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Colony before Party: The Ethnic Origins of Sioux County's Political Tradition

ANDREW KLUMPP

IN 1920, five decades after the first Dutch settlers arrived in Sioux County, Iowa, the county's Dutch residents celebrated their community with a Golden Jubilee Pageant. The production dramatized the Dutch colony's earliest days in northwest Iowa. It told a triumphant story of the Dutch settlers' arrival and recounted the challenges they faced on the prairie: tornadoes, bouts of sickness, and plagues of grasshoppers. The drama imagined the moment when the Spirit of the Prairie, representing tumult and toil, ominously greeted the first settlers along with the spirits of heat, cold, drought, smallpox, and cholera. On the other hand, the optimistic Spirit of the West, characterized by hope, faith, opportunity, love, and trust, warmly welcomed the Dutch and introduced the settlers to his companions: sunshine maids, breezes, rains, corn maidens, and the Queen of Autumn. At the climax of these welcomes and warnings, the Dutch stood hand in hand with characters that embodied faith and Christian service and began to build their new colony.¹

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1. Andrew J. Kolyn, Golden Jubilee Pageant, Act 3, September 30, 1920, Orange City, box 1, Orange City History Collection, Northwestern College Archives, Orange City (hereafter cited as NWCA). The use of "Dutchmen" identifies this group as entirely male. Subsequent usages of terms such as "Dutchmen" or "clergymen" do the same.

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Despite this story of perseverance, another force, unnamed by the Golden Jubilee Pageant, opposed the Dutch when they arrived. A small community of non-Dutch settlers already existed in the county, tucked along the banks of the Big Sioux River on Iowa's border with the Dakota Territory. Although these settlers clashed with the Dutch in the colony's early days, they did not appear on stage in this historical reenactment. They received only a passing reference as insignificant players in the county's origin story.² In this telling, these non-Dutch pioneers were just momentary placeholders who faded into obscurity after surrendering to the newly established Dutch colony. In actuality, fierce tensions flared between Sioux County's Dutch colony and its non-Dutch residents, and those clashes potently demonstrate how the religiously and ethnically unified Dutch managed to secure control of the county for themselves.

The Golden Jubilee Pageant told the story of Sioux County's nativity from the perspective of those who won the county's early battles for political and community dominance. When the Dutch arrived in Sioux County, they brought a robust tradition of building colonies in the Midwest. Part of that vision included consolidating political power so they could govern themselves, which inevitably heightened conflicts with their neighbors. This article shows how the Dutch plan for building a colony in northwest Iowa, coupled with shrewd political maneuvering, a pragmatic approach to party politics, and a shared commitment to their colony, allowed the Dutch settlers in Sioux County to seize and maintain control of county politics. More broadly, this study reveals the benefits and limitations of assimilation to U.S. political culture for white Protestant immigrants and the lengths to which some groups would go to protect their rights as new U.S. citizens and their own cultural and political prerogatives. After their arrival, the Dutch immigrants in Sioux County effectively navigated U.S. political culture, focusing primarily on keeping members of their colony in positions of power in local government and only secondarily on party politics. They prioritized colony over party.

2. *Ibid.*, Acts 2, 3.

The Nineteenth-Century Dutch Colonizing Tradition

When the Dutch arrived in Sioux County, they brought extensive experience in building new communities in the Midwest. Their leader, Henry Hospers, was a seasoned immigration veteran. As a young man, he had arrived with the vanguard of Dutch settlers in Pella, Iowa, in 1847.³ He witnessed Pella's development under Dutch clergyman Henry Scholte's leadership and the growth of other Dutch immigrant colonies in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois. For the Dutch settlers of Sioux County, those initial settlements served not only as models for their own colony but also as crucial sources of new residents.⁴ Immigrants from Pella established the Sioux County settlement as a daughter colony, sending early influxes of money and settlers. A strong cultural, religious, and linguistic tether bound the two communities to one another and to the broader constellation of Dutch colonies throughout the Midwest. This meant that the values that defined the broader tradition of nineteenth-century Dutch colonization formatively shaped the Sioux County colony.

Driven by religious unrest and economic necessity, an exodus of Dutch citizens from the Netherlands in the mid-1840s inaugurated a tradition of Dutch immigration in the nineteenth century. Some immigrants departed for nearby European countries or colonial Dutch outposts across the globe; however, the largest group headed to the United States, more specifically to the rural Midwest. These U.S.-bound immigrants, often led by pastors who had participated in a dramatic schism in the Dutch state church in the 1830s, carried a deep commitment to their Calvinist faith and a fervent desire to build a series of colonies in a rural area of the United States.⁵

3. Henry Hospers, "Reminiscences on the Early Official History of Sioux County," *Sioux County Herald*, 2/10/1892.

4. A. J. Betten, "Geschiedenis," *De Volksvriend*, 9/19/1895; Richard Doyle, "Wealth Mobility in Pella, Iowa, 1847–1925," in *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement, and Cultural Change*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga (New Brunswick, NJ, 1985), 159, 166.

5. Hans Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon: Dutch Immigration to America, 1840–1940* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2009). For more on nineteenth-century Dutch immigration, see Eugene P. Heideman, *Hendrik P. Scholte: His Legacy in the Netherlands and in America* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2015); Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1955); Suzanne Sinke, *Dutch Immigrant Women in*

In 1846, on the eve of the birth of the Dutch immigration tradition, as the initial group of immigrants prepared to depart, two of their most prominent leaders, the Reverends Antonie Brummelkamp and Albertus Van Raalte, proclaimed, "Our hearts' desire and prayer to God is that on one of those uninhabited regions there may be a spot where our people . . . may find their temporal subsistence secured."⁶ They wanted to build communities centered on their shared faith and a common ethnic heritage and were prepared to settle in remote areas of the country in order to ensure that they had ample land for their new homes and little threat of intrusion from outsiders. Thousands of emigrants left the Netherlands during the latter half of the nineteenth century, often settling in colonies under the leadership of clergymen like Van Raalte.

Before leaving the Netherlands, immigrants formed associations to facilitate the move and to screen potential colonists. Scholte headed the Pella colony's association, the Netherlandish Association for Emigration to the United States of North America. Its constitution made freedom from government intervention in religious affairs central to its vision for building a new home; however, it also explicitly excluded any settlers with suspect morals or of "Romish persuasion."⁷ Religious freedom had both standards and limits. Similarly, in 1846, when Brummelkamp and Van Raalte formed the Society of Christians for the Holland Emigration to the United States of North America, which orchestrated the move to Dutch colonies in Michigan, they stated that

the United States, 1880-1920 (Champaign, IL, 2002); Robert P. Swierenga, *Faith and Family: Dutch Immigration and Settlement in the United States, 1820-1920* (New York, 2000); Robert P. Swierenga, ed., *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement, and Cultural Change* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1985); and Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the 19th and 20th Centuries in the United States of America*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga (Grand Rapids, MI, 1985).

6. Antonie Brummelkamp and Albertus C. Van Raalte, "Appeal to the Faithful in the United States of America," May 25, 1846, in *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, ed. Henry S. Lucas, trans. Thomas De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI, 1997), 17.

7. Nederlandsche Vereeniging ter Verhuizing naar de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika, reel 3, Henry S. Lucas Papers, 1846-1930, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Dutch are my own.

its primary mission was “to create a Colony that is Christian.”⁸ They established strict guidelines for the selection of prospective immigrants to ensure that “not only a Christian consistory but also a Christian government will be present in order to uphold the law of God which is the foundation of every state.”⁹ The Dutch dreamed of finding a place where they could build a society and govern it themselves, nurturing their religious and cultural traditions. Dutch colonists needed to be prepared to work hard and to assume leadership positions in their new homes, which would be crucial for their efforts to realize their vision of building these new Christian societies.

As residents of a daughter colony of these first settlements, the Sioux County Dutch claimed this narrative as their own, especially the importance of finding a place where they might practice their faith freely and collectively. The Golden Jubilee Pageant made this connection to the first days of the Dutch immigration tradition clear, and it identified religious persecution as central to the exodus of thousands of Dutch citizens. The opening scene also recognized Scholte as a forefather of the Sioux County colony. In these first moments, Scholte’s character delivered a vivid soliloquy staged at a clandestine midnight gathering in a forest in the Netherlands in 1847.

