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# The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 27.01: Spring 2017

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## *Lucas De Weert—The Seeker*

By Mary Raper

*In the Fall 2016 issue of the Joint Archives Quarterly, Marjorie Viveen challenged readers to help unravel the story of Lucas De Weert. Due to his second marriage of a distant ancestor of mine, I am able to share much of his life:*

Lucas De Weerd, of Holland, an eccentric old man who frequently posed as a disciple of Edward Payne Weston, the aged pedestrian, has shaken the Holland dust from off his feet and has taken up his abode in the county infirmary at Eastmanville. Two years ago De Weerd claimed he walked from Arkansas to Chicago and last year he started on a long distance hike from Holland to Everett, Wash., with a view of emulating the fame of Weston. He started out over the Pere Marquette track to Chicago, but returned three hours later owing to a raging blizzard. DeWeerd is nearly seventy-five years old.

*From the Coopersville Observer, October 10, 1913*  
[newspapers frequently misspelled De Weert's name]

The *Coopersville Observer* of October 10, 1913, reported that Lucas De Weert[t], of Holland, had gone to live at the Ottawa County Poor Farm. His claim to fame was long-distance walking to other states, just as his hero, Edward Payne/Payson Weston had. This part of his story is reflective of his life, both after his move to the Poor Farm, and prior to it.

He was born in Schoonebeek, close to Dalen, Drenthe, the Netherlands, on June 4, 1839.<sup>1</sup> His birth name was Lukas Weerts. His father, Evert, worked on a farm, while his mother, Geesje Snijders, raised the family. Lukas was the middle child and only son, with two older sisters and two younger. Three other sisters died within six years of birth. When Lukas was eleven years old, his mother died.<sup>2</sup>

Drenthe was a land of bogs and swamps, so crops often failed, and economic conditions were poor. Nearby was the border of Germany. People from both countries crossed back and forth each day. When he was 25 years old, Lukas married Gese Roelofs, a 19-year-old born in Germany. His job was shoemaker.<sup>3</sup> Almost two years after they married, in 1866, their first child, Grace, was born.<sup>4</sup> They were, like many Netherlanders, struggling to make ends meet. Many people had already immigrated to the United States due to the poor economy or for religious freedom. Dr. Albertus Van Raalte, a Dutch Reformed minister, began a colony in Holland, Michigan, which soon spread to form other towns in western Michigan. Some of the settlers wrote letters to their relatives in the Netherlands, telling them that with hard work, they could improve their lot in life. Shipping agents were placed throughout Netherlands, competing for sales by offering low prices. Newspapers had weekly advertisements, enticing people to make the trip.<sup>5</sup> Lukas was caught up in the fervor, and, with his family, began preparing to immigrate to western Michigan, in search of a better life.

In 1867, the lowest fares were to be had by leaving from Liverpool, England.<sup>6,7</sup> The first stage of the trip was more than 200 miles from Schoonebeek to Rotterdam, often traveled by foot, railway, and canal.<sup>8</sup> From Rotterdam, they went by ship to Hull, England, and then by train to Liverpool. The change in scenery from the

*(continued on page 2)*

## From the Director



I hope you enjoy reading Mary Raper's story about her ancestor and his interesting life. Mary has been doing research at the Joint Archives for years, and we are happy to publish some of her writing in the *Quarterly*. I also hope that you are able to join me at the Holland premiere of the film

*The Poor Farm: A Documentary* that is being shown at the Park Theatre on May 24 at 6:00 p.m. (see enclosed flyer). A large part of the research and images for this film was taken from archival records held at the Joint Archives of Holland for this county department. See you at the movie!

