The Dutch in Urban America

Robert P. Swierenga, Donald Sinnema, and
Hans Krabbendam
Editors

The Association for the Advancement
of Dutch-American Studies

Fourteenth Biennial Conference Papers

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To Hendrik Sliekers

Librarian, curator, scholar

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Acknowledgements

The fourteenth biennial conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies met on 5-7 June 2003 in Chicago, the nation's second city. So the program committee deemed it fitting to focus on the urban Dutch experience. Prior conferences had generally dealt with the Dutch in the rural colonies in the Midwest—in Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin, and elsewhere, where about three-quarters of the nineteenth century immigrants settled. The urban Dutch now receive their due.

Two sessions at the conference were devoted to significant new books in the field of Dutch American history—Robert P. Swierenga's *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002) and Suzanne M. Sinke's *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880-1920* (University of Illinois Press, 2002). Four scholars in each session commented on the book under review and the author responded, after which the conferees joined in a spirited discussion. The sessions were among the largest and most lively, but the format did not lend itself to formal papers. Commentators on Swierenga's book included Richard Harms (chair), Martin Essenburg, Melvin Holli, and James La Grand. Discussants of Sinke's book were Kathleen De Haan (chair), Hans Krabbendam, Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, and Lisa Jaarsma Zylstra. Following the formal sessions, the conferees on Saturday afternoon boarded a bus to tour the former Dutch settlement of Roseland and the nearby Pullman Palace Car Works, whose manufacturing plants employed hundreds of Hollanders. The book sessions and the tour were so popular that future program committees would be well advised to emulate them.

Three conference papers, those by Gerlof Homan, Paul Petraitis, and David Snyder, are not included here because the authors did not submit copies or they plan to publish elsewhere.

Many people contributed to the conference, *The Dutch Experience in Urban America*. Professor Donald Sinnema of Trinity Christian College took the lead as program chair and conference organizer. Hans Krabbendam and Robert Swierenga joined him on the program committee. At the opening night reception, Sinnema drew upon his forthcoming history of Trinity Christian College to recount briefly the founding and growth of the institution, which recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary.

Geoffrey Reynolds, director of the Joint Archives of Holland, solicited the papers of the participants, Robert Swierenga edited and arranged them for publication, and Lori Trethewey, secretary in the Joint Archives, accomplished the desktop publishing of the book. Michael Douma, a senior history major in Hope College, did some of the graphics and assisted in preparing the index. It is our hope that this book will find a well-deserved place alongside the previous conference volumes, and that it will make a lasting contribution to the study of Dutch American history.

Introduction

The Dutch were among the least urban of all immigrant groups; indeed, in 1920 they ranked seventeenth. Yet that year the federal census reported that more Dutch people lived in cities than in the countryside. On the east and west coasts, two-thirds of the Dutch lived in urban centers, but in the Midwest the urban proportion was closer to one-third. As a specific group and locale, the urban Dutch received little attention from immigrant scholars. This volume of essays adds a welcome chapter to Dutch immigration history, by presenting recent research and providing an overview of the Dutch experience in urban America. Not all essays have a strictly urban focus, because the urban experience was not an isolated phenomenon. The city colonies were part of a national network of Dutch communities and had close links with rural settlements.

As Robert Swierenga points out in his opening essay, the city Dutch suffered from cultural uprooting more than did their compatriots in the farm colonies and small towns, where typical Dutch *gezelligheid* (coziness, conviviality) was the norm. Big cities, like Chicago and Detroit, were crowded, noisy, and impersonal. This atmosphere could be very threatening to newcomers who mostly came off the farm in the Old Country. The risk of losing one's cultural identity and heritage was also far higher in the cities. Yet, the papers by Swierenga and James Evenhuis in this book show that the Dutch Reformed churches and Christian schools anchored urban neighborhoods, just as they did rural villages. Nonetheless, the urban Dutch assimilated faster than did their rural compatriots.

If the Chicago Dutch are famous as scavengers, the Detroit Dutch are renowned as carpenters and homebuilders, according to Evenhuis. Some Dutch laborers found their way into the auto factories, just as the

Dutch in Roseland worked in the nearby Pullman Palace Car factories. The Dutch Reformed did not discover Detroit until the era of World War Two, when war production jobs drew them from Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and other Dutch locales in western Michigan. Evenhuis's paper is the first history of the Dutch in Detroit and offers a foretaste of his projected full-length work on the subject.

