denomination and keeping it united around a shared identity of being a covenant people. The denomination was seen as vital for navigating the twentieth century. The narratives told by Beets and Kromminga both reflected and reinforced this understanding for the people of the denomination. These narratives also filtered down to the congregational level where the writers of commemorative anniversary books hoped to keep the congregations loyal and growing. These narratives during World War II continued with the same kinds of patterns as earlier, but with a few new

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patterns emerging, reflecting the changes in the community as it dealt with the changing internal and external challenges.

Congregational books continued to periodize their narratives around the coming and going of pastors. Pastors came and went, sometimes leaving over clashes with the congregation and other times for more personal reasons. The smoothing out of what, at times, must have been difficult circumstances and conflicts characterized congregational commemorations during World War II. For instance, the First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo endured a major split in 1924 but author of the church anniversary book of 1946 downplayed it by noting how “some difficulties arose” without mentioning the bitter feelings and court disputes. The authors of the narratives during World War II also mentioned how many “sons” of the congregation had become pastors. While this was a trend more in the Reformed Church in America, a greater number of Christian Reformed Church books also mentioned it during World War II, reflecting an emphasis on service and staying within the ethnic group institutions.

Besides photographs of pastors, buildings photographs continued to be a regular part of the books. The compilers of the books took great pride in the physical presence of the congregation in the form of the buildings that reflected a shared sacrifice and success. Buildings clearly mattered for how a congregation thought about itself, but at least one author of a church anniversary book acknowledged that “in presenting this souvenir booklet, the consistory is mindful of the fact that much space is given to the recording of the material progress of the congregation. This is more tangible than the spiritual progress. We should, however, find our greatest joy

in the spiritual prosperity and progress of our members.”

This concession to the reality of the historical record for providing information for the narrative does not exonerate the writers who might have been more creative in how they thought about spiritual growth.

Another continuous theme from earlier books was the veneration of the founders of the congregations. The writers of these books during World War II continued to emphasize how the founders had been faithful so the present and future generations needed to as well. Oakdale Christian Reformed Church’s anniversary book mentioned that there had been opposition at their founding in 1890 in Grand Rapids but “history has amply vindicated the courage and foresight of those who saw the need for establishing a congregation.” Until 1942, many of the books were dedicated to the founders themselves. A church in the vicinity of Orange City observed that the founders had lived up to the high ideals of being pioneers who looked to the future. It then called the next generation to acknowledge these ideals and “follow in their footsteps.” A writer of an anniversary book for a church in Holland, Michigan noted how “staunch old fathers” had to travel out of town to a Christian Reformed Church so they decided to start their own church. This step of faith reflected the kind of dedication the founders had and the present generation

134 Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church, *Twenty-Fifth Anniversary* (Grand Rapids, 1940), 1. Available Heritage Hall

135 Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church, *Fiftieth Anniversary* (Grand Rapids, 1940), 6. Available Heritage Hall.


137 Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church, *Seventy-Fifth Anniversary* (Holland, 1940), 7. Available Joint Archives.
needed to keep even in the face of the great challenges presented by World War II.

While congregational anniversary books often focused on the distinctiveness of their congregation and denominations, World War II had a tempering effect on these divisions. More and more of the authors used the personal pronouns of “us” and “our.” In other words, the definition of who was inside their notion of themselves grew during the years from 1940 to 1946. For instance, even at a great distance from the center of Dutch-American settlements, the First Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington noted how the church grew during the 1930s because of “the influx of our people from the drought stricken areas.”

In Grand Rapids, the dividing lines fell between the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America. As the Immanuel Reformed Church in America pointed out in their 1942 anniversary book, when they approached Calvin College of the Christian Reformed Church to use their auditorium in 1906, Calvin rebuffed them by saying they “would not be rented to a rival organization.” The readers would clearly recognize the fault lines as the writers entered into the discourse of their congregations.

The sense of knowing the outlines of the narratives affected the way the Christian Reformed Church congregations memorialized their connection with the private, Christian schools. One congregation even went so far to note that their church was organized because of the school. The Cutlerville Christian Reformed Church began because Kelloggsville Christian Reformed Church would not support


\[139\] Immanuel Reformed Church, *Thirty-Fifth Anniversary* (Grand Rapids, 1942). Available Joint Archives.
the endeavor of supporting a separate school society.\textsuperscript{140} Dennis Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids included a page about “Our Christian School.”\textsuperscript{141} While the Christian school technically was not controlled by the congregation, the line was never so clear in actuality.

The story told by the authors and compilers of these books extended beyond the historical narrative. One of the aspects of these books that grew during World War II was the inclusion of more photographs and descriptions of various societies within the churches. The number of photos of men’s and women’s societies as well as Sunday school classes increased throughout this period. The increased use of photography in society partly explains this shift but it also reflects a shift in thinking about what the congregation meant. The congregation came to expression in more and more societies, especially for larger congregations. These societies would meet for Bible study, often led by the pastor. The congregation itself was more than just Sunday worship and reflected the changing demographics and expectations of members who now expected and wanted more interaction with each other as a way to navigate the twentieth century.

The largest modifications to established patterns of the narrative included emphasizing how the slowing of migration and concomitant language change affected the congregations. These more recent developments of the 1920s and 1930s played a role in retelling the earlier narrative as well. For instance, the First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Haven noted in its anniversary book of 1940 that “where

\textsuperscript{140} Cutlerville Christian Reformed Church, \textit{The Fiftieth Anniversary, 1893-1943} (Byron Center, Mich., 1943). Available Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{141} Dennis Avenue Christian Reformed Church, \textit{Fiftieth Anniversary} (Grand Rapids, 1943). Available Heritage Hall. Listed under Grand Rapids—MI, Mayfair.
formerly there was strong demand and need for Holland preaching and pastoral work; due to almost complete cessation of immigration, and the passing of many of the older members this need has greatly lessened.” These changes affected how the author interpreted the earlier language changes noting that by 1924, many in the church already encouraged the use of the English language rather than discourage it as happened prior to World War I.\textsuperscript{142} The changes of language and migration also shaped the narrative of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Christian Reformed Church congregation of Kalamazoo. Its 1942 anniversary book noted that “some of the older members were conscious that our young people were desirous of an English speaking congregation.”\textsuperscript{143} While a seemingly innocuous statement, it smoothed over and cleaned up what must have been some heated debate about the language of the congregation.

Another shift in the patterns of the narratives told by authors of these books was a focus on where the founders of the particular congregation came from rather than starting the narratives with the 1840s migration of Van Raalte and Scholte. For instance, Dennis Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids recognized that their growth in the early 1900s came almost exclusively from memberships received from the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{144} The First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo also noted that in the 1910 the church building needed to be enlarged because “at that time

\textsuperscript{142} First Christian Reformed Church, \textit{Eighty-Fifth Anniversary} (Grand Haven, Mich., 1940). Available Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{143} Third Christian Reformed Church, \textit{35\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary} (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1942). Available Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{144} Dennis Avenue Christian Reformed Church, \textit{Fiftieth Anniversary} (Grand Rapids, 1943). Available at Heritage Hall. Listed under Grand Rapids—MI, Mayfair.
many people were migrating from the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{145} This example showed that the stories of migration in at least some congregational commemorations were more localized about the conditions that led to the growth of the congregation.

The slight modifications of the narratives show how changing internal and external dynamics forced members to alter their narratives that formed the basis of their ethnoreligious identity. However, the experience of sending their young people to military service shaded the commemorative books during World War II. These books functioned not only to memorialize the past, but also the present sacrifices of service members. After 1941, rarely did an anniversary book not at least mention something about the “boys in service.” The 8\textsuperscript{th} Reformed Church in America of Grand Rapids in 1941 mentioned “within the past ten months twenty of our young men have been inducted into military training.”\textsuperscript{146} The 3\textsuperscript{rd} Reformed Church in America of Holland in 1942 referred to “the many young people of the church who are now in the service of their country.”\textsuperscript{147} By the end of the war, more and more anniversary committees dedicated the anniversary books rather than the congregational founders. For instance, the committee of the 1944 Wyoming Park Christian Reformed Church book dedicated it to the “sons in Service of Our Country.”\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{145} First Christian Reformed Church, \textit{Anniversary Book} (Kalamazoo, 1946). Available Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{146} 8\textsuperscript{th} Reformed Church, \textit{Our Book of Memories} (Grand Rapids, 1941). Available Joint Archives.

\textsuperscript{147} 3\textsuperscript{rd} Reformed Church, \textit{Seventy-Fifth Anniversary} (Holland, 1942). Available Joint Archives.

From 1943 through 1946, the anniversary books called the congregation to think about the service men and women. These books listed the names of those in the service and often had photographs of them. These lists often appeared in the same section as the list of “sons” serving as ministers and missionaries. This juxtaposition of serving God and country showed the formative nature of the war experience. The anniversary book authors of the Cutlerville Christian Reformed Church’s 1943 book articulated this sentiment clearly. The authors included a page of greetings to “our boys serving our country” and they encouraged the “boys” to “take your part for God on that great battlefield. . . Be good soldiers for your country, but also good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”

No longer did authors of these congregational narratives carefully warn against the influence of American culture and ways; these congregations demonstrated their full support for the American war effort. In fact, some congregations that had published books prior to World War II which did not include a list of their members who had served during World War I now when publishing a book during World War II chose to include a list of soldiers who had served in World War I. The heightened militarism of World War II led the authors during World War II to include the previous generation as faithful servants of the American cause during the war.

School commemorations during World War II did not occur very often

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because few significant anniversaries fell during these years and the retrenchment due to the war. Colleges particularly felt the effect as their commemorative events all but stopped. In the K-12 Christian schools closely associated with the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church, the commemorations fit with the established patterns but with a renewed emphasis on proving they produced American citizens. For instance, the year-by-year history of the Cutlerville Christian School in 1943 noted that the school began teaching American history in 1901 and by 1909 “more English was used than Dutch.”

In the 1942 anniversary book of Byron Center Christian School, Peter Van Tuinen noted the number of graduates in military service and how they now realized “that a real education must be more than a preparation for life.” He implied that real education prepared them for death which they would willingly face for their country.

“The Pilgrim” written by Edward Dimnent, a former president of Hope, to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Hope College in 1941 took a very allegorical approach to commemorating Hope’s past. The eight episodes with titles such as “The Universal Promise,” “The Universal Redeemer,” and “The General Assembly of New World Founders” were meant to symbolize things such as the Christian ideal of life and the foundation of American ideals. Even with such a universal theme, the published program was interspersed with full-page photographs of Hope College buildings. In the “quest that covers centuries,” humanity, represented in the pageant


by a pilgrim, seeks “perfect welfare.” Hope contributes to the quest because it and its graduates were “active in the uplift of mankind.”\textsuperscript{154} Hope College commemorated itself through this pageant to present the institution’s story as part of a universal story during a time of darkening prospects. At the same time, however, it was embedded in the Dutch America community. The pageant was staged for both the local audience as well as for the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America meeting that summer at Hope college. These dual audiences showed how Dutch-American identity needed to always take into account the reality of both the local and global context.

Conclusion

The experience of World War II significantly altered the Dutch-American community. It forced the community to confront its isolation both literally and figuratively. The war effort called the community to send its men and women into the armed services while demanding loyalty for those at home. This meant facing apprehension about what that might entail for the future of its institutions. The Christian Reformed Church particularly worried about the morality and loyalty of the next generation. The war effort also meant that the community needed to show it was totally behind the war effort. Sending young men and women to war helped, as did the institutions appropriating the rhetoric of America more and more.

The war, the invasion of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany, and subsequent liberation put the actual homeland on the minds of many Dutch Americans as well. The Netherlands no longer was only a place their ancestors left for the opportunity of

\textsuperscript{154} Edward D. Dimnent, “The Pilgrim (1941),” Dimnent, Edward Papers, Joint Archives.
America, but was a place that needed liberation and assistance in rebuilding. This juxtaposition of an image of a decrepit Netherlands and an ally Netherlands in the Dutch-American identity formation process would continue through the rest of the century. It shows the complexity of constructing an ethnoreligious identity. Since Netherlands had been attacked by Nazi Germany and was an ally of the United States, loyalty of Dutch Americans in the United States was not questioned by other Americans. Organizers of the Tulip Time Festivals appropriated the new information about the Netherlands which would lead to attempts to be more authentically Dutch following the war.

At the same time, the institutions continued to maintain and strengthen themselves as safe harbors during a time of radical change. Despite the pressures of the World War II, in the short term the end of the Great Depression brought renewed vigor to the institutions. These institutions were safe places in a changing and dangerous world where members continued to find meaning and community from which to engage the world. In congregations, members found a safe place to keep to the Calvinistic tenets of the faith of the fathers. The institutions did not emphasize the differences within the community but instead focused on how the institutions contributed to the American war effort and the way of life the military protected.

The full impact of the war can be seen most fully in the years following the war as service members and others affected by the war worked in their congregations and other institutions again. A sense of isolation and naiveté could not be put back in the bottle as the members of the institutions would have to continue to convince each other of the necessity of the institutions. The encounters during the war spurred some to entrench all the more in the institutions of the community. Others stayed but had a different sense of their identity as a member of the community. Some would silently
slip out of the grips of the community’s institutions altogether. In the context of the
decade following World War II, all of these differences and more can be seen in the
way the community constructed narratives about itself in its commemorations.
CHAPTER V

BUYING AND SELLING THE NARRATIVES OF DUTCH-AMERICAN IDENTITY
FROM 1947 TO 1957

Following the World War II era, the Dutch-American community found itself in a re-arranged society. The war era had forced them to re-consider their place in America both physically, as they left enclaves, and culturally, as isolation became more difficult. For the impact of these shifts would play out for Dutch Americans in the decade from 1947 to 1957. Bracketed by key year of 1947, when both Pella and Holland commemorated the centennial of their founding, and the 1957 centennial of start of the Christian Reformed Church, the Dutch American community navigated the cultural waters of a changed America and still found reasons to keep their institutions. In addition, the movement of a new wave of Dutch migrants to the United States and Canada shaped internal dynamics of what it meant to be Dutch American. The commemorations during these key years reflected a changing identity of Dutch Americans in response to the context of the time. The matrix of what it meant to be Dutch American maintained earlier aspects of the identity but also adjusted others to fit the new time in a metaphorical of buying and selling.

The glow from the defeat of Japan and Germany shaped a post-war culture in the United States that valued conformity and the Dutch-American community was poised to fit in to the new culture. Even prior to World War II, Dutch Americans had constructed an ethnic identity built around America as the land of golden opportunity.
and their experience had reinforced this construction. Following World War II, the commemorations of community emphasized even more how well Dutch Americans fit into the American society and how much they contributed to the culture’s shared values. Dutch Americans did not question the culture of conformity but instead showed compatibility with the American ways. Conformity to the larger narrative of American greatness and freedom in the post-war period did not stamp out fissures within the community, but the Dutch Americans who disagreed with each other over religion and how to engage the broader culture still acknowledged that the freedom of the United States allowed them to differ. Institutions allowed the Dutch Americans to find a distinct way to engage the culture of conformity without losing all sense of the ethnoreligious identity.

The institutional footprint of the Dutch American community grew after World War II because of economic success as well as new migration from the Netherlands. At the same time, changes in the community caused by these growth factors demanded that institutional leaders continue to convince the next generation to remain faithful to the ethnic institutions started by migrants out of necessity. The commemorations from 1947 to 1957 show institutions balancing the need to fit into an American culture of conformity that downplayed differences with their own desire to remain viable institutions. The institutions emphasized how they contributed to American society while at the same time defending their separateness. And the defense of separateness now centered more around distinct religious characteristics than migrant roots.

The United States experienced many changes between 1947 and 1957. As Lizabeth Cohen argues, “in the aftermath of World war II a fundamental shift in America’s economy, politics, and culture took place, with major consequences for
how Americans made a living, where they dwelled, how they interacted with others, what and how they consumed, what they expected of government, and much else.”

The key aspect of that society was mass consumption, which the government supported to provide economic, social, and political goals for a more free, democratic, and great country. These changes influenced the way the Dutch-American community dealt with the world as little enclaves no longer felt as isolated. Like other members of American society, they became consumer citizens in a culture of conformity.

The reaction to World War II also included an emphasis on the home, particularly the ideal of the single-detached home. This ideal, encouraged by the post-war prosperity and rhetoric of the consumers republic, was felt in the Dutch-American community as well. Elaine Tyler May showed how Americans created a nuclear family-centered culture that “would fulfill virtually all its members’ personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life.” This “domestic containment” and improved economic conditions coincided with a baby-boom that then reinforced the emphasis on the home. The fertility rate increased between 1940 and 1945 from 19.4 to 24.5 births per one thousand people—as the marriage rates increased and the marriage age dropped—until a peak birth rate in the late 1950s. The suburbs on the outskirts of cities met and fueled this kind of desire. Kenneth Jackson explained that between 1946 and 1956, 97 percent of new single-family homes were detached.

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3 Ibid., 59.
houses incorporating the assumption that owners would have automobiles.\textsuperscript{4}

The international political situation that emerged in the post-war era also shaped the United States that the Dutch-American community reacted to and participated in. Paul Boyer showed how the threat of the atomic age affected the culture of the late 1940s. He noted that during those years, “Americans first confronted the bomb, struggled against it, and absorbed it into the fabric of the culture.”\textsuperscript{5} The fear of the bomb was equaled by the fear of the Soviet Union. The beginning of the Cold War, as Melvyn Leffler explained, was not predetermined but developed with decision on both sides.\textsuperscript{6} The Cold War created a strong anti-communism culture in the United States. Stephen Whitfield pointed out that the fear of communism tinted how society was viewed by many.\textsuperscript{7}

American religious culture also changed in the years after World War II. More and more Americans attended churches as economic prosperity provided resources for denominations and local congregations to expand their buildings and their programs. Mark Noll noted, in the post-war years, “attachment to church became as normal as increased personal prosperity and a move to the suburbs.”\textsuperscript{8} Not


\textsuperscript{6} Melvyn P. Leffler, \textit{A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War} (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992).


only did denominations and congregations grow, but new efforts at ecumenical cooperation swept mainline denominations such as the starts of the National Council of Churches in 1950 and the equally powerful movement among evangelicals for cooperation with organizations such as the National Association of Evangelicals and the start of Youth for Christ.9 Dutch-American congregations and denominations felt the effects of these religious changes as they benefited from the overall religious interest at the same time needing to navigate what the new ecumenicism meant for their cultural location.

Not only did World War II shape American society, it also had an impact on how Americans remembered the past. As society and culture underwent the significant changes, a simplified past provided people a sense of security in an age of anxiety. The simplification and cleaning-up of the past took place at historical museums and sites, in popular history magazines such as American Heritage, and in other media outlets. This also had an impact on Americans and their descendants who had migrated as America’s past was retold as a story of different migrants coming together. Michael Kammen noted that “the celebration of certain hyphenated American traditions also enjoyed special legitimacy.”10 The past became a repository of patriotic stories in such projects as the Freedom Train that traveled the country with historical documents to reawaken, as Attorney General Tom C. Clark hoped, “a

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profound faith in the American historical heritage."11 That “historical heritage” was defined during the Cold War as a heritage of freedom and democracy where, among others, migrants benefited and added to the American story.

While internal dynamics altered the Dutch-American community, the context of the post-war years shaped the impact of these internal changes. The post-war society and culture encouraged Dutch Americans to take their place in America as contributors to what made America the home of the free and the land of the brave. The broader trends in consumer culture, religious culture invited Dutch Americans to participate in the good life of American consumer culture of suburban homes. Even as they kept their hyphenated identity, they could feel fully American by being patriotic and anti-communist. Their institutions, though still separate, existed because of American freedom and could serve the purpose of the United States in combating anti-American forces. Dutch Americans used their particular past to construct an identity and make sense of their contemporary situation that reflected these realities.

Migration and Institutional Patterns

Post-war prosperity allowed the institutions in Dutch America the resources to grow in ways their founders could have only dreamed of. Existing schools and congregations added students and members and new ones started on a regular basis. Institutional coffers filled with generous donations from community members who had not donated during the scarcity of the Great Depression and World War II. While the growth of their own institutions focused the Dutch-American community on its own developments, a sense of being part of the American society gave the community

11 Ibid., 574.
confidence that its institutions contributed to American greatness.

The institutional growth in the denominations of the Reformed Church in America and Christian Reformed Church most clearly demonstrates the patterns of the period. From 1947 to 1957, the growth of the Reformed Church in America occurred gradually but steadily. The particular synods of Chicago and Iowa had 118,169 members in 1947, making up just under 50 percent of the denomination. In 1957, the particular synods of Chicago, Iowa, and Michigan had 155,501 members that now made up 52 percent of the denomination and an increase of 31 percent in the number of members. The number of churches in these areas also grew from 298 churches to 392 in 1957 with another 21 congregations starting in Canada in these years. In the same years, the Christian Reformed Church experienced explosive growth, expanding from 315 to 495 congregations. About 70 of these new congregations started in the United States and 110 in Canada. The total number of members in the Christian Reformed Church grew from 136,580 to 211,454, an increase of almost 55 percent. Few, if any, established congregations saw their numbers decrease. New congregations sprouted in the growing suburbs of urban areas such as on the south side of Chicago and around Grand Rapids while only a handful of new congregations started in rural areas. The growth in the denominations came not only from a high birth rate and geographic mobility with increased prosperity, but also from members remaining loyal to the denominations.