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

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### *Lucas De Weert (continued from page 1)*

Weerts' village in Drenthe to the sites in England was astonishing. Instead of using horses, farms were being plowed with steam engines. The emigrants saw stone palaces and huge quarries. Their train passed through mountains with long tunnels, and passed majestic churches, estates, and buildings.<sup>9</sup> Once in Liverpool, steamship companies offered lodging for one to several days, until the ship was ready to leave. Throughout the whole journey, the emigrants had to keep a careful eye on their suitcases to guard against thieves snatching them.<sup>10</sup>



*Landing stage for ships leaving Liverpool, England, during the 1860s*

Finally, the day to set sail arrived for the Weerts family. It was in May 1867.<sup>11</sup> Their ship was the *S/S Hibernian*, a steamship with three masts. Cheapest fares were in steerage, where space was shared with many other passengers. The trip, fourteen days or more, must have been difficult with their one-year old child.<sup>12</sup> Eventually,

the ship entered the St. Lawrence River, and then docked in Montreal, Quebec. In order to get to western Michigan, many settlers traveled by boat through the locks of the Erie Canal to Buffalo, and on by steamboat through the Great Lakes.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, they arrived in Holland, Michigan. There, a large colony of people, who had immigrated in the past 20 years, assisted them in the new land.<sup>14</sup> Lukas quickly embraced the United States as his country, signing citizenship papers on October 21, 1867.<sup>15</sup> By August of 1870, he and Gese had a home in Zeeland, Michigan, with two new sons, Frederik, age 2, and Evert, age 3 months.<sup>16</sup> They added another son, Henry, in 1872.<sup>17</sup> Lukas worked as a laborer. He also bought and sold several pieces of land between 1869 and 1879.<sup>18</sup> The couple now signed papers as Lukas and Geesje De Weert; in 1875, Lukas began writing his name "Lucas."<sup>19</sup>



*Typical dug-out dwelling used by Kansas settlers in the 1870s*

Dr. Van Raalte encouraged settlements in other parts of the United States, one of which was Kansas. A well-attended meeting took place in December 1877, and a committee formed to explore the area.<sup>20</sup> They returned with a report of good soil, with large crops of wheat and corn, and enough wood for a large settlement.<sup>21</sup> Real estate agents, anxious to profit on land given by the federal government, promoted interest in moving there.<sup>22</sup> Once again, Lucas's interest sparked, and he moved his family to Cawker Township, Mitchell County, Kansas.<sup>23</sup> In the process, he defaulted on a mortgage.<sup>24</sup> It was worth the opportunity to farm land in a less crowded territory.

However, the country was greatly different. Michigan, at least, resembled their first home in the Netherlands, for both had forests, swamps, and similar weather. Kansas was a drier prairie, with significantly fewer trees and lakes. Many of the early settlers dug their houses in the earth. Later, using interwoven prairie grass roots, they built sod houses.<sup>25</sup> The doors were either made from covered wagon boards, a horse blanket, or buffalo hide. Bedding was often a pile of prairie grass. Native

Americans, who were friendly, lived in the area. Antelope and game birds were a sight to see, as were the many covered prairie schooners pulled by oxen and horses.<sup>26</sup> Other new arrivals walked their way in, carrying small boards to sit down on and remove sandburs from their feet.

Lucas now owned 80 acres of land, 20 of which he farmed. His cows produced butter and his poultry laid eggs he could sell. He had 15 swine. In his fields, he raised Indian corn.<sup>27</sup> With his family, he kept a watchful eye out for prairie fires, wildcats, and poisonous snakes. Spring through fall, grasshoppers were a continual threat to crops, and along with flies, a constant annoyance both inside and out.<sup>28</sup> In 1880 and 1881, a severe drought hit the area, destroying much of the harvest.<sup>29</sup> On July 3, 1881, Lucas and Geesje added their last child to the family, a son, Benjamin.<sup>30</sup> Little more than a year later, Geesje died on August 15, 1882.<sup>31</sup>

The dream Lucas sought in Kansas failed, and he decided to head back to Michigan. His first four children were old enough to care for themselves and help him on his way back, but Benjamin was too young. Lucas found a family willing to take him in, and perhaps adopt him. They were Israel and Mary Bowersock, of Iowa City, Iowa.<sup>32</sup>