Our churches are closed to us, our homes barred to us, prison and death threaten us, but our Faith suffers us not to keep silence. . . . It has become impossible longer here to worship God according to our conscience. The hand of the Almighty clearly points westward across the sea, and thither with Faith in Him, I propose to go. . . . As for me and my house, we go to America. Are you ready to go with me? It is written: “He that is not willing to leave father and mother and wife and kindred for My sake is not worthy to be My disciple.”¹⁰

8. Eugene Heideman, *The Practice of Piety: The Theology of the Midwestern Reformed Church in America, 1866–1966* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2009), 2; Terence Schoone-Jongen, *The Dutch-American Identity: Staging Memory and Ethnicity in Community Celebrations* (Amherst, NY, 2008), 66.

9. Quoted in Heideman, *Practice of Piety*, 3. A consistory refers to the governing board of elders and deacons that oversees a Dutch Reformed congregation.

10. Kolyn, Golden Jubilee Pageant, Act 1, Episode 1.

Rich in biblical quotations and allusions, this dramatization of Scholte's call to leave the Netherlands emphasized the need to find religious freedom. What is more, Sioux County's celebration and reimagination of this moment demonstrated that the Sioux County Dutch claimed the broader religious motivations for Dutch immigration as their own.

The religious convictions of these Dutch Calvinist immigrants influenced not only their departure from the Netherlands but also their group cohesion once they arrived in the United States. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow argues that for immigrants their congregations inculcated a communal sense of being "respectable, God-fearing Americans" even while maintaining beliefs and practices that marked them as outsiders.¹¹ Their origins in Western Europe and their Protestant faith allowed the Dutch to assimilate into U.S. culture in many ways and actually marked them as good Americans in the eyes of their neighbors. Nevertheless, their dedication to their own religious and cultural traditions continued to set them apart, limiting their ability to integrate fully. While many Americans eventually welcomed these Dutch immigrants into political and cultural circles, they continued to be identified as members of a distinct and, at times, suspicious ethnic group.

Dutch immigrants excelled at cultivating bonds with one another, and their shared Dutch Calvinist faith acted as a defining feature of this Dutch self-identification. Even after factionalism splintered the immigrant community in 1857, the faith of the immigrants united them. Dutch Calvinist churches remained at the center of colonies' social life, and despite being split into two factions in many communities, their shared faith still united early immigrants' social, cultural, economic, and political aims as newly minted Americans.¹² Because of their interest in perpetuating their own religious and cultural aims, holding political offices became paramount. Those roles enabled them to construct

11. Robert Wuthnow, *American Misfits and the Making of Middle-Class Respectability* (Princeton, NJ, 2018), 135.

12. Peter Ester, "Religion and Social Capital Bonding and Bridging in Dutch-American Calvinist Communities: A Review and Research Agenda," in *Dutch Immigrants on the Plains*, ed. Paul Fessler, Hubert R. Krygsman, and Robert P. Swierenga (Holland, MI, 2006), 187-91; Heideman, *Scholte*, 212; Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 113.

their new Christian societies more effectively, and, although it was rarely invoked explicitly by Dutch-immigrant political leaders, the cohesive influence of their religion undergirded much of the Dutch colonies' economic and political successes.

In addition to the religious strife that drove the Dutch to the Midwest, another primary motive for immigration to the United States was acknowledged in the Golden Jubilee Pageant: declining rural opportunity in the Netherlands.¹³ Many rural Dutch citizens believed that they faced precarious economic futures as other European countries began to challenge the Netherlands' place among the continent's most prosperous nations. As a result, a majority of those who departed the Netherlands during the nineteenth century left the Dutch countryside.¹⁴ Because of their rural background, these immigrants pursued opportunities to continue to live pastoral lifestyles in and around Dutch villages once they arrived in the United States. Furthermore, laying claim to what they perceived to be an "uninhabited region" not only secured immigrants' economic prospects, but it also allowed them to put down roots in regions with limited encroachment from outsiders, which further enhanced the community's cohesion and political effectiveness.¹⁵

As Dutch immigrants set out from their homeland and envisioned a site for a new colony, the rural Midwest ticked all the boxes. It offered ample farmland and freedom to set up Dutch immigrant-dominated colonies organized around their faith. They could avoid urban environments, which their leaders feared would corrode the cohesion and religious orthodoxy of the community.¹⁶ It was not too far south, where the acceptance of slavery chafed against their Dutch sensibilities, and it was not too far west, where leaders feared that settlers would face potential clashes with Native Americans.¹⁷ It was just right.

13. Kolyn, *Golden Jubilee Pageant*, Act 1, Episode 2.

14. Swierenga, *Faith and Family*, 28; Herbert J. Brinks, "Introduction," *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930*, ed. Herbert J. Brinks (Ithaca, NY, 1995), 5-6.

15. Brian W. Beltman, "Ethnic Territoriality and the Persistence of Identity: Dutch Settlers in Northwest Iowa, 1869-1880," *Annals of Iowa* 55 (1996), 103.

16. Brummelkamp and Van Raalte, "Appeal to the Faithful," 17.

17. Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 38-40.

Trusting that they would find land on which to settle, Scholte and Van Raalte led the way as two of the first Dutch leaders to cross the Atlantic. By 1847, with their sights fixed firmly on the Midwest, scores of Dutch immigrants began to cross the ocean. In short order, they began making homes in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa. Years later, Hospers remarked to the colony in Sioux County, "This was the place for centuries destined for our homes by the Creator of the universe."¹⁸ Their trust in divine providence led them to these new homes and imbued the trek with added significance. Throughout the nineteenth century, Dutch immigrants deftly fused their religious convictions with their desire to make a home in the rural Midwest.

Contrary to the Dutch leaders' perceptions, these new arrivals did not find the region to be entirely uninhabited. Of course, other white pioneers had populated some areas; however, the new settlers also displaced many Native Americans. They rarely worried about conflicts with Native Americans because the policies of the U.S. government had repeatedly pushed tribes off of their land to make way for white settlement. After their arrival in Michigan in 1847, Dutch settlers speeded the departure of a nearby tribe.¹⁹ When they arrived in Sioux County in 1870, the memory of the so-called Spirit Lake Massacre, which had resulted in the deaths of 32 white pioneers in 1857, still lingered, and rumors of roving bands of Native American warriors could still evoke fear in many communities.²⁰ If the Dutch immigrants perceived their new homes to be "uninhabited," interactions with the remaining tribes and rumors of the recent conflicts surely reminded them of those who had lived on the land before them. Like many other white migrants during this era, the Dutch were able to establish themselves as a result of policies that displaced Native tribes and the settler colonialism that characterized the era's westward migration.

18. Henry Hospers, "Farewell," *Sioux County Herald*, 1/26/1882.

19. Robert P. Swierenga, "Introduction," in *Old Wing Mission: The Chronicles of the Reverend George N. and Arvilla Powers Smith, Missionary Teachers of Chief Wakazoo's Ottawa Indian Band in Western Michigan, 1838-1849*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga and William Van Appledorn (Holland, MI, 2007), 46-53.

20. Paul Beck, *Inkpaduta: Dakota Leader* (Norman, OK, 2008), 74-75.

The Pragmatic Politics of the Early Dutch Immigrants

While living in ethnic enclaves, these immigrants began to assimilate to U.S. culture, but on their own terms. They began to learn English, vote in U.S. elections, and petition U.S. officials for aid with projects that were important to their settlements. At the same time, they established Dutch-language newspapers, spoke Dutch at home and in their churches, and carefully guarded their own religious and cultural traditions. Their insistence on maintaining their cultural and religious traditions and their penchant for living in enclaves slowed their process of assimilation into American society.

