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## *The Dual Calling of Missionary Wives: A Look at the Reformed Church of America in China, 1917-1951*

By Victoria Henry

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)*

People often quote and preach from this gospel passage as a call to missionary work. Missionary wives were the same as their male counterparts in this way. They were strong, faithful, Christian women who took their calling as missionary wives seriously in all aspects of their vocation on the field in China. David Angus, a son in a missionary family in China, remarked many years later, “The silent strength was the women.”<sup>2</sup> These missionary wives were the power behind the men, and their role was vital for the spread of the gospel throughout China. Although often their role as a wife and mother did not allow for work on the “front lines” of the mission field, the work they did as missionaries in China, and as a part of their family, was influential and powerful for the spreading of the gospel.

The two roles that missionary wives fulfilled, the family and China, were often in tension with each other. Fulfilling the need of homemaker, mother, and teacher was vital to the survival of the family and the wives themselves as individuals, but they felt the need to live into the Christian call to make disciples through witnessing, teaching and being involved in the mission churches. Both, the role of the family and of China, were part of their role on the mission field, but the role of the family was more imperative and pressing for these women. Neither was more important than the other, but rather

homemaking and the needs of the children was the first priority. As the role of the family decreased over time with children growing older and leaving the house for higher education, the wives gradually took on more roles outside the home and within the mission field. Two emerging roles—the role of the household and the role of China—arise and the tension that existed between the two becomes present in the voice of these missionary wives. However, missionary wives resolved the tensions of serving both China and their families over time through slowly shifting their roles from family to China. By bringing their talents and fulfilling their call from God, they ministered to the Chinese people in whatever way their talents and abilities created ways to do so. Although there were a number of wives in China for the Reformed Church in



*Stella Veenschoten composed and played music as part of her missionary work, ca. 1920*

America (RCA), three women’s voices have been preserved through personal papers and serve as examples of the dual role that married missionary women fulfilled in China. Stella Veenschoten (in China 1917-1951), Joyce Angus (1925-1951), and Ruth Holleman (1917-1951) represent different aspects of these roles.

Stella Girard Veenschoten was born on March 14, 1892, in Pigeon, Michigan.<sup>3</sup> Her father worked for the Pere

*(continued on page 2)*

## From the Director



We are eager to share with you three articles written by freshly minted Hope College alums. All three articles were researched during the summer of 2014 as part of a history department research grant to study the role of Reformed Church in America (RCA) missionaries to eastern China. A large part of the research took place at the Joint Archives because of our extensive RCA missionary collections. I believe you will find these well researched and written articles engaging and a joy to read. I want to also thank the many financial donors that have given to the Joint Archives of Holland over the past year. Your donations go directly to projects like that above and to bring more of our collection to researchers in digital form and translation work.

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

### *Missionary Wives (continued from page 1)*

Marquette Railroad, which brought his family to Holland, Michigan, during Stella's high school years. In Holland, while she was playing piano and singing in the Methodist church choir, Stella met Western Theological Seminary student Henry M. Veenschoten who was known as "Nelson."<sup>4</sup> In 1917, Nelson and Stella Veenschoten were married shortly after Nelson's graduation from seminary.<sup>5</sup> That very same year, they moved to China to become missionaries for the RCA. After studying the Amoy Chinese dialect, the Veenschotens moved to Changchow, China, to take up their post as evangelist missionaries.<sup>6</sup>

In a very different way, Joyce Angus also fulfilled her Christian calling. Joyce grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and after graduating from high school, she got a factory job in Holland. After three years in the job, she found herself wanting something more. Her pastor in Grand Rapids said he could get her a scholarship to Hope College if she would become a missionary. Joyce agreed, and after graduation in 1925, she went to the Board of Foreign Missions in New York to receive her commission. There, Joyce met William Angus, her future husband.<sup>7</sup> The earliest account of her as a missionary is in the *Annual Report of the Board of Missions*, which mentions that the Board appointed Joyce to the Amoy region as an educational missionary. The same year, the board appointed William Angus to the same mission as an evangelical missionary.<sup>8</sup> They both went through two extensive years of Amoy Chinese language school in the Fukien district.<sup>9</sup> In 1927, when William Angus passed the language requirement test and was given an evangelist pastoral position, Joyce and William were married. Most of her early time in China was spent

balancing her role as a wife and mother with her calling to serve the people of China through teaching English.

Ruth Holleman, like the other two women, used her own talents and position to spread the gospel in China.<sup>10</sup> Born in Holland, Michigan, to Reverend Albertus Vanden Burg and his wife, she graduated from Hope College in 1914 and started teaching in the high school in Zeeland, Michigan. Ruth met and married Dr. Clarence Holleman in 1918. In 1919, the board sent them to the Amoy Mission so that Clarence could serve as a medical missionary.<sup>11</sup> When the Hollemans arrived in China, Clarence was sent to the city of Leng-na, to practice as a medical doctor with the Chinese locals.<sup>12</sup>



*Stella Veenschoten (seated on right) and unidentified missionary traveling by boat to summer homes, ca. 1925*

The role of the family was very important to the missionary wife. If anything, it was more important than the call to be a missionary itself. However, Stella, Joyce and Ruth each saw the role of taking care of the family as part of their calling. Missionary wives were responsible for three principle "household" tasks while in the mission field: moving the entire family, managing the household staff, and maintaining an "American" house.

The task to mobilize and move was no easy feat for a missionary wife. The technology of China was not at the same level of advancement as the rest of the world during this period. In addition, many regions where the missionary families lived, such as Leng-na or Changchow, were more than a day's journey by channel boats or rickshaws.<sup>13</sup> A typical missionary family moved at least once a year based on the season, the political status of China, or the husband's type of mission work (evangelical, medical, etc.) For instance, the Holleman family moved far less than the Veenschoten and Angus families because Clarence worked in the hospital in Amoy, a job that did not change locations. This was unlike the nature of evangelistic missionaries like

William and Nelson.<sup>14</sup> Missionaries in China often moved into the mountain regions during the summer months to stay cool in the rising temperatures of China. The Veenschotens had a summer cottage built in the small mountain town of Tao Boa, where the family moved during the summer months to get away from the heat and relax.<sup>15</sup> When the time came to move, the missionary wife went to work. The lack of technology made moving all of their belongings across the large country particularly difficult. The wives packed up each of the family's belongings into crates and trunks and shipped whatever they could to the new location. Depending on distance, geographical features, and the political conditions at the time, these packages often reached the destination long after the family had arrived.<sup>16</sup> Along with their role of orchestrating moves, the wives also had to adapt and orchestrate the household staff.

In China, missionaries were relatively wealthier than they were in the United States. The exchange rate was favorable to Americans and therefore the dollar went farther in China. Along with this idea came the general understanding that missionary work often had better results in a given culture when missionaries were looked up to as the higher class, a perspective that gave authority to the missionaries in the eyes of the local people.<sup>17</sup> Along with this upper-class status came household help for the wives. There were three types of household helpers: cooks, "coolies" and *amahs*.

Cooks were hired to cook the meal for the family; however, this was difficult for many wives. The wives insisted that they cooked American food for the families, but the cooks had to be taught American recipes. Otherwise, the cooks only knew how to prepare Chinese food for the missionary family. In letters to her parents, Stella talks often about the trouble of finding a good cook willing to learn American cooking.<sup>18</sup>



*Chinese maid doing laundry for Angus family, ca. 1925*

The second type of household staff was a "coolie." Missionary households had between one or two coolies in a house at a time. In American tradition, these servants would have been called a "man." They did the heavy lifting for the wives when their husbands were away or went with the men on evangelical missions to help carry supplies and lead the way.

The third type of servant was the *amah*, a nanny for the missionary children and especially important for the missionary wives. Stella writes

that *amahs* gave the wives some freedom to do their own work and get away from the house while their husbands were sometimes gone for weeks on evangelical trips.