Soon after their return to Holland, Michigan, Lucas's oldest child, Grace, married in June 1883.<sup>33</sup> That November, Lucas married Metje Niemeijer Klifman, another Drenthe immigrant, who was also recently widowed.<sup>34,35</sup> He returned to work as a day laborer and a farmer. Lucas and Metje bought and sold several pieces of property, much of it close to the railroad in Holland.<sup>36</sup> Benjamin came back into Lucas's life, working as a servant for a family in Allegan County.<sup>37</sup> In 1905, Benjamin married and eventually moved to Wisconsin.<sup>38,39</sup> Grace's first marriage ended and she followed her brother, Frederick, to Everett, Washington, where she married her second husband.<sup>40</sup> Lucas retired by 1904.<sup>41</sup> On January 10, 1908, Metje, 61 years old, died of pneumonia.<sup>42</sup> With so many losses so quickly, Lucas was in a hurry to marry again, and that June, with his bride-to-be, Belinda Catherine Pierce, got as far as getting their names in the marriage record, and then abruptly cancelled the ceremony.<sup>43</sup> However, Lucas was not to be deterred from the comforts of home, marrying Sadie Goodman Southwell in August.<sup>44</sup> On the grounds of his inability to give her the financial support she needed, Sadie filed for divorce from Lucas on April 22, 1909.<sup>45</sup>

For a time, Lucas lived near the Pere Marquette station.<sup>46</sup> He admired Edward Payne/Payson Weston, renowned as a pedestrian walker. In 1911, Lucas claimed he'd walked

from Arkansas to Chicago. At age 80, he proclaimed that he was planning a walking tour to Everett, Washington, the home of his children, Frederick and Grace. A half mile after he started down the railroad track, he found himself in a raging snowstorm, and returned home.<sup>47</sup>



*Ottawa County Infirmary at the time De Weert was living there, ca. 1913*

In 1913, Lucas's search for care led him to live at the county infirmary in Eastmanville.<sup>48</sup> The stay there didn't stop his amorous adventures, however, as in 1914, the eighty-one-year-old became engaged to thirty-one-year-old Laura Smith. Lucas's 24-year old grandson, Martin, was just seven years younger than his grandmother-to-be!<sup>49</sup> The front page of *The Holland Sentinel* shared the tale of the first time in Ottawa county history two people, with 50 years between them, applied for a license.<sup>50</sup> When asked his plans, Lucas said, "I leave all that to the wife ... We will live wherever she pleases."<sup>51</sup> The following day, again on page 1, *The Holland Sentinel* carried this story: "Jauntily carrying a heavy cane and dressed up as he had not been dressed up in many a moon, carrying in his inside coat pocket the marriage license issued by County Clerk Glerum—which license he took great pleasure in exhibiting—Lucas De Weer[t], the 81-year old bridegroom, set out this noon for Bangor to take onto himself a wife. No report has come as to whether the marriage has actually taken place or not, and according to the story of a local police officer it seems extremely unlikely that De Weer[t] will return to Holland a married man...it appears that the bride-to-be had not been consulted. The officer told how he had been appealed to by the woman to help her to get back to her home in Bangor. She said she had come to Holland to take the position of De Weer[t]'s housekeeper, but that circumstances were such that she could not stay. The officer helped her to the best of his ability and she boarded the train for home. According to the story of the officer, she declared that she had had no hand in planning the marriage and that the thought of wedlock

with the aged Holland would-be groom had never occurred to her.”<sup>52</sup>

The next day, the story’s headline read “Last Chapter Today in Romance of Lucas De Weer[t]”, and related: “When De Weer[t] left for Bangor yesterday on the noon train he was full of good cheer and as debonair as a youth of twenty. This morning when he sailed forth from his home, some of the spring had gone out of his step and the smile had left his face. For sad to say, this particular romance did not have a happy ending for De Weer[t]. ‘Did you get married yesterday?’ asked the *Sentinel* reporter...‘No,’ growled De Weer[t]. ‘I don’t want that girl.’ And he marched on refusing to stop for further details. Nor did he show the marriage license to those he met today as he did yesterday.”<sup>53</sup>

