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A Church Divided: The RCA and CRC Schism

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A Church Divided: The Schism of 1857

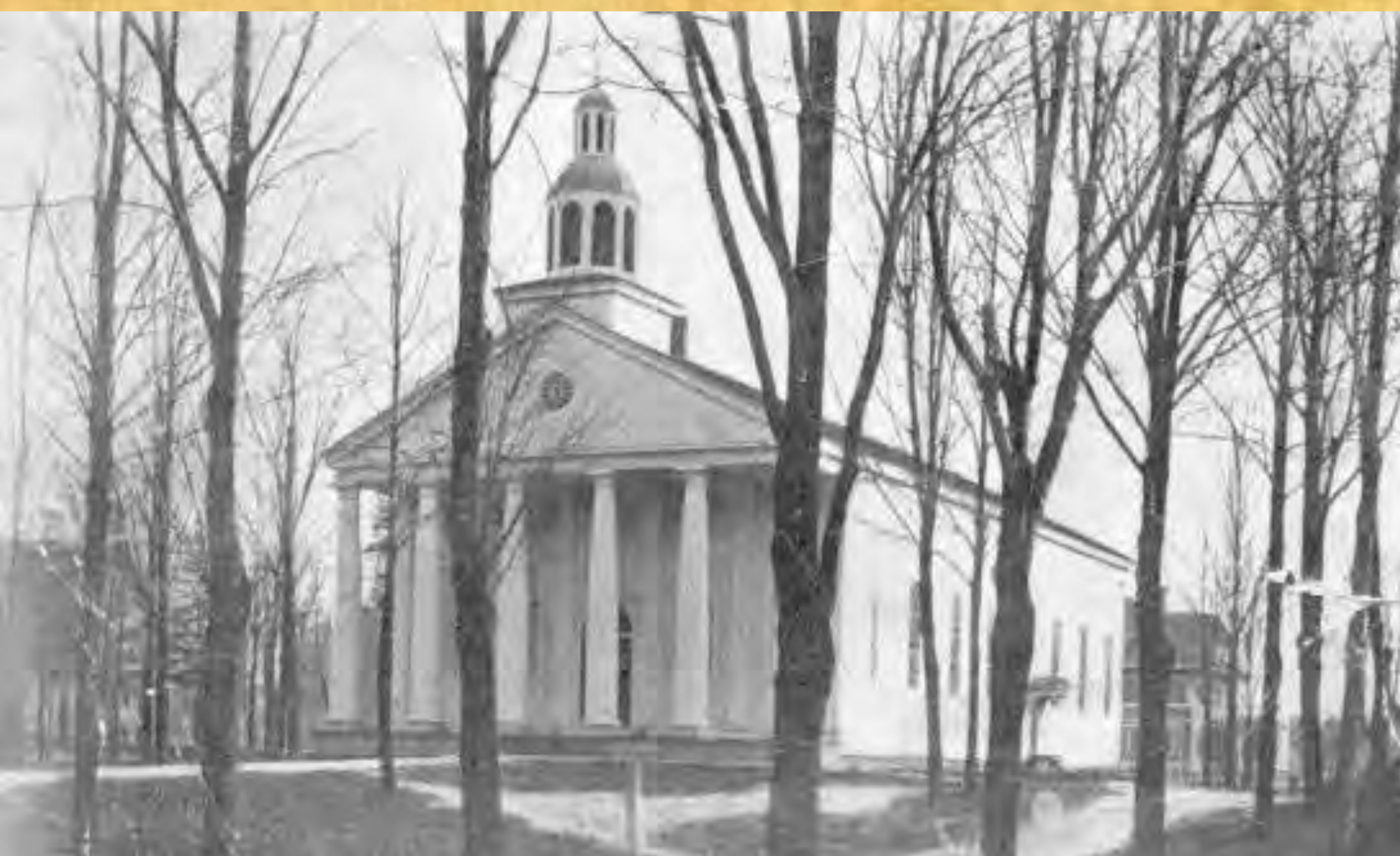
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<http://www.buitenweg-familie.nl/Afscheiding.html>

