

Fall 1990

The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 02.03: Fall 1990

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The Joint Archives Quarterly

Volume 2 Number 3

Fall 1990

The Civil War and Our Hometown

The Civil War. Just mentioning the name of this great conflict raises curiosity, horror and memories. More than 620,000 men — two percent of the population of the United States at that time — died in it.

The Holland/Zeeland area played a part in this break of the union. The Joint Archives of Holland is sponsoring a program in January that will focus on the community's contribution and its loss.

Al McGeehan and John Noe will present a multi-media program January 19 which will include artifacts from the Civil War such as a rifle used by the Michigan 25th Infantry. Mr. Noe will show slides blending photos of the period with those of the battlefields today.

The recent PBS miniseries *The Civil War* has underscored the important role this conflict has had on the formation of our country. The Archives has numerous letters and diaries which speak to our ancestors' efforts in personal ways. The diaries tell of excitement and despair, the destruction of war and the spirit of valor.

Through the efforts of Mr. McGeehan and Mr. Noe we will hear the story of the local troops, how they left their hometown and how they fought. The documents are striking, the stories still seem fresh after more than a century.

In addition the Joint Archives will have various materials from its collection on display in the reading room.

Plan to join us for this fascinating program at 3 p.m. Saturday, January 19 in Graves Hall across from the Van Wylen library.



Ben Van Raalte - A letter home 1864

Camp near Punkinvine Creek, Paldon Co. Ga.
May 31, 1864

Dear Father:

I am happy to report that I am in good health and hope you are also well. Sunday evening we left the front and were sent to the rear to get some rest. It was impossible to get any at the front either day or night. We were relieved by the 1st Division which has not been at the front as yet. They are all new recruits. Now we are about four miles to the rear and are guarding the trains. Last week we fought nearly all week but our company was lucky and didn't lose a man to the bullets. One evening we were shelled very heavily and a piece of shell hit Willerdink in his side but fortunately he had a Testament in his pocket which saved his life. It hurt him a lot but he stayed with the company. Another was hit but his knapsack saved him. Several others were hit — too many to tell about. One day our company was ordered to clear a ridge and after a couple of hours of sharp fighting we did so. That day I had plenty of chances to shoot at Rebs but they also had shots at me. I got a bullet through my blouse at the belt line. It was quite a fight but we made a charge and they retreated and are in their breastworks again. It appears they wish us to besiege them because they make no general attacks. Our rifle pits are opposite their works. They have the habit of making charges at night but so far they have always been repulsed with heavy losses. I think they will get tired of that after a while. My opinion is that much will have to happen before this campaign is concluded. Whoever lives through it will have much to tell.

Morning of June 1.

It is very warm today. Cannonading is going on continuously and reinforcements are rolling in daily. We haven't been sent back to the front as yet but expect to be sent back any moment. The Rebs are finding themselves in a tight spot. Last night I got your letter in which you said that you know the news almost as well as we, if not better. Yes, at the front where you would expect to know it, one hears nothing but the music of bullets.

We get very little mail. I am afraid that it doesn't travel regularly. Please send me a day book. Lost the one you sent before. Now I must close.

Best regards to all.

Your loving

B. Van Raalte

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- Sentinel donates photographic negatives
- New staff at the Joint Archives
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From the Archivist

What a fall! It has been hard to keep up with all the exciting happenings here at the Joint Archives this season. So many things have taken place. Our new assistant archivist has started and has been feverishly processing collections and producing in-depth collection summaries. Our program on the S. S. South American was an outstanding success. Nearly 40 years of negatives taken by Holland Sentinel photographers have been added to the collection. And the list goes on.



What I like most about the Joint Archives is the excitement that the staff and our patrons have shown in the work we do — in our collecting, in our efforts to advance the use and the cause of historical preservation of archival materials in the area. In the coming months we have scheduled speakers to discuss the role of Holland in the Civil War (January 19) and a workshop on the care of photographs (March 2) designed for those in historical, museum and archival work and also the general public. In April we will host our annual spring speaker.

Along the way there will be exhibits of archival materials at the Joint Archives reading room, much like the current displays on Holland's cruise ships and the time capsule which I encourage you to see. (See separate articles).