Once again, Lucas’s setbacks led him to make a move. His youngest son, Benjamin, now lived in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, area.<sup>54</sup> In 1920, Lucas resided near Milwaukee, in Waukesha Springs. He stayed at an institution called the Metropolitan Church Association, a religious faith group.<sup>55</sup> It was active in various parts of the United States, based in Waukesha Springs.<sup>56</sup> The church was also known as the Holy Jumpers, because the members often jumped up during services. Another nickname was the Burning Bushers, after their periodical, *Burning Bush*.<sup>57</sup> The church was very liberal. It welcomed the helpless and outcast, hoping to give them another chance at life.<sup>58</sup> The 1920 census shows Lucas living among students, missionaries, ministers, and fellow inmates, in a building with its own interesting history.<sup>59</sup> It was here that Matthew Laflin built a hotel called the Fountain Spring House. This property had a spring Laflin believed had healing waters, attracting many tourists. After four years, the hotel burned in a fire, but was rebuilt on a grander scale in 1878. The upper crust of society enjoyed going there for a cure for any ailments they might have. In the early 1900s, the automobile brought in less formal activities, and the hotel lost its popularity. It was first sold to a mineral spring company, and when that went bankrupt, to the Metropolitan Church Association.<sup>60</sup> It was an ideal spot for the church’s main office, publishing plant, Bible school, and library. Once again, Lucas found shelter, a place where the rental fee was helping with the group’s work.<sup>61</sup>

Eventually, Lucas again moved on, this time to Milwaukee’s Asylum For The Chronic Insane.<sup>62</sup> This institution provided little more than shelter and food in overcrowded conditions.<sup>63</sup> His son, Henry, who lived in Chicago, sent money to pay for expenses.<sup>64</sup> Henry did not believe his father was insane.<sup>65</sup> On December 12, 1926, Henry received a telegram saying Lucas had died.<sup>66</sup> Henry’s daughter, Grace, believed Lucas was

buried on the grounds of the asylum.<sup>67</sup> Approximately 8,200 people were buried there between 1882 and 1974.<sup>68</sup> Lucas’s search for a better life was finally over, but his struggles for it are remembered today.



Writer Mary Raper enjoys genealogy research. She volunteers for the Jenison Historical Society and is a member of the Genealogy Study Group in Zeeland. Also a retired teacher, Mary volunteers with the Grand Rapids Public Schools. She has a Master’s in Education degree from Wayne State. A lifelong resident of western Michigan, she now resides in Grandville. Mary enjoys her two dogs, reading, traveling, and camping.

Endnotes (some notes abbreviated for space; contact the Joint Archives for full citation source)

