

IMAGINING A NEW IDENTITY

The Dutch American immigrant community, 1847-1875

Abstract — Imagining a new identity: the Dutch American immigrant community, 1847-1875

National and transnational studies of migration define borders within a political framework and try to explain ethnic group identity ultimately through migrants' relationships to national identities. But the Dutch American community formed in the nineteenth century Midwest defined itself to a significant degree through non-political spatial and cultural relationships. The Dutch American community was a matrix of associations originating in the process of migration itself and in the struggles of the American Civil War. In settlements across the American Midwest, Dutch Americans sought belonging among their own and drew mental maps connecting their kind. They concentrated where possible, showed concern for establishing links between settlements, and by keeping 'Yankees' at arm's length, retained cultural habits carried over from the Netherlands. The result was a unique and persistent Dutch American ethnic subculture.

Millions of European immigrants settled in the United States in the nineteenth century, and while only 200,000 of these came from the Netherlands, Dutch immigrants managed to form and maintain a distinct subculture in America. Many immigrants chose not to settle among other Dutch-born people and blended into their surrounding communities. Dutch Protestant immigrants, for the most part, however, intended to settle together, and together they founded and maintained Dutch American communities. These communities, which have drawn much scholarly attention, are the focus of two additional articles in this collection.¹ If, as these and other studies indicate, the most salient and interesting characteristic of Dutch American communities is their emphasis on religious orthodoxy and their allied maintenance of Dutch culture, then it is particularly worthwhile to ask how these communities initially formed and came to share cultural elements. This is the leading question this article addresses.

1. See the articles of Schoone-Jongen and Zwart in this issue.

The story begins with the Dutch Seceders (*Afgescheidenen*: Protestants who had broken from the state church in the 1830s), who in the United States promoted religious and cultural orthodoxy, and with it an ideal of being ‘true Dutch’. Dutch Protestant immigrants were greeted by the open arms of Reformed Church ministers in New York, Americans like Isaac Wyckoff and Thomas De Witt, who thought the new arrivals were a gift from heaven, a dose of orthodoxy from the old country and the best of potential missionaries. From the beginning, the Dutch had planned to settle together, as families and reconstituted religious communities. The Dutch American network grew in the 1850s with two bases in the Midwest, the mostly Gelderland-South Holland colony of Pella, Iowa, and the more diverse Holland, Michigan. Its connections stretched like a comet’s tail east into and through New York State, inviting new immigrants to follow the road west. In the decades to come, Dutch immigrants founded more settlements, daughter colonies on the plains and in the Far West that made space for additional migrants from the Netherlands. And as the Grand Rapids, Chicago, and Wisconsin Dutch communities grew they reinforced the network’s religious and cultural linkages.²

During the nineteenth century, Dutch immigrants mixed with Americans and took on American customs and habits. They celebrated the Fourth of July with as much pomp and circumstance as did other Americans. But Dutch Americans also became increasingly interconnected and aware of each other through a self-conscious promotion of a unique religious and ethnic identity. While national identities provided parameters for the group, at times these immigrants expressed ethnic solidarity that superseded national boundaries. From 1899 to 1902, for example, Dutch Americans expressed deep sympathies for the South African Boers, as these ethnic kin resisted British political domination of South Africa. The Dutch American subculture faced Americanisation drives in the First World War, a persistent threat of secularisation, and – particularly evident in the 1920s and 1930s – the loss of the Dutch language. Historians have produced many studies of nineteenth century Dutch American *immigration*, but most works that discuss Dutch American *subculture* specifically, engage this entity in a period after its formation. For example, in the best work on the Dutch American subculture, James Bratt investigates the theological underpinnings and flavours of Dutch American Calvinism, but he largely neglects the period before 1880, jumping instead from the subculture’s ideological antecedents in the Netherlands to the introduction of Abraham Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism in Dutch American circles in the 1880s.³

2. Hans Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet: Nederlandse emigratie naar Amerika 1840-1940* (Hilversum 2006).

3. James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in modern America: the history of a conservative subculture* (Grand Rapids 1984). Similarly well-researched and informative is Henry Zwaanstra, *Reformed thought and experience in a new world: a study of the Christian Reformed Church and*

Historians have recognised, of course, that an independent Dutch American identity did not develop *ex nihilo*, but they have yet to explain that this identity developed in the earliest years of immigration, and indeed in the migration process itself. For Dutch immigrants in the United States, a general freedom of physical movement replaced the provincial and national restrictions of the old country. In absence of restrictive political borders, Dutch immigrants often drew mental borders, circumscribing their family or community within an imagined sphere. By the 1870s, these initially tenuous borders had become evident as Dutch Americans imagined themselves as a local and regional community and as a unique entity within American culture.