The causes of Dutch emigration to America in the 1840s were both religious and economic. The Secession of 1834 in the State Church set off a decade of religious unrest and government suppression of the dissenters. At the same time, diseases in the mid-1840s in the potato and rye crops, both staples of the poor, cause widespread economic hardship. The desire of the Seceders for freedom of worship is well known, but Janet Sjaarda Sheeres explores another key aspect, the demand for freedom of education—the right to run free Christian schools, which the Dutch government stifled under the Education Law of 1806. Sheeres draws a direct connection between the 1806 law and the emigration of 1847. The Seceders valued "free schools" as much as "free churches." Sheeres relies on Dutch language sources little used by American scholars and makes a signal contribution to our knowledge of the 1840s emigration.

The depths of the Seceders' commitment to a pious and living faith is demonstrated in Joel Beeke's paper on the True Dutch Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois. Founded by ultra-pietists with roots in the Reformed Church Under the Cross, centered in the province of Zuid Holland, the True Dutch group in South Holland seceded in 1886 from the First Christian Reformed Church of South Holland, led by its German-born pastor, Rev. Ede L. Meinders. The congregation is today the only Netherlands Reformed Church in greater Chicagoland. Beeke traces the history of this small congregation from the mid-nineteenth century to its uncertain status today with only twenty-nine "souls." It is a riveting story of stubborn determination and typical Dutch independence in religious life.

To soften the blows immigrants suffered in impersonal big city environments due to job loses, injuries, sickness, and other untoward events, the Dutch consular officials were often called on to provide assistance to their nationals. Even more important, the consuls promoted trade and commerce between the two nations. Hans Krabbendam's paper provides a study of the Netherlands consuls-general in urban America, especially Chicago, Grand Rapids, and San Francisco, and the many ways in which consuls promoted the interests of the two countries. George

Birkhoff, Jr. in Chicago and John and Jacob Steketee in Grand Rapids receive considerable play in the paper.

Michigan was the serendipitous birthplace of one of the world's leading mathematicians, George David Birkhoff, son of Chicago consul general George Birkhoff, Jr. The Birkhoff family, originally from the province of Zuid Holland, was solidly grounded in Chicago and its Dutch Reformed churches. This upwardly mobile family in the second generation moved outside Dutch immigrant circles and became hyphenates through intermarriage. Huug van den Dool, a climatologist and a Dutch immigrant himself, rescues George David Birkhoff from obscurity by revealing his illustrious career in science that brought him international acclaim. That no Dutch American book of notables mentions Birkhoff shocked and surprised Van den Dool, as it will all those who read his path-breaking paper.

One urban occupation that was unique to the West Michigan Dutch was boat building, especially the famous Chris Craft pleasure boats with their sleek wooden hulls and smooth lines. The paper of Geoffrey Reynolds provides an overview of this niche industry in Holland from its Dutch-immigrant beginnings in the 1840s, to the commercial vessels and schooners of non-Dutch owners. Most remarkable is the rise of the pleasure boat era in the early twentieth century.

Urban real estate promoters and railroad companies left their mark on the rural landscape all across the frontier. Robert Schoone-Jongen traces the rise of one such "model town," the Dutch colony of Leota, in southwest Minnesota, at the hands of Close Brothers & Co., a Scottish-financed land development company, and Alexander Mitchell of the Milwaukee Road RR, who was backed by Rockefeller money. The Close Bros. firm gained the attention of first generation Dutch farmers in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa, notably Martin Kallemeyn of Hospers, Iowa, who recruited other Hollanders. Soon two churches, one Christian Reformed and one Reformed, faced each other on the village's only street and Leota became a typical church village. But it also had a grain elevator to store and ship grain by rail to Milwaukee and Chicago.