The earliest Dutch settlers arrived in the United States during a season of political volatility in the nation and in the Midwest. Most immigrants initially found a home in the Democratic Party because they perceived it to be more immigrant-friendly. In the past, the Whigs had included anti-immigrant sentiments in their party platform, although those planks never turned into policy. Still, many Dutch viewed them skeptically. By the early 1850s, the nativist Know Nothing Party seemed poised to fill the vacuum left by the fragmented Whigs, and it certainly did not attract the Dutch immigrants. For these reasons, and due to their agricultural interests and desire to settle on the frontier, the Dutch often found themselves among Democratic voters. Significantly, many of the Americans who initially helped the immigrants were also Democrats, which also attracted the new arrivals to the party. Van Raalte and the Holland settlement moved comfortably into the Democratic fold not long after establishing themselves in the United States. Scholte, however, initially supported the Whigs and only changed his allegiance to the Democratic Party when the Whigs adopted a prohibition plank in their party platform, a position that many Dutch immigrants viewed as an attack on their traditional way of life. By the mid-1850s, most Dutch immigrants supported the Democratic Party, even working on the party's behalf through a variety of political endeavors.²¹

21. Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973), 311; Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, 418; Robert P. Swierenga, "The Ethnic Voter and the First Lincoln Election," *Civil War History* 11 (1965), 30-32; Heideman, *Scholte*, 229.

The Dutch presumed that their support of the Democratic Party gave them a direct connection to the halls of power. Democrats dominated the national congressional delegations from and state offices in Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin until the mid-1850s. With Democrats controlling all of the levers of power in the states where the Dutch founded colonies, it behooved them to foster warm relationships with the Democrats, especially when they sought aid for their fledgling communities. Because they could rather smoothly assimilate to many aspects of U.S. society, the Dutch did not face obstacles when asking for assistance from their representatives, although their petitions were rarely successful. For example, in January 1850, Van Raalte directly petitioned Democratic Senator and former Michigan governor Alpheus Felch for help with a harbor project.²² In Pella, Hospers also maintained relationships with Democratic powerbrokers, such as Barlow Granger, publisher of the *Iowa Star* and one-term mayor of Des Moines.²³ The Dutch viewed the Democrats as their allies at the local, state, and national levels.

As the Democratic hold on national and midwestern politics began to erode due to the breakdown of the established party system in the 1850s, the Dutch immigrants remained acutely aware of the changing political tides. In Iowa the most immediate cause of a shift away from the Democratic Party to the new Republican Party came as a result of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In 1854 James Grimes defeated the Democratic candidate for governor of Iowa with a coalition of Whig and Free Soil-Free Democracy voters, framing his campaign to appeal to a broad cross-section of Iowa voters. The Kansas-Nebraska Act upended the old two-party system in Iowa and throughout the nation, making way for a new coalition to rise as the major opponent to the Democrats. In 1856 the newly formed Republican Party in Iowa placed Grimes atop its first statewide ticket. A majority of Iowans shifted their allegiance to the Republican

22. Albertus Van Raalte to Alpheus Felch, 1/31/1850, Holland Historical Trust Collection, Joint Archives of Holland, Michigan, Holland, MI (hereafter cited as JAH).

23. Henry Hospers to Barlow Granger, 10/29/1863, box 2, Hospers Family Collection, NWCA.

Party, enabling it to secure the governorship and control over the General Assembly.²⁴

In Iowa and in the nation, the Republican Party stepped into the space created by the implosion of the Whigs by uniting a coalition of interest groups that opposed the Democrats. The Republicans supported not only limiting (and, in the most radical wings, abolishing) slavery but also defending “free labor” as the Northern social outlook that supported its burgeoning capitalist economy. Nationally and in the Midwest, the party attempted to hold together a diverse coalition of disaffected Democrats and Whigs, Free-Soil abolitionists, and nativist Know Nothings.²⁵ The presence of the Know Nothings in the coalition caused concern for many immigrant groups, including the Dutch, even though they often supported the party’s antislavery policies. As the nativist elements faded, the Dutch, like some other immigrant groups, would eventually warm to the party.

The Dutch did not entirely move to a new political home in the 1850s, but the political realignment did affect their colonies in the Midwest. Scholte and Van Raalte abandoned the Democrats in 1859. Van Raalte shifted his allegiance with little fanfare, but Scholte’s move to the Republican Party caused a stir well beyond the Pella colony. On June 18, 1859, Marion County Democrats named Scholte as a delegate to the state convention in Des Moines. When Scholte arrived in Des Moines the next week, however, he strode into the Republican convention at the head of the Marion County delegation. Once he arrived, the Republicans even named him the vice-president of the convention. Newspapers throughout the state announced Scholte’s move, with Republicans suggesting that their delegates had swayed him on the steamer to Des Moines and Democrats asserting that he had simply wandered into the convention by mistake.²⁶

24. Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames, 1996), 72–73; Robert Cook, *Baptism of Fire: The Republican Party in Iowa, 1838–1878* (Ames, 1994), 47–48; Holt, “Politics of Impatience,” 309; Leland Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames, 1974), 130.

25. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1995), 11; Sage, *History of Iowa*, 128–32.

26. Robert P. Swierenga, *Holland, Michigan: From Dutch Colony to Dynamic City*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI, 2014), 2:1684; Swierenga, “The Ethnic Voter,” 38.

Dispelling the theory that he had become an accidental Republican, Scholte remained within the Republican fold and even earned a spot as a delegate to the Republican National Convention the following year, where he cast his vote for Lincoln. Yet, while the Michigan communities largely followed Van Raalte's lead in subsequent elections, Scholte failed to deliver the Pella colony for the Republican ticket.²⁷

In 1860 the Pella colony found itself out of step with the rest of Iowa and, more broadly, the North. A closer look at Pella reveals that the decision to support the Democrats did not occur solely due to political inertia. As the rise of the Republican Party suggests, this was an era of political as well as physical mobility, as voters in Iowa and the nation shifted political loyalties.²⁸ The Dutch immigrants who settled in Sioux County, many of whom came from Pella, had no fealty to the Democratic Party even though they had previously supported it in Marion County. For the Dutch who remained in Marion County, who continued to vote Democratic, more factors were at work than simply an unwillingness to change parties. The Dutch continued to fret about the concerns dearest to their own community—immigration and prohibition—and did not see the fallout from the Kansas-Nebraska Act as the most significant factor in their electoral decisions. These divergences in motivating political issues illustrate that the Dutch had not assimilated fully. They worried primarily about policies that affected future immigration and the perpetuation of their traditional way of life. Although comfortably participating in U.S. political life, they continued to see themselves as distinctive.

Another factor influencing the voting behavior of the Dutch immigrants was the intense rivalry between the Dutch in Pella and their American neighbors in Marion County. During the nineteenth century, religious ethnic groups in the United States

27. Ronald D. Rietveld, "Henry P. Scholte and Abraham Lincoln: Compatriots in the Civil War," in *Dutch Americans and War: United States and Abroad*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga, Nella Kennedy, and Lisa Zylstra (Holland, MI, 2014), 6–7, 9–10; William E. Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North Before the Civil War," *Journal of American History* 72 (1985), 553; Swierenga, "The Ethnic Voter," 31.

28. Holt, "Politics of Impatience," 322; Sage, *History of Iowa*, 186.

tended to vote as a bloc when they viewed their neighbors as rivals.²⁹ The Dutch immigrants' neighbors' support of key policy provisions that they despised ensured that partisan divisions remained in place locally. For instance, the Dutch, like most immigrants, disapproved of the prohibition movement that was popular among their neighbors.³⁰ They also knew that national Republicans had brokered deals with the anti-immigrant Know Nothing Party in an effort to defeat the Democrats.³¹ Dutch disapproval of slavery and Scholte's enthusiastic support of the Republican Party could not overcome differing policy priorities that were heightened by local rivalries. In 1860 the Dutch still managed to deliver Marion County to the Democrats, securing for themselves positions in local government and excluding their rivals. They proved that they could retain positions in county government and keep their distance from any vestiges of nativism even if it placed them out of step with the rest of the state and nation.