- <sup>1</sup> <http://alledrenten.nl/>. (abbreviated)
- <sup>2</sup> E. Peters, <https://www.genealogieonline.nl/en/stamboom-peters/I142.php>.
- <sup>3</sup> <http://alledrenten.nl/>. (abbreviated)
- <sup>4</sup> E. Peters, <https://www.genealogieonline.nl/en/stamboom-peters/I189.php>.
- <sup>5</sup> Robert P. Swierenga, [http://www.swierenga.com/Middelbg\\_pap.html](http://www.swierenga.com/Middelbg_pap.html).
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.ancestry.com/>.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert P. Swierenga, [http://www.swierenga.com/Middelbg\\_pap.html](http://www.swierenga.com/Middelbg_pap.html).
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/>. (abbreviated)
- <sup>9</sup> H. J. Brinks, “Crossing the Atlantic,” *Origins*, Vol. II, No. 1, (Calvin College, 1984), 4 – 5.
- <sup>10</sup> National Museums Liverpool, <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/sheet/13>.
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.ancestry.com/>.
- <sup>12</sup> “Immigrants to Canada,” <https://personal.uwaterloo.ca/marj/genealogy/allan.html>.
- <sup>13</sup> “Harm Scheeper’s Letter,” *Origins*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (Calvin College, 1983), 17.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert P. Swierenga, [http://www.swierenga.com/Middelbg\\_pap.html](http://www.swierenga.com/Middelbg_pap.html).
- <sup>15</sup> “Declaration of Intention,” Ottawa County, Archives of Michigan, 1867.
- <sup>16</sup> 1870 United States Census, Zeeland, Ottawa County, Michigan, 55.
- <sup>17</sup> E. Peters, <https://www.genealogieonline.nl/en/stamboom-peters/I189.php>.
- <sup>18</sup> Ottawa County Register of Deeds, <https://www.miottawa.org/Deeds/loadEffectiveDate.action>.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>20</sup> *De Grondwet*, 4 Dec 1877, 3.
- <sup>21</sup> Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, 352.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>23</sup> 1880 United States Census, Cawker Township, Mitchell County, Kansas, 3.
- <sup>24</sup> *De Grondwet*, 20 Jan, 1880, 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, The Historical Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 1928, 542.
- <sup>26</sup> *Prairie View, KS: The First 100 Years*, The Phillips County Review, 47.
- <sup>27</sup> 1880 Productions of Agriculture Census, Cawker Township, Mitchell County, Kansas, 3.

# Weston and the Wannabe

By Marjorie Viveen



Edward Payson  
Weston

This is the strange story of how a lost bet impacted and intertwined the lives of two men. In 1860, Edward Payson Weston, “Weston” to most who knew him, found himself in a Boston pub arguing politics. The idea of Abraham Lincoln being elected president repulsed Weston to the degree it embraced his verbal antagonist. The heated exchange brewed a challenge. If Lincoln won, Weston would attend the president’s inaugural....arriving on foot! The bet required a 478-mile trek from the State House in

Massachusetts to the White House in D.C. and, under its terms, must be completed within a ten-day window. If Lincoln lost, Weston’s opponent would do the same.

Defeated, but ever the sportsman, Weston departed Boston despite a March blizzard. He trudged for days through snow, muck, and ice. Though much relieved at trail’s end, he was disappointed to have missed Lincoln’s inauguration by mere hours. Rebounding, Weston tidied himself and arrived just in time for the inaugural ball. There he met a gracious President Lincoln who delighted in his story and generously offered Weston a train ticket back to Boston. The pedestrian politely declined. Perhaps even then the self-promoting, attention-seeking, publicity-savvy Weston knew the notoriety such a stunt would evoke. He was right.

Nearly overnight Weston became a household name, bringing lifeblood to the competitive sport of “pedestrianism.” Over the next six years, he built a solid reputation for winning long-distance walkist events. In 1867, Weston prepared for his greatest feat to date, the 1200-mile tramp from Portland, Maine, to Chicago. It would take him 26 days and award him \$10,000, a fortune by 1867 standards. In that same year, Lucas De Weert emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States and had signed citizenship papers upon arrival in Holland, Michigan. Most certainly the neo-American was aware of the famed Weston. In fact, the man seemed to capture citizen De Weert’s imagination in obsessive proportion. Yet, despite De Weert’s attraction to Weston, no two men could be more polar.

Weston’s ancestors could be traced to the *Mayflower*. He was born into a literary family. His father wrote

<sup>28</sup> Conrad Vandervelde, *Hollanders in Kansas*, <https://esirc.emporium.edu/bitstream/handle/123456789/1571/Vandervelde%20Vol%207%20Num%203.pdf?sequence=1>.

<sup>29</sup> *Prairie View, KS: The First 100 Years*, The Phillips County Review, 7.

<sup>30</sup> <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/L6C8-HS8/details>.