The addition of more than 30 years of the *Holland Sentinel* negatives to the Historical Trust collection of the Joint Archives is very noteworthy. This gift fills in a large gap in the photo history of the Holland area at the Archives. It also represents a challenge to us to organize, identify, make prints for people to see and, most of all, make an inventory that will make these 30,000+ images accessible. If you would like to help in this task please contact me.

If you have suggestions regarding the Joint Archives or a question about some aspect of history, please call. Our number is 394-7798.

Larry J. Wagenaar

Christmas Hours (December 10-January 5)

Monday-Friday 1-5 pm

Closed Dec. 24, 25 and 31
Jan. 1

Joint Archives of Holland Educational Programming 1990-1991

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|-------------------|--|
| Nov. 3, 1990 | “The S.S. South American: Queen of the Great Lakes.” The history of the Holland-based cruise ships on the Great Lakes. Presenter: Jack Gruber. |
| Jan. 19, 1991 | “The Civil War and Our Hometown” will focus on the role of Holland/Zeeland in the Civil War and the soldiers that fought. Presenters: Al McGeehan and John Noe. |
| March 2, 1991 | Workshop on the care of historic photographs by Marc Choir. Marc is Director of Archives and Historical Collections at the Cranbrook Educational Community near Detroit. |
| April, 1991 | Annual Spring Speaker. (To be announced). This is our “big event.” |
| June, 1991 | Archival skills workshop for church librarians, businesses, historical societies and others. |
| Sept. 20-21, 1991 | Conference host of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies. It will focus on the ethnic identity of the RCA and CRC churches. |

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Sentinel Photo Negatives Donated to Joint Archives

Photographic negatives spanning more than 30 years, from 1954-1986, have been donated by the Holland Sentinel to the Joint Archives of Holland.

In this rich collection are thousands of images from the Holland community including downtown scenes, notable public and private events, industrial areas, accidents and local individuals.

The collection of 30,000 images fully documents the activities of the Holland community for a significant portion of its history and will be a valuable resource for illustrations of area sites and people.

Director Larry Wagenaar commented "this collection is significant for what it will tell us about the past. Up to this point we had good photographic collections through the 1930s but very little from later years."

Reflecting on the work ahead for the Archives staff, Wagenaar said "the fact that so many images are included means that it will be a number of years before we have full control of



An image from the Holland Sentinel collection.

all of these negatives."

The Archives most likely will look to grants and private support as well as its own institutional sponsors to process the collection and make it available for research use. People interested in volunteering to help the Archives document and identify photographs are encouraged to call us at 394-7798.

The Sentinel also donated an enlarger which will allow the Joint Archives staff to copy prints from the negatives in-house, reducing the cost of making prints for patrons.

The negatives will become part of the Holland Historical Trust archival collection housed at the Joint Archives.

New Staff at the Joint Archives

Three individuals have joined the staff at the Joint Archives. They are Laura Bachelder, David Kniaz and Gwen Palmer.

Laura comes to Holland after working at the Grand Rapids Public Library's Michigan Room where she organized parts of the Robinson collection of photographs and negatives donated to the library. With this background in archival technique Laura is well suited for her work at the Joint Archives.

With an interest in political science and work in history, David has been working on keeping various vertical files up to date. In addition, he is in charge of assisting the Holland Historical Society in keeping membership information up to date.

Gwen's efforts have been concentrated on compiling information from alumni files of Hope College. This will be useful in locating information on graduates after 1916.

Reba O'Shesky has been a member of the staff for more than two years and is in charge of major ongoing projects at the Archives.

Each of the new staff members and Reba works regularly with patrons in the reading room — say hello next time you are there.

Robert Swart Missionary Papers Opened

John Robert Swart was born in Rockford, Illinois, in 1919 and became one of the first Reformed Church in America missionaries to work in Africa. The first mission was established in the South Sudan in con-

junction with the Presbyterian church.

An impending civil war caused the mission to move to Ethiopia where further strife forced it to move again in 1977, this time to Kenya.