Despite the Pella colony's continued support of the Democratic Party, throughout the 1850s and especially during the Civil War, many Dutch immigrants did cross the aisle to find a home in the Republican Party for a number of reasons, largely tied to their interest in the continued growth and success of their colonies. Prior to the Civil War, the party's antislavery stance attracted some Dutch immigrants who disapproved of the practice. The Civil War galvanized that trend. The young Dutchmen who fought for the Union during the war often wrote back disparagingly about "nasty Copperheads," vilifying the Democrats in their communities.³² Although newly arrived in the United States, many Dutch immigrants teemed with passion for the Union's cause and, consequently, joined the Republican Party as a sign of loyalty to their adopted nation. As the dust

29. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York, 2007), 581.

30. Swierenga, "The Ethnic Voter," 32.

31. Holt, "Politics of Impatience," 323, 331; Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority," 536, 538, 558; Swierenga; "The Ethnic Voter," 35–36.

32. Ben Van Raalte to Albertus Van Raalte, 6/12/1864, A. C. Van Raalte Collection, Holland Museum Archives, Holland, MI.

began to settle after the Civil War, Dutch veterans maintained that affiliation. These veterans made up a significant portion of the Dutch immigrants who established the colony in Sioux County, which may also help to explain why the Sioux County Dutch tended to be more Republican than those who remained in Pella.³³

Early in their time in the United States, the Dutch owed much to the aid they received from Democrats with political power, locally and in state and national governments, but by the mid-1850s, Democrats had failed the Dutch and fallen from power. The projects for which the Dutch had petitioned Democrats remained unfinished and underfunded. The Democrats who once held power found themselves in the minority, unable to dole out patronages to influential local positions. The Dutch prized such positions and saw them as critical to the effective development of their communities. The Democratic fall from power raised the specter of the Dutch losing some of those plum posts.

The Republican Party quickly began to pass a spate of policies in the 1850s and 1860s that directly benefited the expanding Dutch colonies.³⁴ In 1858 the Republican-controlled Iowa General Assembly passed the Free School Act, which proved to be a boon for education throughout the state.³⁵ The Dutch cared deeply about their schools, much as many other nineteenth-century Iowans did, and they welcomed this support from the government. At the national level, the Homestead Act of 1862 offered 160 acres of unoccupied government land to new settlers provided they live on the land for five years and develop it. That new legislation allowed the Dutch, many of whom only possessed modest means, to establish new colonies more easily and efficiently.³⁶ By the eve of the Civil War and for decades afterward, Republicans held the political power. The Dutch knew that and benefited from it.

Perhaps most significantly, nationally and within Iowa, the Republican-led government made dramatic strides to improve

33. Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, 438.

34. Sage, *History of Iowa*, 131.

35. Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 119.

36. Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, 463; Beltman, "Ethnic Territoriality," 114.

rail transportation, which eased travel and improved the economic prospects of Dutch colonies. In 1848, approximately one year after he arrived in Pella from the Netherlands, Sjoerd Sipma, a future settler in the Sioux County colony, complained about transportation issues that plagued the region, which made it difficult to travel to the colony and to do business. He wrote hopefully that railroads in Iowa might alleviate those difficulties.³⁷ In 1856, the first year of Republican control in Des Moines, the General Assembly divvied up 4 million acres of land among four railroad companies to stimulate railroad development in the state. In the 1860s the U.S. Congress's Pacific Railway Act of 1862 prioritized the expansion of railroads across the continent, and in 1868 Iowa's General Assembly authorized localities to turn over up to 5 percent of their property taxes to railroads as even further incentives. Republicans' generous support for railroads also encouraged increased access to rail transportation, making it easier for immigrants to travel farther west, communicate faster with their family and friends, and do business with major economic hubs like Chicago.³⁸

The Republican-backed agenda brightened Dutch colonists' prospects, especially as they began to look to expand into northwest Iowa. An early Sioux County settler, E. J. G. Bloemendaal remembered, "With [the railroad's] arrival there comes life and activity in the community, traffic and business, and also farming and cattle raising prospers."³⁹ That proved true. Iowa's support for railroads created a web of rails crisscrossing the state, and the Dutch benefited. Bloemendaal and the other early settlers of Sioux County did not wait long for their railroad. Within two years of breaking ground on their Sioux County colony, a railroad passed through it, improving accessibility to new immigrants and markets. Republican policies paid clear dividends for the growing Dutch colonies.

37. Sjoerd Sipma to my relatives, to all farmers and to the director of youth at Bornwerd, 9/26/1848, trans. Edward Fikse, box 1, Sioux County Memoirs and Sermons Collection, NWCA.

38. Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 61–62; William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991), 309.

39. E. J. G. Bloemendaal, *My America*, trans. Conrad Veenstra (Pella, 2009), 95.

Despite the political realignment of the nation, the Midwest, and many Dutch immigrants, some Dutch settlers took their time switching to the Republican Party. Henry Hospers, for example, the single most important figure in setting the tone of the political culture in Sioux County, remained a Democrat throughout the Civil War and even ran as a Democratic candidate for the Iowa House of Representatives in 1869. His eventual shift to the Republicans by the mid-1870s appeared to be quite abrupt, yet an early event in Hospers's life may suggest a potential reason for his move. After his arrival in the United States, Hospers changed his political loyalties in a similar fashion and for what might have been similar reasons. He initially joined the Whigs after he moved to Pella in 1847; however, when they did not reward him with a county office in short order, he switched parties, getting a better deal from the Democrats.⁴⁰

During the Civil War, Hospers had felt the sting of being aligned with those who lacked political power. When Democrat-turned-Republican Governor Samuel Kirkwood repeatedly refused to renew Hospers's commission as Pella's notary public, the Dutchman paid the price for his party loyalty. He feared that without such an appointment, the Dutch might not be able to administer their own affairs as effectively. Acknowledging that he was a "war Democrat," Hospers unsuccessfully pleaded with his friend Barlow Granger to "use the utmost of your or your republican friends influence" to secure a renewal of his commission.⁴¹ Being a Democrat brought few perks in postwar Iowa.

After he lost his bid for a seat in the Iowa House in 1869, Hospers began to move away from the Democratic Party. In 1870, shortly after he helped to form the group that was headed to Sioux County, the Republican-controlled Iowa General Assembly commissioned him as a state immigration agent to the Netherlands.⁴² After receiving that commission, he never again ran as a Democrat.

40. Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, 419.

41. Henry Hospers to Barlow Granger, 10/29/1863, box 2, Hospers Family Collection, NWCA; Henry Hospers to Barlow Granger, 11/19/1863, *ibid.*

42. Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 90.

Hospers's earlier defection from the Whigs suggests that he approached party politics pragmatically and with the mobility characteristic of the age, thinking first about his own position and that of the colony. A few years later he confirmed this when he commented that he oriented his career around efforts to benefit the Dutch and their colonies.⁴³ Hospers's move toward the Republicans due to their ability and willingness to appoint Dutch leaders reflected a larger pragmatic, colony-centric approach evident in the politics of Dutch colonies.

Wooden Shoes on a Warpath

Despite the national turmoil and internal political shifts of the 1850s and 1860s, the first Dutch colonies blossomed. They participated in American life while continuing to guard their own religious and cultural distinctiveness. That success, however, resulted in a dilemma. After waning in the lead-up to and during the Civil War, immigration from the Netherlands increased in 1867, and by 1869, affordable farmland near their settlements became scarce. In fact, by 1870, Dutch farmers owned 98 percent of the land surrounding Pella.⁴⁴ So they looked west, knowing that they stood to benefit from Republican policies that encouraged settlement and connected farmers with crucial commodities markets. In keeping with the Dutch immigrant tradition, they also intended to find a site where they could maintain their distance from outsiders in order to secure sufficient land for future Dutch settlers and to keep non-Dutch officials from meddling in their colonies' affairs. The largest group of westward-bound settlers came from Pella; Hospers, then the town's mayor, led the way. Like their predecessors, they formed an immigration society and set their sights on Cherokee County in northwest Iowa, intending to bring their pragmatic political tradition and vision for building a Dutch society with them.⁴⁵

43. "Letter of Henry Hospers," *Sioux City Journal*, 2/3/1872.

44. Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 73; Brian W. Beltman, "A Dutch Immigrant's Success Story: E. J. G. Bloemendaal's Sojourns and Settlement in Northwest Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 62 (2003), 203, 214.

45. G. Nelson Nieuwenhuis, *Siouxland: A History of Sioux County* (Orange City, 1983), 110; Beltman, "Ethnic Territoriality," 106, 108.

As Dutch settlers got their affairs in order for their migration from Pella to Cherokee County, speculators in northwest Iowa got wind of their plans and swiftly bought hundreds of acres of farmland, hoping to make a quick buck by selling it back to the Dutch.⁴⁶ True to their stereotypical thriftiness, the Dutch balked at paying for something they intended to get for much cheaper or, in many cases, for free due to the Homestead Act. To the speculators' chagrin, the Dutch simply moved farther northwest, putting down stakes in Sioux County. Although that area was not their first choice, the Dutch set about building a new colony as the latest outpost in a growing network of Dutch colonies strewn across the American Midwest.

Until the mid-1800s, Native Americans had called Sioux County home but had been displaced by the rapidly expanding American nation. The Sioux County Dutch knew that. The opening act of the Golden Jubilee Pageant offered a romantic account of how the Dutch came to occupy land that once belonged to the Sioux. In the scene, after a group of Sioux warriors led by Chief Okoboji return to a makeshift camp, having vanquished their perennial foes, the Dakotas, a medicine man approaches the warriors and delivers the news that they too must depart.

I saw a covered wagon carrying four paleface strangers coming slowly westward. . . . Gitchie Manitou the Mighty in a vision bade me greet them. And he bade me treat them kindly. All these rolling hills and valleys which your eyes delight to feast on are decreed to be their portion. They will plow and they will till it. All these lands will feed the hungry of all nations, climes, and people. We must follow the Dakotahs [*sic*]. We must westward take our journey. Lo' behold the paleface strangers even now are come amongst us—Farewell, O ye fertile prairies—Your new masters now have claimed you.⁴⁷

In this Dutch retelling, the Sioux go willingly to the west, directed by a deity-like figure, Gitchie Manitou the Mighty. They give up their land so that the industrious Dutch can more effect-

46. Charles L. Dyke, *The Story of Sioux County* (Orange City, 1942), 14–15. Dyke served as a journalist in Sioux County for many decades. Much of his written account in this book is the product of oral histories that he took from individuals who experienced the events he covers.

47. Koly, Golden Jubilee Pageant, Act 2, Episode 1.



An early image of Washington Street, downtown Orange City. Courtesy Northwestern College Archives, Orange City.

tively use it to feed “all nations, climes, and people.” After the dramatic soliloquy, the stage notes indicate that the “Indians strike camp and move off,” willingly surrendering their land to the Dutch.⁴⁸ This scene reveals that the Dutch settlers knew that they had displaced the Sioux but believed that they had a divine and humanitarian mandate to use the land more efficiently than its original inhabitants.

In keeping with the Dutch immigrant tradition, the migrants from Pella coordinated efforts to assist new arrivals and purchased large swaths of land, including the majority of the plots that would become the colony’s main town, Orange City. Homesteaders claimed the farmland surrounding the proposed town. They built their community as a hub for social, economic, and religious life, modeling it after county seats throughout Iowa.⁴⁹ They swiftly founded a church and called Seine Bolks, an immigration veteran with ties to colonies in Michigan and Wisconsin, to lead it.⁵⁰ Reflecting their characteristic factionalism, the community founded a second church the following year. A school followed shortly thereafter along with a Dutch newspaper, *De Volksvriend*, to keep the community informed of news from other

48. Ibid.

49. Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 154; Tom Schmiedeler, “Frontier Forms of Iowa’s County Seats,” *Annals of Iowa* 57 (1998), 1–37.

50. Edward Tanjore Corwin, *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America (formerly Ref. Prot. Dutch Church)*, 1628–1902, 4th ed. (New York, 1902), 335.



Henry Hospers, 1830–1901. Photo from State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

colonies and throughout the world.⁵¹ Within only two years of their arrival, the Dutch began to dominate county politics, flexing their electoral muscle with skills they had mastered in earlier settlements and their characteristic dedication to their own colony.

Hospers took the helm of the colony's economic and political development. Influenced by his time in Pella, he tirelessly promoted the colony throughout North America and the Netherlands.⁵² He towered over the county's budding institutions. In the three decades between his arrival in Orange City and his death in 1901, he established himself as a perennial political force.

51. Robert Schoone-Jongen, "Dateline Orange City, Iowa: *De Volksvriend* and the Creation of Dutch American Community in the Midwest, 1874–1951," *Annals of Iowa* 69 (2010), 310; Nieuwenhuis, *Siouxland*, 114.

52. Henry Hospers, *Iowa: de Vraag: Zal ik naar Noord-Amerika gaan? Kor en praktisch beantwoord door een geboren Nederlander* (Gorinchem, The Netherlands, 1875); Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 75–76.

He effectively moved in influential political and social circles throughout the state while continuing to dedicate himself primarily to the concerns and interests of his new Dutch colony.

Yet before he could implement the Dutch plan for their colonies in northwest Iowa and become a key figure in the area and state, he had to secure Orange City's position within the county. The Dutch possessed a clear vision for how to build their colony, and they trusted only themselves to carry it out. They needed to gain control over local offices to make the community self-sufficient. Dutch judges, notaries, and land agents could ensure total control over the day-to-day needs of the community, and Dutch officials in local political offices would guarantee them influence over the county's policies and, importantly, its purse strings.

The Dutch immigrants' dominance under Hospers's leadership did not go unchallenged. The American speculators who first inhabited Sioux County a decade earlier held tightly to the reins of power. Although the Dutch built Orange City as a county seat, it was not the home of Sioux County's government. On the banks of the Big Sioux River, the neighboring village of Calliope served as Sioux County's first county seat, and a small group of American settlers held all of the positions in county government, ranging from sheriff to every seat on the Sioux County Board of Supervisors.⁵³ They favored Democratic candidates in state and national elections and, prior to the arrival of the Dutch, faced no challenge to their leadership. All of that changed when the first band of 70–80 Dutch families arrived from Pella in 1870.⁵⁴

The Calliope officials had used the county government to enrich themselves for over a decade, pushing the county to the brink of bankruptcy while filling their own pockets.⁵⁵ Their dishonesty bothered the Dutch, who saw themselves as a community defined and united by their shared Calvinist faith. In this case, the religious identity of the Dutch not only helped them to

53. "Sioux County! The Fairest Land Under the Sun," *Sioux County Herald*, 10/5/1887. Hawarden, Iowa, eventually annexed the community formerly known as Calliope.

54. A. J. Betten, "Geschiedenis," *De Volksvriend*, 9/19/1895.

55. Nieuwenhuis, *Siouxland*, 55–56.

remain a cohesive force in electoral politics but also rallied them against the immoral practices of their neighbors.⁵⁶ These sentiments reflected the importance of honesty and good government that was developing throughout the Midwest in this era.⁵⁷ The Dutch immigrants had not crossed thousands of miles to live under a corrupt government. They possessed a clear political and religious vision, and it was essential to wrest control away from neighbors they perceived to be irresponsible and dishonest. Tapping into this language, Hospers himself touted his honesty in his appeals to the community. In an 1872 letter to the *Sioux City Journal*, he proclaimed, "I am happy . . . to say that I live among that true, Christian people."⁵⁸ Later reflections on the influence of the Dutch on county government celebrated their efforts to clean up the corruption of Calliope with honest and prudent governance.⁵⁹ The desire to bring their faith to bear on county government and to ensure that their new home prospered financially galvanized the colony.

