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The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 03.02: Summer 1991

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The Joint Archives Quarterly

Volume 3 Number 2

Summer 1991

Special Depot Issue

Railroading Played Key Role in Holland



Holland Historical Trust Collection of the Joint Archives

The Holland depot which preceded the current structure.

Locomotives, trains, railroading — they have been part of the fabric of American life for more than 150 years. It was the railroads that helped make travelling easier in the United States in much of its post-Revolutionary period. Rather than requiring days and weeks to arrive at a distant place it could be accomplished in only a fraction of that time.

Holland itself became linked to the world just over 20 years after the first Dutch settler set foot on the banks of Black Lake (Macatawa). The first issues of the local newspaper — printed in Dutch — advocate for a railroad in the 1850s. In 1868 the first railroad company was incorporated and by 1870 Holland had two railroads, the Michigan Lakeshore and the Chicago and Michigan Lakeshore. The first came through Allegan and the latter up from New Buffalo.

When the disastrous fire swept the community in October of 1871 both railroad depots were spared. The east end of town, including the Pillar church and Hope's Van Vleck Hall, was not touched by the flames. One of the reasons that the city could rebuild was the availability of this transport to bring in building materials which were scarce given the multitude of fires in the midwest, including the Chicago disaster.

In 1881 the successors to the two railroads merged into the Chicago and West Michigan Railway Co. Holland served as its operating headquarters. Some local businessmen, unhappy with the line's service, attempted to form the Grand Rapids, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad but failed. Its right of ways were purchased by the existing line.

It was the dawning of this century that saw the name change to the well known Pere Marquette Railroad after a further merger of the Flint and Pere Marquette, the Detroit, Grand Rapids and Western Railroad and the line in Holland. Today's

(Continued on page 2)

Railroading Program November 16

November 16 is the date when the Joint Archives is sponsoring "Depots and Their Past: A Story of Railroading" that will take a look at depots in Michigan and their unique function in the mythology and day to day practice of running a railroad.

Although Sam Breck claims no authority on the subject of railroad depots he is well known for his knowledge on the subject. He will use a multimedia approach to telling his stories

(Continued on page 2)

The Joint Archives Quarterly

From the Archivist

Summer is quickly coming to a close and with it the opportunity of publishing our "summer" issue of the Quarterly. It has been a busy one for us and an exciting one.

This issue is scheduled a little late to coincide with the dedication of the Louis and Helen Padnos Transportation Center, a place that up to now the members of the Depot Acquisition/Renovation Committee - and the rest of Holland - have just been calling "the depot." It has turned out beautifully and it has been an exciting privilege to be involved. I encourage *Quarterly* readers to attend if they can.

The fall conference "The Dutch and their Faith: Immigrant Religious Expression in the 19th and 20th Centuries" has also been a major focus for us. Many well known presenters will be with us and the dialogue will be exciting! Topics to be discussed will include CRC-RCA union discussions, Dutch Catholics, the Protestant Reformed Church and the numbers of remaining Dutch in the churches. Keynote Ronald Jager will be particularly interesting. The conference is September 19 & 20. Registration is still possible: \$15 for individuals, \$25 for couples and \$5 if you care only to attend the keynote.

Going on sale October 7 is the supplement to the *Guide to the Collections*. This item includes our photographic, vertical, biographical and pamphlet files. This publication is over 180 pages in length and has been a major undertaking for us. I would recommend that libraries, individuals and others who do research in the collections order this companion volume. It is \$9.95 and an order coupon can be found on page 5.

Two Dutch library students have joined us this fall and are working in various areas of the Van Wylen Library. They have also spent a week with us. The students learned of Hope College and the Joint Archives through our placement of a *Guide to the Collections* in the U.S. Embassy in the Netherlands!

In the month of August more than 100 patrons were helped by the Joint Archives staff. Usage has been steadily increasing and it is rewarding to be able to help such a wide variety and large number of people. This is the core of what the Joint Archives is about - helping people learn about the past through the use of archival materials.

Larry J. Wagenaar



Railroads in Holland

(Continued from page 1)

mergers do not seem so unusual in the light of this industry's history.

The second depot on the current site, a used depot from Oakdale Park in Grand Rapids, was brought to Holland on rail cars and assembled from several pieces. This structure was later abandoned, moved across the tracks and the depot which is now renovated was built on the site in 1925.