As nineteenth century American immigrants negotiated their personal identities and formed communities, they also chose their national allegiance. Not only was this true in the literal sense, that one could choose to be a citizen of, for example, the Netherlands or the United States, but it was also true in the active, psychological sense that national identity was becoming a more influential sphere of personal identity. Immigration officials required national identification; census authorities demanded a country of origin. But for many immigrants, national identity had yet to take shape, or at least it had not superseded regional, religious, or local identities. Those who kept themselves in an old-world mindset had trouble conceiving of a common identity in the new world. For example, an immigrant of 1848, Andries N. Wormser, who would after a few years return to the Netherlands out of disappointment, described his countrymen abroad as ‘Zeeuwen’ and ‘Overijsselaren’.⁴ This was in distinct contrast to the trend of other Dutch American immigrants of the 1840s and 1850s, who began to refer to themselves collectively as ‘Hollanders’ regardless of provincial origin.⁵ In other words, Dutch American identities formed by eliding provincial distinctions.

The hybrid and contested nature of immigrant identity has led scholars to propose various ways of thinking about immigrant identity that downplay the role of national borders. Indeed, the study of immigration has undergone a paradigm shift from a national to a ‘transnational’ approach, often high-

its American environment 1890-1918 (Kampen 1973). Other volumes which discuss the persistence of a Dutch American subculture in the twentieth century include: Rob Kroes and Henk-Otto Neuschäfer (eds.), *The Dutch in North America, their immigration and cultural change* (Amsterdam 1991); Rob Kroes, *The persistence of ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist pioneers in Amsterdam, Montana* (Urbana 1992); George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (eds.), *Morsels in the melting pot: the persistence of Dutch American communities in North America* (Amsterdam 2006).

4. J. Stellingwerf, *Amsterdamse emigranten: onbekende brieven uit de prairie van Iowa, 1846-1873* (Amsterdam 1975) 149-222.

5. A.C. van Raalte to J.A. Wormser. 7 Jan. 1848, in: Stellingwerff, *Amsterdamse emigranten*, 93.

lighting the role of capitalism in the process.⁶ Thomas Bender suggests that this approach is necessary to challenge the ‘unexamined assumption that the nation [is] the natural container and carrier of history’.⁷ Immigrants might be said to have a ‘transnational’ identity when they freely operate between two or more nations and their respective cultures.⁸ Scholarship on the ‘transnational’ begins with the assumption that national identity has been paramount in the study of the past, but that often a migrant culture transcends national identities. In order for transnational identity to be a useful term of analysis, we must remember not only that local and regional identity may precede or supersede national identity, but that the many reference points of identity work in concert with each other.

However, because of its ambiguity, the term ‘transnational’ has many detractors. Some point to the unfortunately common elision of ‘transnational’ with ‘international’ or even with ‘multinational’ in the politically charged context of modern day globalisation.⁹ Others have attempted to use the term ‘translocal’ to help explain how immigrant identity navigates between multiple points of reference. But this term as well suffers from a lack of a clear definition. Elliot Barkan, for example, uses ‘translocal’ to mean a moderate or symbolic attachment to multiple foci of old country identity, a sort of watered-down transnationalism.¹⁰ Robert Zecker, however, employs ‘translocal’ as an adjective for far-flung social networks linked together without being adjacent. Zecker’s ‘translocal’ Slovak American communities must make a concerted effort to maintain their connections.¹¹ Both uses of ‘translocal’ may apply to the Dutch American community, a network with moderate but inconsistent attachments to the old country. Nevertheless, a more thorough explanation of Dutch American identity is in order.

Despite their disagreements over the correct historical approach, most scholars would agree that migration in the age of nationalism caused many an identity crisis in which the demands of national identity competed with the legacies of other social, religious, and political identities. The concept of

6. John Bodnar, *The transplanted: a history of immigrants in urban America* (Bloomington 1985).

7. Thomas Bender, *A nation among nations: America's place in world history* (New York 2006) 5.

8. David G. Guitierrez and Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, ‘Introduction nation and migration’, *American Quarterly* 60:3 (2008) 503-521.

9. Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick and J.T. Way, ‘Transnationalism: a category of analysis’, *American Quarterly* 60:3 (2008) 625-648.

10. Elliot Barkan, ‘American in the hand, homeland in the heart: transnational and translocal immigrant experiences in the American West’, *The Western Quarterly* 35:3 (Autumn 2004) 331-354.

11. Robert Zecker, ‘Where everyone goes to meet everyone else: the translocal creation of Slovak immigrant community’, *Journal of Social History* 38:2 (2004) 423-453.