<sup>31</sup> <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/L281-13B/details?cid=partner-3Z3L-Z4GK-J7ZS-YT3Z-Q4KY-YN66-ZX5K-176R>.

<sup>32</sup> Durant, W. and Rose, A. G., III, *The Durant Genealogy*, 1890 and 1968, 106.

<sup>33</sup> <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/LZ8Y-H6Q/details>.

<sup>34</sup> <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/L281-1MN/details?cid=partner-3Z3L-Z4GK-J7ZS-YT3Z-Q4KY-YN66-ZX5K-176R>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/L5G8-L2V/details?cid=partner-3Z3L-Z4GK-J7ZS-YT3Z-Q4KY-YN66-ZX5K-176R>.

<sup>36</sup> Ottawa County Register of Deeds, <https://www.miottawa.org/Deeds/loadEffectiveDate.action>.

<sup>37</sup> 1900 United States Census, Fillmore Township, Allegan County, Michigan, 14.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-40000-88021931/benjamin-payson-deweert-in-geni-world-family-tree?s=337642831>.

<sup>39</sup> 1910 United States Census, Russell Township, Lincoln County, Wisconsin, 3a.

<sup>40</sup> <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/LZ8Y-H6Q/details?cid=partner-3Z3L-Z4GK-J7ZS-YT3Z-Q4KY-YN66-ZX5K-176R>.

<sup>41</sup> *Holland City Directory, 1903 – 1904*.

<sup>42</sup> <http://seekingmichigan.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p129401coll7/id/657836/rec/68>.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.ancestry.com/>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *The Holland Sentinel*, 20 Oct 1914, 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Coopersville Observer*, 10 Oct 1913.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *The Holland Sentinel*, 21 Oct 1914, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *The Holland Sentinel*, 20 Oct 1914, 1.

<sup>51</sup> *The Holland Sentinel*, 21 Oct 1914, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *The Holland Sentinel*, 22 Oct 1914, 1.

<sup>53</sup> *The Holland Sentinel*, 23 Oct 1914, 1.

<sup>54</sup> 1920 United States Census, Russell Township, Lincoln County, Wisconsin, 2A.

<sup>55</sup> 1920 United States Census, Waukesha Ward 1, Waukesha, Wisconsin, 10A.

<sup>56</sup> “Metropolitan Church Association,” *Religious Bodies: Separate denominations, history, description, and Statistics*,” 282

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.amazon.com/Holy-Jumpers-Evangelicals-Radicals-Progressive/dp/0195377842/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1489885336&sr=8-1&keywords=Holy+Jumpers](https://www.amazon.com/Holy-Jumpers-Evangelicals-Radicals-Progressive/dp/0195377842/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1489885336&sr=8-1&keywords=Holy+Jumpers)

<sup>58</sup> “Metropolitan Church Association,” *Religious Bodies: Separate denominations, history, description, and Statistics*,” 282

<sup>59</sup> 1920 United States Census, Waukesha Ward 1, Waukesha, Wisconsin, 10A.

<sup>60</sup> <http://oldmilwaukee.net/blog/?s=waukesha+springs>.

<sup>61</sup> “Metropolitan Church Association,” *Religious Bodies: Separate denominations, history, description, and Statistics*,” 282.

<sup>62</sup> Western Union telegram, Dec 12, 1926.

<sup>63</sup> “Milwaukee County Asylum for the Chronic Insane,” *Wauwatosa Wiki*, [http://wauwatosa.wikia.com/wiki/Milwaukee\\_County\\_Asylum\\_for\\_the\\_Chronic\\_Insane](http://wauwatosa.wikia.com/wiki/Milwaukee_County_Asylum_for_the_Chronic_Insane)

<sup>64</sup> Western Union telegram, Dec 12, 1926.

<sup>65</sup> Letter to Mary Raper from Grace De Weert, daughter of Henry De Weert, undated.

<sup>66</sup> Western Union telegram, Dec 12, 1926.