The current structure is a solid and attractive depot that serves as a flagship for the city. It has a long and rich history that can now be continued.

(Editor's note: Robert Vande Vusse supplied background dates and information for this article.)

Railroading Program

(Continued from page 1)

pulling on the many photographic images in his collection. Mr. Breck will be able to illustrate the unique role a depot plays in the life of various communities. It also ties in well with the September dedication of the Louis and Helen Padnos Transportation Center in Holland.

The Joint Archives will also have on display the contents of the 1925 time capsule which was removed from the Historic Pere Marquette depot (now the Louis and Helen Padnos Transportation Center) in the fall of 1990. It includes period newspapers, pre-Tulip Time Holland brochures and examples of period railroad publications. Also on hand will be memorabilia from private collections used to complement the documentary materials which is the focus of the archives' collections.

Sam Breck is a self-employed marketing and sales promotion consultant. He has written two books one about life in Ann Arbor and the other focusing on small towns in Michigan. He was also editor of *The Inside Track*, a bimonthly journal of history and news about Michigan railroads.

"Depots and Their Past: A Story of Railroading" will be held at 3 p.m. in Graves Hall across from the Van Wylen Library. The public is encouraged to attend. Admission is \$2.

Hope College 125th Anniversary Book

This year Hope College is celebrating the 125th anniversary of its incorporation in 1866. In addition to assisting the college with a large number of historical research and reference requests the staff has been involved in organizing a retrospective look in an upcoming book being issued by the school.

Archivist Larry Wagenaar has assembled approximately 60 photographs that give an overview of Hope's history from its beginnings in the 1850s to the present.

Throughout the year articles will appear in the publication *News From Hope* highlighting significant and not so significant aspects of the college's history.

Initial sales of the book will be through mail order from the Office of Public Relations, Hope College, Holland, MI 49423.

Happy Birthday Hope!

The Joint Archives Quarterly

The Depot (1933-1936)

By
Lois Menken

The renovation of the Holland depot evokes some of my earliest and fondest memories. These memories are of my grandfather, Peter Koopman, who was an agent for the Pere Marquette Railroad, and the hours I spent visiting him at the depot between the years of 1933 and 1936.

My uncles would drive me to the station where Grandpa would meet me wearing his "work" clothes. Suit coat disposed of he would be in shirt sleeves, his collar high and stiff, sleeves rolled up and held in place with garters, a green eyeshade perched on his forehead.

I always hoped a train would arrive while I was there as that could mean a ride. If it was a freight train I would ride in the cab with the engineer and fireman, all the way to the Waverly Yard. Often Grandpa would ride along hopping off at various spots to check things, switches I guess. I would sometimes be allowed to "blow" the whistle which meant being hoisted up so I could grab the dangling rope and pull with all my might. It never occurred to me that the big hand beneath mine was doing the actual pulling.

The arrival of a passenger train might mean a ride in the parlor car or coach. The seats were high, with doilies on the backs and arms. The upholstery scratched the back of my legs. I felt quite grand as I waved to the people in automobiles that were stopped at the Eighth Street crossing.

Then, there was the dining car. Pure elegance. The tables were covered in white linen and set with gleaming silver, white china, sparkling crystal, and a flower in a bud vase. It was there that this 4 or 5 year old "Hollander" encountered her first black man or "person-of-color" as they said in those days.

After my "trip," usually just a few blocks one way or the other, we would roll back into the station where people would be gathered to board the train. The conductor would hold the passengers back as he lifted me from the train making me feel like a princess.

If no train arrived while I was visiting I would make myself at home in the



Photo courtesy of Lois Menken

Peter Koopman (left) and Lois at the depot in 1933 or 1934. The man at right is not identified.

waiting room with its polished, pew-like benches and big, brass buckets. I didn't know what those buckets were for until I saw several men spit in them. If they could, so could I. I churned up every bit spit my small mouth would hold, looked around to see if anyone was watching, puckered up, took aim and blew. I missed. I also got caught. Here came Grandpa with a handful of sawdust, a broom and a piece of cardboard. He sprinkled the sawdust on the mess and swept it onto the cardboard. I don't remember his exact words but, by way of reprimand, he told me I'd better learn to spit straighter before I did it again in "his" depot.