Robert Swart became coordinator of the American Missions Medical-Educational-Agricultural Development Program, initiated the use of windmills for irrigation and developed an effective cassette tape ministry. His wife Morrell was editor of *Ethio-Echo*, a missionary newsletter, and together they had six children.

The Joint Archives of Holland has opened the Swart papers consisting of materials from 1948 to 1988 documenting their missionary activities in Africa. Papers such as these are critical to telling the story of those who have gone before. The Swart

(Continued on page 5)

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The Processor's Table

by
Craig Wright
Assistant Archivist

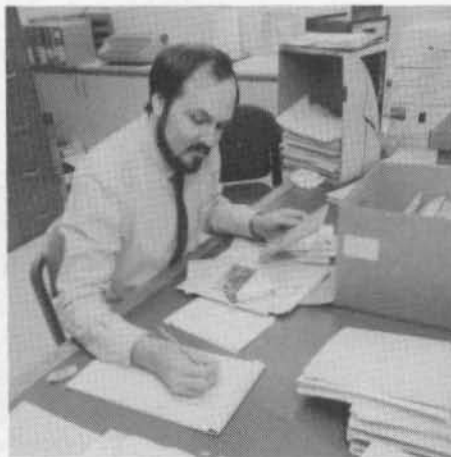
One of the most interesting aspects of working with collections of historical materials is the number of obscure and fascinating items that one discovers. During my first month of processing at the archives, I was introduced to two important figures in the history of Holland — Gerrit Van Schelven and P. Theodore Moerdyk.

Van Schelven was postmaster of Holland for many years and worked for the *Holland City News*, *De Hope*, and *De Grondwet* newspapers. Through his passion for local history, he was instrumental in acquiring historical information and oral histories from many of the Dutch pioneers of the area.

Moerdyk worked for the Netherlands Museum for well over 20 years and did extensive research into local history and Dutch immigration, as well as many other subjects. His research files provide access to a wealth of information by subject headings. Here is some of the information I found while working with the papers of these important men.

While examining the Moerdyk papers I discovered that the election for Ottawa County Treasurer in 1860 resulted in a tie. Even though both men received the same number of votes the incumbent, George Parks, claimed that John Roost was not legally elected. So for several months both men occupied offices at the Court House, each claiming to be the legal office holder.

In February of 1861 a posse overwhelmed Mr. Parks in his office while he stood on the safe trying to fight them off with a club. After the lock was drilled off the safe, nothing was found inside. Mr. Parks then went into custody of the sheriff, who refused to retain him, and an injunction was issued to keep Mr. Roost out of the office.



Craig Wright

From the information I have found it seems that Mr. Parks finally emerged triumphant in the struggle for County Treasurer.

An interesting story I came across in the Van Schelven collection is full of mystery and drama. One February night in 1843 an Indian family found shelter and warmth in the camp of Edwin Miller and William Hovey. When the father and daughter awoke in the morning they found that the mother, Nega, had been murdered and the two white men were nowhere to be found.

The Indians unsuccessfully hunted the men for days and eventually the story reached the ears of Thomas Gilbert. No tracks were visible in the icy weather but Mr. Gilbert discovered a trail of tobacco juice on the shore of Lake Michigan.

Since the Indians had not yet developed the habit of chewing tobacco, Gilbert correctly assumed the trail was of a white man, probably on the run. The trail led south to the lighthouse at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River where Miller was apprehended. Mr. Hovey was eventually caught as well.

Miller was tried, convicted and sentenced to be hanged, largely due to the testimony of Hovey. As Miller awaited death, Hovey became ill with typhoid fever and confessed that it was he who had killed the squaw, and that Miller was in fact innocent. Hovey died the next day, Miller was

pardoned and went home to Vermont.

Did you know that Michigan had a "King" of Beaver Island? Do you want to know the rules and regulations regarding the life of a Hope College student in 1889? Or how about the history of Hollanders in the Dakota Territory? The answers to these questions and many more will be found in the interesting information and stories contained in the Van Schelven and Moerdyk collections.