The other large increase, particularly for the Christian Reformed Church, came

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from the large post-war migration to Canada. The post-war migration from the Netherlands resulted from a number of factors. Frustration mounted as rebuilding seemed to take longer than some hoped and opportunities seemed more appealing in other parts of the world. Migration fever took hold of the Netherlands with an average of 28,000 leaving between 1947 and 1957 totaling 306,808 migrants. 1952 alone saw a peak of 48,690 Dutch migrants leave their homeland. Of all the migrants who left between 1947 and 1957, 124,389 (40.5 percent of migrants) entered Canada and 44,280 (14.4 percent) arrived in the United States.  

Enne Koops noted a number of characteristics of the migration from the Netherlands to the United States in these years. He described the migration from 1947 to 1952 as limited because the US government had set a quota of 3,136 Dutch migrants. While only averaging 2,700 in these years, Koops posited that the reason for this difference, even given the waiting list of 40,000, was that 14 percent of all available visas for the Netherlands were sent to consulates in foreign countries. These expatriates were not counted in the Dutch official statistics of those who left the Netherlands but the United States government counted them against the full quota. Most of the migrants from the Netherlands in these years fell into the so-called “relational migrants” because they needed a sponsor. Migrants disproportionately, compared to the overall population of the Netherlands, came from rural Gereformeerderd congregations that shared a conservative Calvinist theology and ethos with the

14 Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Health of the Netherlands. Cited in Albert VanderMey, To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada (Jordan Station, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1983), 52-53. Between 1947 and 1957, Australia received 88, 311 (28.8%), South Africa received 25,930 (8.5%), New Zealand received 15,498 (5.1%), Brazil received 3,578 (1.2%) and other countries received 4,822 (1.6%) migrants.
Migration from the Netherlands to the United States escalated from 1953 to 1962 because of special legislation that allowed more Dutch refugees and repatriates to enter the United States. The 1953 Refugee Relief Act allowed immigration to exceed the allotted number for specially chosen countries, including the Netherlands. Victims of World War II, survivors of the 1953 North Sea flood, and repatriates from the Dutch East Indies received 15,000 extra visas. Family members of migrants already living in the United States obtained 2000 more visas. In total, 15,162 migrants, including 7000 repatriated migrants from Indonesia entered the United States by 1957. The other special legislation signed into law in the United States (called the Pastore-Walter Act) allowed another 8,956 repatriates from Indonesia to emigrate between 1958 and 1960. When it expired in 1960, Congress authorized another special visa program which allowed 8,876 Dutch nationals from Indonesia to settle in America between 1960 and 1962. The special legislation that allowed more Dutch migrants into to the United States from 1953 to 1962, however, added little growth to the Dutch-American institutions. Since many came from Indonesia and a different religious background, few joined the already established Dutch-American


16 Public Law 85-892.
community.

The flow of Dutch migrants to over-seas destinations after World War II followed other patterns as well. The migration to specific countries did not match the demographic proportions of the Netherlands as the choice of destination often reflected religious commitments of the Dutch migrants prior to departure. For instance, members of *Gereformeerderd* congregations generally chose to move to Canada and the United States and settle with other Dutch migrants or in established Dutch areas to affiliate with the religious institutions.\(^\text{17}\) However, because of the number of Dutch migrants from Indonesia to the United States, 43% of Dutch naturalization between 1966 and 1971 occurred in California where many of these migrants had settled. Only 9% of naturalization occurred in New York, 5% in Michigan, and fewer still in Iowa.\(^\text{18}\)

The number of migrants who entered the network of Dutch-American institutions in the United States following World War II turned out to be relatively small. The impact in certain locales occurred when congregations that had ceased using the Dutch language again started holding services in Dutch to accommodate the new arrivals. This took place, for instance, at Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids between 1952 and 1954 before a city-wide service was organized at Calvin College.\(^\text{19}\) In the immediate post-war years, congregations and

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\(^{18}\) De Jong, *Dutch in America*, 186-188.

\(^{19}\) Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, *Diamond Jubilee* (Grand Rapids, Michi., 1954), 30. Available at Heritage Hall, Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Hereafter Heritage Hall.
individuals sponsored migrants to the United States. Other congregations sent relief packages to the Netherlands itself. For instance the First Christian Reformed Church of Orange City, Iowa boasted, “The people of our church donated liberally toward the relief of our people in the Netherlands during the past two years, giving well over $10,000 through the church that was converted into new goods and sent by parcel post, and at least an equal amount of good used clothing. Besides, many of our people sent an inestimable amount of food and clothing to relatives and friends on their own.”

While the number of newcomers to the Dutch-American enclaves did not radically change the institutions, the realization of connections across the Atlantic with a few new migrants in their midst did awaken relief efforts and renewed interest in the contemporary Netherlands.

The number of migrants who arrived in Canada proved to be more influential on Dutch America. The number of Dutch migrants to Canada between 1946 and 1976 topped all other receiving countries with 175,000 (35% of total). The Gerformeerder Calvinists made up a disproportionately high percentage in the migration to Canada compared to their demographic position in the Netherlands as they made up only 9.6% of the population in the Netherlands but 41.2% of this migration to Canada. This overrepresentation shaped the community in Canada and its connections with the Dutch-American community in the United States that had defined itself as a Protestant, Calvinistic group. These migrants formed a strong network of institutions and communities which integrated with Dutch Americans

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20 First Christian Reformed Church, *Seventy-Fifth Anniversary* (Orange City, Iowa, 1946). In the author’s personal collection.

through denominational structures. Shaped by their religious outlook, the cultural patterns of the Gereformeerd focused on separating themselves into their own organizations and culture. Enne Koops also pointed out how the migrants organized themselves and the migration process through the Christelijke Emigratie Centrale (Christian Emigration Center) that funneled Dutch migrants to places where other Dutch migrants lived.

Earlier Dutch migrants and their descendants already living in the United States and Canada welcomed these new migrants and worked to integrate them into the network of institutions already started. The well established network of Christian Reformed Church congregations extended into Canada to give the Christian Reformed Church a foothold in starting new congregations as the post-war migration funneled to Canada. Twelve Christian Reformed Church congregations in Canada had started prior to the post-war migration. The first congregations established themselves on the southern plains of Alberta in the early 1900s when Dutch settlers crossed the border from settlements in Montana. Congregations soon began in larger western cities such as Edmonton and Vancouver. By the 1930s, congregations existed also in southern Ontario in Chatham, Windsor, and Sarnia. The beachhead

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23 Enne Koops, “Postwar Dutch Emigration to the United States,” and De Jong, *The Dutch in America*, 1012-1015

of these churches provided the starting place for welcoming the post-war immigrants. As Herman Ganzevoort noted, for *Gereformeerde* Calvinist migrants, “The assurance that a Calvinist church, the Christian Reformed Church, was prepared to aid them in their settlement and reestablish their church life in the New World gave comfort and promised at least an approximation of the society they knew at home.”

The post-war Dutch migrants to Canada arrived in a country where they could quickly establish their own institutions. As Frans Schryer has noted, Canada particularly allowed the Calvinists to recreate their pillarized society. The idea of pillarization held that each religious group in the Netherlands should have its own set of institutions and the *Gereformeerde* migrants to Canada hoped to replicate this. While the all Dutch had migrated from a pillarized society, it was the *Gereformeerde* who most actively tried to put their social understanding into practice in Canada. However, while this kind of pluralism in the Netherlands was based on religious differences, in Canada pluralism was characterized by cultural differences. In this context, Harry Van Belle argued, Dutch-Canadians focused more on their “Reformed religious identity” and separated it from their “Dutch ethnic identity.”

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28 Harry A. Van Belle, “From Religious Pluralism to Cultural Pluralism: Continuity and Change Among the Reformed Dutch in Canada,” in *The Dutch in
their institutions would have an impact on Canada and as Harry Kits noted, this kind of “structural expression of confessions and world views” represented a unique approach to social involvement among migrants to Canada. Dutch migrants to Canada willing gave up their Dutch customs and language but held to their ideas about institutional separateness and completeness.29

The incorporation of these Dutch migrants into the Christian Reformed Church and the Dutch-American network of institutions did not always go smoothly as different ideas about institutional life and their purposes could come into conflict. Post-war migrants had experienced pillarization in the Netherlands to a much greater extent than the Dutch that had settled in the United States. While they clearly had built an institutional base, the new migrants viewed the earlier waves of migrants as being too American who had given up too much of their religious separateness.30

Joining the Christian Reformed Church in large numbers, this critique of Dutch Americans presented a direct challenge and forced Dutch Americans to adjust their ethnoreligious identity.

Dutch migrants to Canada after World War II quickly organized congregations to meet for worship and mutual support and accountability. The second step after organizing a congregation for many Dutch migrants to Canada was to establish a Christian school. However, deciding which building to construct first caused tensions

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in some communities. The stories of a congregation deciding between building a church or a school abound throughout the histories of Canadian Christian Reformed Church congregations. A strong tradition of Christian schools accompanied the Gereformeerd migrants to Canada. In fact, the struggle over state funding for religious schools (schoolstrijd) in the Netherlands was one of the catalysts for the pillarization of Dutch society beginning in the nineteenth century and ending in 1917. Christian schools associated with the National Union of Christian Schools existed only in Lacombe, Alberta and Holland Marsh, Ontario with a combined student total of 85 in 1947. By 1957, 18 new schools had been founded in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario with 2220 students. Separate churches and schools became the foundation of the Calvinist Dutch-Canadian community. Their presence in the Christian Reformed Church denomination and the National Union of Christian Schools network forced both institutions to imagine themselves in new, bi-national ways following the 1950s.

Besides the influx of Dutch migrants and their children into the network of Christian schools, new schools in established communities in the United States sprang up after World War II. Economic prosperity allowed societies that could not previously afford to start schools now had the funds and the growing support to build new schools and hire teachers. This trend reflected that they had both the freedom in the post-war era but also the desire to stay out of the public schools. The National Union of Christian Schools grew from 125 school units in 1947 with 21,503 students to 207 school units with 40,754. The number of students nearly doubled with much

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of the growth coming from the increased number of children per family had but also increasing availability as 82 new schools began in these 10 years. While never fully populated by Dutch Americans (there were schools in Philadelphia controlled by Presbyterians and schools in New Mexico operating as mission schools among the Navajo) nor only educating the children of Christian Reformed Church congregations, the close connection between the ethnic identity, denomination, and school should not be discounted. For instance, the NUCS conducted its “Decade Survey” in 1960 in which the enumerators listed every Christian Reformed Church congregation and what percentage of the students attended a Christian school. It also listed other congregations that had a more than one of students in the Christian schools such as Orthodox Presbyterians, Protestant Reformed, and Reformed Church in America congregations. However, out of the 45,249 students counted in 1960, 38,322 came from the Christian Reformed Church. The study estimated that almost 71% of school age children in the Christian Reformed Church attended Christian school in 1960.

The huge growth of Calvin College following World War II, though started already in 1946 with returning veterans, resulted from both the Dutch migrants from Canada as well as a growing college-bound population within the Christian Reformed Church. Calvin grew from 503 students in 1945 to 1245 in 1946 and 1394 in 1947 before climbing to 1541 in 1955. By 1960, 90% of the 2232 students came from


Christian Reformed Church congregations. This kind of growth strained faculty and physical plant. An enlarged library, a new Science Building and Student Commons Building were added in the early 1950s as well as a growing faculty. By 1956, the Board of Calvin decided to purchase land on the edge of Grand Rapids and, in the words of one historian of the college, “abandon” the city and neighborhood that Calvin had called home. Moving to the edge of the city followed the trend of many Dutch Americans moving out of urban areas to more suburban areas.

While Calvin College was owned by the Christian Reformed Church denomination, some in the denomination questioned whether the college should be owned by the group of churches. Some of these people in Iowa and Chicago areas started to organize societies to run what began as junior colleges. Part of an expansion of junior colleges across the United States, discussions had started in Sioux County about having a normal school program in the summer to train teachers for the Christian schools in the area. In the fall of 1955, Midwest Christian Junior College opened in Sioux Center, Iowa with 35 students. It changed its name to Dordt College in 1956 and grew to 110 students in 1957. In Chicago, the beginning of Trinity Christian College occurred in 1952 with a committee to study the possibility of starting a junior college. A society formed to organize the school in 1956 and the first

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34 John J. Timmerman, Promises to Keep: A Centennial History of Calvin College (Grand Rapids: Eerdman, 1975), 92; and Harry Boonstra, Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 64.

35 Timmerman, Promises to Keep, 114.


37 Marlin Vanden Bosch, A History of Dordt College: The B.J. Haan Years (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1990), 30-95.
faculty were hired in 1957. The two year program began in the fall of 1959 with 37 students. These institutions, closely aligned with the Christian Reformed Church but run by independent societies, experienced obstacles in support and finances. However, the desire to have their own, separate institutions continued to prompt Dutch Americans to start these endeavors.

The overall growth of the colleges of the Reformed Church in America from 1947 to 1957 reflected an expansion of higher education in the United States more generally. Hope College surged to 1200 students in 1947 but then retrenched to a low of 700 in 1950 before rebounding to 893 students in 1951.38 The school continued to enroll a majority of its students from Reformed Church in America congregations with 65% coming from these congregations in 1953.39 Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa existed as a Junior College and Academy until the “Senior College” was added in 1959. The Academy closed its doors in 1961 with a dwindling enrollment due to a new Christian high school and growth of public high schools. The Junior College grew slowly from 1946 to 1957 enrolling 125 students in 1946, 161 students in 1951, and 226 students in 1957 with an overwhelming percentage being from the Reformed Church in America congregations. In the academic year 1950-1951, 111 of the 158 students came from the Reformed Church in America and 23 from the Christian Reformed Church.40 Central College in Pella, Iowa had 518 in


1946 and fell to 341 in the fall of 1952 before realizing continued growth through the late 1950s.\(^{41}\) Even if the number of students seemed unpredictable following the graduation of World War II veterans, all the schools looked to the future with optimism as their financial situation stabilized with the post-war economic prosperity.

The Dutch-American community and its institutions prospered in the decade from 1947 to 1957. This occurred despite fitting into American culture and society with more and more ease as the Dutch language fell out of use and the shared experience of military and homefront life during World War II. The post-war culture also allowed them to construct an identity that made it clear they had a particular role to play in the American society as their institutions made good Americans. However American the community became, the post-war years also brought the Netherlands as a contemporary country more into focus with both the reality of Nazi occupation and the subsequent liberation. The movement of thousands of migrants to North America where a sizeable number in Canada integrated into the institutional patterns through shared religious beliefs required Dutch Americans to re-imagine the Netherlands. The institutions that defined membership in the community also strengthened in their footprint through enlarged congregations, denominations, and schools. So while the members of the community could be considered more American than ever, they continued to choose to keep their separate institutions and strengthen them.

What accounts for the continued institutional strength? A strong sense of being a definite group continued to pervade the identity formation activities of the group, particularly in their commemorations. They relied on remembering the past

through a faith lens that allowed them to see themselves as God’s covenant people. They believed their mission was to continue the institutions started earlier. The strength came from having the rhetoric become more and more a reality in these years with growing confidence and resources. The post-war years also provided a number of major opportunities to re-emphasize the faith of the fathers in building the institutions. The Canadian Dutch also challenged the Christian Reformed Church to continue in its institutions and even pushed them to institutionalize themselves more.

Celebrating a Centennial: 1947

Following the deprivations of the Great Depression and World War II, the community seemed ready to have a celebration and the year 1947 presented two opportunities. First, Holland, Pella, and Orange City held Tulip Time for the first time since World War II in 1947. Second, residents of Pella and Holland celebrated the centennial of the founding of their towns and first congregations in 1847. These major events provided the first opportunity after World War II for the leaders to interpret the identity of Dutch America in the context of the rearranged American culture. The message of the 1947 commemorations emphasized the contribution the Dutch Americans made to American culture and society. Tulip Time and the enclaves in general no longer saw themselves as just a nice novelty of a quaint, isolated community, but as a community that more and more contributed to the national cause in their own peculiar way and staying within the ethnoreligious group was the best way to contribute.

1947 in Holland could hardly have been a more grand occasion. Leaders had already been looking to it as they started the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical
Foundation in 1937. In a planning session held on January 10, 1945, Willard Wichers laid out his plans for the centennial in Holland to a committee made up of city council members, chamber of commerce representatives, and members of the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation. As the Director of the Holland office of the Netherlands Information Office, Willard Wichers had shown his ability to stage public events which would also place him in good stead when you took over as Tulip Time Festival organizers as well in the late 1940s. For the Centennial celebration, Wichers envisioned three major projects, namely a suitable recognition of the veterans, resuming the Tulip Time Festival, and celebrating the centennial. He hoped it would “be on a broad enough basis to provide for over-all participation by Dutch communities in Western Michigan with possible exchange between the Iowa groups as well as those of Wisconsin and other midwestern states.” Attempting to highlight the place of the Dutch Americans in Michigan and American society, he wanted to entice a number of organizations to hold their conventions in Holland throughout the year such as the Michigan State Historical Society and Federation of Women’s Clubs. Wichers laid out his ambitious ideas for educational endeavors, memorial statues, specially produced films, radio programs and advertisements, special issue coins and stamps, and publication of books. In the same planning session, Wichers proposed a broad publicity campaign shaped by his work for the NIB and his connection with wire services and large magazines as well as Dutch journals to publicize the event. He also encouraged the committee to give some “intense study” to what the congregations and denominational bodies could do. In reflecting about the planned

event, Wichers said he thought the ceremonies should “open with impressive religious services followed by secular programs.” Wichers’ plan to highlight both the religious and secular aspects of the community showed his understanding of how the community contributed to the American society.

The actual Holland, Michigan, Centennial celebration took place from August 12 to August 16, 1947 and included a number of events that interpreted the past for the audience in light of the present context. The committee that organized the events clearly saw the possible power of the events as the theme for the celebrations was “The Present is the Lens through which the Past is Projected on the Future.” The more informal aspects of the daily program of events included the Netherlands Museum being open daily along with Little Netherlands, motion picture films of “Old and New Netherlands,” and car tours of the “Kolonie.” A parade on August 14, commemorated as V-J Day, was publicized as having military units, representatives of patriotic organizations, veterans, and historic Centennial floats “depicting important episodes in our history.” What “our” represented in this description is not clear but the interesting juxtaposition of patriotic and ethnic elements did not seem incongruous to the organizers in the post-war period that celebrated the contributions of Dutch Americans to the American nation.

The Centennial celebration also employed the broadcast division of the NIB in New York to produce “Echoes of a Century,” a dramatic radio program that included 13 episodes. This program played daily at the Centennial Park and on a network of radio stations. The Netherlandic perspective on the script showed in its handling of the motivations for migration. It emphasized that Van Raalte really did not want to

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43 Summary of meeting held at 5 P.M., January 10, 1945, City Hall, Holland, Michigan, Willard Wichers Papers Box 4, Holland Museum.
leave the “soil of his beloved Holland” but needed to because of the economic situation. The traditional cause of migration was the oppressive government that had persecuted the Afscheiding churches and Van Raalte for their religion. In the radio program, the religion of Van Raalte and his followers only played a key role in their success in Michigan, not in their reasons for leaving. This was one instance where the image of the Netherlands among Dutch Americans had an influence on the way the NIB constructed its image of the Netherlands. The image of a Netherlands as being a place to leave had slipped into the NIB’s message even as it was altered to focus on economic instead of religious issues. This radio program constructed a story of the past that reflected both the aims of the NIB to highlight the Netherlands as well as the local organizers who had a long history of emphasizing leaving a decrepit Netherlands. The story of the success of the Dutch migrants that formed the backbone of the radio narrative highlighted the contributions they had made to the United States in episodes on leaders and institutions.  

The climax of the Centennial celebration was the pageant, “The Past is Prologue,” where the community again heard the story the organizers told about the place of Dutch Americans in the United States in 1947. Staged for three nights in Riverview Park in front audiences of 2,000 people it included a cast of over 200 members. A long history of staging pageants preceded the centennial event and while earlier pageants had emphasized progress and belonging in the United States, the 1947 pageant made these the main focus. The earlier pageants had been locally


45 See my chapter “Staging the Past; Historical Pageantry in the Dutch-American Community in of West Michigan” in Dutch-American Arts and Letters in
written and produced, particularly by Hope College students and staff, but the 1947 pageant called for professional help. Paul T. Haagen Jr. directed the pageant under the production of the John B. Rogers Producing Company of Fostoria, Ohio. The pageant’s text said that “these Hollanders found freedom and opportunity, but they brought to it a fair exchange. They brought industry and frugality, they brought integrity. ... Their contribution to the new land in exchange for all they received was in full measure running over.” The pageant’s overall structure was more about the history of the United States than the Dutch in particular. It focused on the United States as a wilderness needing to be conquered, which the Dutch ably assisted. The pageant portrayed the United States as the land of freedom while the Netherlands was an oppressive place. It noted how Dutch authorities had arrested Holland’s founder Van Raalте for having more than 19 people in an illegal meeting. As the Netherlands became more oppressive, clearly the freedom found in the United States—where “nearly all people eat meat three times a day”—provided the solution. As the pageant closed, following a choral rendition of “America the Beautiful,” the narrator stated, “the story of Holland is that of a seed planted in the dark earth by our forefathers, growing year by year – first a tender plant, then a sturdy stalk, blessed by the rain and sun and by God’s Ever Lovingkindness [sic], until at last it has blossomed in full-blown beauty.” The Dutch had taken their place in and contributed to the overall story of American progress and freedom. This pageant made clear that Dutch Americans believed and told themselves and others that they gladly took their place


within the unfolding of American history. The Dutch had made the United States home and had made a contribution; they did not have any divided loyalties with their homeland, even with the allied Netherlands.