However, despite the help the household staff provided, the missionary wives often did not like having the staff on hand. Stella often wrote to her parents about the trouble of finding good household staff and how much she preferred to not have them around the house. "I tell you I would fire every one of them if I could. It sounds so big to most people at home when we say, 'Oh, we keep three servants.' Well you can just believe me, I prefer the kind of servants we have at home: vacuum cleaner, electric washers, iron, gas stove, running water and such like."<sup>19</sup> Other wives felt this way about their household staff as well. The desire to maintain an "American home" will be discussed below, but the point here is that the household staff was necessary to maintain the missionary wife's household vision.

Another purpose of maintaining a household staff was the freedom and mobility it gave to the wives in a foreign country. While many of the wives passed language classes with their husbands before given a commission in China, they were still unaccustomed to the culture of the market place and other locations they needed to visit for errands and household responsibilities. The household staff was important for the mobility and efficiency of the wives to fully understand the culture and language of the Chinese people.<sup>20</sup>

The *amahs* were equally vital for the life of a missionary family, but they posed many obstacles for maintaining the "American household" that the wives worked to form. They wanted to raise their children in the American way in the child upbringing mentalities of Americans. However, the cultural differences between China and America were particularly noticeable with the *amah*. Stella wrote to her parents, "These Chinese women are ruled by a boy, from the day he is born, until she dies it is like that. Oh! I could write just pages on how much I love servants, but you might get tired of it."<sup>21</sup> Although the help of servants was much needed in the household, the wives did not want the influence on their children and wanted to maintain an "American" household closely.

All the different roles and responsibilities that the missionary wives filled in the home were to keep the home as "American" as possible. Missionaries knew that they could not assimilate into the culture of China for their children's sake. In an interview with the son of Joyce and William, David said that the missionary culture in China placed importance on raising children as "Americans."<sup>22</sup> However, criticism for maintaining a culture in their homes and not assimilating into the

culture of the Chinese people is common. In *Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity*, Ryan Dunch discusses the arguments and criticisms around missionaries maintaining a “homeland” culture in their homes on the field.<sup>23</sup> Dunch argues that maintaining this sort of home was often a conscious decision for evangelism, as well as for the missionaries and their children.<sup>24</sup> Although the point of this paper is not to discuss the criticisms surrounding missionaries, it is important to address Dunch’s argument and a few reasons why this home life was important to the missionary wives. In the end, the missionary wives knew that they needed to raise their children as Americans, because it was not likely that their children would grow up to become missionaries themselves. Therefore, their children needed to be able to assimilate into American culture when they returned home.<sup>25</sup>

In comparison to the role of the family was the role of the wives as missionaries. Although it can be argued that their primary goal was to spread the gospel to the native people through the provision of a home for their husbands, every missionary wife found a way to utilize her specific talents and gifts to give to the people of China. The examples of Stella, Joyce, and Ruth show how missionary wives did this through music, education, and medicine.

Music was a powerful and important way that some missionaries were able to spread the gospel to the people of China. Across the world, music in the church is an important part of any worship service and the missionary wives that were able to minister in this way helped the church grow. Stella felt that, “Music is a vehicle of power deployed by the Holy Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel.”<sup>26</sup>

As a trained musician, Stella often spent hours by the piano composing, singing and playing music. As her children grew older, Stella could become more invested in her music as an active ministry to the Chinese people, doing so in multiple ways. She taught piano and voice lessons to not only missionary children, but also to Chinese Christians. As she gained more time away from the home, Stella began teaching music in the Christian missionary schools. Gradually, she took on more class periods and was teaching at different schools around China as well. Stella’s work as a musician and her talents as teacher, singer, pianist and composer were well-known among the missionary community. In addition to the work that she did as a teacher and music director in the school system and the churches, Stella was also in charge of the worship music and piano at the missionary church in Changchow, or wherever the family was stationed at the time. The Chinese congregation praised her piano playing and singing and

missed her musical contribution when the Veenschotens left in 1951.

Stella’s ability to teach in the school system was a great way for her to spread the gospel and fulfill her call as a missionary in China. When Joyce became a missionary as a single woman, she was commissioned to be an English teacher in the missionary schools. She continued this role even as a missionary wife. Of course, with the role of the family taking precedent, like with Stella and even Ruth, the role that she played in the school system was second to the needs of her family.<sup>27</sup>

Ruth Holleman fulfilled her role as a missionary in China in like ways to Stella and Joyce. Ruth was in a position where her husband needed an English-speaking nurse early on in his medical career in China, and she was the only available option for an emergency surgery. Also, Ruth helped whenever needed. For instance, during the Japanese invasion of Amoy, Ruth started a clinic that gave milk to around 200 babies. This clinic was important, not only for the survival of the infants, but to the spread of the gospel as well. Ruth’s help during this time of unrest and chaos in China was important and beneficial to the spreading of the Gospel. This role that she undertook was important to the missionaries and was a role she was filled apart from her work as a mother and wife in the home.

The dual roles of the missionary wife were both valuable and important. She had to balance the two jobs, but the family dictated the amount and type of work that the missionary wife could do for China. In all three women’s situations, as their children became older and moved on to other schools for education, the women took on more roles in China. Stella began teaching more classes and traveling to other villages to sing and play music.<sup>28</sup> Joyce also began to teach more and travel with her husband on evangelical missions.<sup>29</sup> Ruth started working in the hospital and creating programs to meet needs in times of crisis for the Chinese people.<sup>30</sup> While they balanced these roles well, there was often a sense of tension that existed between the two. Missionary wives managed to reconcile the two through the passage of time.

Stella, Joyce and Ruth, and many other missionary wives in China during this time, sought to live into their calling amid the tension between the roles of the family and the mission field in China. Missionary wives were an important and incredible part of the greater story of spreading the gospel in China and the stories of these incredible women need to be told. Although the amount of sources that depict their lives and work is minimal, communication across the globe can make their stories known. In the end, Stella, Joyce, and Ruth sought to live into the deeper call of the gospel: “*Therefore go and*

make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”<sup>31</sup>

Victoria Henry is a 2015 Hope College graduate from La Salle, Illinois, with degrees in history and flute performance. Her future plans include attending the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana beginning this summer for a master’s in library and information science.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Matt 28:19-20 NIV.

<sup>2</sup>David Angus and George Kraft, “Chinese Missionary Experience,” interview by Marc Baer et al., July 21, 2014.

<sup>3</sup>Although conventional for historians to refer to historical figures by their last names, I will be referring to Stella Girard Veenschoten by her first name. This is an intentional decision for two reasons. First, with her last name changing from Girard to Angus when she married Henry “Nelson” Veenschoten, the matter of calling her by her last name becomes complicated and confusing with Nelson having the same last name. Finally, most importantly, part of the importance of writing this paper is that missionary wives were not given a place where they were fully acknowledged for their work and were not even called by their first names. Therefore, from here on, I shall be referring to Stella Girard Veenschoten as “Stella.” “Obituary for Stella Veenschoten,” *The Church Herald*, September 7, 1962, W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>4</sup>Although conventional for historians to refer to historical figures by their last names, I will intentionally be referring to Henry M. Veenschoten by his nickname, “Nelson,” for clarifying which Veenschoten I am referring to and to not appear as though a female or male missionary is above the other; Girard Veenschoten, “Mother,” May 20, 2014, Unprocessed collection to be processed into H. M. Veenschoten collection at later date, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, 1.

<sup>5</sup>Girard Veenschoten, “Memories of Henry and Stella Veenschoten, Reformed Church Missionaries to the Chinese People: 1917-1958,” n.d.

<sup>6</sup>In the present day, the island city of Changchow is known as “Zhangzhou.” It is located in the Fukien or Fujien region of China and borders Amoy on the northeast side, and Lengna on the northwest. For the purpose of this paper, I shall be referring to Zhangzhou or Changchow by the name that the missionaries knew the city by—Changchow.

<sup>7</sup>Although conventional for historians to refer to historical figures by their last names, I will intentionally be referring to William Angus as “William” for clarifying which Angus I am referring to and to not appear as though a female or male missionary is above the other; David Angus and George Kraft, Chinese Missionary Experience, interview by Marc Baer et al., July 21, 2014.