In his office there stood a huge desk, at least to a little girl it was huge. If memory serves me right there was a light bulb with a semi-transparent shade hanging over the desk. On top there was a blotter-like desk pad, an inkwell, several long, wooden pens, with spare nibs in a little

dish and a blotter fixed in a curved holder with a handle on top. It was, I thought, the neatest thing I'd ever seen. There was also a box-like instrument with two brass knobs on top that bounced up and down and clickety-clacked. Sometimes Grandpa would grab a pen, dip it in the inkwell and write, in his flowing script, on a pad of paper and blot it with that neat, rolling blotter. Other times he would clickety-clack himself by tapping rapidly on those brass knobs. Sometimes after he wrote down what I now know was a message in Morse Code, he would rip it off the pad and hurry out to the platform. On his way out he would turn, point to that instrument and admonish me to "never, ever touch that." Of course the minute he left my tiny fingers just itched to reach out and do some clickety-clacking of my own. As tempting as it was I never touched those brass knobs as to do so might mean banishment forever from that wonderful place.

Grandpa, though not a Holland (Michigan) native, was extremely proud of his Dutch heritage. In those early days of the Tulip Festival he donned a Dutch costume and wooden shoes to greet Tulip Time visitors who came by rail. One year when I was about four years old, I helped. In my "Dutch Girl" costume of light blue and white, I earned a fortune in pennies posing for tourists in front of the tulip beds that had been planted around the station.

Grandpa died unexpectedly in 1936 ending my very special relationship with my loving, indulgent grandfather. It also ended my visits to the depot. No journey by train ever again sparked the excitement of those short trips to the Waverly Yard. The seats no longer scratched my legs, the doilies were gone and the dining car, though beautifully appointed, didn't seem quite so elegant.

The depot, as it has in the past, may be remembered by some as a place of joy where loved ones were greeted. To others it may hold sad memories of saying good-bye to sons or daughters going off to war or seeking their fortunes elsewhere. To me it is remembered as a magic place where a little girl could "blow" the whistle of a locomotive, wave like a princess to her subjects and spit in a spittoon.

The Joint Archives Quarterly

The Processor's Table

by
Craig G. Wright
Assistant Archivist

This summer I have had an opportunity to review many of the materials housed here at the archives and I have come across some very early materials which predate the founding of Holland. Since these items relate more to American history than local Holland history, their value is not so much due to research potential but more because of their age and display interest.

The pamphlet file of the Western Theological Seminary collection is rich in early materials, most of which help document the early history of the Reformed Church in America. The earliest example of this is the text of a 1628 letter written by Jonas Michaelius, the first minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in the United States. We do not have the original, but copies which were published in the late 1800s. Probably the earliest printed work we have is from 1737, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls, in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of New Hampshire, in New England; in a Letter to the Rev. Dr. Colman, of Boston, Written by the Rev. Mr. Edwards, Minister of Northampton, on Nov. 6, 1737.*

There are eight other pamphlets from the 18th century in the collection, most of them are sermons. One of the more interesting of these is *A Discourse on National Sins: Delivered May 9, 1798; Being the Day Recommended by the President of the United States to be Observed as a Day of General Fast.* It is hard for me to imagine President Bush recommending a fast, but perhaps he could emulate President John Adams. It might be a way to bring attention to some of the more pressing domestic problems of today.

I was extremely surprised to discover in the Hope collection a deed to land in Virginia signed by Lord Fairfax himself in the year 1764. All I have been able to determine about the history of this document is that it was found in the attic of old Van Raalte Hall by some students belonging to the Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity in the spring of 1963.

The Holland Historical Trust collection



has two newspapers dating from the colonial period of American history, which the reader may have seen since we often use them as illustrations in our group presentations. The first is a copy of *The Massachusetts Son: Or, American Oracle of Liberty.* This was a political paper aimed at promoting support for the rebellion as indicated by the heading "Americans!--Liberty or Death!--Join or Die!" This issue is dated May 3, 1775 and was printed by Isaiah Thomas. The second is the May 19, 1779 issue of *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* printed by Thomas Bradford. In addition to news, the paper has the equivalent of today's classified section. This section includes several ads for selling slaves and a \$20 reward for finding a lost slave. It is interesting to note that the reward for a lost horse was \$80. The *Journal* also has a "Proclamation by his Excellency George Washington," which extended the grace period on pardons for army deserters from May first to July first.