'immigration' itself reinforced national identity; it was a nationalist model. Immigrant identity in the nineteenth century, therefore, must be considered in light of this rise of national identity, but not to the exclusion of other foci of identification that existed prior to the rise of the nation-state. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson wrote that the nation-state, viewed as sovereign over a community and limited territory, has been the dominant political form since the nineteenth century. E.J. Hobsbawm adds that nationalism was born in the eighteenth century and was developed in the nineteenth. According to Hobsbawm, the state preceded national identity and created nationalism from above.¹² National identity was a product of the age, and immigrants were the intermediaries who tested the boundaries of early nationalism.

If we agree with Anderson and Hobsbawm, then national identity must be promoted by the state but accepted by the people. A nation, after all, is a different kind of group identification. Not one member of a national community, Anderson says, could possibly know all the others, and thus for a nation-state to exist, one has to 'imagine common linkages'.¹³ A nation is born in the process of imagination, of mythmaking and the invention of tradition. A nation is an imagined community. Like an 'imagined nation', the Dutch American community existed in the mind. Since it was not a political unit, its borders were not clearly drawn, nor could they be since each member perceived the community's boundaries based on their own knowledge and experience. This community was 'imagined' and constantly renegotiated, but that does not make it any less real. Rather, the Dutch American community was real because it was imagined.¹⁴ Unlike Hobsbawm's nations, with their impetus from the state – their design from 'above' – the Dutch American subculture was established from 'below'. This community derived from and was shaped by the aggregate expressions of individuals who considered themselves a part of it. Dutch Americans were linked by the idea that they shared a common past. Their churches, newspapers, schools, and kin networks united them across space and time. Instead of placing immigrants solely within a national or transnational framework, then, it is useful to see the boundaries of immigrant communities on their own terms, in the ways they envisioned them.

A few themes help to explain the early development of an 'imagined space' and an 'imagined identity' belonging to Dutch Americans. First, in the earliest years of immigration, the Dutch established themselves in the West, at a

12. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge 1990).

13. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London 1983).

14. I would argue that a community which is not 'real' is one which is imposed. That is, simply by defining and labeling a specific geographic or political unit a 'community' does not make it such. For example, a 'retirement community' might be no community at all.

distance from American culture and institutions. Writings from Dutch immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s show a conscious distinction between established native or ‘Yankee’ Americans and newly-arrived immigrants. Dutch Americans only briefly saw themselves as foreigners in a new country, but long imagined a divide between their cultural communities and the country at large. Geography at the local and regional level provided easily recognisable physical boundaries that helped circumscribe and protect their communities. These communities were then connected through common channels of information diffusion, particularly in letter exchanges and newspapers that built a common sense of purpose. The Civil War Americanised Dutch immigrants and reinforced an allegiance to the new fatherland. Dutch Americans developed a sense of dual allegiance to their country and to their fellow immigrants from the Netherlands. The subculture formed in these years would endure into the twentieth century.

This article employs theoretical works about identity formation and is built on an array of primary sources found both in the Netherlands and in the United States. Primary sources include correspondence stored in Holland, Michigan at the Joint Archives of Holland, the Van Raalte Institute, and the Holland Museum Archives. Much of the source material from these archives, which I cite in connection to the American Civil War, has been relatively recently acquired and has not previously been mentioned in scholarly works. In addition, the papers of American contingent of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, kept at the Netherlands National Archive in The Hague, have been rarely consulted in works relating to Dutch Americans. Further primary sources include articles from Dutch and Dutch American newspapers and previously published letter collections. A diverse base of secondary sources reflects and synthesises important insights made by Dutch and American scholars independently and often without recognition outside of their respective home countries. These sources indicate that Dutch Americans of the period 1847 to 1875 were already imagining themselves as a common people.¹⁵

The Dutch-Yankee inferiority complex

The term ‘Yankee’ possibly originated in the seventeenth century when the two generic Dutch names, ‘Jan’ and ‘Kees’ were combined to form a term for

15. The call number for the collection of the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs at the Netherlands National Archive in The Hague is 2.05.13. Civil war letters of Jan Nies can be found at the Holland Michigan Museum archives (collection T88-0138). The letters of Willem Roon (collection H04-1535.5) and Walter Weener (collection H07-1659), as well as the newspapers *De Grondwet*, *The Holland City News*, and *De Hollander* are available at the Joint Archives of Holland Michigan.

Dutch New Netherlanders. In the antebellum, however, the word denoted New Englanders more generally. Dutch immigrants were partly in awe of their fellow Americans, somewhat jealous of their successes and abilities, and overall desirous of similar material and social comforts. The disenfranchised Dutchmen appealed to Americans for guidance, employment, and financial aid, thus establishing themselves as junior partners in a shared American experience. In the first years, everything was new and needed understanding: the forests and the prairies, the soil composition, language, geography, and climate, American traditions and holidays, and the procedures of local democracy.