Within Sioux County, the Dutch soon challenged the non-Dutch settlers for numerical dominance and wielded their power to contest the Calliope officials' grip on power. In mid-June 1870 the federal census counted 576 individuals in the county, 253 of whom were newly arrived Dutch settlers from Pella.⁶⁰ Before the end of the year, 76 more Dutch settlers transplanted themselves from Marion County to the new colony, giving the Dutch colony a slim but outright majority in the county. Just months after their arrival, Tjeerd Heemstra became the first Dutchman to win a seat on the three-member Sioux County Board of Supervisors. The next year, Hospers won the election for Heemstra's seat, which he had left open to allow Hospers to run unchallenged, and two other men supported by the colony

56. Ken Hansen, *Calliope: A History of the County Ring Rule of Sioux and Surrounding Counties* (Marceline, MO, 1982), 86–87; Nieuwenhuis, *Siouxland*, 113.

57. James H. Madison, "The States of the Midwest: An Introduction," in *Heartland: Comparative Histories of Midwestern States*, ed. James H. Madison (Bloomington, IN, 1988), 6.

58. "Letter of Henry Hospers."

59. "Sioux County!"

60. Beltman, "A Dutch Immigrant's Success," 214; Beltman, "Ethnic Territoriality," 102.

won county offices, securing a formidable voice in county affairs for the newly arrived Dutch.⁶¹

Despite this election, a peaceful transition of power was not in the cards. The Calliope officials expediently installed Hospers in Heemstra's former seat after the election, but they refused to allow the others to take their roles.⁶² They objected to the documents presented by the two new officials, calling into question the signatures on them and complaining that their bonds were too low.⁶³ After several attempts to install the new members, Hospers and the newly elected officials brought an attorney to present their case at the board meeting scheduled for January 22, 1872. Even with the support of a lawyer, the Dutchmen failed to secure their seats. The Calliope officials presumed that they could continue to stonewall the Dutch.

The next morning, the Calliope officials realized their error. A mob of Dutchmen from throughout the county had traveled through the night in sub-zero temperatures across snow-covered prairies intent on ensuring that the Dutchmen took their seats. At 10:00 a.m., a convoy of sleds carrying Dutchmen who were "arrayed in wood shoes, armed to the teeth, well supplied with spirits . . . and brimful of wrath and cabbage" poured down the slopes of the river valley.⁶⁴ The Dutchmen overran Calliope, a town of only approximately 100 residents, and insisted on installing their newly elected officials. Most of the Calliope officials fled across the ice-covered Big Sioux River to the Dakota Territory. When the sheriff told the raiders that they could accomplish their goal only over his dead body, they responded that if he resisted the "dead body he spoke of would not need burying as it would be plugged so full of lead that it would sink like a rock through the fishing hole in the ice of the Big Sioux river."

61. Betten, "Geschiedenis."

62. Ibid.

63. Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, 485; Nieuwenhuis, *Siouxland*, 56. Bonds for county officials insured the county against any mismanagement of funds by public officials.

64. "The Holland Conquest of Sioux County," *Sioux County Herald*, 10/5/1887. This story originated in the *Silverton Democrat* in Silverton, Colorado, whose publisher had previously published the *Sioux County Herald* and resided in Calliope. It ran opposite the Dutch account, "Sioux County! The Fairest Land Under the Sun."

The sheriff and his deputies promptly surrendered. At that point, the county recorder, Rufus Stone, was the only official left in town. "No gang of woodenshoe Dutchmen can run the county as long as I have anything to do about it," he declared. But, within hours, he, too, had fled across the river. The Dutch refused to allow their political influence to be curtailed and did not mind resorting to threats of violence to accomplish their goals.⁶⁵

Unable to install their elected officials and locked out of the courthouse and safe, the Dutchmen chopped down the doors of the courthouse and commandeered official documents, the county safe, and a generous stash of bacon. After devouring the bacon, they loaded the contraband onto their sleds and headed for home, firing shots from the top of the ridge as a warning to those who might be cavalier enough to follow them.⁶⁶ Mob justice had been served. The Dutch had proven that they were a formidable force—and not only at the ballot box.

After the dust had settled, the *Sioux County Herald*—exhibiting questionable historical perspective—claimed that the skirmish was only outshone in "importance and historical results" by Peter Stuyvesant's expulsion of the Swedes from colonial Delaware.⁶⁷ One resident characterized the booty the Dutch stole from Calliope as "the spoils of war" and suggested that the Dutch victory revealed what might have happened if Napoleon had taken Moscow.⁶⁸ For those who experienced this dramatic clash, it was not just a political squabble between rival neighboring villages. It was war.

The fracas between Calliope and Orange City illustrates the passion and intensity that undergirded the Dutch approach to community building and politics and echoes themes present in many county seat wars that popped up in the mid- to late nineteenth century.⁶⁹ The dispute also illumines the seriousness of the efforts the Dutch took to consolidate their political power in

65. Dyke, *Story of Sioux County*, 130–33; Nieuwenhuis, *Siouxland*, 57; "The Holland Conquest."

66. Dyke, *Story of Sioux County*, 134; Hansen, *Calliope*, 100.

67. "The Holland Conquest."

68. *Ibid.*

69. For an in-depth study of U.S. county seat wars, see James Schellenberg, *Conflict Between Communities: American County Seat Wars* (New York, 1987).

Sioux County. They violently moved against their neighbors whom they believed to be standing in the way of the establishment and orderly functioning of the Christian community that they hoped to build. The skirmish also demonstrates the ability of the Dutch to coordinate their actions even when they were distributed throughout the county and travel during the winter months proved difficult. The wooden-shoe-clad men who arrived in Calliope full of “wrath and cabbage” saw themselves as a community that had not lost all of its distinctiveness even though they had effectively assimilated to many aspects of U.S. culture. They had a community-focused agenda and intended to enact it.

Despite this passion and coordination, running county officials out of Calliope and confiscating county documents did not win the day. When the sheriff came to Orange City a few days later, the Dutch returned the county records in exchange for assurances that the new Dutch officials could take their positions on the board.⁷⁰ When the Calliope officials delayed installing the men yet again, Hospers took matters into his own hands. He headed to Des Moines to hobnob with his friends in Iowa’s General Assembly. His relationships with Republican legislators had earned him his commission as a state immigration agent, and those same officials leaned on Hospers’s international connections to attract new immigrants to the state.⁷¹

Hospers’s connections with the Iowa General Assembly, in addition to his willingness to throw his lot in with the Republicans, gave the Dutchmen the edge over their stalwartly Democratic opponents in Calliope. While in Des Moines, Hospers encouraged the swift passage of a law in the General Assembly that would allow judges to bypass county supervisors and install county officials, thereby cutting the Calliope crowd out of the process.⁷² On March 15, 1872, less than two months after the initial skirmish, Hospers’s law passed. As he later reminisced, all the Calliope officials had to say for themselves was “G–D–, Hospers, you got us this time.”⁷³ The tenacious Dutch had won.

70. “The Holland Conquest.”

71. Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 90.

72. *Approval of Bonds of County Officers*, H.F. 280, 14th General Assembly, Session 1, *General and Public Acts*, ch.16:17; Nieuwenhuis, *Siouxland*, 58.

73. Hospers, “Reminiscences.”

Their coup nearly complete, as soon as the new members took their seats the Dutch officials voted to hold a referendum on moving the county seat to Orange City and expanding the board of supervisors, allowing them to take advantage of their numerical advantage in the county to stack the board with even more Dutchmen. Representing a clear minority, the Calliope officials realized their worst fears when the resolution passed in the fall election by a vote of 185 to 65.⁷⁴ The Dutch had secured nearly total control of county politics. More than a decade later, the *Herald* reflected, "Any question, political or financial for years thereafter, was decided by the colony. Orange City held the balance of power."⁷⁵ Within two years of arriving in Sioux County, the Dutch had secured their position as the dominant community and constituency in the county. They could build their new community unencumbered by troublesome neighbors.