<sup>8</sup>*Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America* (New York: Board of Publications of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1926), Days Missions Annual Reports, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:18755>; *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America* (New York: Board of Publications of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1925), Days Missions Annual Reports, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:18755>.

<sup>9</sup>In the present day, the province of Fukien is known as “Fujian.” It is located in the southeast corner of China and borders the Pacific Ocean. For the purpose of this paper, I shall be referring to Fujian or Fukien by the name that the missionaries knew the city—Fukien province, H00-1381, William R. Angus, Jr. Papers, H00-1381, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>10</sup>Although conventional for historians to refer to historical figures by their last names, I will be referring to Ruth Vanden Burg Holleman by her first name. This is an intentional decision for two reasons. First, with her last name changing from Vanden Burg to Holleman when she married Clarence H. Holleman, the matter of calling her by her last name becomes complicated and confusing with Clarence having the same last name. Finally, most importantly, part of the importance of writing this paper is that missionary wives were not given a place where they were fully acknowledged for their work and were not even called by their first names. Therefore, from here on, I shall be referring to Ruth Vanden Burg Holleman as “Ruth.”

<sup>11</sup>Although conventional for historians to refer to historical figures by their last names, I will intentionally be referring to Clarence H. Holleman as “Clarence,” for clarifying which Holleman I am referring to and to not appear as though a female or male missionary is above the other, W95-1196, Clarence H. Holleman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>12</sup>In the present day, Leng-na is known as “Longyan.” It is located in the southwest corner of the Fukien province of China, and is considered a mountain town. For the purpose of this paper, I shall be referring to Lengyan or Leng-na by the name that the missionaries knew the city—Leng-na.

<sup>13</sup>Rickshaws are Chinese carts that people rent on the streets of China to get from location to location. Cities such as New York in the United States have these today, W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College; W88-0055, Tena Holkeboer Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>14</sup>W95-1196, Clarence H. Holleman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>15</sup>Girard Veenschoten, “Memories of Henry and Stella Veenschoten, Reformed Church Missionaries to the Chinese People: 1917-1958,” n.d., W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>16</sup>W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>17</sup>William Edward Soothill, *A Typical Mission in China* (New York: F.H. Revell, 1907).

<sup>18</sup>W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>19</sup>Stella Veenschoten to Girard Family, February 18, 1923, W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>20</sup>David Angus and George Kraft, Chinese Missionary Experience, interview by Marc Baer et al., July 21, 2014.

<sup>21</sup>Stella Veenschoten to Girard Family, June 25, 1923, W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>22</sup>David Angus and George Kraft, Chinese Missionary Experience, interview by Marc Baer et al., July 21, 2014.

<sup>23</sup>Ryan Dunch, “Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity,” *History and Theory* 41, no. 3 (October 1, 2002): 301–325.

<sup>24</sup>Ryan Dunch, “Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity,” *History and Theory* 41, no. 3 (October 1, 2002): 301–325.

<sup>25</sup>W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten, Henry M. Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>26</sup>W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>27</sup>H00-1381, William R. Angus, Jr. Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>28</sup>W88-1078, Henry M. Veenschoten Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>29</sup>H00-1381, William R. Angus, Jr. Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>30</sup>W95-1196, Clarence H. Holleman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>31</sup>Matt 28:19-20 NIV.



## *Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital School of Nursing: The Role of Missionary Nurses in Xiamen, China*

By Katelyn Dickerson

Jeannette Veldman was a missionary nurse of the Reformed Church of America (RCA) during the early twentieth century. She was stationed in Xiamen, China. Her work served as the foundation for the Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital Nursing School. She and her fellow missionary nurses were extremely passionate about the training of young Chinese nurses, in a country that had yet to fully embrace the nursing profession. She diligently remembered the history of the school in her writing *The History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing and Some of its Human Side*. Many of her contemporaries questioned her decision to practice and teach nursing in China. She responded as follows:

Is Christian nursing in China worthwhile?  
When God fills your heart so full of His  
peace and love that it fairly bursts, is it  
worthwhile? When a body is saved, is it  
worthwhile? When a new soul grasps the  
meaning of the free gift of love, is it  
worthwhile? Broken bodies repaired, broken  
hearts mended, lost hopes replenished, lost  
souls brought to Christ. Friends, those are  
the results of the work of yours and my  
hospital.<sup>1</sup>

The Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital School of Nursing faithfully served its students, the hospital and the local community from 1925 until its service was interrupted by the Second World War. The Christian missionaries that founded the nurses' school pushed boundaries for women and the medical profession alike. Their progressive spirit and Christian ideals gave space for their student nurses and graduates to do the same.

It is imperative to understand the formative years of both the hospital and the nurses' school, because of the foundation that they provided the school in its peak years. The Hope Hospital was erected in April of 1898 by Dr. John Otte.<sup>2</sup> It was located on Gulangyu Island, an international settlement about a mile away from the city of Xiamen in South Fujian province, China.<sup>3</sup> It was the first mission of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in the country, and the medical aspect of the mission was key to its success. The hospital, like many other missionary facilities of the RCA, was constructed with funds provided by the church. The reward for Otte's persistence and hard work quickly took shape as he



*Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital School of Nursing, ca. 1925*

gained a reputation in the surrounding region for the hospital's modern technology, clean environment, and upstanding personnel. This was not in a small part due to Otte's sincere dedication to the people of Xiamen and his devotion to Christ. There was a serious deficit of formally trained medical personnel at the hospitals. Otte recognized this and began to train willing students in the art of medicine.<sup>4</sup> Thus, from the very beginning, the hospital in Xiamen was known not only as a place of healthcare, but also as a venue for learning.

Before the founding of the nursing school, missionary nurses worked at the hospital. Early nurses from the Netherlands shocked the local Chinese with their traditional Dutch values.<sup>5</sup> These nurses upheld strict standards. They adhered to clear visiting hours and demanded a spotless facility. The newly adopted restrictions annoyed their Chinese patients, who were unfamiliar with their styles and expectations.<sup>6</sup> Despite the new nurses' strange ways in regard to standards, the Chinese-patient base continued to grow. Due to growing numbers, the Dutch nurses were forced to limit their services to only the women's facility, leaving the men's section of the hospital in the care of only the hospital servants and doctors.<sup>7</sup>

Missionary nurse, Jean Nienhuis, arrived at the Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital in 1920. As the founder of the nursing school, Nienhuis was critical to the school's evolution. She was the first trained nurse from America to arrive in Xiamen. Nienhuis took on the men's hospital as her beginning project.<sup>8</sup> As she started her work at the hospital in Xiamen, she began to see and understand the growing need for nurses around the globe, but particularly in China. The conditions that she witnessed during the first few months of her experience astounded her. She remembered "Everything was dirty. I was afraid to touch anything...I'd shut myself up in a vacant room and wonder, 'what shall I do?'"<sup>9</sup>

Despite the fact that nursing was becoming a standard in the western medical field, it was just being introduced by medical missionaries in southern China. At this time, duties that today would be expected of a nurse were divided between the patients' families and hospital servants.<sup>10</sup> The job of a hospital servant was to clean and prepare the hospital for the patient. The families would take care of the patient during the duration of their stay. Nienhuis set out to change this tradition, as best she could, in order to insure that the needs and wants of the patient were successfully met.

As Hope Hospital continued to grow, Jean Nienhuis had difficulties keeping up with demands of the patients. Doctors were learning to depend on nurses like Nienhuis, and the nursing profession was becoming invaluable to the hospital. The increased demand, coupled with the As Hope Hospital continued to grow, Jean Nienhuis had difficulties keeping up with demands of the patients. Doctors were learning to depend on nurses like Nienhuis, and the nursing profession was becoming invaluable to the hospital. The increased demand, coupled with the limited hours in a day, had Nienhuis "dreaming of taking in girls as students and of beginning a nurses' training school and linking up with the Nurses Association of China."<sup>11</sup> Nienhuis wanted to both better the hospital and find a niche for young Chinese women to better themselves and the community. In 1922, after a visit from Cora E. Simpson, one of the founders of the Nurses Association of China (N.A.C.), Nienhuis felt better equipped to organize a nursing school by showing the other hospital personnel the practicality of such a program. Two years later, Nienhuis began taking in students to help her. The students could not receive any formal nursing degree from the school, as it was not yet recognized by the N.A.C. Any aid that the young students could provide in the hospital had to suffice. Finally in 1925, the N.A.C. recognized her School of Nursing.<sup>12</sup> With the official opening of the nurses school, the atmosphere of the hospital began to change, as young Chinese nurses began to prove themselves.