We also have several pamphlets from the Seminary collection printed in 1800 which contain the text of funeral orations for Washington. The speeches were delivered on February 22nd, 1800 which was the day recommended by Congress for citizens of the United States to publicly grieve the loss of this great leader. In the same vein, there is a similar oration for another of our founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton, dating from 1804.

One of my favorite items from the Trust collection is an 1805 geography textbook entitled; *The Rudiments of Geography; being a Concise description*

of the Various Kingdoms, States, Empires, Countries, and Islands in the World: Together With Their Latitudes, Longitudes, Extent, Boundaries, Rivers, Lakes, Air, Climate, Soil, Produce, Manufactures, Chief Towns, Population, Religion and Learning. With an Introduction Explaining the Astronomical Part of Geography. To Which is Added, a Chronological Table of the Most Important Events Which Have Happened from the Creation of the World to the Present Day.

Unlike textbooks of today, there are no maps so it seems that students were required to memorize the longitude and latitude of each state and country. At this time Michigan was not yet a state, but part of the Northwest Territory. It appears that our famously fickle Michigan weather was much more sedate as the following entry illustrates.

"The air in this extensive Territory is generally very good, and free from all noxious vapours. The climate is mild, and free from those sudden changes which are frequent in many parts of the United States. In a considerable part of this Territory, winter does not begin until about Christmas, and in March the trees and vegetables are in full bloom."

These are only a few of the interesting, extremely old items which we have here at the archives. You don't have to be writing a paper or researching your family history in order to use our facilities, just stop by whenever you have some spare time and see what materials we have that may be of interest to you.

Attention New Readers

Visitors to the Depot dedication are receiving copies of the *Joint Archives Quarterly*. If you are interested in receiving this publication regularly — filled with news and interesting stories — contact the Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College Campus, 49423 or call 394-7798.

The Joint Archives Quarterly

Joint Archives of Holland Educational Programming 1991-1992

Sept. 19, 20, 1991 "The Dutch and Their Faith: Immigrant Religious Experience in the 19th and 20th Centuries." Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies.

April 24, 1992

The Gerrit Diekema story - Ambassador to the Netherlands, member of Congress, prominent leader. One of Holland's premier citizens. This is our Spring Speaker Program, admission is free. C. Warren Vander Hill.

Nov. 16, 1991 Depots and Their Past: A Story of Railroading. Program on railroading focusing specifically on depots in western Michigan and their stories. Admission \$2. Sam Breck.

June 20, 1992

Basic Archival Skills Workshop. Designed for those who have to care for archival materials who do not have training. \$25 fee. Richard Harms.

Feb. 29, 1992 Basic Conservation Skills. Learn how to do basic cleaning and repair of archival materials. Fee required. Richard Harms.

In September the Holland Historical Trust's Netherlands Museum is focusing its monthly exhibit on Railroading. Their hours are Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Plan a visit today!

Train Depot Dedication Saturday, Sept. 21

The depot dedication will occur on Saturday, September 21 at 10 a.m. according to plans set by the Depot Renovation and Dedication Committees. The event, which is being tied in with Victorian Days, will include comments by those involved in bringing this project to completion, the presentation of the keys and the placing of a new time capsule in the cornerstone.

The Holland Trolley will be running all day between festivities at the Victorian Days celebration and the Louis and Helen Padnos Transportation Center. Individuals, including staff of the Joint Archives, will be on hand at the depot to explain its history and to tell you about its function today.

The Joint Archives of Holland was involved with the creation of the new time capsule. After preserving the materials removed from the 1925 capsule in the Holland Historical Trust collection a new capsule, incorporating up to date preservation techniques, will include materials which will be a snapshot to some future historian about our time.

Other highlights include individuals dressed in costume, the participation of the American Legion Band, and refreshments will be served. Come join us for a very festive day!

The Supplement to the Guide to the Collections of the Joint Archives of Holland

Supplement to the Joint Archives of Holland *Guide to the Collections*. Documenting our photographic, biographical, vertical and pamphlet collections, this is a major addition to the finding aids to get into the collections. Highly recommended for libraries, researchers and those who own the *Guide to the Collections*. Cost \$9.95.

Please send me _____ copies of the Supplement at \$9.95. Michigan residents please add 4% sales tax.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Hope College students getting ready to board a train, probably in Kalamazoo, for an oratorical contest, 1905.

Hope College Collection of the Joint Archives



The Joint Archives of Holland

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Railroads in Holland



Photo courtesy Loring Holt

Engine and railroad workers at Waverly Yards.