Despite the passions that flared between the two communities, political differences never appeared in the discussions of these events. By 1872, Hospers and a majority of the Dutch had moved toward the party of Lincoln. That same year they helped to deliver Sioux County to Ulysses Grant and the Republicans for the first time by a margin of over 200 votes.⁷⁶ Calliope, on the other hand, remained a decidedly Democratic town. Undoubtedly, Hospers's good relationships with Republicans in Des Moines contributed to the ultimate victory for the Dutch; however, none of the accounts from the era acknowledge party politics as a significant point of division. In each retelling, the Calliope officials resisted Dutchmen, not Republicans. Similarly, the Dutch insisted on consolidating the colony's political power, not stripping it from Democrats. Ethnic distinctiveness continued to differentiate the Dutch from their American neighbors, demonstrating the limits of their assimilation even as they proved to be masters at navigating U.S. electoral politics, legislative processes, and the judicial system. For the Dutch and for their neighbors, it was about the colony, not the party.

74. Antonie J. Betten, Jr., "Legal Notice," *Sioux County Herald*, 9/20/1872; Dyke, *Story of Sioux County*, 136; "What Shall We Say?" *Sioux County Herald*, 11/9/1872.

75. "Sioux County!"

76. "What Shall We Say?"

Dutchmen at the Helm

The heist of the county seat and subsequent political wrangling secured Orange City's and, by extension, the Dutch immigrants' position in the county. The following year, Hospers's comrades elected him as chair of the Board of Supervisors, and the Dutch charted a course for the continued growth and development of Sioux County.⁷⁷ Although by that point most of the Dutch immigrants had given up their ties to the Democratic Party in favor of the Republicans, they focused first on their colony and only secondarily on party politics. The Dutch paid attention to and engaged in regional and national movements, but the colony always came first.

The supremacy of the colony and ethnic cohesion over party politics is particularly apparent in the early political activities of the newly empowered Dutch colony. In October 1872, fresh off their victory over the Calliope officials and poised to vote to move the county seat to Orange City, the Dutch held a "People's Convention." The gathering invited the men of the colony to choose nominees for various county offices. A women's chorus sang, and the wives of prominent leaders served a meal bankrolled by Hospers. The *Herald* characterized the gathering as "the dawn of a new era in our County's history" and "a grand stride in the current of a peaceable honest County government." After the election, the *Herald* proclaimed, "The whole Orange City convention ticket is elected." Reveling in victory, the article made clear that the People's Convention really meant the Dutch colony's convention.⁷⁸

As the People's Convention focused on the Dutch community, it remained nonpartisan. The ticket that the convention produced ran next to the national Republican ticket in the *Herald*, yet the Dutch made efforts to distinguish between the two.⁷⁹ The convention recognized that the colony leaned Republican, so it placed its ticket alongside the party's ticket in the papers;

77. Betten, "Geschiedenis."

78. Ibid.; "People's Convention," *Sioux County Herald*, 10/4/1872; "What Shall We Say?"

79. "National Republican Ticket" and "People's Ticket," *Sioux County Herald*, 10/4/1872.

however, its designation as the People's ticket, with Dutch candidates from both the Democratic and Republican parties, reduced the risk of losing Dutchmen who maintained their allegiance to the Democratic Party. In a colony with divided political allegiances but a solid commitment to one another, the nominees from the People's Convention provided an effective solution to avoid splitting the Dutch vote and communicated that the concerns of the colony remained paramount.

Two years later, many Dutch candidates migrated over to the county Republican ticket that appeared in the *Herald*, although colony, not party, still clearly defined county politics. Several Dutch nominees appeared on the *Herald's* Republican slate, but Sioux County's newly established Dutch newspaper, *De Volksvriend*, advertised a slate of nominees for county and township offices without regard for party affiliation, demonstrating that the Dutch still saw their politics defined primarily by ethnicity and only secondarily by party.⁸⁰ Regarding the election, the paper reminded the colony that the results showed that "we may be able to mobilize the Dutch people for the cause, the interests of our colony."⁸¹ Although more closely affiliated with the Republicans by 1874, the Dutch continued to differentiate between themselves and their American neighbors, demonstrating that not only did Americans place limits on how entirely the Dutch might assimilate but also that they limited their own assimilation into American political and social cultures.

Even though the Dutch maintained a primary commitment to the colony, most of the Dutch settlers in Sioux County cozied up to the Republican Party by the end of the decade. For example, in the 1876 election, Jelle Pelmulder, the 1872 People's Convention's nominee for clerk of court, appeared on the Republican ticket for the same position. That same year, Hospers, who had already established himself as a political power broker in the county, wrote to the colony in *De Volksvriend*, calling it to make its collective voice heard. Two weeks later, the editor of *De Volksvriend* acknowledged that a difference of political opinion existed within the colony but encouraged the Dutch to "obtain a

80. "Plaatselijk Nieuws," *De Volksvriend*, 10/8/1874.

81. "Plaatselijk Nieuws," *De Volksvriend*, 10/22/1874.

full voice, in order to show that the Dutch are one! ONE! ONE!" Writing to the colony in the Dutch newspaper, its leaders asked voters to set aside political differences in the interest of ensuring the colony's electoral success.⁸²

Throughout the 1870s, the Dutch became more and more at ease reconciling their industriousness and conservative religious and cultural traditions with the progressive Republican agenda that defined the postwar decades. Like many other groups that had attained financial stability in the West, the Dutch valued their independence, credited their success to hard work and God's favor, and remained skeptical of government intervention. At the same time, they embraced the continued use of government efforts to encourage economic growth and expansion of settlements in the United States.⁸³ They believed firmly in the strength and industriousness of their colony; at the same time, they eagerly took advantage of government-subsidized railroads, the Homestead Act, and other progressive Republican policies. Many western pioneers who benefited from such government programs saw their success as the product of their own labors and disapproved of government intervention unless, of course, that intervention benefited them. The Dutch were no exception to this trend.

Particularly illuminating examples of Dutch loyalty to the colony over their political party occurred when non-Republican Dutchmen ran for local offices. Throughout the 1870s, when that occurred, the Dutch immigrants proved that their loyalty remained first to one another and only secondarily to the political party of the majority. A revealing instance took place in 1874, just two years after the People's Convention. That fall Pelmulder appeared on the Sioux County Republican ticket for clerk of court alongside E. M. Wood, a non-Dutch candidate for county recorder. Pelmulder cruised to reelection; however, a Dutchman not aligned with the party, Francis Le Cocq Sr., defeated Wood with 55 percent of the vote. *De Volksvriend* did not

82. "Republican County Ticket," *Sioux County Herald*, 10/26/1876; Henry Hospers, "Township Conventie," *De Volksvriend*, 10/19/1876; "Ons County Ticket," *De Volksvriend*, 11/2/1876 (emphasis as in original).

83. Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven, CT, 2007), 5.

mention Wood; instead, it made sure to note the victory of "our fellow countryman, F. Le Cocq." On election day, the county's townships all engaged in clear split-ticket voting with the Dutch townships throwing their support overwhelmingly to Pelmulder and Le Cocq and the non-Dutch townships voting against both men, though often with less lopsided tallies.⁸⁴

Another instance of the Dutch downplaying the importance of party occurred in 1880 when Dutch Democrat Henry J. Lenderink ousted Le Cocq from his post as county recorder. Only the two Dutchmen appeared on the ballot, and the Dutch colony split its vote between the two men but leaned in favor of Le Cocq, who by that time had joined the Republican Party. The non-Dutch townships, though, cast the bulk of their votes for Lenderink, allowing him to squeak out a nine-vote victory.⁸⁵ The *Sioux County Independent*, crediting Lenderink's first win to "democrats and independent republicans," celebrated Lenderink as the only Democratic victory in any of the surrounding counties.⁸⁶ Lenderink's connection to the colony helped him to siphon votes away from Le Cocq's total and secured his victory.

Two years later the anonymous author of an incendiary pamphlet titled "The Free Voter," which appeared immediately prior to local elections and scandalized the colony, identified another reason for Lenderink's victory: the Dutch vote. The pamphlet pointed to Lenderink's reelection bid in 1882 as its primary piece of evidence. That year Lenderink was running as an independent against a non-Dutch opponent. Remaining loyal to Lenderink, the Dutch Republicans declined to put up a candidate for recorder. The author of "The Free Voter" bemoaned that out of loyalty to the colony, the "Dutch Republicans left the field clear for a Dutch Democrat."⁸⁷ The Dutch not only supported Lenderink but also proved shrewd enough to recognize the danger of splitting the colony's votes and unintentionally

84. "Republican County Ticket," *Sioux County Herald*, 10/1/1874; "Official Vote of Sioux County," *Sioux County Herald*, 10/22/1874; "Plaatselijk Nieuws," *De Volksvriend*, 10/22/1874. The final tally was Le Cocq Sr. 174, Wood 134.