*Left to right: Jessie Platz, Jean Nienhuis, Jeannette Veldman, ca. 1931*

In 1931, Nienhuis gained two permanent coworkers and women of God, Jeannette Veldman and Jessie Platz.<sup>13</sup> In collaboration with Nienhuis, these women would be the heart and soul of the nursing school. Each

woman would transition through the roles of director of nursing and nursing student supervisor during her time at the hospital. The trio ran the nursing school until it was forced to close in 1941.

Nienhuis, Platz, and Veldman all left their mark on Hope hospital, as well as the nurses' school. By creating an intimate bond with their Chinese pupils, the missionary nurses were able to push their students outside of their comfort zones. The nurses' presence made it possible for Chinese women to find their own place, in a society that more often than not dictated their lives. The missionary nurses were strong, independent women whose time in Xiamen was only a small portion of their impressive careers. These women taught their Chinese students how to be capable Christian nurses, in addition to providing strong, female role models for their young students to look up to. This mentor relationship was built around trust, eventually allowing the missionary nurses to change the social expectations placed on their students.

As missionary nurses were teaching their students to be nurses, they were also paving the way for Chinese nurses to eventually maintain their own hospitals and schools. Unfortunately, they were also inadvertently creating stumbling blocks that their young students would have to overcome later. The school recognized the importance of educating strong and independent women for the nursing profession. Although, the missionary nurses gave room for the Chinese nurses to push boundaries within the profession and society, there was resistance among the students. Social norms were deeply engrained in the student, as well as the community. It was rare to find a student that was willing to take risks on the job, because it was already considered a courageous act to enter the profession. As Veldman once stated, nursing in China "requires girls with a somewhat adventurous, unselfish, sacrificing spirit to do nursing as the community as a whole gave them very little, if any, respect."<sup>14</sup> The profession itself asked a great deal from the girls, in the terms of bravery.

The relationship between the missionary nurses and the students exemplifies the hopes that the missionaries had for China. The missionary nurses were not detached from their students; on the contrary, they were very dedicated to their young pupils and felt a significant bond with many of them. The foreign nurses lived together with their students in the Nurses' Home. They said their daily prayers together and studied the Bible in one group. Because of the nature of nursing, there was a professional and academic hierarchy at the hospital, but in spite of that, all of the nurses were socially and religiously on an equal field in the eyes of the missionaries. The missionary nurses created an



environment that allowed for cross-cultural interactions. Starting in 1933, Nienhuis and Veldman threw an annual Christmas party for all of the students and nurses.<sup>15</sup> Together, the Chinese and American nurses would plan out events such as a celebration of Florence Nightingale Day. The missionary nurses introduced another way of building relationship that was not based on a social hierarchy so prevalent during that period in China.

One reason the Chinese and American nurses were able to achieve this close relationship is that missionary nurses were required to take an entire year of language study before working in their designated hospital. By the end of that first year, the language abilities of the nurses was sufficient enough for them to converse with their students. This was yet another step that the missionary nurses took to embed themselves in the culture and make an active choice to improve their relations with the young students.



*Jean Nienhuis (back row, center) and Chinese nursing students, ca. 1930s*

Although the missionary nurses saw their Chinese counterparts as equals in many ways, the Chinese students had a more difficult time seeing themselves as peers of the foreigners. The young girls were unsure of their position. One student wrote to her teacher, Nienhuis, “Thank you so very much with all my heart for the love you have given me and I want to be one of your good friends.”<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere in the letter the author, Sio Gin Siu, asked if she could call Nienhuis her friend, revealing some of the student’s unease. Building professional relationships inside of a strange and new environment was difficult for these young women, despite the comfort that missionaries felt in their relationship with their students.

Despite some students’ discomfort with their relationship, the student nurses saw a great deal of value in their time training with the missionary nurses. For years to come, their gratitude would be seen time and time again as retired missionary nurses would visit the region. David Angus, the son of William Angus, a missionary in the Xiamen region, remembered the

reunions quite well. “[Chinese] women that had gone through the program were so grateful for their education, whenever elderly [missionary] nurses returned they were showered with gifts and parties,” recalled Angus.<sup>17</sup> Veldman, herself, experienced this grateful reception by the Chinese when she visited the mission in the early 1980s. Chinese nurses trained by medical missionaries were given an invaluable education, a professional skill that could be used for a lifetime. The effort on the part of the missionary nurses was not overlooked by their Chinese students, who remained grateful throughout their lives.

The educational expectations for students changed within the classroom over time. The required classes grew and evolved as the nursing school itself progressed. During the first few years, classes started off as basic health classes supplemented by courses like home economics.<sup>18</sup> This move could be seen as a way to continue the girls’ general education through nursing. Since most of the students had not made it to the ninth grade, the school saw it as a way to further their education. By the late 1930s, students were studying science-based subjects such as dietetics, gynecology, bacteriology, and communicable diseases, as well as theory based courses such as history of nursing, nursing ethics, psychology and Chinese citizenship.<sup>19</sup> With regard to practical skills, the young women started their training right away in the hospital. As Platz remembered, “they had to do the same work I did...we had a regular schedule just like public health nurses have in this country (America).”<sup>20</sup> The addition of a broader curriculum is an indication of the changing role of nursing in China during the early twentieth century. Nurses were expected to have an increasingly overarching curriculum, and because of their increasingly prominent role, they had to have an improved skill set.

Attending the nursing school opened many doors for young women, giving them the opportunity decide what their future would look like. After the students graduated from the Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital School of Nursing, they took one of several paths. Several young women decided to continue their education by going on to study midwifery at Hope Hospital. Some students were hired by the hospital as graduate nurses and continued to work under Veldman and Nienhuis. Other students moved on to work in hospitals all across the country, even though there was often a great need for nurses even just in the region. Not every student continued in the nursing career; some married and subsequently left the profession to be mothers. In this same vein, having a nursing degree gave the graduates more than just opportunity; it gave them choice and control of their own lives.



*Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital staff, ca. 1930s*

Young nurses were able to choose their own unique path, once they graduated from the nursing school. In the summer of 1937, Veldman described the graduating class to her family back home. Six students graduated that year including: Miss Koa, Miss Wu and her sister Miss Wu, Miss Khu, Miss Huang, and finally Miss Shao. Two of the girls stayed on to work at Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital, one accepted a position at a small country hospital, and one enrolled in a university in Nanking for a public health degree.<sup>21</sup> This letter described the different paths available to nursing graduates. It also demonstrated the affection and pride that Veldman felt regarding her students. Veldman was exceptionally proud of the progress that these young women had made during their time at the school, particularly as professionals and as Christians.

Since the school opened in 1924 until the Japanese took over Gulangyu Island in 1941, Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital School of Nursing served the community and the young Chinese students. The nursing students were given strong independent female role models to look up to, as well as befriend. By forming relationships built on trust, missionary nurses were able to force their students to go outside their comfort zones and push against the traditional social expectations. Through this, the missionaries gave their Chinese students a platform to build themselves up as women, as well as professionals in a changing society. The presence of the missionary nurses in China did hinder the progress of nursing in some ways, due to the lack of Chinese leadership in the upper-level professional positions. With that being said, the overall impact of the missionary nurses' presence was beneficial. Missionary nurses broadened the opportunities that young Chinese women could attain. Students were given an invaluable education and professional skills that would be useful for a lifetime. Ultimately, the Chinese students recognized the work that the missionaries were doing and the lasting influence that the latter had over the students' lives and the nursing profession in China.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Jeannette Veldman to Friends, September 6, 1932, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence 1930-1934, W89-1012. Jeannette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>2</sup>The Reformed Church of America, *A Century of Missions in China*, n.d., Box 4, Folder: Pamphlet, "A Century of Missions in China," W89-1012, Jeannette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, 376.