<sup>67</sup> Letter to Mary Raper from Grace De Weert, daughter of Henry De Weert, undated.

<sup>68</sup> “Monsters & Mobsters,” <http://monstermobsters.blogspot.com/2010/08/it-was-chilly-day-in-november-few-years.html>.

poetry and books detailing his adventures in gold mining and mountaineering. His mother was a published novelist. Weston himself worked for a newspaper, and came to fully appreciate the power of advertising. He was a risk-taking, dapper fellow whose overflowing enthusiasm was punctuated by bouts of depression. Nonetheless, Weston always presented himself as the most important person in the room. In contrast, De Weert was the middle child of humble agrarian stock, a struggling immigrant, who logged more failed dreams than realized ones. Weston was the total package De Weert only wished to be.

By the 1870s, mania for pedestrianism was peaking across the United States and beyond. The sport had universal appeal, likely because, while not every man could deliver the knockout punch required, for example, in boxing, all could put one foot in front of the other. DeWeert identified with that and increasingly with Weston. Both were born in the same year, 1839. Both married, raised families, and became widowers. Both suffered financial humiliation. Little by little DeWeert's life, whether by coincidence or copy, began to parallel his hero Weston.



Edward Payson Weston (right) and walking partner, n.d.

In 1909, Weston, now 70 years old, set out afoot from New York City to San Francisco, missing his 100 day goal by five. Responding to that perceived failure, in 1910 he made the return trip in heart-stopping 87 days. The world was awed. In step, soon after De Weert claimed he had walked from Arkansas to Chicago. There was no evidence of that accomplishment, but plenty documenting "Weston Fakes." To be

taken more seriously, in 1913, De Weert made an earnest attempt at distance walking. Starting from Holland, Michigan, he aimed for Everett, Washington, to visit his children. As reported in the October 10, 1913, Eastmanville Echoes column of the *Coopersville Observer*, "(De Weert[t]) started out over the Pere Marquette track to Chicago, but returned three hours later owing to a raging blizzard." The scene was reminiscent of Weston's premiere slog to Washington, D.C. De Weert's Washington state bid was most likely what landed the 74-year-old in "protective custody" at the Ottawa County Infirmary, if only temporarily.

Advancing age did not diminish lust in either of the old gents. Both sought relationships with women decades their junior. Weston maintained his partnership with his mistress Anna O'Hagan, while De Weert's plan to wed Laura Smith was thwarted by her shock and disinterest. Time passed and took a mental toll on both octogenarians. Eventually Weston was admitted to Bellevue Hospital, where he was treated for "Senile Psychosis." He died at age 90 on May 13, 1929. Lucas De Weert had passed three years earlier and was interred in the cemetery at the Milwaukee Asylum for the Chronically Insane. In the end, it seems, both men had more in common than either would have bet....and both lost.



*Marjorie Viveen, Ed.S. is a retired school psychologist and lifelong resident of Grand Haven. She chaired committees to preserve the Ottawa County Poor Farm Cemetery, the Grand Haven Central Park Fountain, their Town Clock, and led a year-long celebration of the Grand River Greenway in celebration of Ottawa County Parks' Silver Anniversary.*

*Viveen founded the Dusty Dozens History Group and was named Tri-Cities Historical Museum's 2010 "Historian of the Year." In 2012 she authored "Historic River Road: A Self-Guided Auto Tour for All Seasons, co-authored Our People, Their Stories with Wallace Ewing, Ph.D., and has written numerous articles. A second book on Grand River fur trade is in the works. She currently serves on the Ottawa County Parks Foundation Board, the Tri-Cities Historical Museum's Editorial Board, and is the chairperson of the Ottawa County Poor Farm Sesquicentennial Committee.*

### Seeking Images

Remember the neighborhoods? Maplewood, Washington Square, Montello Park, Longfellow, and the smaller areas on 13th and Van Raalte, 13th and College, and 17th and Columbia all had a small grocery, barber shop or drug store. Deborah Noe Schakel, who has done local research in the Holland area, is seeking photos from the neighborhoods. If you have photos and stories, please direct them to Geoffrey Reynolds at the Joint Archives (reynoldsg@hope.edu) for documentation, and we will pass them on to Deborah.