The professional but locally adapted pageant differed from the NIB production “Echoes of a Century.” The differences between these two texts demonstrate the conflict of telling the story of the past. When the Dutch in Holland, Michigan, with the help of a professional production company were responsible, they emphasized the greatness of the United States and the problems of the Netherlands. They proved their worth as Americans to a public audience through the pageant by emphasizing that they had no dual loyalties, their loyalties lay totally with the United States. The radio program produced by Dutch from the Netherlands never questioned the strength of the United States and noted the help of the Americans in rebuilding the Netherlands following World War II. However, it did not construct the United States as the only land of freedom and progress but put the Netherlands in the same category that had just had a few bad years when Van Raalte and his followers needed to leave because of poor economic situation.

While the pageant and radio programs were transient and fleeting given their medium, a more permanent telling of the story was in a book commissioned for the event. Henry Lucas wrote his book *Ebenezer* for the Centennial Commission of Holland and the NIB published it. Like the radio program, Willard Wichers used his connections between the NIB and Holland to great success. A native of West Michigan and professor of history as the University of Washington, Henry Lucas wrote *Ebenezer* as a memorial souvenir “for the memory of the severe struggles our fathers had in hewing down the forests, breaking the prairie and helping to leaven the
lump of American life by founding churches and schools and leading upright lives.”

Lucas argued that the Dutch made a significant contribution to America. The title, *Ebenezer*, referenced I Samuel 7:12 where Samuel sets up a stone saying “Hitherto hath the Lord blessed us” with connotations for the Dutch-American community that they had been blessed as Lucas showed in the book. Lucas covered not only the migration of Dutch to West Michigan but also other 19th century settlements in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois as well as Dutch-Catholic migrants to Wisconsin. His overview included many photographs of buildings, pastors, “bird’s eye view” of cities, and publications such as newspapers showed the contributions the community had made to the American society. Lucas’s book reflected and reinforced a founding myth for Dutch Americans in a durable form that future story tellers could use.

Pella also celebrated its Centennial in 1947 at the same time it restarted its Tulip Time festival. Resuming the features of Tulip Time such as crowing a queen, antique displays, Little Dutch village, and parades, the Centennial celebration added a program of character sketches of early pioneers called “Echoes of Pioneer Days” as well as a pageant entitled “City of Refuge.” Just as the pageant in Holland used professionals to stage it, so did Pella. Paul T. Haagen, Jr. directed the production of the John B. Rogers Producing Company of Fostoria, Ohio in Pella just as he would in Holland in August. Like the Holland pageant, it integrated the story of the Dutch in Pella with a broader story of the freedom of America. Only the titles and a few details were changed in these two pageants and both emphasized the importance of freedom and how the Dutch fit well into the story of the United States. The finale noted how “their common pledge and prayer is not only a salute to America, but a salute to all

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mankind that have ever since time began, hungered, searched, and fought for the right to freedom and individuality."  Produced by an American company and with an external audience in mind, the pageant sought to show how the Dutch fit in and contributed to their new nation of freedom. The newspaper estimated that over 100,000 visitors attended the festival and many thousands saw the pageant.

Producing the pageant for Pella called for much cooperation and itself helped create a shared identity through cooperation for a common goal. Over 600 local people participated in the staging of the event. When the Festival General Committee decided to postpone the festival one week at a meeting in late April because the tulips would not be in bloom, the cooperation needed in a small town for the pageant and Tulip Time festival was put to a test. The coverage in the papers, though, emphasized the tulips as the main attraction for the festival. Moving the festival was just one example of this emphasis. In a brief comment about the highlights of the festival, the newspaper noted that their tulip displays did not equal Holland, Michigan’s that had “no breaks in the display on the streets . . . their lanes are complete.” The paper encouraged the city to take up the project to improve the lanes of tulips with funds and asked homeowners to cooperate.


49 “Will Canvass City for Advance Sale of Tickets to Historical Pageant,” The Pella Chronicle, 10 April 1947, 1.

50 “Centennial Tulip Time Postponed One Week,” The Pella Chronicle, 24 April 1947, 1. It seemed to pay off as the paper reported on May 16 that the tulips were perfect.

51 “Highlights of the Centennial Festival,” The Pella Chronicle, 22 May 1947, 1.
provided an opportunity to tell the story of the town and its identity but also act it out through cooperation to stage a pageant and festival showing the community and others that Pella contributed to the United States.

The story told by Dutch Americans for themselves and outsiders at the centennial celebrations in Holland and Pella made clear how they contributed to the United States. The commemorations demonstrated that Dutch Americans felt at home in the United States and were thriving. No one needed to question their loyalty or contributions to the country, neither outsiders nor the community itself. The public centennial commemorations also emphasized, for both the community and outsider audience, that God had blessed the community as a whole because they were highly religious. The differences between the two town centennial celebrations point to the difference that circumstances could make. Holland had a longer history of commemorating its past outside of its Tulip Time festivals with the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation celebrations and the Netherlands Museum that were detached from the Tulip Time festival prior to Wichers running them all after 1946. Holland also had access to the resources and expertise of the Netherlands Information Bureau which brought the contemporary Netherlands into the discourse community. Helping to produce a radio program and book, the image of the Netherlands had to be altered to fit the expectations and needs of the official office of the Netherlands. Pella, where Tulip Time served as the singular voice about the history of Pella by having historical window displays and a history museum all organized by the Pella Historical Society, did not have as many different constituencies to contend with as it told its history. Celebrating the centennial reflected both the context of the community itself but also broader dynamics in society.
Institutional Remembering

The institutions of Dutch America also used the year 1947 to construct a story that reflected and reinforced how members saw themselves. The years between 1947 and 1957 provided congregations and denominations an opportunity to reflect on their past to tell their story again for a new generation in a new context. Many of the commemorations of these institutions intentionally acknowledged the goal of keeping the next generation loyal to the institutions of the community. Since membership in these institutions clearly reflected a shared identity, understanding these commemorations showed how Dutch Americans in these years understood their experience and why they continued to support these institutions as they navigated these years.

Because of the density of congregations and their age, congregations in the enclaves in West Michigan and Iowa established and reinforced important patterns in telling the story of the past. These places, with their Tulip Time Festivals, also had been “home” for many who migrated to other areas of the country so played a defining role in the identity for the entire community. Congregations in these areas celebrated anniversaries from 1947 to 1957 that provided them opportunity to shape a narrative that they used to justify their existence. Because of the long histories and the important developments that shaped the community, the stories told in these places are important to understand the formation of institutional loyalty. The congregational commemorations in West Michigan clearly connected the particular congregational stories to the larger and longer story of the Dutch migration. The congregational commemorations between 1947 and 1957 often highlighted the congregation’s role in the original migration in 1847 to Michigan. At least two
congregations started their historical narratives by reminding their readers that the
congregation had actually started in the Netherlands. The migration story played a
larger role in these commemorations in West Michigan than in any place but Pella,
Iowa. The Michigan story revolved around Van Raalte while the Pella story had
Scholte as the main character. By keeping these stories alive through other
commemorations, Dutch Americans in these two places came to use them also in their
congregational commemorations.

Congregations throughout Dutch America and across denominational lines
understood their success to have resulted from their faithfulness to their God, which
was justified with their Calvinistic and covenant theology. Congregational
commemorations nearly universally acknowledged their dependence on God for the
accomplishments they enjoyed as a congregation since the time of their founding.
Holland, Michigan’s Central Park Reformed Church’s commemoration book in 1947
said, “we cannot help but feel deeply grateful to God for His kindly providence. . . .
[Our forefathers] were led by the hand of God.” Pella, Iowa First Reformed
Church’s 1956 commemorative book reminded its readers that “Jehovah hath been
mindful of us; He will bless us.” The dependence on God was matched by the
faithfulness of the founders of the institutions of Dutch America. Zeeland,
Michigan’s First RCA commemorative book from 1947 said that it was the “faith of

52 Vriesland Reformed Church, One Hundredth Anniversary (Zeeland, Mich.,
1947); Overisel Reformed Church, Centennial (Holland, Mich.: 1947), 6. Both
available at the Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, Holland, Michigan.
Hereafter Joint Archives.

53 Central Park Reformed Church, One Hundredth Anniversary (Holland,
Michigan, 1947). Available at the Joint Archives.

54 First Reformed Church, Centennial (Pella, Iowa, 1956). Available at the
Joint Archives.
our fathers [who] braved persecution in the Netherlands and faced perils on sea and
land in the arduous journey to America and on to Michigan, their promised land."\textsuperscript{55}
Congregations celebrated the faithfulness which their God had blessed with success.

The congregational celebrations in late 1940s and 1950s across geographical
and denominational divides continued to emphasize how Dutch migrants had found
freedom in the United States. For instance, the 9\textsuperscript{th} Street Christian Reformed Church
in Holland noted how the founders of the congregation had left a "land of intolerance
and persecution" in contrast to the land of freedom they found in the United States.\textsuperscript{56}
Holland, Michigan’s First Reformed Church echoed the same sentiments. In its
telling of the story, the Netherlands had secularized with a "denatured religion" that
did not allow the forbearers of the congregation to freely practice their religion while
they found this freedom across the Atlantic. The First Reformed Church further noted
that "the people of this community were by ancestry and background excellent
material for the making of American patriots."\textsuperscript{57} This emphasis on freedom found in
the United States consistently provided the narrative for the retelling of the story of
congregations in anniversary book. According to these stories, members of
congregations made good citizens and hard workers who contributed to society.
Additionally, many congregational anniversary books in the years after WWII
mentioned their service members, sometimes listing the names. If a member of the
congregation had been killed in the war, the name was always listed to show the

\textsuperscript{55} First Reformed Church, \textit{One Hundredth Anniversary} (Zeeland, Michigan, 1947). Available at the Joint Archives.

\textsuperscript{56} 9\textsuperscript{th} Street Christian Reformed Church, \textit{One Hundredth Anniversary}
(Holland, Michigan, 1947). Available at the Joint Archives.

\textsuperscript{57} First Reformed Church, \textit{One Hundredth Anniversary} (Holland, Michigan, 1947). Available at the Joint Archives.
sacrifice the congregation had made for the American war cause. These stories and inclusion of the service members helped balance their separateness even in the consensus culture of the Cold War.

While Calvinistic theology and American freedom united Dutch America in a common identity during these years, divisions within the community were reflected and reinforced in the commemoration as well. The major division was between the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America. The authors of the narratives in the congregational anniversary books could use two major schisms to tell their version of the differences between the two denominations and why their congregation was in one or the other. The first split occurred in 1857 started when some congregations left the Reformed Church in America and Classis Holland to establish the Christian Reformed Church. The other split occurred in the early 1880s when a number of congregations left the Reformed Church in America because it allowed local congregations to decide if Free Masons could be members.  

Individual congregations of the Christian Reformed Church continued to defend the separations which colored much of the commemorative stories.

At the congregational level, the 1857 split helped define the differences between what looked like similar churches. The commemorations of congregations split by the 1857 start of the Christian Reformed Church had both sides claiming superior righteousness and faithfulness. The burg of Graafschap, only a few miles

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southwest of Holland, had been one of the original congregations started in the Kolonie in 1847. It experienced firsthand the start of the Christian Reformed Church in 1857 as one of the original congregations that left Classis Holland of the Reformed Church in America. However, the Central Park Reformed Church considered itself the continuation of the original Reformed Church in America congregation. Its 1947 centennial anniversary book explained that the schism in its congregation resulted when “several influential members of the church brought false charges and caused suspicion to be aroused. . . . They were finally successful in disrupting the membership to such an extent that the majority seceded. Only five families remained loyal to the Reformed Church.” The writers of the 1947 clearly felt their forebears who stayed loyal were in the right as far as following the correct church. Some of the animosity came from the fact that, as the writer continued, “the seceders also succeeded in instituting a process of law whereby they acquired the church building and all the temporalities of the church so that nothing remained of the Reformed church of Graafschap except the five families.”

59 Congregations fought over buildings in the courts in other cases of schisms as well and left a bad taste in the mouth of the losing congregation. Notably, the Graafschap Christian Reformed Church waited until 1957 to commemorate its centennial even though its narrative claimed it was the true, continuing congregation since the founding in 1847. The authors of the centennial narrative simply stated that the congregation returned “to the independent status enjoyed by the group before their affiliation with the Dutch

59 Central Park Reformed Church, One Hundredth Anniversary (Holland, Mich., 1947), 10. Available at the Joint Archives.
Reformed Church [RCA].” Both sides claimed God had been faithful to their congregation and both claimed they more faithfully epitomized staying true to the ideals of Calvinistic theology. The authors and intended readers understood the church polity issues involved so they did not need to be spelled out.

The First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, often considered the founding congregation of the Christian Reformed Church, spent a significant amount of space in its 1957 book examining multiple angles of the 1857 split. The author of the book, Jacob De Jager, apologized in a “Personal Appendix” for the length of the book at over 50,000 words in which he gave much credit to Gysbert Haan for agitating for separation. The author’s very first sentence of the history pointed out that “there was great unrest in the Second Reformed Church of Grand Rapids” throughout the 1850s. By the end of De Jager’s text, the reader would have understood the underlying hope of the author was to convince insiders to stay inside, since the congregation was on the right side of the split. De Jager spelled out in his personal appendix that “it has been my constant endeavor to let the present generation feel the heartbeat of the past in our church life.”

Another Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Alpine Avenue, wrote its history in 1956 and championed their mother congregation, First Christian Reformed Church for the “staunch and

60 Graafschap Christian Reformed Church, One Hundredth Anniversary (Holland, Mich., 1957), 8. Available at Heritage Hall.

61 First Christian Reformed Church, Centennial (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1957), 5. Available at Heritage Hall.

62 First Christian Reformed Church, Centennial (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1957), 79. Available at Heritage Hall.
sturdy Calvinists” who “withdrew their membership from the Holland Classis.”

Both of these Grand Rapids congregations in the Christian Reformed Church justified their one hundred years of history by noting the original reason for separation.

The 1857 schism left few other congregations split the way Graafschap had since most just started a new congregation or took the whole congregation to the new denomination. The 1880s schisms in congregations, however, left a bitter taste in congregation after congregation in West Michigan that split over allowing Free Masons to be members. The most renowned instance occurred at the heart of Dutch America, at what had been Van Raalte’s church in Holland, First Reformed, also known as Pillar Church. In 1882, the congregation voted to withdraw from the Reformed Church in America because, according to the 1947 centennial commemoration of First Reformed “from the standpoint of the Classis, the motion to withdraw from the Reformed Church . . . was out of order and therefore null and void. So considered, the First Reformed Church of Holland never ceased to exist and never severed it connection. . . . What happened was only that the officers of the church, having been duly tried, were found guilty of malfeasance in office and were deposed, after which another consistory was elected.” Of course, the congregation on the other side of the issue, 9th Street Christian Reformed Church, had a different version of the story. Its understated narrative simply noted “A break with the Reformed Dutch Church by some congregations followed [the synod failing to take action on the lodge membership issue]. One of the congregations that severed her connection was

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63 Alpine Avenue Christian Reformed Church, 75th Anniversary (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1956), 14. Available at Heritage Hall.

64 First Reformed Church, 100 Years (Holland, Mich.: 1947), 14. Available at the Joint Archives.
the Ninth Street Church at Holland.”65 The split led to a protracted legal battle over the property which the First Reformed Church lost to the 9th Street Christian Reformed Church congregation. In spite of the differences over interpreting the split, both congregational centennial books claimed a common heritage in Van Raalte and the migration. The differences stemmed from church polity issues again and not deep theological differences.

The freemasonry issue of the early 1880s also ran through Grand Haven. The First Reformed Church had started in 1850 and an independent Reformed Congregation had begun in 1855 before joining the Christian Reformed Church in 1865.66 A number of families left the First Reformed Church in 1881 over the issue of freemasonry to form the Second Christian Reformed Church, choosing not to join the First Christian Reformed Church. The 1950 centennial book of the First Reformed Church acknowledged it as a time of “much dissension and quarreling” that led to “about one-third of the congregation and five of the six consistory members, along with the pastor” leaving the congregation.”67 On the other side of the split, the 1957 anniversary book of the Second Christian Reformed Church stated dryly, “The


66 Though there was some discrepancy. The First Reformed Church celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1926 and thought, at that time, they had begun in 1851. However, by the centennial, they decided to move their founding date to 1850. The First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Haven claimed 1855 when some left the First Reformed Church and started an independent congregation. As the author of the history of the First Christian Reformed Church noted in 1955, “the new immigrants were still casting about for the best way to preserve the ideals for which they had left the Netherlands.” Centennial Anniversary (Grand Haven, Mich., 1955). Available at the Joint Archives.

67 First Reformed Church, Our First Century for Christ (Grand Haven, Mich., 1950), 18. Available at the Joint Archives.
Second Christian Reformed Church was organized in the fall of 1881 when a large
group of families left the Reformed Church because of the lodge membership
question.\textsuperscript{68} The author never explained the decision to start a new congregation and
not join the existing Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven.

The situation in Zeeland mirrored the one in Grand Haven in many ways.
Members of Zeeland Reformed Church were dissatisfied with the decision of the
Reformed Church in America synod and tried to unite with the Christian Reformed
Church in Zeeland. The dissatisfied families formed a new congregation called North
Street Christian Reformed Church. Its commemorative book from 1957 retold the
story of how they had hoped to join the First Christian Reformed Church rather
simply but “the consistory of this church . . . demanded that they should make
confession of faith before the church. . . . But in view of the fact that these persons
had once made confession of faith and by leaving the Reformed Church they had
taken a definite position and were making it known, they therefore, deemed this
condition for membership to be unjust.”\textsuperscript{69} This perceived slight continued to give
justification for why there were two Christian Reformed Church congregations in
Zeeland in 1957.

Other small hamlets dealt with the issue of freemasonry and mentioned it in
congregational anniversary books. The Overisel Reformed Church’s Centennial in
1848 flatly stated that in 1880 “a disturbance arose in the Church in reference to oath-
bound societies, and the trouble became so acute that quite a number of families left,

\textsuperscript{68} Second Christian Reformed Church, Seventy-Fifth Anniversary (Grand
Haven, Mich., 1957), 3. Available at Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{69} North Street Christian Reformed Church, Diamond Jubilee (Zeeland, Mich.,
1957), 15. Available at Heritage Hall.
and the Christian Reformed Church was formed in the village in 1882.” The authors of the history of the Drenthe Christian Reformed Church traced the beginnings of the congregation to 1847, but the congregation had joined the Christian Reformed Church denomination in 1882.

While both schisms had West Michigan roots, they shaped the entire Dutch American community as the separating divided the community in two denominations in 1857 and gave new momentum to the Christian Reformed Church in the 1880s with a flurry of new congregations and growth of membership. However, the animosity and competing narratives never had the same effect in other areas of the country. For instance, in Pella when the Second Christian Reformed Church commemorated its 50th anniversary in 1947, it downplayed its reason for beginning. Its history noted that “our church, we may say, along with other churches in this community has its roots in the original Pella colony” and later claiming that “no schism or internal dissension had blurred our history.” These kinds of claims hid the larger story of almost the entire Fourth Reformed Church congregation leaving in 1898 because “they did not feel truly at home in the Reformed Church in America and that they were not fully in harmony with the trends manifesting themselves in that church.” Any schisms or hard feelings did not even make the history of the First

70 Overisel Reformed Church, *Centennial* (Holland, Mich., 1948), 8. Available at the Joint Archives.


72 Second Christian Reformed Church, *Fiftieth Anniversary* (Pella, Iowa, 1947), 7, 12. Available at Heritage Hall.

73 Second Christian Reformed Church, *Fiftieth Anniversary* (Pella, Iowa, 1947), 8. Available at Heritage Hall.
Reformed Church in Pella when it was written in 1956.\textsuperscript{74} Or even farther west in Lynden, Washington where the First Christian Reformed Church’s 1950 anniversary book did not rehash any of the schisms.\textsuperscript{75}

The 1857 and 1880s tensions were the most notable schisms in the community. A smaller, yet more recent, schism in the 1920s left a bitter taste on both sides of the dispute. The dispute centered around Rev. Herman Hoeksema, a well-regarded, young preacher at Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. In 1924, his views on a point of theology were considered heterodox by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. He refused to leave the pulpit with the support of about 800 members of the 1100 member congregation. As the 1954 anniversary book of the congregation noted, “it was heart-rending for the small sober group of some 300 members of Eastern Ave. who remained loyal to our beloved Church and the glorious complete Gospel of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{76} Eventually the 300 won a court case that ended at the Michigan Supreme Court to determine the rightful owners of the church building and parsonage. Of course, the congregation that Hoeksema led, eventually called the Protestant Reformed Church, had a different understanding of these events. In 1947, Herman Hoeksema published \textit{The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine} where he defended his position with great vigor and condemned the Christian Reformed

\textsuperscript{74} First Reformed Church, \textit{Centennial} (Pella, Iowa, 1956). Available at the Joint Archives.