<sup>3</sup>The location names have changed since the early twentieth century. During the period that the missionaries lived in China, the city of Xiamen was known as Amoy and Gulangyu Island was known as Kulangsu. Quotes will reference the traditional names.

<sup>4</sup>The Reformed Church of America, *A Century of Missions in China*, 377.

<sup>5</sup>Jeannette Veldman, *History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing with Some of Its Human Side*, (January 1933), Box 4, Folder: Hope Hospital-General, 1912-1949, W89-1012, Jeannette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College 1. This document is used throughout the paper as a primary source because of the abundance of information it provided of the nursing school's early life and its condition at the time the history was written, as well as the school's future plans. Jean Nienhuis collaborated with Veldman to create this history and she is quoted several times throughout the piece.

<sup>6</sup>Jeannette Veldman, *History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing*, 2-3.

<sup>7</sup>In the original documents coolie was used. It was not meant offensively for it covered all manual laborers, including those that were employed by the hospital. I have chosen to use the term hospital servants because of the nature of their work and their position in the hospital.

<sup>8</sup>Jeannette Veldman, *History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing*, 2.

<sup>9</sup>Jeannette Veldman, *History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing*, 3.

<sup>10</sup>Jeannette Veldman, *History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing*, 3-4.

<sup>11</sup>Jeannette Veldman, *History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing*, 5.

<sup>12</sup>Jeannette Veldman, *History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing*, 7.

<sup>13</sup>Jeannette Veldman, *History of the Hope Hospital School of Nursing*, 11

<sup>14</sup>Jeannette Veldman to Friends, May 16, 1932, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence 1930-1934, W89-1012, Jeannette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, 2.

<sup>15</sup>Jeannette Veldman to John Veldman, December 16, 1933, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence 1930-1934, W89-1012, Jeannette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, 1-2.

<sup>16</sup>Sio Gin Sui to Jean Nienhuis, May 14, 1933, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence 1921-1939, W96-1208, Jean Nienhuis Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>17</sup>David Angus, interview by Mark Baer, Claire Barrett, Katelyn Dickerson, Victoria Henry, and Gloria Tseng, Holland, MI, July 21, 2014.

<sup>18</sup>Annual Reports of Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital for 1939-1940, 6.

<sup>19</sup>Jessie Platz, *The Progress of Nursing in China*, Box 4, Folder: Amoy-Hope Hospital-Student Play, W89-1012, Jeannette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, Act 6.

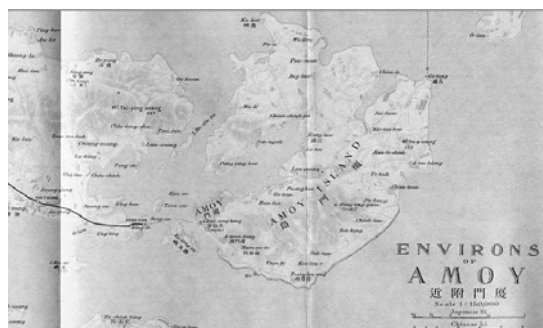
<sup>20</sup>Jessie Platz, interview by Julie Van Wyk, June 23, 1977, Box 1, Folder: Jessie Platz, H88-0113, The Old China Hands Oral History Project Records, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>21</sup>Jean Nienhuis to Gertrude Lievense, July 21, 1937, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1935-1939, W89-1012, Jeannette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, 1-3.

## *Faith and Humanitarian Aid in Wartime China, 1937-1941*

By Claire Barrett

“The heroism of these Christian missionaries in China, carrying on their mission of relief and service to millions of suffering Chinese, will remain one of the great chapters of history of the Christian Church,”<sup>1</sup> Rear Admiral Harry E. Yarnell, former Commander-in-Chief of the Asiatic Fleet, stated in 1940. The Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and World War II (1939-1945) led to an estimated ten to twenty million Chinese civilian deaths. The humanitarian aid provided by the missionaries from the Reformed Church in America (RCA) stood in stark contrast to the brutality seen not only at the frontlines of the war, but also in actions inflicted by the Japanese army on Chinese civilians. The missionaries’ work during this time was not just the preaching of the gospel. As well, it exhibited the practical demonstration of the word of God. From an early date, missionaries had been involved in education and medical work in China, which was justified in Scripture’s emphasis on the obligation of Christians to perform good works.<sup>2</sup> However, the aid and assistance beginning in 1937 far exceeded any previous effort. As this chapter reveals, RCA missionaries were more effective in administering aid than other relief organizations and the Chinese government in particular.



*Environs of Amoy, 1915*<sup>3</sup>

The RCA began its missionary work in 1842 on Amoy Island, China.<sup>4</sup> Established by Reverend David Abeel, the Amoy mission located on the southeast coast of China, with its headquarters on the smaller island of Kulangsu to the south of Amoy, began to lay the foundation for large-scale missionary efforts. Abeel and the missionaries who followed him sought to spread the Christian message and win souls for Christ.<sup>5</sup> However, this mission also led to education and medical work, which would play a vital role in refugee work during the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II. Kulangsu’s prewar population hosted only several thousand, which in 1938 spiked to 42,000 inhabitants due to its distinct status as an international settlement.

The creation of international settlements arose with the signing of the Treaty of Nanking on August 29th, 1842, at the end of the Second Opium War fought between the British and the Chinese, 1856-1860. The island of Kulangsu was officially made one such settlement in 1903, where it became a Western oasis by virtue of having international religious groups, commercial shipping, financial institutions, consulates—including an American one—and diplomatic agencies. What emerged in the early 20th century was an international community not under the direct control of the Chinese that was run by several nations on the island including the British, Americans, and Japanese. As a consequence at the outbreak of war, many Chinese in Amoy and the surrounding areas fled to Kulangsu and secured more safety and freedom due to the island being separately governed, primarily by foreign powers.<sup>6</sup>

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War was not the first instance of Japan’s territorial aggression on the Chinese mainland, as in 1931 Japan had invaded Manchuria. The 1937 conflict ended any chance for Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party, to create a strong, centralized nation state.<sup>7</sup> Chiang Kai-shek’s political agenda to unify first, and fight the impending invasion second, fell away swiftly and out of necessity, he entered into an uneasy and brief alliance with the Communists. China faced a multitude of



*China Divided, 1938*<sup>8</sup>

problems at the outset of the conflict. The nation was fractured between the Nationalists and Communists, the two competing governments; the expansive territory of China that was once unified under the Qing Empire was fragmented into ten distinct divisions ruled primarily by warlords. During wartime, this disunion hampered the efficiency of organized aid that the Nationalist government could provide to their citizens and foreign nationals who remained in the country. In *China at War: Regions of China, 1937-1945*, Diana Lary asserts that “the de facto division of China into so many different regions underlines the fact there was no functioning

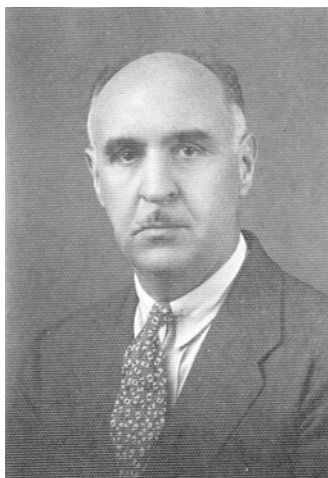
nationwide system of government...”<sup>9</sup> Unable to receive adequate assistance from their leadership, Chinese refugees, fleeing from the Japanese onslaught, found a unique ally in Christian missionaries.