85. "The Vote in Sioux County," *Sioux County Herald*, 11/11/1880. The final tally was 516 for Lenderink and 507 for Le Cocq.

86. "The Republican Ticket," *Sioux County Independent*, 11/20/1880.

87. "The Free Voter," *Sioux County Herald*, 11/16/1882.

delivering a seat in county government to a non-Dutchman. In an era of Sioux County politics defined first by ethnicity and only secondarily by party, the decision to decline to nominate a Republican and throw the full weight of the Dutch vote behind Lenderink came naturally. Moreover, despite years of engagement with U.S. politics and society, the Dutch, by their own estimation and that of their neighbors, had not yet fully assimilated and remained a persistently distinct group.

In the lead-up to Lenderink's reelection, the non-Dutch voting bloc in Sioux County made a play to upset the political status quo by circulating "The Free Voter" throughout the areas of the county with the fewest Dutch settlers. The anonymously penned pamphlet threw its support behind the non-Dutchman in the race, independent Fred Stone, the eldest son of Rufus Stone, the former recorder who had clashed with the Dutch during the Calliope raid in 1872. The *Herald* printed the pamphlet the week following the election, crediting the publication with energizing the Dutch base to "rise in their might" and "crush [the American ticket] beneath their feet, killing it so completely that there is no hope of its ever reviving." Lenderink managed to win reelection with 58 percent of the vote thanks to his large margins of victory in Dutch-dominated townships.⁸⁸

The pamphlet laid bare the simmering political tensions in the county, yet the conflicts articulated by the disgruntled author of "The Free Voter" focused not on the Republican leanings of the Dutch but rather on their efforts to maintain political dominance in the county. The lines in Sioux County politics, from the author's perspective, were drawn not by party but by ethnicity. The author declared, "We do not want to live where wooden-headed and wooden shod have absolute control of public affairs, where the people are a hundred years behind the time. . . . We want to live in a community controlled by public spirited, progressive men—men who are abreast with the century." The author recognized the Dutch dominance and lambasted their adherence to their religious and cultural traditions as out of step with American life. The Dutch were not good Americans. "The

88. "Death Claims Fred P. Stone," *Hawarden Independent*, 8/5/1937; "Editor's Note," *Sioux County Herald*, 11/16/1882; "Election Returns," *Sioux County Herald*, 11/16/1882. The final tally was 716 votes for Lenderink and 530 for Stone.

Free Voter" described them as "clannish" and making every effort to "hinder and prevent their enlightenment."⁸⁹ The author objected to Dutch conservatism, culture, religion, and political dominance but never mentioned an objection to their party affiliation. In the author's view, the Dutch had remained an un-assimilated band of conservative immigrants who had no business controlling the county.

In the view of the pamphlet's author, conservative Dutch immigrants controlled a political cabal in keeping with the effectiveness of the ethnicity-based machines that operated in cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, and Minneapolis. The Dutch had decided the winner of every county office for over a decade, and the author insisted that the Dutch selfishly wielded their influence and made every effort to "keep [non-Dutchmen] out of power." The slogan that accompanied the pamphlet served as a call to arms and a reminder of how the Dutch in Orange City resembled the other ethnic political machines dominating the politics of the era:

Down with the Dutch bosses!
 Irishmen to the rescue!
 Down with the Dutch bosses!
 Americans to the rescue!
 Down with the Dutch bosses!
 Scandinavians to the rescue!
 Down with the Dutch bosses!
 Germans to the rescue!
 Down with the Dutch bosses!⁹⁰

Throughout this diatribe, the divisions remained focused on ethnicity; when "The Free Voter" attempted to rally support for Fred Stone's candidacy, it made no mention of party politics. Moving to its rhetorical climax, the pamphlet called for a united front against the Dutch political machine. "Now is the accepted time for every American, German, Irishman, and Scandinavian in Sioux County to make a united effort to throw off the supremacy of the Dutch. It has been tolerated too long, and a more odious and unbearable curse it has seldom been the lot of any people to

89. "The Free Voter."

90. Ibid.

bear.”⁹¹ The call focused squarely on the ethnicity of the dominant Dutch colony.

Not about to let such an affront go unanswered, the editor of the *Herald* tacked on an addendum to the pamphlet when he reprinted it. In a series of pointed queries, he responded to the pamphlet’s main points, especially in the wake of Stone’s defeat at the ballot box. The editor praised the Dutch colony as a leader in education not only in the county but also throughout the region. He characterized the Dutch settlers as “industrious, honest, and upright” and lauded their hospitality to outsiders. He cast them as an embodiment of American ideals as well as Dutch traditions. “Who would not control the county if they could?” he asked. If such a groundswell of dissatisfaction with Dutch dominance existed, he quipped, “Why did you not swamp the Dutch?” “Why did not the people of other nationalities come to your rescue when called upon?” With the Dutch victorious, the editor concluded by asking why the author did not simply leave if the Dutch dominance of the county proved to be so intolerable.⁹²

The election of 1882 reflected the continued Dutch influence over the politics of Sioux County, but the political rhetoric that surrounded it suggested that political divisions in the county during the early years of settlement continued to focus on ethnicity rather than political party. What is more, Lenderink’s election demonstrated that the Dutch preferred to elect someone from their own colony regardless of his political party. In the wake of the 1882 county elections, *De Volksvriend* had even announced, “We, therefore, all agree to vote together.”⁹³ The Dutch still maintained a desire to vote in the interest of the colony. When considering only state or national elections, Sioux County and the Dutch colony that dominated it appeared to be reliable Republican partisans in the 1870s and 1880s; however, a closer look at local elections and the debates that raged in the county reveals that the Dutch colony’s ethnic distinctiveness rather than party functioned as the most decisive force in the early days of Sioux County’s political tradition.

91. *Ibid.*

92. “Queries – To the Editor of the Free Voter,” *Sioux County Herald*, 11/16/1882.

93. “Zij Zouden ‘T Ontgelden,” *De Volksvriend*, 11/9/1882.

Conclusion

In 1895 Antonie Betten surveyed the history of the Dutch colony in Sioux County with pride. He pointed to the Calliope raid and the electoral dominance of the Dutch as the turning point in the county's history and noted, "So far, there has been steady progress."⁹⁴ By the 1880s, partisan politics had started to play a larger role in county affairs; however, because so many of the Dutch joined the Republican Party, the colony could have it both ways, consistently electing officials who were both Dutchmen and Republicans. Occasionally, a Democrat won an election. Yet that was an anomaly, and he almost always had ties to the colony. Being Dutch still mattered.

In some ways, the origins of the political culture of Sioux County reflect larger developments in the political history of Iowa and the nation. The Dutch eventually moved squarely into the party of Lincoln, appreciated the opportunities afforded by Republican legislation, and understood the benefits of political patronage. They held firmly to their conservative religious and cultural traditions and championed the fierce independence that defined rural life in the American West. Yet they also gladly reaped the advantages brought by government programs spearheaded by Republicans. As white Protestants, they faced few obstacles to assimilating into American political culture and quickly mastered electoral politics. Their shrewd political maneuvering carried favor with politicians in power and allowed them to maintain control over the policies and finances that affected the development of their "Christian colonies." Nevertheless, their insistence on remaining distinct made it easy to distinguish the Dutch from their American neighbors, revealing the limitations of their ability and desire to assimilate fully. The Dutch knew how to navigate the American system but prioritized the power of their colony over any party affiliation or their newfound American identity. Candidates could hold differing political viewpoints, but so long as they exhibited good character and contributed to the colony, they could win an election, proving that in Sioux County's earliest days, the Dutch placed colony before party.

94. Betten, "Geschiedenis."