\textsuperscript{75} Lynden Christian Reformed Church, \textit{Golden Jubilee Anniversary} (Lynden, Wash., 1950). Available at Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{76} Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, \textit{Diamond Jubilee} (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1954), 20.
Church’s position.77

Congregational commemorations between 1947 and 1957 followed the pattern that had been established in previous commemorations emphasizing preachers and pews. These institutions held the loyalty of their members through telling a common story of migration, being favored by God, and the success that followed being faithful. The story of the commemoration showed that they belonged in America and were thankful for the freedom, which they helped secure through their service members. The members of these institutions, also understood the division that shaped the community between the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America. These commemorations reminded the audience of these old schisms and that each side was correct. As the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church anniversary showed, the more recent and difficult the fissure, the more alive the commemoration and justification for the split.

The context of these years gave the congregations confidence in their strength. Particularly in West Michigan and during the time of heightened historical awareness due to centennial and Tulip Time festivals, the Dutch aspect of the congregation never seemed threatened, nor did the American aspect. Both were held with seeming ease in an identity that spurred the members to remain loyal to the institutions of the community as the strength of the institutions was a sure sign of God’s favor. The individual congregations balanced the tensions between being loyal Americans but also faithful to their separate institutions. The stories they told in their commemorations showed this duality in their understanding of themselves. The constructed identity in the commemorations provided the story for how they

understood the meaning of their institutions as both giving strength for members in
the past and the future as they made decisions about how to live in the world.

Denominational Commemorations

While congregational commemorations and narrative construction played an
important role in defining and reinforcing a shared identity at the local level,
denominational commemorations united Dutch Americans across the country.
However, both the rhetoric and actions of the Christian Reformed Church and
Reformed Church in America in the late 1940s and 1950s continued to show the
differences within the community. Since its founding in 1857, the Christian
Reformed Church worked hard to justify its separate existence at the congregational
level, as noted above, as well as at the denominational level. The denomination
pulled out all the stops for its 1957 centennial celebration to justify its existence in the
Cold War era as an institution. The leaders saw the Centennial as an opportunity to
knit the denomination together and emphasize a shared history of defending Calvinist
orthodoxy in a time of seeming liberal trends in American religious life. They
understood their approach as a third way between “liberal” mainline denominations
and “fundamentalist” evangelical churches. The language change spurred on by
World War II and the changing expectations of returning soldiers to have a broader
impact on the United States challenged the denomination in new ways. The
centennial theme, “God’s Favor is Our Challenge,” also recognized the success the
denomination enjoyed by the 1950s.

The denominational coordinating committee hoped the celebration would
educate the members of the denomination about themselves and their history as it
would provide “an excellent opportunity to make clear, both to ourselves and to our
neighbors, just what we are and what we believe.”78 The committee even went so far as to hire a “Centennial Manager” to oversee the centralized celebration. The published histories of the denomination from this centralized office show the emphasis. A commemorative book entitled *One Hundred Years in the New World* showed the prosperity of the denomination with photographs of many church buildings. It also emphasized the denomination’s work in communities around the country as the historical narrative made it clear that the Christian Reformed Church contributed to the United States in important ways by engaging with the community and being good citizens.79 A pageant produced in 1957, entitled “Upon This Rock,” emphasized the doctrinal roots of the denomination within Calvinist orthodoxy.80 The information campaign included many other books and presentations which showed the members of the importance of these separate institutions. When the centennial committee produced information for use in local papers, however, much of it stressed how the churches of the denomination fell within the normal range of churches in the United States. The advertisements produced for local papers highlighted a general Christian creed as one advertisement connected the “inalienable rights which we claim in a democracy” with finding true happiness in the Christian faith.81

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79 *One Hundred Years in the New World* (Grand Rapids: Publication Section of the Centennial Committee, 1957).

80 Betty M. Duimstra, “Upon This Rock . . .” Available at Calvin College Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

81 “Open Doors,” Box 528, Folder 9, Christian Reformed Church Collection, Heritage Hall.
and fitting into and contributing to the United States characterized the Christian Reformed Church celebration of 1957 and the construction of an ethnic identity in these years.

The Centennial Celebration was an important site for the Christian Reformed Church to invent a tradition that met their needs in 1957 and so it helps explain the denomination largely made up of Dutch Americans. The invention of tradition in the form of the Centennial Celebration reveals how the denominational leaders shaped the story of the past in reaction to the perceived threats to the denomination especially a loss of unity and orthodoxy. The leaders saw the Centennial as an opportunity to knit the denomination together and emphasize a shared history of defending orthodoxy. The church feared that as it lost much of its original immigrant identity during World War II; it would be integrated into a conformity that would be less than orthodox. The Christian Reformed Church underwent wrenching changes following World War II. One of the changes was a loss of using the Dutch language which affected their sense of identity and place within the United States. No longer was survival the only goal, now it was argued that the church should have an impact on America. The church experienced phenomenal growth not only because of growing families but also a new wave of immigrants that settled in Canada and associated with the denomination. These immigrants brought a different mentality to the denomination that was not associated with the older, American immigrant identity. These changes required that the leaders not only craft a Centennial Celebration that would be a “recognition and public acknowledgement of God’s blessings”\(^8\) but also one that would unify the denomination as it dealt with this changing world. The

church leaders also perceived a general slipping of orthodoxy that they considered to be detrimental to their unique place in the religious landscape of North America. A broad ecumenical movement among American Protestants meant that the denomination was feeling the pressure to conform to their American context. Choosing to emphasize orthodoxy as coming not only from the Bible, but also a shared past constitutes an invented tradition that was meant to unify the denomination across theological and sociological lines.

The mechanisms of the invention of tradition in the case of the Centennial included a strong central committee of male leadership in the denomination that set the course and controlled the message. This small group disseminated the message they wanted to craft around their goals of unity and orthodoxy. One of the defining features of this Centennial Celebration was the centrality of the control of the message by this small group of men. These were largely leaders in the denomination in positions such as seminary professor. However, the denominational membership accepted this message partly because they deferred to the leadership that was appointed and elected through a complex governance structure of the denomination. The dissemination and reception of the information in the 1950s demonstrates the mechanism of knitting together denominational members from across the continent with over 200,000 members in 466 churches through an invented tradition.

This study also interrogates the variable that religion brings to the invention of tradition. The Christian Reformed Church claimed to read the Bible through “historically-redemptive” eyes. This meant they saw the Bible as history that was the recorded story of redemption that continued after Biblical times, which they were now participating in as they connected their story to the Biblical story. Reading themselves into the Bible might help to explain the “thrust” of the Centennial
Celebration of “God’s Favor is Our Challenge.” As Calvinist Protestants, they believed in the election of certain people for eternal life with God and this translated into a belief that they were elect and their brand of Christianity was more favored. They seemed to believe they were being more truthful to the Biblical narrative than either “liberal” mainline denominations or “fundamentalist” evangelical churches. This religious dimension in inventing the history of the denomination required the leaders to tell their story through the use of religious rhetoric that was familiar to the members of the denomination.

The mechanisms of the Christian Reformed Church Centennial Celebration reveal much about the invention of tradition within a specific context. The denomination had a complicated governance structure that relied on the local church, local groups of churches (classis) formed by representatives from each church, and a national body (synod) formed by representatives from each classis. A single church could petition a classis for answers to a problem or if they wanted some unified action as the classis level. A single church could also petition the synod if the local classis allowed it. This implies that the local church was the seat of power. However, the synod could also enact requirements for classes and local churches which they were then expected to follow. The accountability and action requests ran both ways so it was neither a truly congregational form of governance nor a “high-church” form of governance. This form of governance meant that the decisions of each body could be questioned by any other body but great deference was paid to a decision once it was made. For instance, in 1953 three classes suggested to the synod that there should be a centennial celebration.83 The synod appointed a committee to make a report and

present it in 1954. The classes appear to have wanted a unified celebration and gave deference to the synod to accomplish this. However, the representatives of the classes at synod expected a report.

The membership of the Centennial Committee was comparable to most other committees formed by synod to study certain issues or carry on the business of the denomination between annual meetings. The Centennial Committee consisted of all men who were either pastors, seminary professors, or laymen who had some other connection to the history of the denomination. The chair of this committee, John H. Kromminga was a faculty member and future president at Calvin Theological Seminary in church history. His appointment came as no surprise since he had been the chairman of the standing historical committee. 84 This original group of five men told a story and organized the Centennial Celebration with only limited oversight from the synod for which they provided yearly reports over the next few year. Each year the committee reported their plans the larger group, the record shows there was almost no debate except for issues of funding the work of the committee. The representatives of the various classes at each synod never questioned the story these men decided to tell. 85 The deference for a small committee of men qualified to do the work for a larger body symbolized the kind of deference the denominational members seemed to take towards their leaders. The structure and culture of the denomination seemed to revere pastors even if the theology of the denomination was that all members could have personal contact with God. One of the requirements for new


85 See the relevant sections of the Acts of Synod for the years 1953 through 1958.
pastors was to be approved by the synod after attending Calvin Seminary. This vetting process ensured that the future pastors would be duly prepared to take up their calling.

The Centennial Committee reported in 1954 that it saw its purpose as celebrating God’s blessings for the denomination with a secondary purpose “to preserve, and even if possible improve, the excellent denominational solidarity which was characterized us up to this point.” The committee even acknowledged that the centennial provided an “excellent opportunity to make clear, both to ourselves and to our neighbors, just what we are and what we believe.” This seems to indicate that the Committee recognized that the past could be retold in such a way as to have an influence on the present. So while the church governance structure was a two way street, the story of the Centennial would be shaped by this Committee with these express purposes. The way this was carried out helps explain how the Centennial Celebration invented tradition.

The Committee took a very top down approach to the Celebration. They wanted all events to be coordinated through them and a central office. By the end of 1955, the Committee had hired a “Centennial Manager.” This position oversaw the day-to-day operations of coordinating a denomination-wide celebration and tried to keep local congregations informed by the use of a newsletter. These newsletters were sent to regional coordinators and “key-men” in each local church. It alerted these men to the overall scope of the Celebration. This simple act of having one Manager who


distributed a newsletter showed how the mechanism themselves could be a unifying force for the denomination as it increased awareness of other areas.\textsuperscript{88}

A top-down approach of disseminating decisions and information meant the central committee could control the overall direction and story of the Centennial Celebration. Regional coordinators and “key-men” not only received the newsletter from the Manager, but also a “Centennial Facts and Background” booklet that included extended essays on the history of the denomination and its “work,” numerous table that examined the growth of the denomination in several areas, and a list of “memorable dates.” This list of “memorable dates” focused largely on the establishment of new churches in various states. This booklet provides one example of how information produced at the top of the organizational structure spread through the entire denomination.\textsuperscript{89} A catalog entitled “Here’s a Complete Guide for Planning your Local Centennial Celebration Program” was also distributed to the churches through the same channels. This catalog opened with a short letter by chairman John Kromminga and then laid out all the resources available for the local congregation. The number and variety of resources the Centennial Committee made available to the denomination was quite remarkable.\textsuperscript{90}

The Centennial Committee eventually divided its work among various sub-committees, but still maintained a firm grasp on the decisions of these other committee by a member of the Centennial Committee chairing each sub-committees.

\textsuperscript{88} Newsletters are available in Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527 and 528, Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{89} Centennial Facts and Background, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 528, Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{90} Here’s a Complete Guide for Planning Your Local Centennial Celebration Program, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 528, Heritage Hall.
One of these committees was responsible for regional celebrations. These were intended to be events that members of the denomination and community could attend under the theme “This We Believe.” There would be little variation among these regional celebrations since they were all planned through the central committee. The committee even suggested that “the mass-choir technique” be used to assure large crowds and that “every effort should be put forth to develop community appeal.” A roster of approved speakers was even proposed but then dismissed when all the regional events were planned for the third week in March 1957.91 These “rallies” mimicked a regular worship service yet the gathering in Chicago attracted 12,000 people to the International Amphitheater and “many were turned away.”92

A sub-committee for the program of the Centennial also took some of the work away from the Centennial Committee. This sub-committee oversaw a pageant, “sight-sound” programs, a central rally, and a Centennial hymn and anthem contest. The pageant was the centerpiece of this committee’s work. Written by Betty Duimstra and produced by Edgar and Ervina Boeve, this form of production had a long history that had its heyday before World War I.93 However, this pageant seemed to be very popular for the Christian Reformed Church audience and received strong reviews in the Grand Rapids Press.94 The pageant was presented to over 10,000 people in Grand Rapids in February 1957 with plans for a repeat performance in

91 Here’s a Complete Guide for Planning Your Local Centennial Celebration Program, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 528, Heritage Hall.

92 Newsletter, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 528, Heritage Hall.


94 “Pageant Here Impressive” and “Centennial Pageant Here Proves Vivid, Impressive,” Grand Rapids Press, 28 February 1957.
Grand Rapids in June of that year. It was also presented in slightly varied forms in at least eight other locations with high concentrations of Christian Reformed Churches throughout the U.S. from Patterson, New Jersey to Hull, Iowa. This pageant was a key place where lay people would encounter the story the leadership was telling about the past.

The pageant, entitled “Upon This Rock,” had four parts: doctrinal roots of our church, historical roots of our church, our church within, and our church and evangelism. The separation of doctrinal roots from the historical roots was probably more a production choice than a theological one because the theology of the church was to connect itself to the broader Biblical history. The doctrinal section connected the church to the New Testament, the Council of Nicea, Augustine, Luther and Calvin as the basis for the doctrines of the church. The historical sections focused on the Dutch background with such things as the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618 and then the struggle for “purity of doctrine” in 1834. This section concluded by noting how “the church has paid the price for purity” in the one hundred years since its founding in the United States. The final two sections highlighted the contemporary work of the church. By presenting its story in this manner, the Centennial Committee hoped to leave a lasting impression on the denominational members about a shared, orthodox past.

The program sub-committee played a key role in bringing the message of the Centennial Committee to the members of the denomination in other forms as well. This sub-committee organized a denomination wide rally in Grand Rapids to be held

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95 “Upon This Rock,” Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527, Heritage Hall.
in conjunction with the meeting of synod in June of 1957.96 “Sight-sound” programs were available to local congregations for viewing. Twelve different slide shows with narration, called “sight-sound” programs, included everything from “The Heidelberg Catechism” to “Our Indian Cousins” as well as a version of the Centennial Pageant and one about the history of Calvin College, the college owned and operated by the denomination. These productions were meant to relate the story of the church “to the membership.”97 Over 750 of these programs were purchased throughout the denomination.98

The Centennial Hymn and Centennial Anthem competitions provided an opportunity for musicians to submit entries to be selected as the official hymn or anthem of the centennial. The hymn competition meant to have a piece of music the entire church could sing in worship while the anthem was the name given for a piece of music to be sung by a choir. This effort to unite the music of the church did not end at producing singular pieces of music but also extended to include calls for a totally new hymnal that would appear in 1959 and be called the “Centennial Edition.”99 This hymnal would serve the churches for at least 30 years and provided a weekly reminder of the Centennial for those who used it.

Another sub-committee oversaw a large effort to publish books and pamphlets

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97 “Here’s a Complete Guide for Planning Your Local Centennial Celebration Program,” Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 528, Heritage Hall.

98 February-March 1957 Newsletter, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527, Heritage Hall.

that would continue to tell the same story. The publications effort went in several
directions, all under the control and oversight of the Centennial Committee. The
“Centennial Facts and Background” was published by this sub-committee and
distributed to regional coordinators and key-men. This treasure trove of details about
the denomination included a chart that claimed the “rock” of the denomination was
the 1618 Synod of Dort in the Netherlands from which many different Dutch
Calvinist denominations flowed in both the Netherlands and America. It included a
key to the chart that emphasized the various schisms and how the Christian Reformed
Church fit within these Dutch Calvinists denominations.

A souvenir book published in the style of a “yearbook” was available for
members to purchase. Entitled One Hundred Years in the New World, it included
many pictures of the church buildings seeming to celebrate the rootedness and wealth
of the church. Chairman John Kromminga wrote an extended essay about the first
one hundred years of the denomination. This retelling was dominated by justifying
the reasons for founding and continued existence of the denomination based on being
the protectors of orthodoxy. This popular form of publication allowed more people to
have an easy-to-read book. The entire goal of the book was to emphasize the unity
and work of the denomination. It also included a long section on “The Centennial in
Review.”

Other publication efforts were not necessarily under the direct control of
the sub-committee but were encouraged by it. For instance, I Will Build My Church
by Thea Van Halsema had the Centennial symbol printed on its title page and the
minutes of the Centennial Committee referred to its publication.

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100 Christian Reformed Church Centennial Committee, One Hundred Years in
the New World (Grand Rapids: Centennial Committee of the Christian Reformed
Church, 1957).

101 Minutes, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527, Heritage Hall.
wrote the story in a narrative fashion that might appeal to a broad audience. The overall structure of the book highlighted the Christian Reformed Church as part of the Biblical story. Each chapter built on the previous to show how the contemporary denomination fits into the larger story.\textsuperscript{102}

The publications committee also worked to write articles for the denominational magazines, \textit{The Banner} and \textit{De Wachter} (a Dutch language weekly). These articles attempted to alert the subscribers to the importance of the Centennial Celebration for the denomination. In one article, a member of the Centennial Committee justified why the denomination was making such a big deal out of the celebration. He argued the Centennial was “an occasion to tell men the message we bear in behalf of the King!”\textsuperscript{103} Other articles in the magazines throughout 1957 also seem to try to justify the effort and expense of the Celebration. A “Centennial Issue” of \textit{The Banner} dated April 5, 1957 included stories that highlighted the history as told through the filters of the Centennial Committee. The information for the articles was provided by the committee.

Finally, the publications committee oversaw the book \textit{This is Our Story}. While the other publications were targeted to the membership within the denomination, this book was part of the outreach to tell others about the denomination. This pamphlet downplayed the Dutch roots of the church but laid out the basic doctrines of the church. The book focused on the work of the church and why someone should join a Christian Reformed Church. The evangelistic tool was

\textsuperscript{102} Thea B. Van Halsema, “...I Will Build My Church” (Grand Rapids: International Publications, 1956).

meant to introduce the Christian Reformed Church to neighbors of the local churches and invite them to the church. In order to accomplish this, it included a list of all the churches in the denomination.\textsuperscript{104} The committee widely distributed \textit{This Is Our Story} with over 34,000 copies sold by local churches for distribution.\textsuperscript{105}

Finally, a promotions sub-committee of the Centennial Committee made a serious attempt to publicize the Centennial not only within the denomination but also to a wider audience. This sub-committee’s efforts to publicize the event within the denomination used such ephemeral items such as lapel pins, mailing seals, placemats and napkins that all had the Centennial symbol on them. The calendar published by this sub-committee not only included a picture for each month highlighting an aspect of the denominational history, but also placed “memorable dates” and Centennial events on the calendar as a reminder to its members of important dates in the history of the denomination and the Centennial year. This material culture had the impact of uniting the denomination across the continent by simply having a shared experience with the material of the celebration. If some members did not read other material or even accept the story being told, at least they would be united around the materials of the Centennial Celebration.

For the local churches, the promotions committee produced a series of 13 weekly bulletin covers. Churches used weekly bulletins to convey church announcements and the order of worship. This series of 13 covers corresponded with a general advertising campaign that ran for 13 weeks between March 3 and May 26.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{This is Our Story}, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 528, Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{105} February-March 1957 Newsletter, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527, Heritage Hall.
Local churches purchased over 80,000 of these bulletin covers.\textsuperscript{106} The shared experience across the denomination of having similar bulletin covers was yet another way to knit the denomination together.

Even though this sub-committee produced material for the denominational membership, most of its efforts focused on creating “a setting for the witness we want to give to our communities.”\textsuperscript{107} This included everything from church signs to radio advertisements. In order to increase opportunities for evangelizing, churches could also purchase church signs which the committee intended to be a visible symbol for all to see who passed the church. These signs consisted of the centennial symbol on a large sign to be displayed with the regular church sign. The committee reported that it sold 226 of these signs.\textsuperscript{108}

Using media outlets for both publicity and evangelism also fell under the auspices of the promotions sub-committee. Advertising included billboards which local churches could purchase from the Centennial Committee in order to have a presence on the highways. Local churches could also purchase newspaper advertisements for their local newspapers. The committee intended this series of advertisements to correspond with the bulletin covers that ran from March 15 until May 26. The advertisements purchase from the committee allowed the local church to insert its local information in the advertisement. The advertisements emphasized the “historic Christianity” of the Christian Reformed Church and invited readers to

\textsuperscript{106} February-March 1957 Newsletter, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527, Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{107} Here’s a Complete Guide for Planning Your Local Centennial Celebration Program, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 528, Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{108} February-March 1957 Newsletter, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527, Heritage Hall.
contact the local church or listen to the radio program of the denomination, The Back to God Hour, which was coordinated to have a weekly message on the same topic as the advertisements. In the entire series of thirteen ads, not a single mention of the Netherlands or Dutch exists. Local churches purchased over 100 of these advertisements for placement in their local newspapers. Radio advertisements were also available for purchase.