Prior to 1941, before the United States and her allies declared war on Japan, American citizens were neutral foreign nationals in China. This key distinction allowed RCA missionaries to aid refugees in more extensive ways than the fractured Chinese government was able to because of a network on the ground for relief set in place by the missionaries.

On May 10, 1938, the Japanese invaded Amoy Island. In his diary, missionary Dr. Clarence Holleman’s wrote:

4 A.M. the bombardment really began in earnest... it is reported that some 200 Japanese soldiers have landed under cover of darkness. From that time on throughout the day we are deafened by the roar of planes, diving and zooming, dropping bombs and firing machine guns, the anti-air-craft from below and a million of her sounds that are a mixture of them all.<sup>10</sup>

By the next day, May 11, the Japanese had easily taken the island and, in doing so, created a humanitarian crisis. The war had cut off communication with Amoy to the



Dr. Clarence Holleman,  
ca. 1930s

world at large. By Japanese orders, the telephones and telegraph offices were destroyed. Many Chinese fled from Amoy or were shot in their attempt to do so. Thousands of others remained on Amoy, becoming refugees and generating a huge demand for the dwindling food and water resources. In spite of the chaos in a land which was not their own, the RCA missionaries remained. Holleman wrote that despite the conditions “we foreigners

[were] not afraid for ourselves but for those under [our] care.”<sup>11</sup> The focus was not on the missionaries themselves, but on the impending humanitarian crisis.

In the initial first few days following the invasion, foreigners and missionaries alike joined the International Relief Committee, which took the place of a Chinese committee that was not able to operate. Holleman stated that while only five percent or less of the population on Kulangsu were Christian, “more than 90% of the

leadership and relief work was conducted by them.”<sup>12</sup> However, while the leadership within the camps were primarily missionaries, it is important to note that it was the Chinese who cooked the meals and cleaned for the refugees, as well as translated for many of the missionaries, an essential function in the camps.<sup>13</sup> Alma Vander Meer recalled that “on the island of Kulangsu tents were erected and the Chinese organized themselves into working squads, some for cleaning, and some for cooking, et cetera.”<sup>14</sup> The committee promptly directed that every building on Kulangsu be put to use as a camp. On the small island, refugees occupied every church, school, factory, temple, and vacant residence. Henry Poppen wrote that, “during the first two nights thousands slept out in the open, in doorways, sheltered spots along the streets and alleys, in most any place where they lay their heads.”<sup>15</sup> In the next few months, tents and buildings were erected for those without shelter.

From the outset, medical attention was a primary objective for the RCA in Amoy. The Reformed mission in China operated two adjacent hospitals in Kulangsu, Hope and Wilhelmina. The missionary hospitals in Kulangsu were inundated with wounded Chinese civilians and military alike. Roughly one month after the Japanese occupation of Amoy and Kulangsu, the *Intelligencer-Leader*, an RCA newsletter published both in China and the United States, included observations of missionaries in China commenting on the rising number of refugees flocking to the island of Kulangsu in which “the wounded and the dying, all were brought in, doubling the normal capacity of [their] hospital.”<sup>16</sup> The small island’s facilities were stretched thin, however, the missionaries doctors and nurses continued to work unremittingly for the next four years.

In a letter published in the *Intelligencer-Leader*, Poppen approximated that after the Japanese forces captured Amoy, the island of Kulangsu “saw an influx of approximately 60,000 refugees from Amoy city...” With its hot climate and now overpopulation, the fear of an outbreak from diseases such as cholera and typhoid in the camps was a foremost concern to the doctors and nurses on the island. Immediate calls for assistance were sent, and by June 6, 1938, the missionaries had received “from the Lord Mayor’s Fund of London... a supply of serum for 50,000 injections for cholera and typhoid.” Poppen estimated that “The medical staff ha[d] already given more than 15,000 injections.”<sup>17</sup> Throughout the Japanese occupation, the mission’s hospitals were the only ones able to obtain medical supplies. Even so, getting them through the Japanese checkpoints was very difficult. In a report to the *Far Eastern Survey*, Robert W. Barnett asserts that, “a basic cause underlying most of the problems which [he] observed was the breakdown of transportation.”<sup>18</sup> Cut off from mainland China and

occupied by a hostile nation, it was essential to work not only with the Japanese, but also with the Chinese, British, and Americans.

The missionaries' neutrality was crucial to maintaining relationships with both the Chinese and Japanese governments, and their moral and religious obligations were lifesaving to the Chinese refugees. After the first twenty-four hours of the initial Japanese bombardment on May 10, 1938, few residents on Kulangsu had food and even fewer had access to water, for the Japanese had cut off the water supply to Amoy. However, the U.S. Navy and the American Consul came to the aid of the missionaries and refugees alike. *The Intelligencer-Leader* reported that the U.S.S. *Asheville* "hoisted the stars and stripes over the water boat and went to Amoy for water. Since then the Japanese Admiral ha[d] given permission to supply Kulangsu with water... water [was] now being supplied by the Japanese Navy."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the missionaries, working with the Red Cross, negotiated with the Japanese to allow them to take a boat from Kulangsu to mainland China so that those living upcountry could receive the necessary supplies. The missionaries on the islands of Kulangsu and Amoy were essential not only in mediating with the Japanese for goods and medical supplies for the islands themselves, but for those on the mainland as well.

The missionaries were able to provide relief in the form of medicine, clothing, food, and water by working in conjunction with the church in the United States, the Japanese government, the Chinese government, private Chinese citizens, Americans, and the British. Establishing lines of communication in the early days of the occupation was essential to facilitate humanitarian aid. The Church Committee for China Relief was the official agency of the RCA to make a unified appeal for aid for China both at home and abroad. The 1938 *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions* noted that "it became apparent early last fall that there would be serious need of civilian relief in China and... an appeal for \$15,000 was sent out to the Churches."<sup>20</sup> Three hundred and sixteen churches responded to the request and by May 11, 1938, \$15,961.55 was received. Of this amount, \$6,550 was sent to the National Christian Council of China for refugee camps and other relief needs.<sup>21</sup> This figure helped to stem, at least momentarily, the staggering humanitarian crisis that was occurring in occupied China.

In Changchow, the missionaries arranged for relief boats to carry supplies to the refugees on Kulangsu. By the end of September 1939, \$2,000 worth of supplies had been sent there, and it was estimated that future shipments would require around \$3,000 per month for the following months.<sup>22</sup> The Japanese, as well the



*Red Cross relief boat, ca. 1938*

Chinese government, responded to the initial pleas of assistance with the Japanese Consul General supplying the mission with serums while Poppen wrote in *The Intelligencer-Leader* that within a month of the invasion the Japanese Navy "donated 304 bags of rice, 100 bags of flour, 98 bags of sugar, 40 bags of salt and 20 cases of soy towards relief of refugees on Kulangsu."<sup>23</sup> The International Relief Committee in China, established in 1933 primarily by the American Red Cross, was a main lifeline to the missionaries and refugees alike. Through their work with the missionaries, the International Relief Committee was responsible for organizing:

British and U.S. warships radio messages [that] were sent far and wide calling for help. General Chiang Kai-Shek responded with \$100.00; Overseas Chinese in Singapore and the Straits and Manila sen[t] funds and shipped rice; to date more than \$300,000 ha[d] been received in addition to large quantities of rice; 41,000 [were] being supplied with two meals per day; a milk depot supplies milk to babies; an emergency hospital and two clinics ha[d] been opened.<sup>24</sup>

The relationships created between the missionaries and those individuals working towards the relief effort were critical during this period. Chinese overseas donated rice, money, and clothing, sending it through one of the only channels available to them, the missionaries. Led by Chiang Kai-shek, as of June 6, 1938, the Nationalist Government of China had donated \$10,000 to the relief effort.<sup>25</sup> However, this was \$5,000 less than what the RCA churches raised during the same year, and while the Chinese government donated money to the camps, it was the missionaries on the ground who budgeted and cared for the needs of the refugees.