Cities always needed an agricultural hinterland with "truck farmers" or market gardeners to supply their tables with fresh fruits and vegetables. Throughout the United States, Dutch immigrant seized this opportunity and settled on muck soils that they knew how to drain, tile, and cultivate. David L. Zandstra grew up in one such locality, the Calumet region of northern Indiana, where Dutch market gardeners cultivated

vegetables on the fertile marshlands, notably onion sets. Zandstra's paper is a fascinating account of the marketing system the Dutch developed to sell their produce to urban customers in Chicago and suburbs. During the Great Depression, the author notes that stoop labor to cultivate the crops, surprisingly, were the very children and spouses of the eastern European Catholics in the city who bought the Dutch produce. Urban and rural labor markets were as intertwined as produce markets.

David Zwart's paper describes the history of a Dutch American farming settlement in the San Joaquin Valley of central California that is quite unlike the Midwest Dutch farm colonies. It is clearly "on the periphery," in terms both geographical, culture, and in cropping. The hardpan desert soils stymied the first Hollanders who in the 1890s succumbed to the promotional allures in Merced and Fresno counties of the Holland California Land Company. The Queen Wilhelmina Colony in Hanford (present-day Kings County) fared better. The soil was fertile and the nearby Kings River provided irrigation water. Dutch farmers came in sufficient numbers to claim fourth place in Kings County among all immigrant groups. Hanford, the county seat, soon had a thriving Christian Reformed Church, and later a Christian school. In the 1940s the county counted more than five hundred residents of Dutch ancestry. Zwart's paper is a preview of his forthcoming master's thesis on the subject.

Robert P. Swierenga

Contributors:

Joel R. Beeke (Ph.D., Westminster Theological Seminary) is president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics in Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, pastor of Heritage Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and editor of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*. He has written numerous books, most recently *Truth that Frees, A Reader's Guide to Reformed Evangelism, Puritan Evangelism*, and *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors.*

James Evenhuis (BA, Hope College, and AMLS, University of Michigan), was director of branch libraries, Detroit Public Library. He later did graduate work in archival studies at Wayne State University and works currently at the Detroit Public Library's Burton Historical Collection.

Hans Krabbendam (Ph.D., University of Leiden) is assistant director of the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg, The Netherlands. He is the author of *Model Man: A Life of Edward W. Bok, 1863-1930* (2001), as well as many edited books on European (Dutch)-American relations. He is currently president of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies.

Geoffrey Reynolds (B.S., Central Michigan University; M.L.I.S., Wayne State University) is Director of the Joint Archives, Hope College, and holds the rank of Assistant Professor at Hope College. He is a local authority on the boat-building industry of Holland, Michigan and is writing a book on the subject. He is currently president of the Michigan Archival Association.

Robert Schoone-Jongen (Ph.D. candidate, University of Delaware) is assistant professor of history in Calvin College. He is currently completing his dissertation on "The Dutch American Colonies of Theodore F. Koch." Formerly he taught social studies at Central Minnesota Christian High School, Edgerton, Minnesota.

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres is a historian and genealogist who works as an administrative assistant in the Psychology Department at Calvin College,

and serves as associate editor of *Origins: The Historical Magazine of the Calvin Heritage Hall Archives.* She specializes in family history and has published in both history and genealogy journals. Currently, she is completing a book-length biography of Douwe Vander Werp, a founding cleric and leader in the Christian Reformed Church.

Robert P. Swierenga (Ph.D., University of Iowa) is Albertus Christian Van Raalte Research Professor in the A.C. Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, and professor of history emeritus, Kent State University. His latest book is *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (2003).

Huug van den Dool (Ph.D., University of Tilburg) is a scientist in the Climate Prediction Center in Washington, DC, and an adjunct professor in the department of meteorology in the University of Maryland. He has published more than 100 articles on meteorology and climatology. As an immigrant himself in 1982, he is interested in the history and genealogy of his family, and more broadly in the Dutch immigrants from Noordeloos, province of Zuid Holland, to Noordeloos, Michigan.

David L. Zandstra (B.A., Calvin College) is a veteran social studies teacher at Illiana Christian High School in Lansing, Illinois. He had written extensively on the Dutch in the Calumet region of northern Indiana.

David Zwart (B.A., Dordt College) taught social studies at Central Valley Christian Schools in Visalia, California. He is currently writing his master's thesis in history at California State University, Fresno, on the history of Dutch immigration to Kings County, California from 1890 to 1940.