The efforts of the Christian Reformed Church and the Centennial Committee to knit together a denomination that had undergone wrenching changes came under the leadership of chairman John Kromminga. His strong hand seems to have guided much of the vision and direction of the Centennial Celebration. As professor and then president after 1956 of the denominationally owned Calvin Seminary, Kromminga had a vested interest in telling a certain story about the denomination. In a book he published in 1957, he laid out his vision for the denomination and the Centennial Celebration seems to have been his attempt to bring his vision to the largest possible audience. He admits there were two different historical streams within the theology of the Christian Reformed Church but he admits the Centennial Celebration glossed over these differences to emphasize “unity in heritage and unity in mission.” The whole Centennial Celebration was an attempt to unify the denomination by having a shared experience and a shared story about the past. Throughout the book, Kromminga argues that the Christian Reformed Church has a legacy of ethnic

\[\text{109}\] Advertisements, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527, Heritage Hall.

\[\text{110}\] February-March 1957 Newsletter, Centennial Celebration Committee, Box 527, Heritage Hall.

isolation to protect but also something to offer the broader American culture. He fears extremes in both directions leading to isolationism or conformity. This middle-way, as Kromminga would describe it, took form in the Centennial Celebration when certain aspects about uniqueness of Dutch Calvinism were emphasized for the membership while a broader emphasis on being the upholders of “historical Christianity” was presented to the general public. Kromminga’s vision took the form of concrete actions in the Centennial Celebration.

The Centennial Celebration of the Christian Reformed Church demonstrates how a small committee guided by one man oversaw the invention of tradition for the entire denomination. The committee used various techniques to knit the denomination together across the continent and glossed over issues that might be divisive within the denomination. The committee took a top-down approach in order to accomplish this. Information flowed from the Centennial Committee to the rest of the denomination. While this fit the denominational culture of deference for leadership, it did go against governance practices of the local church having a say for larger assemblies.

The invention of tradition works in different ways in different circumstances. In the case of a small, ethnically homogenous church in the mid-twentieth century, it took the form of a highly centralized committee directing its efforts at creating a unity in the denomination even as it glossed over aspects of its history that had produced counter-narratives. This study also suggests that religious feelings can be a key component to a shared tradition. The way the Centennial Celebration talked about their theology changed based on the audience. This variance in how the Christian Reformed Church connected itself to the broader Christian history helps explain the way they invented their tradition.
Conclusion

The ethnoreligious identity of Dutch Americans both created and maintained the institutions where people found their primary relationships and those institutions then perpetuated the identity. The forces of affluence and Cold War seemed to weaken ethnic institutions for many European immigrant groups. However, Dutch Americans continued to build a bunker mentality during the late 1940s and 1950s in numerous ways, including telling their history in commemorative celebrations convincing themselves of the importance of their institutions. Their institutions flourished into the future partly because they had convinced themselves that their institutions still mattered and contributed to American society and culture. But they also had to negotiate a pressure for homogenization in the post-war culture of the United States. They wanted to show anyone listening that they were good Americans. They might be hyphenated Americans, but in a good way, as they embraced freedom and their institutions contributed to it and flourished in it.

A richer understanding of ethnic identity formation also needs to consider how groups understood themselves in religious terms. The covenant theology used by Dutch-American Calvinists helps explain their insistence on the worth of their institutions. God had blessed their institutions in the past because, according to the commemorations, they had been faithful. If the institutions were to continue, faithfulness would be needed and then God would bless them. Seeing themselves as God’s covenant people would support their efforts to hold their community together through institutions. Ethnicity is more than just a symbol, for Dutch it meant keeping their institutions intact. It was not just about eating certain food, celebrating Tulip Time festivals, windmills in lawns, or even speaking Dutch. It was about keeping a
certain theological position that allowed them to be in but not of the world.
CHAPTER VI

REMODELING THE NARRATIVES OF DUTCH-AMERICAN IDENTITY FROM 1957 TO 1976

The people who remained committed to the institutions of Dutch America from the 1950s to the 1970s maintained a strong sense of shared identity. The loyalty demonstrated through the tumult of these years affirmed the strength of the narratives constructed over the previous years that united Dutch Americans in shared institutions. However, in order for the institutions to remain strong, Dutch Americans reshaped their narratives in response to internal and external changes. The separate institutions that had a peculiar identity as Dutch American needed new ways of telling their stories that would continue to justify their existence. This remodeling of the narrative resulted not only from the strength of the framework built over the years, but also the malleability of the story to fit the new needs of the community.

The Dutch-American community for the twenty year from 1957 to 1976 continued to experience changes internally. As noted in chapter 4, one of the major internal issues involved the recent migrants living in Canada and their participation in institutions such as Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church denomination. These migrants brought not only a different view of the Netherlands and what it meant to be Dutch to North America, but also a different theological emphasis coming from the same wells of Calvinism brought by earlier migrants but with a different experience in the Netherlands. The community also dealt with spreading out geographically as people moved to many new locations.
The broader society and culture also continued to shape the Dutch-American community. No longer isolated, and acknowledging that isolation was neither possible nor desirable, the community’s leaders tried to steer the community forward, holding onto what they understood to be the heart of their identity while innovating on the edges. The internal debates within the institutions of the community relied on leaders to define the identity of the group even as some disagreed with the direction of the institutions. These internal debates reflected the external challenges confronting them. The community itself saw the challenges as pulling at their shared identity and common cause but they no longer labeled these challenges as simply about assimilation or Americanization. The changes in American society during the long 1960s pressed on a group that saw itself as part of the American mainstream and had benefited from the authority structures in place. The members of the community, as a whole, did not welcome the upheaval of the established order. It became harder and harder to justify and maintain separate institutions in an era that questioned the existence of the old authority structures that had supported those institutions.

Americans’ perceptions about their national identity changed following the 1950s as different groups of minorities claimed their place within America’s story. The civil rights movement led by African-Americans forced other Americans to reconsider their version of American identity as being too white. While the strife caused by the civil rights movement felt distant for most Dutch Americans, other urban ethnic groups such as Polish Americans and Italian Americans had a much more immediate experience with the Civil Rights movement.¹ America was

undergoing a serious identity crisis and ethnic revival was just waiting to happen.

The full implications of the civil rights movement for ethnic identity can be most clearly seen in the 1970s. As Michael Novak argued in 1971 already, he saw a new age of the rise of the “unmeltable ethnic.” A new emphasis on group identity came out of the 1960s that would shape how Americans with migrant ancestors would think about themselves.² More recently, Matthew Frye Jacobson examined the same period and noted how ethnic hyphenation grew in the post-civil rights America. Examining movies, literature, politics and gender relations, Frye Jacobson argued that the 1970s saw a real shift in how Americans thought of themselves as a nation of immigrants.³ These changes to Americans’ conception of themselves affected how Dutch Americans imagined themselves.

These external challenges and internal changes to the Dutch-American community shaped the way institutions commemorated themselves. Since the 1920s the narratives had emphasized the contributions the community made to the United States, which had been reciprocated with freedom to build their institutions. Changes in the 1960s forced Dutch Americans to change their image of the United States and their place in it. While the institutions of Dutch America remained strong, the members often felt the institutions threatened in the context of the changes of the 1960s.

Dutch Americans between the 1950s and 1970s continued to think of

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themselves as a distinct group. The stories they told about themselves and the narratives they constructed established the boundary of who was in and who was out of the group. Membership in the institutions remained a high priority for many. Others left the institutions of the group when they no longer found the institutions meaningful in shaping the patterns of their lives or their identity. This boundary making function of institutional membership was reinforced by Calvinist theology about being covenant people who were set apart by God. As the boundaries shifted, the lived religion of the members struggled at times to keep up with the shifting identity and shifting notions of what held the group together. While earlier commemoration required a common descent from the Netherlands to be part of the group, the search for new ties during the 1960s resulted in a remodeled narrative.

For Dutch Americans, this boundary-making and consenting to be part of the ethnoreligious institutions of the group occurred within the relative freedom to join voluntarily. They felt little external pressure to join because of their color of skin or externally prescribed definitions of not being white or fully American. They could choose to continue to be part of a group that had institutions started by people of a certain descent but began to welcome more and more people into these institutions by virtue of consent. As they made more and more contact with other groups and the broader culture between the late 1950s and the 1970s and the institutions included more and more who could not trace their descent to the Netherlands, this meant they continued to negotiate who they were and what manifestations their identity would take. Could someone who was part of the institutions but not with ancestors from the Netherlands be considered Dutch American? Dutch Americans had significantly remodeled what it meant to be Dutch American between the 1920s and 1976 but the framework of institutions remained.
Migration and Institutional Patterns

As a group brought together by a shared migration story, Dutch migration to the United States and Canada continued to play a role in identity construction. Dutch migration to North America peaked in 1952 with 23,282 migrants from the Netherlands, then fell to 10,666 in 1955 before rebounding to 20,798 in 1957. From 1957 to 1976, the number of migrants to North America averaged only 5,696 per year with a total of 113,923. The second highest one year total behind 1957 was in 1960 when 14,157 migrated to North America and then a general decline to 1976 when the number was only 1,278. In the years from 1957 to 1976, 55% of the migrants to North America went to Canada (62,292) with the years from 1966 to 1976 seeing the highest percentages going to Canada. Dutch migrants had other options in these years as only 51.6% of all Dutch migrants chose North America over other options such as Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa. The slow trickle of migrants to the United States from 1957 to 1976 did not significantly alter the Dutch-American community in the United States. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the number of Dutch migrants in Canada and their inclusion in Dutch-American denominations and other institutions influenced the community more and more.

The denominations made up of congregations continued with relative strength in numbers. The Christian Reformed Church had 211,454 members in 495 congregations divided into 29 classes in 1957, its centennial year. By 1967, that number had grown to 275,530 members in 629 congregations in 34 classes. The

numbers continued to grow through 1976 with 282,132 members in 695 congregations divided into 37 classes with 26% of members living in Canada. The membership grew from by 70,000 between 1957 and 1976 with half of the new members in Canada. The number of congregations grew by 200 with 232 new ones in both countries (32 congregations either folded or left the denomination). While half of the membership growth came in Canada, only 47 new congregations started in Canada during these 20 years. The new congregations mainly began in suburbs of Chicago and Grand Rapids that attracted those moving from established congregations and in western states where Dutch Americans migrated to from more established enclaves in the Midwest.\(^5\)

The Reformed Church in America experienced the same pattern of growth. While always having a larger geographic distribution because of the older “eastern” section of the denomination, the Reformed Church in America spread farther afield in these years just the same. The denomination, including the eastern section, grew from 295,800 in 1957 to 360,281. This included the addition of a separate classis for the congregations in Ontario, Canada with 18 congregations and 5,529 members and a total of 25 congregations in Canada with 7279 members. Nearly 59 percent of the membership was in the synods of the west, namely the Synods of Chicago, Michigan, and the West which had traditionally been dominated by more recent Dutch migrants and had a strong Dutch-American identity. A survey conducted in 1978 by Donald Luidens, a sociology professor at Hope College, found that the western synods “are clearly the centers of Dutch ethnic strength” as a self-reported identity compared to

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\(^5\) *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, year stated).
the eastern synods. People in these synods, Luidens showed, claimed a Dutch ethnic identity by nearly a 2 to 1 margin. Interestingly, the same synods had more frequent attenders of worship services as well as more regularly read *The Church Herald*. These findings demonstrate how closely church attendance and membership correlated with a strong sense of Dutch-American identity even in 1978 and the importance of shared religious beliefs for defining that identity.

The Christian schools continued to grow as well. The growth came from both the baby boom within Dutch America and more schools and students who could not trace their ancestry to the Netherlands joining the network of Dutch-American schools. The National Union of Christian Schools increased from 207 schools in 1957 with 40,654 students to 294 schools with 61,819 students in 1976. The growth came from establishing new schools in Canada and among other pockets of Dutch Americans. As the post-World War II migrants settled in Canada, many started Christian schools as soon as possible but not to preserve the language. They had arrived from the Netherlands with a strong sense that Christians needed to be active citizens in the world and these migrants wanted to develop their schools not as safe havens but as training grounds to engage the world. This desire not to isolate themselves was the result from not only a rapid transition to using English but also emphasizing their shared religious identity with their English neighbors who knew the reformation led by John Knox. In fact, a number of the new schools took the name


8 *Christian School Annual* (Grand Rapids: National Union of Christian Schools, years stated).
John Knox Christian School to show their connection.\textsuperscript{9} The National Union of Christian Schools also grew because they welcomed schools started among conservative Presbyterians in the south, particularly the Presbyterian Church in America which separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) in 1973. Schools with the name Westminster started to join the National Union of Christian Schools in the 1960s and 1970s particularly. Even though they did not trace their ancestry to the Netherlands, these schools and students came into contact with Dutch America through the National Union of Christian Schools. The new schools recruited teachers from the colleges of Dutch America that shared Calvinistic theology. These schools also adopted and used the curriculum and policies of the National Union of Christian Schools. The institutional completeness continued.

Even with the changes, the schools of the National Union of Christian Schools continued their close relationship with the Christian Reformed Church congregations. In 1960 and 1970, the Union continued its survey of the number and percentage of children in the Christian Reformed Church who attended these schools. The 1960 “Church-School Survey” was the fourth survey “to determine both the number and percentage of pupils from various churches attending Christian schools.”\textsuperscript{10} This survey simply listed all of the Christian Reformed Church congregations, making the assumption that its readers understood the denominational affiliation of a majority of the congregations listed in the survey. The list of congregations, grouped by state or

\textsuperscript{9} John Knox was a leader of the reformation in Scotland in the sixteenth century.

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Christian School Annual} (Grand Rapids: National Union of Christian Schools, 1960), 156.
province also included a list of congregations “having no Children in Christian Schools” as a kind of list of shame. After the list of Christian Reformed Church congregations, the survey listed every other congregation that had students in NUCS schools such as 12 Orthodox Presbyterian, 6 Orthodox Protestant Reformed, 11 Protestant Reformed, and 39 congregations of the Reformed Church in America. Other denominations represented but with no data for particular congregations included Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, Methodist, and Pentecostal. Of the 45,249 students enrolled in NUCS schools in 1960, 38,322 were part of Christian Reformed Church congregations (85%). A total of 43,369 students came from other Reformed or closely aligned Presbyterian denominations (96%). The analysis provided by the director of the NUCS, John A. Vander Ark, noted that the number of students had increased in 1960 by 94% from the 1950 Decade Survey. He also stated that 416 out of 541 Christian Reformed Church congregations had pupils in Christian schools and “in areas where Christian schools are available, the average percentage of Christian Reformed children attending is 70.8.” At the same time, Vander Ark pointed out that there had been “a significant increased interest in Christian education” among Reformed Church in America congregations as enrollment from these congregations nearly doubled in the last ten years. Most members of the Christian Reformed Church and the leaders of many Christian schools recognized and accentuated the close connection between the two as they imagined what it meant to be Dutch American within these two institutions.

The Decades Survey of 1970 of the National Union of Christian Schools revealed interesting trends in the demographics of students and their connection with

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other institutions of Dutch America. The percentage of students from Christian Reformed Church congregations in NUCS schools declined to 77.4% from 84.7% in 1960. This decline occurred because more and more other denominations sent their students to the NUCS schools. At the same time, a smaller percentage of Christian Reformed Church families sent their students to Christian schools. However, some of this was due to the fact that more congregations reported that they did not have a Christian school in their area as the Christian Reformed Church spread geographically. The highest percentage of children of congregations who went to the Christian schools continued to be in major metropolitan areas and in rural areas with a large number of families in Christian Reformed Church congregations such as Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo in Michigan and around Orange City and Pella in Iowa.¹²

The Christian schools had continued their growth from 1957 to 1976 at the same time the colleges of Dutch America grew. While they experienced different kinds of changes, they had to deal during these years with a student body that wanted to push the limits of authority as the community had defined it. These issues were even larger for a community that worried endlessly about its “covenant youth.” Their religious understanding of the world required them to care deeply for the next generation who they understood to be set apart by God as his chosen people. When that generation seemed to be challenging the status quo of the authority, concern followed. The Christian colleges felt this acutely.

The colleges associated with the Christian Reformed Church included Calvin College (owned and operated by the denomination), Dordt College, and Trinity Christian College in the Chicago area, which started classes in 1959. Together, these

¹² Christian School Annual (Grand Rapids: National Union of Christian Schools, 1970), 243-266.
schools had a student population made up of 93% Christian Reformed students with 75% having graduated from Christian high schools.\textsuperscript{13} As Calvin College President William Spoelhof made clear in his NUCS annual convention address of 1970, the students of these colleges were from “a homogenous ethnic and religious background” and were “exceptionally well-trained and generally able.”\textsuperscript{14} However, Spoelhof showed concern about the influence of “the American Youth Culture” on the students in the colleges. He worried that the youth culture “was making inroads among us” as students “imbibed, consciously and unconsciously, the influences of the youth culture of our age.”\textsuperscript{15} At the same time, Spoelhof did not think all was lost. Youth culture made students more aware, assertive and action-minded but these characteristics could be used “in the cause of Christ.”\textsuperscript{16} Spoelhof reflected the concerns of many in the Dutch-American community as they saw “the world” pushing in on their ethnoreligious group. They might not have defined themselves as purely Dutch or they were reacting to a loss of ethnic cohesion, but sometimes code words slipped in such as “our” and “us.” The concern about the changes in the world in the 1960s challenged the community.

The colleges did continue to grow from the 1950s to the 1970s. Calvin College grew from 1541 students in 1955 to 3234 in 1966 and to 3674 in 1975. The growth in the student population necessitated not only appointing more faculty

\textsuperscript{13} William Spoelhof, “A Look at the Products You Send Us,” in \textit{Christian School Annual} (Grand Rapids: National Union of Christian Schools, 1970), 232. This was given as an address as the annual NUCS convention.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 232.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 238.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 239.
members, but also the campus moving to the edge of Grand Rapids to what was known as the Knollcrest campus. This 166-acre location was purchased in 1956 with the seminary building completed in 1960 and the first college building finished in 1962. The college operated with a split campus until 1973, shuttling students and faculty between the two sites as the construction continued on the Knollcrest campus.\(^\text{17}\) A commentator in 1975 noted how the new campus was “fresh, original, organic. Its admirable symmetry was everywhere apparent.” But the move also meant leaving the older neighborhood that had “forced the institution into confrontation with deep social problems.”\(^\text{18}\) The growth of the student body, made up in 1975 of 83% Christian Reformed Church students, required the larger campus but also demonstrated a larger trend of moving to the edges of urban centers in search of safety.

Dordt College, founded in 1955, grew from a junior college to a full four year program in 1964. With a starting enrollment of 35 in 1955, the school quickly grew to 227 in 1961 and to 447 in 1964 when the full four years were on campus. The enrollment continued to grow to 970 in 1971 and to over one-thousand in 1976.\(^\text{19}\) While technically not owned by the Christian Reformed Church denomination, it received its support and students from the congregations of the denomination. If Calvin struggled with a move and more students, Dordt struggled to keep up with its growing enrollment as well as defining the direction the college would take in the

\(^{17}\) Harry Boonstra, *Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 64, 45.


\(^{19}\) Marlin Vanden Bosch, *A History of Dordt College: The B.J. Haan Years* (Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press, 1990), 51-216.
tumultuous 1960s and early 1970s. However, most of these struggles were rather intramural as the students rarely openly questioned authority and while college students on other campuses openly challenged the governments, students at Dordt College marched in support of the United States government and its growing presence in Vietnam in 1965.\footnote{Ibid, 119.} At the same time Dordt began on the plains of Iowa, a movement in the Chicago area resulted in a third college closely associated with the Christian Reformed Church. Trinity Christian College opened its doors to 37 students in Palos Heights in the fall of 1959 as a junior college. This college enjoyed growth as well during the 1960s and 1970s, becoming a four year college and adding buildings to the original golf course club house.\footnote{Donald Sinnema, \textit{If We Begin With Christ: The Founding of Trinity Christian College, 1952-1960} (Palos Heights, Ill.: Trinity Christian College, 2009).}

The colleges of the Reformed Church in America, namely Hope, Central, and Northwestern, experienced their own growth through these years. The pressure of the culture and exact needs of a college education continued to press on these colleges. Each experienced a level of growth in terms of students and physical plant. Hope College grew mainly through appealing to a broader swath of ecumenical prospective students. This ecumenical openness had been part of Hope’s history, but always within a Protestant frame of understanding. During the 1960s particularly, ecumenicity came to mean a more tolerant position towards all Christians, including Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox as well as students who were part of no religious organization.\footnote{James C. Kennedy and Caroline J. Simon, \textit{Can Hope Endure? A Historical Case Study in Christian Higher Education} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 116.} In 1954, Hope College had 877 students with over 66\%
claiming the Reformed Church in America as their denomination with the rest being predominantly Protestant with only a total of four Roman Catholics, two Buddhists, and five others. The student population grew to 1571 in 1963 with 62% from the Reformed Church in America, a larger number of other Protestant denominations, 15 from the Roman Catholic Church, and a handful of those who claimed no recorded religion.\textsuperscript{23} The number rose steadily to 1,980 students in 1968, with only 52% from the Reformed Church in America, and to 2,071 students in 1970 with only 40% from the denomination.\textsuperscript{24} The more than 1000 student growth in these years came mainly from non-Reformed Church in America students. Hope’s identity as a self-consciously Dutch-American institution waned in these years even as it continued to operate within the “Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities” established in 1969 between the denomination and its institutions of higher education.\textsuperscript{25}

Northwestern College in Orange City saw its student population grow during these years as well. It added a four year program in 1959 with a junior class and graduated its first 4-year graduates in 1961. The Academy that had been part of the institution closed in the same year. The college then grew from 340 students in 1961-62 to 724 in the fall of 1976. This doubling of the college enrollment required concomitant building and faculty growth. While it struggled to retain faculty in the 1960s, the positions were generally filled with Protestant Christians who shared the basic theology of the college even if their last names showed they did not hail from

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 119.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 137.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 136. The Covenant had been drafted during the 1960s by the denomination with input from the colleges.
the Dutch-American community itself.\textsuperscript{26} New student residence halls, classrooms, and recreational facilities kept pace through a concerted effort to raise money from the college’s supporters who mainly came from those within the Reformed Church in America and Dutch-American community.\textsuperscript{27}

The strength of the institutions of Dutch America did not falter through the 1960s and into the 1970s. The growth of congregations, denominations, and schools showed that loyalty to these institutions continued. However, this did not mean that no one feared for the future of loyalty of the next generation. The usefulness of these institutions for the next generation in the 1960s and early 1970s could not be guaranteed. An identity built on shared religious concerns coming from a shared past as a migrant community would need to be remodeled to continue to shape the shared identity of the community. The community continued to alter its identity in response to both internal changes and real and perceived external threats to the carefully constructed institutional life that had been the bedrock of their community and shared identity.