The missionaries not only provided aid in the form of food and clothing, but creative methods were employed to provide safety for the refugees. Throughout the course of the conflict, the missionaries used existing

British and American flags or created and sewed new ones. The missionaries, recognizing that the Japanese would be more hesitant to bomb an area they believed was under U.S. or British aegis, used the flags to protect the refugees.<sup>26</sup> The RCA mission in Changchow, realizing the reticence of the Chinese to come to the hospital for fear of bombing, moved its location into their seminary buildings and William Angus noted that “confidence in the British flag... brought them to the hospital at its new location until facilities [had] been taxed to the limit.”<sup>27</sup> It was commonplace to use the flags of these neutral countries to provide a modicum of safety for refugees. In his newsletter, *News From the Front*, William Vander Meer recalled how the missionaries aided hundreds of their Chinese friends in escaping Amoy and Kulangsu, and that fortunately, upon being searched in Amoy by the Japanese, he had “two six by three foot American flags. Th[ose] made an impression.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, “huge American flags had been prepared and so placed as to be visible from both the air and the ground.”<sup>29</sup> The refugees found an unlikely ally in the RCA missionaries who used ingenious methods to secure safety for those displaced Chinese, creating an atmosphere vis-à-vis the Japanese, which might be understood as “purposeful ambiguity.”

Initially in 1938, 90,000 meals a day were provided to the refugees in the form of rice and beans mixed with soy sauce, with recipients providing their own utensils and bowls.<sup>30</sup> Two canning factories were made available on Kulangsu, utilizing the entire staff, as well as employing volunteers from the camps. The workers were organized into groups of twenty-five and the “rice distributed from the cooking centers carried into empty five gallon kerosene tins supplied by the Standard Vacuum Oil Company and the Asiatic Oil Company.”<sup>31</sup> The initial concern was to provide nourishment for underfed mothers and their infants. Immediately a Milk Clinic was opened and food for this purpose was supplied partially by the Chinese Red Cross Society, the International Red Cross, and the Lord Mayor’s Fund in London. As of January 6, 1939, missionary nurse Jessie M. Platz was still caring for 150 undernourished babies, as well as their mothers.<sup>32</sup> Milk, bean milk, and tonics would be used exclusively throughout the war years to alleviate the undernourished newborn population.

Since the Japanese invasion took place in 1938, missionaries in Amoy and the small island of Kulangsu had cleared every available building to accommodate the large influx of refugees. Huts, tents, and mat sheds had been erected to house the Chinese. Alongside the missionaries, the Chinese organized themselves into cleaning and cooking divisions to assist running the camps. Clarence Holleman noted that there were fifty-two camps “ranging from 500 to 3,000” people.<sup>33</sup> At its

peak in 1938, Kulangsu housed 42,000 refugees. However, that number fluctuated monthly. Enough shelter for the large number of Chinese fleeing the Japanese remained an issue throughout the war. Thousands of Chinese, aided by the missionaries, left Amoy and Kulangsu for the mainland, Singapore, and Manila; however, their places within the camps were immediately filled.



Alma Vander Meer, 1946

The end of 1941 brought about drastic changes to the lives of the RCA missionaries in Kulangsu and Amoy. Following the December 7th Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, America had no choice but to enter the conflict. A day later, the United States declared war on Japan, thus ending the neutral status of the missionaries. Alma Vander Meer, wife of missionary William Vander Meer, recalled that on the morning of the 8th that they “woke up and saw the Japanese flag waving on [their] school flag pole, so the much-dreaded moment had come. America was involved in the war, and [they] were caught in Japanese territory.” David Angus, the then eight-year old son of RCA missionaries William and Joyce Angus, remembered that day “looking down into our yard and seeing a Japanese soldier in full uniform standing guard with his rifle and fixed bayonet.”<sup>34</sup> The Americans, alongside the British, were interned by the Japanese in the hospitals in Amoy and Kulangsu where they were held until freed by negotiations between their respective governments and Japan, which led to an exchange of prisoners. While their work was halted due to their change in political status, from 1937 to 1941 the missionaries provided thousands of Chinese civilians the basic necessities to survive in the face of a foreign invasion. Despite malnutrition and malaria, William Angus remained in unoccupied China during the course of the war and continued to serve as a missionary.<sup>35</sup>

The gospel was manifested and embodied by the missionaries not only in their words, but in their actions as well. While unique circumstances aided the missionaries, their unflagging devotion to God and to the Chinese people anchored the Christian doctrine concretely in this world. Providing medical treatment, food, and shelter, the RCA missionaries helped to care for the physical and emotional needs of the Chinese refugees. In John 14:12, the message of Jesus Christ is



that the one who “believes in [Him] will also do the works that [He] do[es]; and greater works than these will he do, because [He] [is] going to the Father,” a message manifested by the RCA missionaries in China.

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#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup>“For China,” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, January 19, 1940, 13, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Hope College Joint Archives of Holland (W89-1012, Box 1, “China, 1936-1989”).
- <sup>2</sup>Gerald F. De Jong, *The Reformed Church in China 1842-1951* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), xii.
- <sup>3</sup>“Environs of Amoy,” University of Texas Library, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/amoy\\_environs\\_1915.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/amoy_environs_1915.jpg) (accessed July 14, 2014).
- <sup>4</sup>There exists both a town termed Amoy City (now called Xiamen) and an island by that name. In this text when using the term Amoy it will be referencing the island. Initially Kulangsu was spelled Kolongsu, while presently the island is named Gulangyu. However, I will be using the Romanized colloquial version that the missionaries used. Therefore, throughout the work it will be spelled Kulangsu.
- <sup>5</sup>De Jong, *The Reformed Church in China 1842-1951*, xii.
- <sup>6</sup>Clarence Holleman, W95-1196, Box 1, “Japanese Invasion of North China, 1937-1938,” Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.
- <sup>7</sup>There are three separate translations, Kuomintang, Guomindang, and the Chinese Nationalist Party. I will be using the westernized term.
- <sup>8</sup>Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 404.
- <sup>9</sup>Stephen R. MacKinnon, Diana Lary, Ezra F. Vogel, eds., *China at War: Regions of China, 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 12.
- <sup>10</sup>Dr. Holleman, *Extracts From a Diary*, July 1, 1938, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College. Dr. Clarence H. Holleman (1890-1973) was a medical missionary in Amoy from 1919-1941 and 1946-1949.
- <sup>11</sup>Dr. Holleman, *Extracts From a Diary*, July 1, 1938, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.
- <sup>12</sup>Dr. Holleman, *Diary entry*, May 13, 1938, 3, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.
- <sup>13</sup>David Angus, who was born in Amoy in 1933, spent his first eight years there recalled that the dialect in Fujian was quite distinct from national Mandarin, creating serious communication problems: interview with David Angus, July 21, 2014.
- <sup>14</sup>Alma Vander Meer, *Oral History Interview*, 28.
- <sup>15</sup>Henry Poppen, “Inasmuch.....” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, July 7, 1939, 5-7, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.
- <sup>16</sup>“Dear Friends in the Homeland,” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, July 29, 1938, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.
- <sup>17</sup>Henry Poppen, Excerpt from a Letter, *The Intelligencer-Leader*, June 6, 1938, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College. Poppen, “Inasmuch....” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, July 7, 1939, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College. The focus was not on the missionaries themselves, but on the impending humanitarian crisis.
- <sup>18</sup>Robert W. Barnett, “Isolated China,” *Far Eastern Survey*, 11, 15 (July 27, 1942): 169.

<sup>19</sup>“Dear Friends in the Homeland,” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, July 29, 1938, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>20</sup>*Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions* (New York: Board of Publications of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1938), 6.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>Angus, “Latest News From Amoy,” *Intelligencer-Leader*, January 6, 1939, 11, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>23</sup>Henry Poppen, Excerpt from a Letter, *The Intelligencer-Leader* June 6, 1938, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>24</sup>“Dear Friends in the Homeland,” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, July 29, 1938 (In Print) June 17, 1938 (Written), W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>25</sup>Henry Poppen, “From a Letter,” *The Intelligencer Leader*, June 6, 1938, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>26</sup>David Angus recalled that “From time to time warships from the American fleet would anchor in the Amoy harbor”: David Angus, sermon, First Presbyterian Church, Lansing, Mich., May 2014. Their presence may have contributed to the Japanese military’s hesitancy to act against American civilians.