# Joint Archives of Holland

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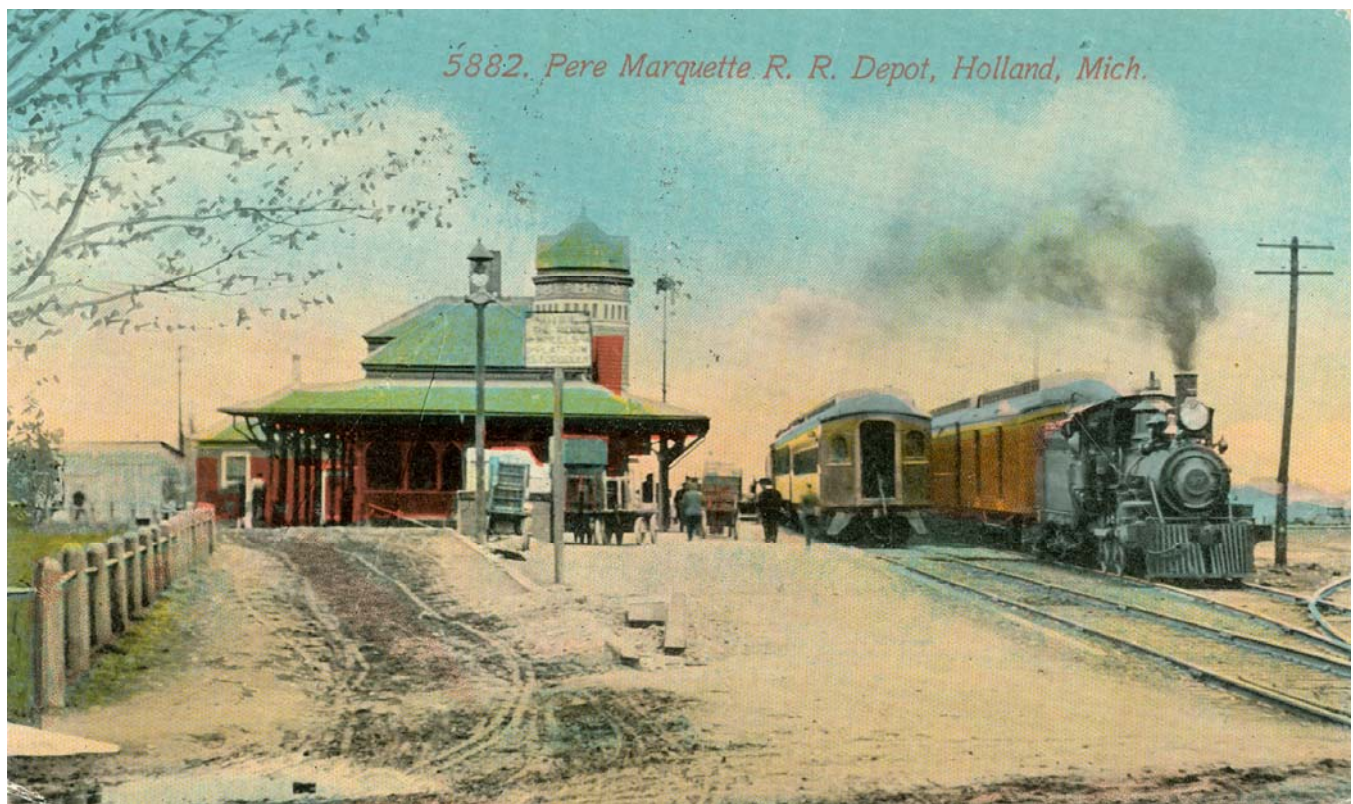


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