The institutional and migration patterns of the Dutch-American community were the social reality for Dutch Americans during the 1960s. Those who claimed a Dutch-American identity could trace their ancestors to the Netherlands and participated in the institutions started by the migrants. However, as migration slowed and members of institutions felt their institutions needed reinforcement, the stories told by Dutch Americans headed in two directions. The differences between the stories presented at Tulip Time festival and in institutional commemorations grew


\textsuperscript{27} I could find no sources yet for these years at Central College.
farther apart even as the people involved in both sets of commemorations often overlapped. This bifurcation became even more pronounced from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s as Tulip Time depictions of what it meant to be Dutch tried to take a more “authentic” turn with the help of more recent immigrants, research, and appeals to a sense of a simpler time. These were years of rapid growth in popularity for the festivals as the festivals continued to attract visitors year after year. At the same time, the Dutch aspect seemed to be left out of the commemorations of the institutions of Dutch America more and more, particularly in the schools which appealed to a wider demographic for their students. However, while overt reference and appeal to the Dutch homeland or migration experience lost much of its appeal for these institutions, the insider language made it clear they were a distinct group.

“Authentic” Tulip Time Festivals

The Tulip Time festivals experienced significant growth and catered more and more to the tourist audience from 1957 to 1976 as the festival organizers provided a more polished experience for their guests. The staging of the festival required more and more community organization and participation as the cities presented themselves as places of progress and wholesome family entertainment. At the same time, visitors in these years demanded an “authentic” Dutch experience. This desire for authenticity led the organizers to try to present a more authentic representation of the Netherlands through costumes and the built environment.

The Tulip Time Festivals continued to trade in quaint and safe images of a bygone era to tell the community’s story. As Deborah Che has argued, during the 1960s and 1970s the Tulip Time Festival in Holland allowed “tourists to ‘step back in time’ to a clean, safe, wholesome story book town with a wealth of community
spirit.‖ Suzanne Sinke also noted that while religion was not prominent in the festivals themselves, a “conservative morality . . . imbues many of the festival activities” that fit the American ideal for small-town values. For Sinke, this morality reflected the conservative theology of the group around family values and respect for authority structures. The brochures of the Tulip Festival in Orange City during these years emphasized the small-town ethos and family centered atmosphere. The 1960 brochure said, “We truly believe that you will find no entertainment more wholesome, more deeply interesting, more thoroughly enjoyable, than the many unique features of Tulip-time. . . an event which rises from a people’s memory and spirit as joyful affirmation of a good way of life.” The 1965 brochure for the 25th anniversary of the Tulip Festival in Orange City told would-be-visitors that they would find the event “wholesome, entertaining, interesting, and thoroughly enjoyable.” In 1970, during the 30th anniversary of the festival and centennial of the city, the brochure noted not only the family centered atmosphere but also how the festival “has been a strong contributing force to the growth and economy of Orange

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31 “Tulip Festival, 25th Annual, 1965,” Orange City Tulip Festival Box 8, Folder 5: Brochures, Ramaker Library.
City” providing for a strong community to raise a family. Orange City organizers did not corner the market on presenting their festival as family friendly. Both Orange City and Pella highlighted how their children participated in Dutch dancing. The brochures produced by the Pella festival promoters used many photos of children in the midst of tulips dressed in costume throughout this period. The Dutch-American image presented in the 1960s and 1970s had as much to do with being a haven in a world of change as with anything particularly Dutch; wooden shoes, windmills, and tulips continued to take a leading role, but more as symbols of a wholesome bygone era than of the Netherlands itself.

The wholesome, family friendly towns that hosted the festival also wanted to use that image to increase community pride. The brochure from the 1961 festival in Pella announced that “Pella has . . . civic pride and progressive spirit” as well as strong infrastructure, schools, and churches with a population over 5000 started by Dutch immigrants. The organizers in Pella stressed that the great community pride found in the festival resulted from the founders of the community. The brochures for the Tulip Time Festival prior to 1966 explained that the Tulip Time Festival commemorated the founding fathers who had made the difficult transition to the new world. After 1966, the explanation still highlighted the founders of the community as the reason for the festival, but also how “Pella has long been known as the Garden City of Iowa, the citizens vieing [sic] with one another for the more picturesque and

32 “Tulip Festival, 30th Annual, 1970,” Orange City Tulip Festival Box 8, Folder 5: Brochures, Ramaker Library.


34 For instance, see “Tulip Time, 30th Annual, 1965,” Tulip Time Folder, Pella Historical Society.
luxuriant flower gardens. . . The populace of Pella, who pride themselves on their Holland Ancestry and folk-lore traditions, will live again their typical Dutch Life during Tulip Time.”

This shift in emphasis in the brochures demonstrated the changes taking place within the festival itself. As more and more tourists viewed the festival, community boosterism took precedent. Reconstructing “typical” Dutch life from a pre-modern era made the tourist feel like the festival was more authentic. The community pride also showed itself in Pella in the work in the mid-1960s to transform the business district into a “small Dutch hamlet” where “many stores have already installed Dutch architectures on their fronts.” These physical transformations of the town corresponded with a new emphasis on using more authentic symbols and styles from the Netherlands. Orange City followed Pella’s lead in using more boosterism trading in more Dutch images. The Orange City brochures of the 1960s and 1970s called the festival a “spring-time gift to all the City’s friends.” The 1973 brochure in Orange City included a list of industries and pictures of the county court house and medical clinic. In a moment of self-reflection in the 1970 brochure in Orange City, which coincided with the centennial of the founding of the community, the writer of the narrative noted that “the festival has been a strong contributing force to the growth and economy of Orange City . . . [and]  


37 For instance, see “Tulip Festival, 27th Annual, 1967,” Orange City Tulip Festival Box 8, Folder 5: Brochures, Ramaker Library.

38 “Tulip Time, 38th Annual, 1973,” Orange City Tulip Festival Box 8, Folder 5: Brochures, Ramaker Library.
leaders . . . have long realized the desirable results of groups working together for a common cause. What could serve better to unify a community.”

The festivals helped construct a story of community progress and pride both through the story they told about the festival and its purposes as well as the actual staging of a festival that required significant effort and cooperation across the cities. The organizers of the Tulip Time festivals told a narrative about how the community had continually improved from the humble beginnings by poor Dutch immigrants to thriving communities built around shared family-friendly values.

The effort to provide family entertainment in a wholesome environment attracted larger and larger crowds in the 1960s and 1970s. These years brought the growing group and package bus tour market to all three major festivals. In Orange City, the crowds grew in relationship to the growing publicity efforts through regional advertising and press releases. By the early 1960s, the local newspaper in Orange City estimated crowds for the three day event totaled around 40,000. This number increased to around 65,000 in 1967 and to 100,000 in 1970 for the city’s centennial combined with the Tulip Festival. Pella and Holland’s festivals experienced the same kind of growth in these years as they attracted those looking for a spring festival that was family friendly.

As the crowds grew so did the level of organization needed to stage the festival year after year. For instance, the level of record keeping and organization to present and maintain the miniature Dutch Village in Pella grew from year to year.

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39 “Tulip Time, 35th Annual, 1970,” Orange City Tulip Festival Box 8, Folder 5: Brochures, Ramaker Library.

Staged in various auditoriums over the years and entitled originally “A Day in Holland,” this replica of a simulated town scene from the Netherlands started already in 1938. From its beginning, the organizers billed it as “one of the most perfect toy towns which has ever been constructed. . . . Every detail of Dutch life is shown, with canals in which small boats operate, the various business houses, schools, churches, etc.” This idyllic depiction of rural Dutch life hardly matched the bitter reality that most of the nineteenth century migrants had left. Also from the beginning, visitors viewed it under the direction of a guide whose scripted description continued though at least the 1959 event. A photo from that year showed a guide dressed in a Dutch costume explaining the village with a microphone. The name of the exhibition also changed in 1959 from Miniature Dutch Village to “A Day in Holland.” By 1963, the organizers counted nearly 14,000 visitors who paid an admission charge of 30 cents for adults and 15 cents for children. The people involved in staging the miniature Dutch village included not only a handful of costumed guides, but also eleven different teachers from Pella’s schools and students in the commercial, speech and agriculture classes. A careful set of instructions for erecting the village also had developed by at least 1969. The committee responsible also made a careful


42 Photograph, Dutch Village Folder, Pella Historical Society.


accounting of the number of tickets sold and receipts throughout this period. The Pella miniature Dutch village functioned as both a story about the Netherlands for visitors devoid of the harshness of life of the era and a community project that required cooperation in the present. This one small part of the festival required many community people to host and stage this one small aspect of a much larger event that drew such large crowds during the 1960s.

The large crowds not only required a high level of organization but also features and attractions to keep them coming back. The organizers wanted to provide what they perceived the crowds wanted, a wholesome festival with a touch of authenticity. The biggest attraction always was the tulips. All three Tulip Time festival cities touted their tulips in photographs and in the activities surrounding the flower. Pella and Orange City both claimed primacy as a photographer’s paradise in Iowa. Pella’s 1957 brochure claimed to have “Iowa’s Loveliest Blooms” with hundreds of thousands of flowers in the city. In that same year at the “Sunken Gardens,” gardeners had planted 10,000 red, white, and blue flowers forming an American flag. The 1962 brochure encouraged visitors to bring their cameras as there were “picture opportunities everywhere” at “Iowa’s Most Colorful Event.” In these same years, the brochure of the Orange City festival claimed to be “Iowa’s most photographed holiday. The picture opportunities are everywhere because of the brightly colored tulips.” The brochures always highlighted how many tulips and the

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48 “Tulip Festival, 20th Annual, 1960,” Box 8, Folder 5, Orange City Tulip Festival, Ramaker Library.
location of the best tulip viewing. Though the tulips remained the focal point of the
day, because of the size of the festivals and the amount of advanced planning, the
date no longer could be changed as it had in the early years of the festivals to
accommodate the fickle blooms.

As the crowds grew and organized tour groups began attending the festival,
the organizers also started directed tours that allowed the cities to showcase what they
considered their best aspects to their visitors. Pella advertised official tours of the city
already in the middle of the 1950s but by 1957, the Rotary Club took over this
activity. The advertised tour visited “Pella’s lovely park, plantings, spots of historical
interest, industries, schools, etc.”49 The chartered bus groups in Orange City received
guided tours and the script for the 1966 tour emphasized both points of interest for
those visiting the festival as well as general points of pride of the community such as
churches, hospitals, and manufacturing plants. Attempting some authenticity, the
opening lines of the script were in stilted Dutch followed by a translation. The script
also pointed out various locations where festival events were held as well as the many
plantings of tulips.50 These organized tours helped orientate visitors to the entire
community and allowed organizers to tell their story of a successful community based
on a shared past. Visitors would be left with an indelible image of a prosperous,
thriving community.

Beyond the wholesome family entertainment and story of progress, the visitors
and organizers throughout the late 1950s to the 1970s grew more and more concerned
about presenting an “authentic” representation of the Netherlands. The search for an


50 Memo to Tulip Festival Tour Guides, 13 May 1966, Leona Vander Stoep
authentic experience at a Tulip Time festival fit a larger pattern of the 1960s in the United States. Historians of the 1960s have noted how the era was characterized by a search for authenticity. Doug Rossinow showed how this search “lay at the heart of the new left . . . They talked all the time about becoming ‘real’ or ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ and about transcending their generation’s ‘alienation.’” As Matthew Frye Jacobson showed in *Roots Too*, the emergence of a strong ethnic revival in the 1960s came from both the Civil Rights movement and a “powerful current of antimodernism.” Many Americans viewed ethnicity and the concomitant tribalism as a “haven of authenticity that existed at a remove from the bloodless, homogenizing forces of mass production and consumption, mass media, commodification, bureaucratization, and suburbanization.” For both the Dutch-Americans in these towns and the visitors, Tulip Time festivals seemed like a step back in time to a more authentic, pre-modern time. However, the organizers worked in these years to cater more and more to the search for an authentic experience which really became an authentic small town festival with a Dutch veneer to pull in the visitors as a marketing tool.

While the rhetoric of authenticity had surrounded the festivals from the beginning, it was during these years organizers worked to replicate exact Dutch costumes, build “Dutch fronts” in the business sections of the towns, and erect windmills to give the landscape a Dutch feel. Community members who participated in attempting to make the festival more authentic worked with constructs of the Netherlands both they and their visitors found acceptable. The images of the


Netherlands continued to emphasize a bygone era of quaint pastoral people. The Netherlands of the 1960s and 1970s had developed in different ways, yet the Dutch-American community continued to trade in these traditional images. Authenticity in this sense was a kind of construction that reflected the community’s perception of itself but also their perception of what their visitors expected in a folk festival.\(^5^3\)

The attention to authenticity by festival organizers required the kind of organization that paralleled the growing crowds. One of the areas requiring coordination to make the festival feel more authentic was the costumes participants wore. Costumes had been an aspect of the festival from the beginning, but most residents did not have heirloom Dutch clothes to wear. The original costumes mostly mimicked popular American notions of what Dutch clothes might look like. After World War II, the costumes became more and more sophisticated with the concomitant organization. Organizers worked to educate participants in what was appropriate and inappropriate attire. The brochures for the festivals as well as the queen’s attire highlighted where the costume originated. Photographs in the newspapers often captured the queen and her attendants in full costume that changed from year to year. In order facilitate this emphasis on authentic costumes, the organizers started costume exchanges and a pattern service. In Orange City in the early 1970s, advertisements for the events held in the town hall basement happened once during the late winter and once closer to the festival. In the same era, the newspaper ran a “costume of the week” column explaining the various costumes. Illustrations and descriptions of costumes from specific towns and areas in Zeeland

and Friesland for both men and women. The same kinds of exchanges and organization occurred in Pella and Holland where the organizers wanted authentic costumes from specific places in the Netherlands.

The organizers also started to adjust the built environment to make it more authentic. For these towns, it included both remodeling business fronts to look more Dutch as well as building windmills. Beginning in 1966, the brochures for the Pella Tulip Time Festival highlighted the efforts made to build “Dutch Fronts.” As the brochure of that year and subsequent years noted, the intent was to create an “Old-World atmosphere symbolic of the Netherlands.” The efforts by the merchants were applauded in helping “transform Pella’s business district into a small Dutch hamlet.” The effort corresponded with the efforts in Pella to create, through costumes and tulips as well, a typical scene from the Netherlands that fit their perceptions of the Netherlands as well as what visitors expected of a portrayal of the Netherlands.

The addition of windmills to the landscape of these towns also pointed to the quest for an authentic Dutch village feel for visitors. Holland had the most ambitious project of securing and transporting a windmill from the Netherlands. Willard Wichers wanted to have an actual windmill from the Netherlands to grace the city. His efforts were rewarded when in 1964 a windmill called “De Zwaan” arrived and began operations in 1965. It immediately attracted the kind of attention Wichers had hoped for and altered the built environment of the city of Holland with a windmill


55 “Tulip Time, 31st Annual, 1966,” Tulip Time Folder, Pella Historical Society
from the Netherlands itself. This effort at being authentic required a substantial investment of time and money.\textsuperscript{56}

While the most ambitious project took place in Holland, Orange City also built a more authentic environment by adding windmills, thanks mainly to Andy Vogel, the owner of Vogel Paint and Wax. He helped build a windmill in Central Park as an information booth in the early 1960s which cost him $1,500 of his own money when fundraising came-up short. By 1967, Vogel again used his own capital to build a replica windmill that topped out at 45 feet in front of his paint factory. It was equipped with paint grinding equipment and living quarters and a newspaper reporter considered so authentic that it “would be a credit to Amsterdam.” Vogel clearly hoped it would attract more visitors as he called it “a good promotion” for a town that should “capitalize on a windmills and wooden shoes image.” The city’s bus tour added it to the itinerary and the Chamber of Commerce president saw it as a positive physical presence to add to the authentic built environment of Orange City.\textsuperscript{57}

Institutional Commemorations

Just as in the previous decades, the Tulip Time Festivals were not the only or even the most important places for Dutch Americans to negotiate their identity, but they did provide part of the context for other commemorative events for congregations, denominations, and schools. The colleges of the community continued


\textsuperscript{57} Clippings in Leona Vader Stoep 1969-1971 Scrapbook, Box 1965-1974, Ramaker Library. The identifying information on the newspaper clipping in the scrapbook indicates the article appeared in the 14 May 1967 \textit{Sioux City Sunday Journal}. 
to play a key role in not only producing graduates but also as a shared concern for a wider geographic area than private schools or congregations. They also had some of the most turbulent waters to navigate within the community and with the way the world pressed in. The two institutions in western Michigan particularly had to understand their place in the matrix of institutional life of the United States and Dutch America. The way they presented themselves in these years demonstrates the challenges facing both the institutions and the entire community as both negotiated the remodeling years of 1957 to 1976.

Hope College in Holland had the longer history and found its home in the heart of a town that traded in its Dutch image. However, while Hope had Flying Dutchmen for its athletic mascot, its identity had shifted as the college had moved beyond its narrow Reformed Church in America and Dutch-American roots. The transition taking place in these years had as much to do with religious identity as Dutch identity, yet these two were closely intertwined. Hope College celebrated its centennial in 1966. Along with the publication of *A Century of Hope, 1866-1966* by Wynand Wichers, Hope used other college publications, particularly the *Alumni Magazine*, to tell its history. The digest version of the book, the October 1966 *Alumni Magazine* included a chronology of the developments of Hope beginning in 1851. This version of the history of Hope started by noting that Van Raalte and a “band of Dutch immigrants” arrived in 1847. The digesters only mentioned anything Dutch or immigration this single instance. The history went on to note that Van Raalte “worked tirelessly” for education in his new colony, starting with the Pioneer School in 1851, of which he famously wrote, “This is my anchor of hope for this people in the future.”

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photographs of the various buildings which signified success and growth. The other photographs interspersed were both presidents and a few select years of graduates. The overall story being told to the alumni of Hope College for its centennial centered around the greatness of Hope itself. The Dutch-American community and support from congregations and the Reformed Church in America played a minor part in the success. Hope would use the centennial year to launch a campaign to raise more money for buildings and programs. The identity of the college, as presented in the centennial story, no longer aligned with the Dutch-American identity that it had used in previous pageants and commemorations. In the 1960s, the leaders of the college presented it as growing out of that shell even if it continued to receive support and students from the community and used the Dutchman as its mascot. Dutchness still played a role, but in a much different way.

Calvin College and Seminary in nearby Grand Rapids, owned by the Christian Reformed Church denomination, celebrated its centennial in 1976. This celebration too required great planning and an impressive amount of administrative effort. The story told in this commemoration paralleled much of the story of Hope ten years earlier that also included John Timmerman’s *Promises to Keep: A Centennial History of Calvin College*. The celebration also needed to coordinate with Calvin Seminary, which had a common board but separate administrations. The story told in the book and digested in a “sight-sound” production entitled “Where is Calvin” emphasized the growth and success so typical of institutional commemorations. The script for the production highlighted the men who had taught at the start of the college and seminary and subsequent growth of buildings and programs. This production traveled to over 100 Dutch-American enclaves in 1976 and 18,000 people viewed it from coast
to coast and in Canada.\footnote{20 April 1976 Minutes of the Central Centennial Committee, Folder 12, Box 630, Calvin Centennial Committee RC C12-30, Heritage Hall, Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Hereafter Heritage Hall. Locations for Centennial Film Presentation, Folder 7, Box 152, William Spoelhof Collection RC C2.1.7, Heritage Hall.} It instilled a pride in the institution from its supporters because of the faith of its founders and their sacrifices. The success also existed because of the continuing faithful support of the constituency that the presentation sought to reach. To further strengthen ties with the constituency, particularly the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin helped produce a special edition of *The Banner* in March 1976. The articles and editorials argued that the connection had been strong and needed to stay strong.\footnote{*The Banner*, 12 March 1976.}

The campus celebrations for the Calvin College and Seminary centennial lasted the entire academic year from 1975 to 1976. It began in November with a convocation headlined by the Dutch Ambassador to the United States. Hope had launched its centennial in April 1965 with a visit by Prince Bernhard, the husband of Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, on the same day he helped dedicate De Zwaan Windmill. Both of these visits highlight the actual connections to the Netherlands both institutions cultivated in the years after World War II. However, this connection could muddle the narrative the institution had constructed over the years. The ambassador’s Calvin convocation address emphasized that the nineteenth-century migrants had left the Netherlands not for religious or economic reasons but “with the zeal of the missionary . . . determined to create, in its fullest aspects and implications, the kind of life and society for which they needed virgin soil. All of this was very
typically Dutch."\(^6^1\) This counter-narrative of migration at the start to the year of commemorations at Calvin never publicly received a challenge. The other major celebrations included a “Jubilee” convocation on the exact date, March 15, when the first professor had been appointed by the Christian Reformed Church synod in 1876. This convocation featured Mark Hatfield, a U.S. Senator from Oregon. Hatfield was the first choice as a speaker for the event on with an address entitled “Christ and the Powers: New Testament Views of the State.”\(^6^2\) This choice of speaker and topic revealed how Calvin College began presenting itself as more than just an institution for the Dutch-American community even if 83% of its students in 1976 still came from the Christian Reformed Church. The college’s growing role in American Christian higher education, represented by Mark Hatfield’s presences and topic of how Christians should be involved in politics, started to shape the direction of the college more than connections to the Netherlands.