Abstract

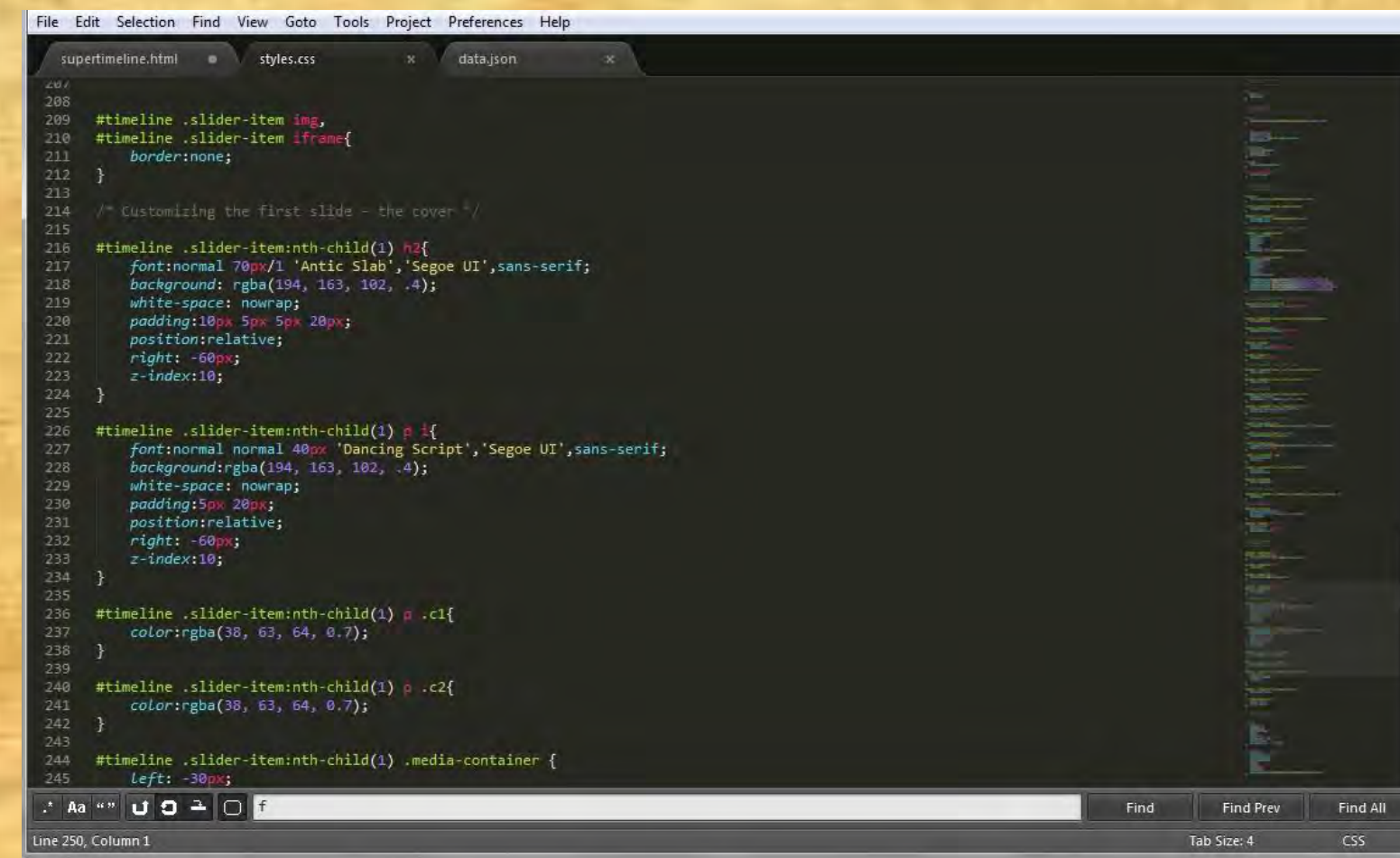
The schism between two Dutch churches, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA), shaped the demographic and cultural landscape of Holland, Michigan. While most research on the schism appears in books and articles, our project presents this history in a simple, accessible way using an interactive timeline on digitalholland.hope.edu. We draw on interviews, archival research, and existing literature on the topic to critically compare Dutch identity, liturgy, schooling, and worldview in these respective churches. The theological differences underlying the schism are clear, but we have investigated the demographic and cultural identity issues that may have had an even greater role in the schism. Many of the immigrants to America coming from the more theologically liberal state church in the Netherlands joined the CRC, which held significantly more purist views. One of the founding impetuses behind the CRC was the preservation of Dutch culture. The RCA was traditionally based in a worldview that embraced ecumenism and American culture whereas the CRC prioritized doctrinal purity. The CRC claimed separatism because they believed they were the one true church. Thus, we tentatively conclude that one of the main motives behind the founding of the CRC was their desire to preserve Dutch culture.



<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/B97XKnOCQAERmQ.jpg:large>

Timeline

We created an interactive timeline using TimelineJS to make an engaging historical presentation of important events related to the schism. TimelineJS is an open source software program, and we made changes to the CSS to change the appearance of our timeline. We published our timeline on a public WordPress site linked to Digital Holland.



Methodology.

Our research was mainly archival in nature. We started with combing the Van Wylen Library for pertinent information and dove into a number of books written on the topic. Many of these were written by Dr. Robert Swierenga or Dr. Elton Bruins, both resident historians at the Theil Research Center. The Theil Research Center in Holland supplied our project with a plethora of resources, and we spent a number of hours investigating the works at our disposal. Eventually, we decided to visit the Christian Reformed Church archives, contained in the Calvin College library. After collecting our information, we constructed a timeline on TimelineJS and embedded links within the timeline to informative pages constructed on WordPress.



Conclusion

The Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church were quite theologically similar. Divergence in religious practice and attitudes toward open communion and hymn use provided concrete reasons for the split. Underneath such differences lay deeper religious and cultural attitudes. The RCA embraced American culture; the CRC eschewed it as a potentially dangerous influence that could compromise their perceived doctrinal purity.



<https://www.genealogieonline.nl/stambloom-hobers/13083.php>



http://dutch-reformed.wikia.com/wiki/Eastern_Avenue_Christian_Reformed_Church,_Grand_Rapids,_Michigan

Special Thanks to the Mellon Scholars Program, Reverend John Brown of Pillar Church, Dr. Elton Bruins, and Dr. Robert Swierenga.