<sup>27</sup>William Angus, “Latest News from Amoy,” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, January 6, 1939 11, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>28</sup>William Vander Meer, Box 1, Articles, *Intelligencer-Leader and Church Herald*, 1936-1953, 1937-1979, W88-0315, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>29</sup>William Vander Meer, “News from the Front,” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, February 17, 1939, 11-12, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>30</sup>Henry Poppen, “Inasmuch.....” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, July 7, 1939, 5-7, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>31</sup>Henry Poppen, “Inasmuch.....” *The Intelligencer-Leader*, July 7, 1939, 5-7, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>32</sup>William Angus, *The Intelligencer-Leader*, 11, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

<sup>33</sup>Dr. Holleman, *The Intelligencer-Leader* May 13, 1938, 4, W89-1012, Jeanette Veldman Papers, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College

<sup>34</sup>Alma Vander Meer, *Oral History Interview*, 30; David Angus, sermon, First Presbyterian Church, Lansing, Mich., May 2014.

<sup>35</sup>David Angus, sermon, First Presbyterian Church, Lansing, Mich., May 2014.

# Joint Archives of Holland

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# The Dutch in America Across the Centuries: Connections and Comparisons

Albany, New York, September 17-19, 2015

Joint Conference sponsored by the New Netherland Institute and the  
Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies

Conference Registration: \$75 — Registration will begin in June with a separate mailing.

## Planned Schedule

Thursday, September 17

A pre-conference tour of colonial Dutch heritage sites along the northern Hudson Valley.

Guided by Heleen Westerhuijs, coauthor of *Exploring Dutch New York: New York City, Hudson Valley, New Jersey and Delaware* (\$60 lunch not included)

Thursday, September 17

Evening Opening Reception at the Fort Orange Club  
(Included with registration with cash bar)

Friday, September 18

Paper Sessions at Huxley Theater at the New York State Museum  
(Coffee/tea and box lunch included with registration)

Evening Banquet at the Hampton Inn & Suites Albany Downtown, 25 Chapel Street

Banquet Meal: Rijsttafel (\$75) Speaker: Russell Shorto

Author of *Island at the Center of the World* and *Amsterdam*

Saturday, September 19 (ending by 1:00 pm)

Paper Sessions at Huxley Theater at the New York State Museum  
(Coffee/tea and box lunch included with registration)

Conference hotel accommodations \$129 per night plus tax

Hampton Inn & Suites Albany Downtown, 25 Chapel Street, Albany, NY 12210

Phone: 518-432-7000 – Contact the hotel directly using the code S20/SMERF

## Tentative List of Participants and Papers

**Andrew T. Stahlhut**—Albany's Commissioners for Indian Affairs in Colonial New York: The Dutch Shaping of Indian Diplomacy in the Larger British Empire, 1691-1755

**Babs Boter**—The Bond of Both Worlds: Travel Writers Bridging North America and Holland

**Bill Kennedy**—The Reformed Protestant Dutch Church and the Slavery Crisis of 1855

**Cornelia Kennedy**—Of Men and Words: An early Holland Debating Society

**Erin Bonuso Kramer**—Prisoners and Profiteers: The Economics of Imperial Loyalty on the Albany Frontier, 1664-1748

**Hans Krabbendam**—How Transnationalist were the Dutch in America?

**Henk Aay**—Westward Migration of Dutch Americans from the New Netherland Settlement Region as Measured by the Spread of RCA Congregations, 1664-1850

**Iris Plessius**—Imposed Consensus: An Examination of the Relations between Dutch Settlers & Native Americans in North America between 1674 & 1783

**Jan J. Boersema and Henk Aay**—From Wilderness to Cultivated Landscapes; 19<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Immigrants and the Natural World

**Leon van den Broeke**—Flexibility or Fixed Idea? Reformed Church Polity in New Netherland and Dutch-American Midwest

**Michael J. Douma**—A Dutch Confederate: Defending Slavery in a Transnational Context

**Peter D. Van Cleave**—Saving New Netherland in the Early American Republic: The Importance of Francis Adrian van der Kemp's Attempt to Translate the Records of New Netherland

**Pieter Hovens**—In Search of Gold, From New Netherland to the Far West: Dutchmen, Indians, and the Quest for El Dorado

**Robert P. Swierenga**—Helping Hands: Old Dutch Rescue Young Dutch

**Robert Schoone-Jongen**—New Dutch Folks in an Old Dutch Neighborhood: New Dutch Immigration to the Passaic Valley (1845-1900)

### **Getting to Albany (September 16)**

AADAS15 in Albany is a long way from our members and constituency. From Grand Rapids alone (through Canada) it is 9 h. and 40 min by car (not counting stops) and many of you live much further from Albany than that. The board would like to make it possible for everyone interested in attending AADAS15 to be able to get there. It will be a unique conference bringing together people from different organizations with an interest in Dutch American history and culture.

We have made a reservation for a motor coach to Albany leaving from Calvin College's Prince Conference Center early on Wednesday, September 16, arriving at the Hampton Inn in Albany around suppertime, leaving for Grand Rapids around 1:00 on Saturday, Sept. 19 and returning to GR around midnight. The same coach will be used for the all day field trip to Dutch heritage sites in the Hudson Valley on Thursday, September 17.

The tentative cost for the return trip to Albany by motor coach will be \$100 (assuming 45 riders). Why should you take the bus? First, cost. The cheapest flights I can find on Expedia for GR to Albany for Sept. 16-19 are around \$325/person, and from Chicago, around \$300/person. If you use the AAA estimated costs of driving (61 cents/mi., for a medium size sedan, 15,000 miles/yr.) the return cost from GR to Albany is \$809 (or \$202/person with four in a car). Second, convenience. It's a more relaxing way to travel; on the bus you can socialize, read, nap, hop on the Internet (Wi-Fi provided) and arrive bright-eyed and bushy-tailed in Albany. Third, environment. Driving a midsize car from GR to Albany and back puts .48 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the environment, airplane .16 metric tons (3 times less) and motor coach .06 metric tons (8 times less). Fourth (and very important), love for your neighbor. Your taking the motor coach makes it possible for a number of seniors who otherwise would not be able to get to Albany to attend AADAS15. I realize, given our car-oriented culture, that it will be a challenge to get 45 persons to take the motor coach option, but with your help I think it's doable. The motor coach will also be available to take people from the hotel to the conference site, an 18-minute walk. So, let's get on the bus! You will need a valid passport with an expiry date three months from our return date (Sept. 19).

A final incentive to take the motor coach option is that this will secure a place for you on Thursday's fieldtrip (Sept 17) to Dutch heritage sites along the Hudson River valley. With 45 riders, there will only be another ten seats available for that daylong excursion and, I am sure, those few remaining spots will be taken quickly.

Those taking the motor coach may leave their car at the Prince Conference Center at Calvin for the duration of the conference. If necessary, those travelling to Grand Rapids can also make a reservation to stay at the Prince Conference Center Tuesday evening.

**Please contact Henk Aay ([aay@calvin.edu](mailto:aay@calvin.edu))  
if you have any questions or to indicate your interest in the bus to Albany.**

### **Excursion to Hudson Valley Dutch American Heritage Sites (Thursday, September 17)**

Heleen Westerhuijs, coauthor of *Exploring Dutch New York: New York City, Hudson Valley, New Jersey and Delaware* will be our guide as we explore a number of colonial Dutch heritage sites in the northern part of the Hudson Valley, likely including the Craillo State Historical Site Museum, the Bronck Museum, Saugerties, Kingston, New Paltz, Rhinebeck and Kinderhook. Cost: \$60 per person (lunch not included). You will be able to sign up on the registration web site for the conference.



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*Rev. Henry Veenschoten conducting a funeral service with his wife, Stella, at the organ, ca. 1940s*