The Dutch-American identity in community and college commemorations experienced some major remodeling in years from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. In the Tulip Time festivals, organizers sought to connect with an “authentic” image of the Netherlands that would continue to draw visitors. The colleges of the community worked to redefine themselves away from such a narrow identification as migrant and ethnic institutions but ones that would take their place within the broader milieu of higher education in the United States. However, congregations continued as the primary social institution for most of those who considered themselves Dutch.

\(^6^1\) R. Tammenoms Bakker, “Centennial Convocation,” *Spark*, February 1976, 6. This was the alumni magazine of Calvin College.

\(^6^2\) Central Centennial Committee Minutes, Calvin Centennial Committee, Box 630, Folder 12, Heritage Hall.
American. These institutions also remodeled their sense of shared identity around a common story that had to deal with changing internal dynamics and external challenges.

The late 1950s through the mid-1970s brought new challenges to congregations of Dutch America. If, according to James Bratt, the post-war period saw a “settling down into the nation” for those who claimed a Dutch ethnicity, the 1960s and 1970s required convincing the next generation to remain loyal to the institutions started by their migrant forbearers. The importance of congregational life continued to define the core of being Dutch American. The competing demands on the congregation as a social institution and as a faith community can be seen in the way Dutch congregations in North America commemorated their past during the 1960s and 1970s. Congregational commemorations provide one place to understand how the older generation, whether first generation immigrants in Canada or third and fourth generation ethnics in the United States, constructed a story of faith, effort, and progress to tell the next generation the worth of continuing the local congregation and continue to use a Dutch Protestant ethno-religious identity to understand the North American world. The congregational producers of an ethnic identity relied on constructing a collective memory during the 1960s and 1970s in the hopes that the congregations would retain their vitality.

The congregational commemorations used their past to help construct an ethno-religious identity built on their experience as migrants and as Calvinists. Their memory of leaving in the Netherlands, whether in the nineteenth century or in the pillarized twentieth century, shaped their construction of an ethnic identity in North

America. Their Calvinist ideas about their covenant relationship with God as a people called apart needed to be told over and over. They were Calvinists through a Dutch lens which set them apart from other Calvinists in the United States even as the Dutch language became less of an issue over time. In the 1960s and 1970s, as their faith became less distinctive through ecumenical movements and a general evangelical push, their Dutchness and Old World orientation became an embarrassment for some in the community.

The ethnic identity constructed in the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Canada by Dutch migrants and their descendants reflects this changing reality for ethnic groups and the way the Dutch dealt with it through the stories they told. Congregational stories played an important role in this ethnic identity formation even as what it meant to be a Dutch ethnic continued to change.

The Canadian congregations within the Christian Reformed Church were started in the late 1940s and early 1950s with a new migration from the Netherlands. Migrants from the Netherlands also came to the United States during this period but joined existing ethnic institutions that had a much longer history. The writers of congregational anniversary books in the 1960s and 1970s argued that the institutions were worth preserving and had a role to play even if they were less distinctively Dutch. The language shift had occurred, quickly in the case of Canadian congregations and in some US congregations only in the 1950s after almost 90 years of using at least some Dutch language in their communal life, yet the Dutch ethnic congregation should be preserved. These anniversary books served as a durable memorial to the anniversary celebration. The general pattern of the books had been set prior to the 1960s and the general patterns explained earlier continued in these years.
These books continued to include photographs of preachers of the congregation as well as the buildings erected by the congregation. The books also functioned as a published archive, or memory book, for the congregation. Committees and authors included congregation related photos such as those of current and former consistories and other societies, lists of men who had served as elders and deacons, lists of charter members, and other important details about the history of the congregation. The more self-aware committees and authors of these books would even mention this intent in their forewords or introductions. Houston, British Columbia’s Christian Reformed Church celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1964. Reverend Simon Viss explained that one reason for the publication of the book was that “a great deal of information is available today which will be lost by the time another twenty five years have past.”

The Editor’s Note from the twenty-fifth anniversary book in 1976 of the Christian Reformed Church in Telkwa, British Columbia, noted that for some, the book would “be somewhat of a history book—divulging facts and stories about how the church started and how people lived.” Ray Koning, the author of the fiftieth anniversary of the Chatham, Ontario, Christian Reformed Church in 1976 worried that “much of the story of First church had, prior to this, not been written down” and he was “concerned that some of the history would be lost and forgotten and covered by the grew cloak of receding time.”

Authors and committees that compiled these books also recognized the

64 Houston Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Houston, British Columbia, 1964). Available at Heritage Hall.


66 Chatham Christian Reformed Church, 50th Anniversary, (Chatham, Ontario, 1976). Available at Heritage Hall.
selective nature of the history they were producing. The Christian Reformed Church of Orange City, Iowa, celebrated their centennial in 1971. The book’s authors acknowledged that “it is impossible in a history of this scope to encompass all of the activities of the church, or of the individuals who comprise it.” The authors of the First Christian Reformed Church’s centennial book in Pella, Iowa noted in 1966 that their chronology was “very incomplete. In fact, the real work of the church is often ignored because of its personal nature.” Transcona Christian Reformed Church of Winnipeg, Manitoba celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1978 with a published book. The anniversary committee begged its readers to be gracious and recognize the amount of work that went into the book.

There are possibly many more happenings that could have been written down in this “Historical” write up. Many probably say, “this or that should have been in it.” But it is very difficult to remember everything and very time consuming to contact people, or to go through records, which wer [sic] not made with the aim of giving for future anniversaries. As a Committee we have tried, many evenings have been spent to gather information and to organize. We hope and pray that what has been written in these pages may be interesting, may bring back the past for you, the reader of this write up. May you feel thankfulness in your hearts and give thanks to the Lord for what HE has done for us in these 25 years.

The importance of the books as a collection of information about the congregation was balanced with the fact that authors and committees were selective in the information presented.

67 First Christian Reformed Church, Centennial (Orange City, Iowa, 1971). Available at Heritage Hall.

68 First Christian Reformed Church, Centennial (Pella, Iowa, 1966). Available at Heritage Hall.

69 Transcona Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1978). Available at Heritage Hall.
The writers and compilers of the books chose information that would encourage the whole congregation, but particularly the next generation. In forewords, in pastor’s messages, and in concluding paragraphs, the point was to encourage the next generation to recognize the importance of the past and be persuaded to continue the congregation. The Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Jarvis, Ontario celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1974. The goal of publishing the book, according to the Foreword by Peter Brouwer, was to summarise the “record of our church’s past and as a means of binding us closer together.” The Fruitland Christian Reformed Church in Ontario published its twenty-fifth anniversary book in 1975. The authors concluded their narrative history by reminding the readers that the book told “us the story of His servants, who have faithfully and patiently pointed us to our Father in heaven and the Christian way of life.” The “forward” in the First Christian Reformed Church of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta put it this way, “May this book be a remembrance to all of us and to our children when we read it. May we understand that the work which our fathers and mothers have done to build the church is Kingdom work.” This was not just a Canadian phenomenon either. Rev. Walter Akerman wrote in the fortieth anniversary book of Third Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington in 1978 that the present and future members should “count as precious the memory of those who began the church and gave of themselves that God’s witness might praise His name. We think of the roll call of the church; we see

70 Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Jarvis, Ontario, 1973). Available at Heritage Hall.

71 Fruitland Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Fruitland, Ontario, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.

72 First Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.
names that have lost some luster to the present generation but who nevertheless built
the church with love and devotion and sacrifice; we note too, names from the roll,
parents in the flesh and spirit, and we thank God for our covenant heritage."73

The authors and assemblers of these books, when writing to encourage the
next generation of the congregation, relied on themes that would resonate with their
faith perspective. At least three themes recur throughout the books of the 1960s and
1970s. These themes existed in the books from the United States and Canada, from
rural and urban areas, and from old and young settlements. First, the faith perspective
that God was in control clearly showed itself. The emphasis on a God who worked in
the world through a covenant people shaped the overall narrative.74 Second, the
authors of the historical narrative stressed the great effort extended by the founders of
the congregation. The details might be different from congregation to congregation
but the dedication of the founders to their congregation always played a significant
role in the narrative. While God controlled things, immigrants still had to work.
Finally, the historical narrative noted the progress that had taken place in terms of
both building and membership size. These provided easy evidence of God’s
blessings. These were standard tropes that existed in early books and continued to
have currency for the authors in the 1960s and 1970s reflecting the faith perspective
of these Calvinists.

First, the writers of the narrative history of Dutch Reformed congregations
acknowledge their reliance on God. Whether it commemorated only 25 years, as in

73 Third Christian Reformed Church, 40th Anniversary (Lynden, Washington, 1978). Available at Heritage Hall.

74 Robert Swierenga noted the nature of a covenanted community in his conclusion to Dutch Chicago, 745.
the case of most Christian Reformed congregations in Canada in the 1970s or commemorating the centennials of nineteenth-century establishment of congregations in the United States, this theme demonstrated the role their faith played in interpreting history. In introductions and conclusions, writers noted how God had increased their number and saw fit to bless them. The writer of the twenty-fifth anniversary book of Fruitland, Ontario Christian Reformed Church conveyed this message by saying: “Christ chooses to build His church.”\(^75\) The writers of the historical review in the 1962 tenth anniversary book of the Terrace, British Columbia Christian Reformed Church emphasized that the book was “not to show what we have done, but the leading idea in this review is: What God has done for us—and all we as members of the church did, was done by His grace—and so the theme of this evening is applied to this review: Soli Deo Gloria” [emphasis in original].\(^76\)

Pella, Iowa’s Second Christian Reformed Church celebrated 75 years in 1972. The opening words of the narrative history echoed this sentiment with the words, “The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.”\(^77\) The author of the narrative history in the seventy-fifty anniversary for Hudsonville, Michigan’s First Christian Reformed Church emphasized that though “the people were poor, their number small but with God’s help they persevered.”\(^78\) An often used Bible verse was

\(^{75}\) Fruitland Christian Reformed Church, 25\(^{th}\) Anniversary (Fruitland, Ontario, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.

\(^{76}\) Christian Reformed Church, 10\(^{th}\) Anniversary (Terrace, British Columbia, 1962). Available at Heritage Hall.

\(^{77}\) Second Christian Reformed Church, Going Forward in Faith (Pella, Iowa, 1972). Available at Heritage Hall.

\(^{78}\) First Christian Reformed Church, 75\(^{th}\) Anniversary (Hudsonville, Michigan, 1977). Available at Heritage Hall.
I Samuel 7:12, which recounts how Samuel set up a stone and “named it Ebenezer, saying ‘Thus far has the Lord helped us’” after he defeated the Philistines. According to these books, God had specially blessed these congregations.

Introductions and conclusions as well use of Bible verses in the narrative were only part of the recounting of what God had done. In the messages of pastors to their former parishioners, they stressed the growth of the church as the work of God. Rev. Gerard Bouma noted how “the Lord has prospered us beyond our wildest imaginations” in his letter in the twenty-fifth anniversary book of London, Ontario Christian Reformed Church in 1975. Rev. C. Spoor prodded the Christian Reformed Church in New Westminster, British Columbia to “gratefully observe how God has prospered these efforts.” Pastors reminded the congregation of their Calvinist understanding of how God worked in the world.

The decision to migrate was also prompted and controlled by God, according to the story told in commemoration by these Dutch Calvinists. Migration and the subsequent building of institutions was the work of a God who had the whole world in his hands. Authors emphasized this theme to convince the next generation of the need to continue the institutions of their ethnic group because migration and institution building was God ordained. God wanted them to go to North America and wanted them to establish themselves in the institutions of the ethnic group. This interpretation found expression in the 1960s and 1970s for both the nineteenth and twentieth century immigrants. Celebrating the 125th Anniversary of the founding of


the Graafschap Christian Reformed Church near Holland, Michigan, the author
observed how the group of 1847 migrants

had sought a strictly Reformed church life with Christian instruction
for their children, but because of persecution it was impossible to
worship God according to what they believed was required in God's
Word. God in His providence had endowed these early pioneers with
the desire and the courage to leave their homeland. [...] Each man had
been urged to examine himself prayerfully to make sure that material
gain was not his chief motive for leaving.81

The Red Deer Alberta Christian Reformed Church’s twenty-fifth anniversary book
noted how “the Lord used this movement [the migration] to build a church in
Canada.”82 These commemorations reminded the faithful that God was in control of
their history and this control would continue.

A second theme of these commemorations emphasized the struggle, but
eventual success through sacrifice, of those who established the institutions of the
Dutch immigrant community. While God was clearly the one who gave the increase,
it took the work of the faithful to accomplish the building of institutions. The author
of the centennial anniversary book of the First Christian Reformed Church in Pella,
Iowa in 1966 elaborated.

First Church is very fortunate to possess intact all the minutes and
records from the very first meetings in 1866. These tell a dramatic
story of the struggle of our forefathers to establish and maintain this
church. It is very difficult for those of us who worship and fellowship
in the larger more affluent company of today’s congregation to realize
how much prayer, how many admonitions, how much sacrifice was

81 Graafschap Christian Reformed Church, 125th Anniversary (Holland,
Michigan, 1972). Available at Heritage Hall.

82 First Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Red Deer, Alberta,
1976). Available at Heritage Hall.
required to bring things to where we are today!\(^{83}\)

One pastor drove home the point with recalling how the first offerings received in the congregation were miniscule but reminded the readers: “Don’t forget, however, that these offerings probably involved more sacrifice than a hundredfold more today.”\(^{84}\)

Many authors of the books emphasized how earlier members made the best of the tough situation to encourage the next generation to stay faithful in the relative ease of its current situation. The authors pointed out how these early immigrants had relied on and built the congregation in spite of difficulties. The authors of the Fruitland, Ontario Christian Reformed Church’s 25\(^{\text{th}}\) anniversary book recalled its old, dilapidated building “with squeaky old chairs which sometimes gave way under the weight, and cobwebs and faded streamers hanging from the ceiling. But we worshipped. Here we found Christian fellowship, and friendships were founded. We soon found that it is not a building that makes a Church.”\(^{85}\) The books contained comments about the closeness of the congregation in those tough times. The book of the Terrace Christian Reformed Church in British Columbia noted the “close relationship in those days. The need to come together in society life was greater than it is now perhaps because this was the place where one could speak out.”\(^{86}\) The book of the Riverside Christian Reformed Church, in Wellandport, Ontario, reminded the

\(^{83}\) First Christian Reformed Church, *Centennial* (Pella, Iowa, 1966). Available at Heritage Hall.

\(^{84}\) First Christian Reformed Church, 25\(^{\text{th}}\) Anniversary (Regina, Saskatchewan, 1979). Available at Heritage Hall. Quotation from a letter by Reverend M. Dornbush.

\(^{85}\) Fruitland Christian Reformed Church, 25\(^{\text{th}}\) Anniversary (Fruitland, Ontario, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.

\(^{86}\) Terrace Christian Reformed Church, 25\(^{\text{th}}\) Anniversary (Terrace, British Columbia, 1977). Available at Heritage Hall.
congregation of the excitement of the early years “because everyone participated in building something new. Our weekly meetings were often the only times we saw each other and gave us a chance to tell each other about our homes and our work.” Congregations in the United States also emphasized the closeness of the early years in the face of difficulties as a way to remind the present generation of the need to stay close. For instance, the Third Christian Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington wrote a book that highlighted the “sense of unity and a sacrificial spirit” of the founders. The forces tugging at the loyalty of members of congregations in the 1960s and 1970s needed to be counteracted with stories of close ties within the congregations.

Finally, the commemoration books all emphasized the progress the congregation had made through its shorter or longer history as a spur for the readers to think about how they could continue the story. The congregations that survived the test of time memorialized progress and success in their anniversaries. The fact that only congregations that survived commemorate anniversaries and produce books fails to recognize the number of congregation starts that failed to endure. The successful congregations do not mention the number of failures but assume since they survived that they were specially blessed. The story of progress and success took the form of celebrating the growing number of members and the size and grandeur of the building. Showing that progress in the books took a number of forms. Compilers of the books included photos of successive congregational buildings as popular way to

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87 Riverside Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Wellandport, Ontario, 1977). Available at Heritage Hall.

show progress. The story behind the photos stressed how the congregation had quickly outgrown its buildings. In Canada, many early congregations rented halls or held services in the afternoon after another congregation that owned the building vacated. The recollections of finally owning their own building fill the pages of the commemoration books.

The authors of these books also highlighted the growth of the congregation in terms of number of members. The book of the First Christian Reformed Church in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1977 included one such story from the wife of the first pastor. She recalled how “the faithful few were willing to sacrifice and shoulder responsibilities. Little could we visualize then that twenty five years later there would be a well-established congregation, strong in numbers and witness, in this lovely city of Victoria.” The same book continued the progress theme by noting how the congregation “was happy when it could move up a step; first from the YMCA to a real Church; then to its own church which offered two services.”89 A former pastor of Terrace Christian Reformed Church in British Columbia, Rev. John Hanenburg stressed: “your beginnings were small [. . .] you faced the challenge, you moved forward in that little rough city in its exquisite mountain setting.”90 Many books included tables showing the growth in the number of members with the unacknowledged understanding that migration brought many new faces into their midst.

The three themes outlined above demonstrate the commonalities of Dutch
Calvinist migrants and their descendants in the 1960s and 1970s across the United States and Canada. They reflect how the faith perspective of these Dutch Calvinists with a strong emphasis on God’s role in the migration story shaped the broad outlines of how the past would be commemorated and the history told. God was in control but humans had responsibility and God blessed their efforts. However, the particular milieu of the 1960s and 1970s and the national context showed itself in a number of ways. For instance, many commemorations written in the context of the Cold War emphasized that the reason people had left the Netherlands was for religious freedom. One author boldly asserted, the nineteenth-century immigrants’ ‘earnest desire and determination to be free to worship God as they believed they should, brought them to America, and kept them here through unimaginable difficulties and continued to care for them as they established the church and developed the new community. To Him belongs all the praise!’ The Cold War rhetoric of freedom shaped the language of the commemoration to emphasise the United States as a nation of freedom.

The ecclesiastical setting of the 1960s and 1970s also provided the context for writing these commemoration books. The growth of missionary and evangelical outreach of neo-evangelicals such as Billy Graham influenced these congregations as well. Many congregation anniversary books mentioned the ecumenical Key 73 and the Christian Reformed Church version, Evangelism Thrust. Carl Henry, editor of Christianity Today, organised Key 73 to evangelise all of North America. According to the literature of Key 73, “The plans call for a gigantic offensive in which every person in North America will be challenged with the claims of Jesus Christ.”

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91 Graafschap Christian Reformed Church, 125th Anniversary (Holland, Michigan, 1972). Available at Heritage Hall.

it fell well short of this lofty goal, it did produce some changes even in the Christian Reformed Church which participated in it through its own Evangelism Thrust.\textsuperscript{93} The anniversary books of the Christian Reformed Church noted how this influenced their congregations and even how congregations highlighted their mission efforts throughout their histories. For instance, the First Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington emphasized that the effort “led us to much fruitful self-examination. Training for personal witnessing and visiting was provided.”\textsuperscript{94} The Thunder Bay, Ontario Christian Reformed Church’s book in 1975 lamented that “perhaps through lack of leadership [. . . its] effort amounted to very little.”\textsuperscript{95} These congregations had been influenced by the evangelicalism they found all around them in the ecclesiastical context.

Even with the commonalities across the border, significant differences did exist between the Dutch immigrants and their descendants in the United States and Canada. Demographically, the Dutch in Canada largely immigrated following the Second World War leaving a very different Netherlands than most of the Dutch in the United States who had left in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The Netherlands the Canadian contingent left was a pillarized society that few of the nineteenth and early twentieth century immigrants could fully understand. This separated society created different ideals about how the immigrant institutions should interact with the broader society.


\textsuperscript{94} First Christian Reformed Church, 75\textsuperscript{th} \textit{Anniversary} (Lynden, Washington, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{95} First Christian Reformed Church, 25\textsuperscript{th} \textit{Anniversary} (Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.
The migration experience clearly shaped the details of the story being told in these books but the experience also influenced the memories of the experiences in the 1960s and 1970s as well. The closeness to the experience itself obviously formed the basis for the differences. Numerous commemoration books from congregations in Canada related personal stories by migrants themselves. These stories provided an intimate look at the migration such as the stories in the book from First Christian Reformed Church in Victoria which included many personal memories. The intimacy of these stories shows how Dutch-Canadians remembered their migration experience through more personal recollections than the Dutch-American versions that relied on congregation minutes and other written sources.