Recent Research

To give you an idea of who uses the Joint Archives and why, we've listed a few of the recent projects of patrons:

- The history of the De Zwaan windmill (Windmill Island)
- History of Dutch Dancing in Holland
- Missionary work in Africa
- Environmental impact of previous tenants on industrial property
- Photographs for a national ad campaign
- The Reformed Church and Liberation Theology
- Background on the Knickerbocker Theater
- The Georgian Bay Line cruise ships
- History of Hope College athletics
- RCA missions to India
- Architecture in Holland
- Dutch in the Civil War
- Hope College's Nykerk and the Pull
- Great Lakes navigation
- Photographs for display in downtown shop

As you can see from this partial list of research we have quite a cross-section of users. All the research listed above was undertaken between November 1 and November 20, 1990 and is a partial list. In those 20 days 41 people researched in materials and numerous others came to see our exhibits on the Georgian Bay ships and the railroad time capsule.

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Time Capsule Showed Importance of Railroads



Opening the time capsule at the railroad depot.

The experience we had Nov. 2 was nothing short of remarkable. That warm and sunny morning at about 9:30 Soren Wolf, Holland city manager, called to alert me to a surprise at the old train depot — and to be there by 10 a.m.

When I arrived a number of us stood outside the dismantled frame of the old building and soon surmised that the surprise was the time capsule. The search to find two pickle jars rumored to be in the building had been all but given up as reconstruction work was about to begin.

After 20 minutes of prying the glass jars from the wall (they had been cemented in) we undertook the delicate job of removing the curled up documents. They were in remarkable shape as they had been literally airtight in the jars for 65 years.

Inside we found a number of exciting things, some which we did not have in the research collections of the Joint Archives. Probably the most interesting items were the railroad schedules which demonstrated how much traffic went through Holland in 1925. At that time the train was still the primary mode of transportation as the automobile was just beginning its ascendancy. Workers at the station are

listed on the inside cover of one schedule. Also included were a magazine and an almanac which were published by the railroad.

The Pere Marquette Railway was quite a business in its day as the front of the almanac trumpets "its 350 odd stations, towns and cities that it serves in Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, Ontario and the Niagara Frontier." Holland was a point at which travelers could continue north to Muskegon. The schedule reveals numerous passenger trains which stopped enroute to Chicago or back to Grand Rapids. Quite a change from our once a day train of today. You could even get a full meal, not just a snack bar on these trips.

Local groups also helped out E.B. Rich who undertook the time capsule project at the last minute. Membership rosters of the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Exchange Club and teachers groups were included. Copies of the local paper give a unique look at the day the jar was filled, too.

All of these documents, as well as others found in the jars, are now on display at the Joint Archives of Holland on the lower level of the Van Wylen Library at Tenth and College.

I invite you to come and see this display as well as our current exhibit on the cruise ships of the Georgian Bay Line.

Finds such as this one and the opportunity to preserve history as well as tell its story are exciting. Please come and experience this excitement with us.

(Reprinted from the *Holland Sentinel*)

Ship Program Big Success

More than 160 people attended our first educational program of 1990-91 at Graves Hall. Jack Gruber and his assistant were able to tell the story of the S.S. South American and were joined at times by former crew members Ron Rosie and Julius Bright. Stories about the ship's cruises to Duluth, her participation in the dedication of Isle Royal National Park and sailing through the St. Lawrence Seaway were fascinating.

Following the presentation a large portion of the audience joined the presenters and former crew members in the Archive reading room where special exhibits were staged. Items included a life saving ring and jacket, photo albums, ship's logs, and memorabilia. Many of these items will be on display at the Archives through January 11.

The next Joint Archives program is "The Civil War and our Hometown" scheduled at Graves Hall across from the Van Wylen library Saturday, January 19 at 3 p.m. A \$1 donation at the door is requested.

Swart Papers Opened

(Continued from page 3)
papers include 1.5 linear feet of correspondence, letters and articles.

This material will be a rich resource as we work to document the missionary heritage of the Reformed Church through the Western Theological Seminary Collection housed at the Joint Archives of Holland.

Before Big Red. Holland's south pier at the turn of the century.



The Joint Archives of Holland

Holland Historical Trust
Hope College
Western Theological Seminary

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