The authors of the story in the commemoration books in Canada told about a massive migration that caused congregations to grow. The growth of the congregations came almost completely from new migrants. The author of the book for New Westminster Christian Reformed Church in British Columbia wrote that: “After they had arrived in this country they felt that being here they also had a spiritual and cultural task.” Congregations survived based on their ability to attract new immigrants to their membership rolls. The First Christian Reformed Church in Victoria, British Columbia began their narrative history by noting “the heavy influx of immigrants from the Netherlands [. . .]. Many of them were from Reformed

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background and gradually they swarmed from east to west all over Canada." The migration drove the growth of these congregations and the anniversary books highlighted that fact.

The role of the congregation in uniting Dutch-Reformed immigrants from a variety of backgrounds in the Netherlands was also consistently highlighted by authors. Rev. Ralph Boss recalled how they came together in Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Canada, even though “they often came from different Reformed congregations in the Netherlands, most of them were glad to attend our services, and soon felt at home in our midst. Some who were even fringe-members in the Netherlands became better members here. A few unchurched were led to the Lord.” According to the story told in the fiftieth anniversary book from 1976 of Chatham, Ontario’s Christian Reformed Church, in the 1920s “there were some Baptists, Nederlands Hervormd, etc. For the time being all these different viewpoints and beliefs were held together by a common language and a common need, rather than a common faith or creed. Even those who professed to no religious leanings whatever, found shelter under the wings of the Church.” Rev. H.R. De Bolster noted the “variety of people! From all over the Netherlands they came. Some men and women from other congregations joined the congregation, and a few were added through evangelism outreach” to Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in St.

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98 First Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Victoria, British Columbia, 1977). Available at Heritage Hall.


100 Chatham Christian Reformed Church, 50th Anniversary (Chatham, Ontario, 1976). Available at Heritage Hall.
Catharines, Ontario in 1973. The authors told the story of the congregation as a unifier of Dutch Protestant migrants. Even if almost double the number of migrants after the Second World War went to Canada compared to the United States, Dutch migrants did land in the United States. Theo Van Halsma recalled in the 1964 centennial book of Holland, Michigan’s Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church that “The Reverend Vander Zwaag was conducting profession classes in both Dutch and English, and the congregation was growing through the arrival of new families from the Netherlands who emigrated in the post-war years.”

In Lynden, Washington, the First Christian Reformed Church’s 1975 anniversary book noted: “Because of the influx of Holland immigrants and the needs of a few of the older generation, Rev. Verbrugge volunteered to conduct a Holland service in addition to two American services, so that each Sunday the congregation worshiped God in two American services supplemented by a Holland service held later in the afternoon.”

The books of the congregations in the United States stressed how they accommodated the migration.

The authors of some books in Canada emphasized the help they received from their American brothers and sisters. Port Alberni Christian Reformed Church on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, noted how the congregations in the United States “felt that it was their duty to help the new immigrants and they appointed home

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102 Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Centennial Book (Holland, Michigan, 1964). Available at Heritage Hall.

103 First Christian Reformed Church, 75th Anniversary (Lynden, Washington, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.
missionaries and ministers all over Canada.”\textsuperscript{104} Chatham Christian Reformed Church recalled its especially close connection with the Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The author of the Thunder Bay, Ontario’s First Christian Reformed Church anniversary book highlighted the role of the Christian Reformed Church. The author noted, “much help was received as a church from our fellow Christian Reformed people in the States. Financial help through congregational building fund and private loans, fieldmen and home missionaries, and used clothes. We remember these things with much appreciation.”\textsuperscript{105}

Even though the Canadian congregations remembered their close connection with migration and therefore the Netherlands, congregations in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s also noted their continuing connection with the Netherlands. For instance, Orange City, Iowa’s First Christian Reformed Church remembered their connection with the Netherlands after the Second World War. Through their pastor, Dr. R. Bronkema, and his wife, the congregation participated in the relief effort “being among the first to send packages to friends in the Netherlands after the war.”\textsuperscript{106}

The proximity to migration was not the only difference between the Dutch ethnics in Canada and the United States. The commemorations of the 1960s and 1970s also point to differences in the mindset of the Dutch immigrants and their descendants in the United States and Canada toward the broader world, reflecting at

\textsuperscript{104} Port Alberni Christian Reformed Church, 25\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary (Vancouver Island, British Columbia, 1976). Available at Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{105} First Christian Reformed Church, 25\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary (Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.

\textsuperscript{106} First Christian Reformed Church, Centennial (Orange City, Iowa, 1971). Available at Heritage Hall.
least partly changes in the Dutch society they left. The Dutch-Calvinist immigrants in Canada took a more proactive stance toward the Canadian culture. Coming from the pillarized Netherlands and on the coattails of Abraham Kuyper, these post-World War II immigrants wanted to shape the Canadian culture in a more Christian direction. One pastor implored the congregation to become “loyal Canadians without losing what is best of your Dutch heritage and Reformed world and life view.”

A pastor in Regina, Saskatchewan noted: “In the past our church has served as a spiritual home for immigrations who found it difficult, due to cultural differences, to feel at home in other churches. This role is virtually finished. [...] We have a more important role to play in this city. This city needs a truly Reformed Church.”

The Dutch Canadians felt at home in their new homeland relatively quickly and hoped to be role models for their adopted land.

They not only wanted to build churches, but also other institutions that were commemorated in the 1960s and 1970s as well. For many in the Christian Reformed Church, starting a parent-run Christian school was a vital endeavour to pass on the faith to the next generation. This was true in both the United States and Canada for many years. The difference was the motivation for starting them. In the United States, the reasons given in the 1960s and 1970s for starting the Christian school was a defensive measure against the larger world. The First Christian Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa noted that the schools started and were sustained because “the Christian Reformed Church remains loyal to the tradition of its Dutch forbearers who

107 Rocky Mountain House Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.

108 First Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Regina, Saskatchewan, 1979). Available at Heritage Hall.
objected to governmental limitation upon their churches and schools.” The authors of the Oak Harbor Christian Reformed Church’s anniversary books highlighted that the parents there wanted to start a Christian school in 1938 to separate from a public school that “was introducing subjects like dancing into the curriculum.” The defensive reasons given for starting these schools showed how the authors in the 1960s and 1970s understood the reasons for continuing Christian schools.

In Canada, the Dutch remembered starting their Christian schools for slightly different reasons. The First Christian Reformed Church of Vancouver’s book had a section named “Our School” that recounted how the school was started in 1948 with one teacher and eleven students. The authors of the anniversary book of the Christian Reformed Church in Smithers, British Columbia, highlighted the debates in 1957 “about what should be first: a new church building or a Christian school.” The Holland Marsh, Ontario Christian Reformed Church included a section in their book that remembered the “fact that many of the pioneers in the Holland Marsh were

109 First Christian Reformed Church, Centennial (Orange City, Iowa, 1971). Available at Heritage Hall.


111 It is not clear from the sources if the authors of the anniversary books were familiar with the educational developments in the Netherlands. While the founders of the schools may have started their schools knowing about the “schoolstrijd” in the Netherlands, the language of the anniversary books points towards understanding these commemorators as being against the trends they perceived in the government, or public, schools in the 1960s and 1970s.

112 First Christian Reformed Church, 50th Anniversary (Vancouver, British Columbia, 1976). Available at Heritage Hall.

113 First Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Smithers, British Columbia, 1976). Available at Heritage Hall.
familiar with Christian education in the Netherlands.”

While the congregation had only started in 1950, by 1951 the Fruitland Christian Reformed Church in Ontario had established a Christian School Society, according to the anniversary book of 1975. The almost immediate start of parent-run Christian schools reminded the readers of books in the 1960s and 1970s that the schools started out of a dearly held principle brought from the Netherlands where Calvinist congregations had strongly advocated for government funding of separate, denominational schools. This precious principle had been established in 1917 following the “schoolstrijd” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Accustomed to having separate Christian schools, these immigrants worked hard to establish their schools and to remember the sacrifice it took in Canada to continue the principle of separate schools that were to be a positive example.

Separate, parent-run Christian schools were not the only institutions that Dutch Canadians started to influence the broader culture. The anniversary books remembered how they had started labour organisations, farmer associations, and newspapers. The New Westminster Christian Reformed Church in Vancouver had to start Christian institutions such as schools, presses, social action groups, and radio stations, according to their anniversary book because “they felt […] they had received a mandate. They had been brought up with the conviction that all of life was to be submitted to the Lord who died for them.”

Riverside Christian Reformed Church

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115 Fruitland Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Fruitland, Ontario, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.

emphasized not only school but also its support for the Christian Labour Association of Canada and the Christian Farmer’s Association.117 As Reverend Persenaire recalled about the early founders, “they were not only interested in the growth of the church but also sought to promote God’s kingdom in other areas.”118 These kinds of organisations and the proactive stance toward the broader society were in marked contrast to the commemorations in the United States congregations that only mention the defensive Christian schools. The emphasis on the congregation in the United States reflected the much different situation for leaving the Netherlands in the nineteenth century when the patterns of the community were established.119

This difference in the stance towards the broader world can be seen in other aspects of the commemorations as well. For instance, the Christian Reformed congregations in Canada fondly remembered participating in national events. One such event was the 1967 centennial of the dominion. A Christian school started there in 1967 was named Centennial Christian School.120 Congregations also remember thanking the Canadians for the liberation of the Netherlands. In Wyoming, Ontario, the Christian Reformed Church remembered how the congregation celebrated the


118 Riverside Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Wellandport, Ontario, 1977). Available at Heritage Hall.


120 Terrace, B.C.
twenty-fifth anniversary of Canada helping to free the Netherlands. A large section in its book detailed how the congregation “expressed the thanks of the people of Holland for the sacrifice made by Canadian soldiers. [. . . and] for welcoming Dutch immigrants to Canada where they have found a new purpose in life.” 121 The Christian Reformed Church in Thunder Bay, Ontario, also remembered celebrating the liberation of the Netherlands, reminding themselves that they had sent their choir to Ottawa to participate in a special service. 122

The story told in these anniversary books about the language transition again points to the stance of the congregations towards the broader culture. The authors of books in the United States highlighted how long their congregations maintained the use of the Dutch language until pressure grew so great they could no longer maintain the Dutch language. The First Christian Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa, started a “Hollandsche School” during the summers of 1907 and 1908 so students could learn Dutch according to the centennial anniversary book. 123 Orange City, Iowa’s First Christian Reformed Church’s 1971 book said “though there were still misgivings, the church was coming to realise it was required of God to speak and witness in the language of the country where it was placed” after nearly 90 years of using Dutch. 124 Oak Harbor, Washington, Christian Reformed Church started because at first joined United Presbyterian Church but many “were unable to understand the English Bible


122 First Christian Reformed Church, 25th Anniversary (Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1975). Available at Heritage Hall.

123 First Christian Reformed Church, Centennial (Orange City, Iowa, 1971). Available at Heritage Hall.

124 Ibid.
language. [. . .] the urge and desire to organize a church of our own denomination was so strong that soon action was taken.”

First Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington, held onto Dutch while two other Christian Reformed congregations started in Lynden that used English only.

The story in the Canadian congregations emphasized the quick and almost immediate transition to at least using some English. The New Westminster, British Columbia’s Christian Reformed Church’s anniversary book pointed out that the founders’ “conviction that they should be a Canadian church led them early to become an English speaking church.” The congregation used English within two months of starting.

In a long chronology of historical highlights, the authors of the Terrace Christian Reformed Church anniversary book took pains to call attention to every change in the quick transition to English.

The Wyoming, Ontario, Christian Reformed Church’s book underscored how it had used English from the beginning of its organisation.

Congregational anniversary books provide one source for looking at how people in the pews constructed their story and not just denominational or national leaders. These books were directed at those within the congregation for their own edification. While it is clear only a few people in each congregation actually wrote


the books, they had to work within the parameters of what would be acceptable to their readers. However, this does not mean that the particular author had no leeway as many acknowledged the subjective nature of writing their history.

The stories told by Dutch ethnics in congregations in the 1960s and 1970s reflected an identity tied to both their faith perspective and their relationship to the migration experience. The Calvinist religion these immigrants took with them stressed the leading of God throughout the migration experience. He was the one who guided the decisions and blessed the immigrants’ endeavours. By examining both sides of the border, this study argues that the similarities in the United States and Canada point to the shared faith perspective of Dutch Calvinists within the Christian Reformed Church. The differences point to the proximity to the migration and the differences in the Netherlands that they left. The relationship to the migration experience for those who landed in Canada and the United States varied considerably because of the historical changes in the Netherlands. The context of the 1960s and 1970s in each country also shaped the story these congregations would tell about themselves.

Congregational commemorations helped to construct an ethnic identity useful for the continuation of the ethnic institutions, particularly the local congregation. Scholars have noted the importance of the local congregations as both social and meaning making institutions. This study shows how the older generation produced commemorations to pass on a loyalty to the institutions of the ethnic community and its shared identity. They constructed an ethnic identity that emphasized loyalty to separate institutions as a key component coming out of a religious understanding that stressed being a covenant people with separate institutions that God had specially blessed. The importance of passing on this loyalty in the local congregation to the
next generation whose faithfulness was being tested in the 1960s and 1970s did not escape the leaders of the commemorations.

**Conclusion**

By 1976, the Dutch-American community had changed significantly from 1957. For instance, the confidence exhibited in the Christian Reformed Church’s centennial in that year had been replaced by a community not quite sure of its identity as its story told in commemorations did not have the clarity the earlier versions exhibited. The members of the Reformed Church in America dealt with being part of the religious mainstream at the same time holding their shared identity. These transitions resulted from internal pressures such as the spreading out of the community geographically, the influence the Canadian-Dutch began to effect, and the questioning of the institutions’ worth. External pressures from a changing American society and the place of ethnics and evangelical Christians forced the community to continually navigate the choppy waters of ethnic identity construction. By 1976, being Dutch American still meant being part of a congregation within a denomination that traced its roots to the Netherlands and claimed to be Calvinistic. It also meant supporting the educational institutions whether that was private elementary and secondary schools or colleges where networks of similar people worked together. However, these institutional networks began to expand in new ways. No longer did CRC and RCA mission efforts only mean starting congregations where Dutch Americans settled. Outreach efforts sought to evangelize a much larger demographic. The educational institutions also saw themselves more than just narrowly serving the Dutch-American community. These contacts with those who were part of the institutional matrix by consent but could not trace their descent to the Netherlands
required a change in the way the institutions commemorated themselves. The migration story took a more and more minor role. At the same time, the Dutch aspect showed a renewed push in the Tulip Time festivals. A quest for “authentic” Dutch in these festivals could be seen as a response to the lessening of the Dutch aspect in the institution and a broader societal search for something authentic. Dutch became something to “stage” and “play” at but had less and less real influence on the everyday actions of the people. This also reflected the broader roots movement of the time where whites recaptured their ethnic identity. A shared identity still shaped the people in the institutions of Dutch America and convinced them to remain in the institutions, however, the Dutch-American appellation had less and less to do with the actual Netherlands.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Dutch America was constructed by people who faithfully remembered their past. This group of people who had a shared experience of either migrating from the Netherlands or being descendants of those who did stuck together around a shared identity and institutions. Their identity and institutions reinforced each other as they navigated the events and culture of the 20th century in their own way. The developments of this group also contributed to that American culture as they reflected ideas of freedom and opportunity, economic success, and acculturation. These were people who navigated their lives through their ethnoreligious community that was built, maintained, and remodeled to fit their needs and reflect their experience in dealing with the events and culture of the twentieth century. The main way they dealt with the twentieth century was by building and staying in their institutions. Particularly key for this group was their congregations and their denominations where they had their primary relationship and where they shared their deepest beliefs and cultural patterns. These congregations and denominations also encouraged educational institutions which reinforced these ideas for the next generation.

These Dutch migrants and their descendants understood, encountered, and participated in the events of the twentieth century through their particular view of themselves that was created, maintained, and reinforced through their narratives they told about themselves when commemorating themselves and their institutions. Their narratives and collective memory of their past relied upon and was shaped by their
faith and theology, just like the other actions of their lives. Their Calvinistic theology
gave them their justification to maintain their institutions. Calvinistic theology relied
on ideas about the sovereignty of God who chose certain people to be his people.
This was used by the Dutch Americans to say they were his chosen people who
needed to stay in their institutions to show their faithfulness.

The Dutch American belief of being God’s chosen people engaged broader
cultural images of what it meant to be Dutch. Tulip Time festivals helped create and
keep Dutch images that were more palatable to the American culture in the forefront
of the minds of Dutch Americans. As they yearly put on these festivals, the image of
the Netherlands performed for an outsider audience did not always match what they
were actually living but a kind of invented tradition that fit their need and attracted an
American audience. They chose to emphasize certain aspects of their Dutchness like
wooden shoes and windmills but not their particular Calvinistic theology.

Being Dutch American then, had consequences for how these people chose to
pattern their lives in the twentieth century. They placed great emphasis on sticking
together to remain faithful and loyal. They built separate institutions and then worked
very hard to maintain them by telling narratives about them that reinforced their
particular understanding of why they were so important. These narratives were
shaped by internal and external dynamics including the Tulip Time Festivals and new
migrations and major world events like World War II and the Cold War. They
navigated the twentieth century by faithfully remembering their past to build
institutions that shaped the way they encountered the twentieth century.

The narratives they constructed about themselves tell us how they understood
themselves from the 1920s to the 1970s. While actions say something, how did they
understand their actions and what they were doing? How did they give voice and
meaning to their actions? The best sources to answer these questions were commemorations. Congregations, denominations, and schools all celebrated themselves at milestones such as 25th, 50th, and 100th anniversaries. One of the lasting features of these events was the books they published. From simple to ornate, from short to very long, these books set down the official narrative for the institution. Having examined over 400 of these books from the institutions in the United States and Canada, they are a wonderful source for examining how the writers thought about the institutions and the discourse they participated in as they wrote. The other major source was the community celebrations such as centennials which had a much more public record including newspapers, minutes of committees and published books. Tulip Time festivals also left a more public and published record but not to the extent I would have imagined.

The framing of the narratives took place within a particular context of the social reality of the community. The community that I examine started in the middle of the 19th century when, as Robert Swierenga has shown, the economic, religious, and family demographics shaped who migrated to the United States and established the patterns of the community even if subsequent migrants did not share all of the same characteristics. In the United States, these Dutch Protestant migrants established their own Calvinistic congregations, grouped together in denominations, and taught their children in their own schools and colleges.

By the 1920s and the slowing of the Dutch migration and Americanization efforts of World War I and the 1920s, the community moved from having institutions that they relied on for survival to choosing to stay in the institutions. The narratives they constructed about themselves and their past reflected the community as it stood in the 1920s and 1930s and trying to keep people loyal despite the Americanization
pressures and Great Depression which stretched their resources. The narratives also showed the fissures of the community between two different approaches to America, one more embracing and the other more cautious. At the same time, the community as a whole recognized the possibilities of hosting Tulip Time festivals that would show the American audience they were loyal Americans and contributed to the United States.

During World War II, the community worked doubly hard to keep its institutions intact as the ordeal of war in the armed forces and on the homefront pulled the members ever more into contact with others. The narratives during the war emphasized the loyalty of the group members and the love of freedom they brought to the United States as well as their service to the war effort. At the same time, a more contemporary view of the Netherlands entered the narratives through the work of the Netherlands Information Bureau in Holland which sought to give the Netherlands a good name in the United States more broadly.

After World War II during the 1950s, the community had some years to spread its legs. It reveled in the freedom that allowed them to keep their separate institutions but they also needed to justify their separate institutions as not dangerous. The centennials of Pella and Holland and the Christian Reformed Church all happened during this period as well as the rapid growth of Tulip Time Festivals which all allowed the community to justify and use its institutions to cope with the world they saw around them.

Finally, the members of the community had to deal with the culture of the 1960s and its aftermath. Again, the members of the institutions understood that they were building institutions for God and being faithful to them meant something important. They wanted an “authentic” experience in their lives and they tried to be
“authentic” to the Netherlands as possible too.

This dissertation has illuminated at least three important aspects of the American experience. First, religion mattered for how Dutch American encountered and navigated the twentieth century. They interpreted their experience through their theology and thought of themselves first as being “reformed/Calvinistic” in a very particular sense. For other Americans in the twentieth century, the importance of a framing reference, whether a formal belief system or informal understanding, these “religions” mattered to how people understood their lives.

Second, ethnicity is a construction that Dutch Americans used to navigate the twentieth century. It did not occur in a vacuum of internal or external pressures but was built on a particular telling of the past and a collective memory. Ethnicity had consequences for those who shared the identity and was not just symbolic. For Dutch Americans, it meant they built institutions and Tulip Time festivals.

Finally, chronology matters for how religion and ethnicity influence actions. The implications of being Dutch American and what exactly it meant to be Dutch American changed over time. It did not go away through World War II, the 1950s or the 1970s even for an ethnoreligious group that should melted into the American culture based on demographic features such as white, protestant, and economic success. They chose their institutions and identity because of their theology.
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