An immigrant Dutch-Yankee inferiority complex was built around the desire to talk like the Americans. 'Confident and self-assertive enough among themselves and in their own tongue', wrote Dutch American novelist and historian Arnold Mulder (1885-1959), 'the Dutch folk were likely to display a too great humility in the presence of Americans'.¹⁶ Indeed, Mulder explains that this first generation tendency towards deference gave way to stronger feelings of inferiority among second generation immigrants who felt incredible pressure to succeed in American circles while burdened by a funny foreign name and a perhaps too heavy childhood dose of parochialism and Biblical morality. For the American-born children of the Dutch, it was important to fit in and speak properly. Mulder's chapter on this subject, in his book *Americans from Holland*, can be considered both a secondary and a primary source, since the author was a second generation immigrant who had personally experienced these pains. In originality and devotion, this chapter outshines the rest of his work, and attempts to make up for what Mulder saw as the unheard voice of Dutch Americans caught between cultures. Mulder argued that his experiences in the 1890s and 1900s were similar to those of many Dutch Americans in earlier decades.

Part of the inferiority complex of nineteenth century Dutch immigrants, Mulder said, was an inability to speak proper English. Sent as a scout in advance of the proposed Iowa colony, Hendrik Barendraft reported from St. Louis in 1846, 'I can not advise everyone enough to really learn the English language'.¹⁷ In letters that followed in the 1850s, immigrants continued to stress the necessity of learning English. They repeatedly implored family members and other potential immigrants to learn the language. Language acquisition was not only practical, but the ability to speak and write properly was a mark of class. For this reason, the immigrant leaders Hendrik Scholte and Albertus Van Raalte worked hard to learn the language as quickly as

16. A. Mulder, *Americans from Holland* (Philadelphia 1947) 245.

17. Hendrik Barendregt (St. Louis, 14 Dec. 1846) printed as 'Brief uit Noord Amerika', in: *De Reformatie* (Amsterdam 1846) 367. Translation of 'Ik kan dus een ieder niet genoeg aanraden om toch de Engelsche taal te leren'.



Ill. 1 Part of a 1847 poster entitled 'The sad story of the miseries during the journey of emigrants', which was used at fairs. An organ produced the music and the public sang along guided by pictures. The poster warns against the dangers of migration. In the first picture a minister, clearly meant to be Van Raalte or Scholte, urges his flock to follow him to the USA. Once in the USA the emigrants encounter all sorts of trouble until the colony collapses and money has to be collected in the Netherlands to help the poor migrants survive. Source: Atlas van Stolk 34396: uitgave: C. Campagne, Tiel.

possible. Some of the more well-to-do immigrants to Pella had even taken English lessons while still in the Netherlands. Immigrants with more contact with Americans, those who lived in American cities for example, naturally learned English more quickly, as did men generally more than women (except young women who learned it faster than anyone). A mixed 'Yankee Dutch' developed in urban areas among those who spoke Dutch at home but needed to express American thoughts in public.¹⁸

The immigrants were also attempting to rise out of a low socio-economic standing. Many Dutch immigrants of the 1840s and 1850s had escaped positions of relative weakness and persecution in the Netherlands. They tended to come from distressed regions of the country where the agrarian crisis of the late 1840s was most acute, and where, for that very reason, cholera could do the most damage. The Dutch term for immigrant, 'landverhuizer,' literally 'one who moves to another country,' had a negative connotation. In the province of Friesland, explains historian Annemieke Galema, young emigrants were seen to be abandoning their social responsibilities.¹⁹ In addition, Pieter Stokvis has highlighted socio-economical developments as the dominant push factor for the 12,000 Dutch who migrated to the United States between 1846 and 1850.²⁰ Dutch officials at the time could only conclude that emigrants were those who could not make it in the Netherlands on their own or who did not fit in.²¹

18. Suzanne Sinke, *Dutch immigrant women in the United States 1880-1920* (Chicago 2002) 183; Jaap van Male, 'Yankee Dutch literature as a marker of acculturation', in: Robert P. Swierenga, Jacob E. Nyenhuis and Nella Kennedy (eds.), *Dutch-American arts and letters in historical perspective* (Holland MI 2007) 61-67.

19. Annemieke Galema, 'Frisian emigration to America in the 19th century', in: Peter de Haan and Kerst Huisman (eds.), *Famous Frisians in America* (Leeuwarden 2009) 31-46.

20. Pieter Stokvis, *De Nederlandse trek naar Amerika, 1846-1847* (Den Haag 1977) 29.

21. J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts (eds.), *History of the Low Countries* (New York 2006) 396.

Although these immigrants disdained powered elites, they were not paupers. Relative poverty is a key term for understanding the motivation and ability to emigrate. Only 13 percent of Dutch immigrants to America were ‘well-off’ and only 22 percent were very poor. To afford to emigrate, one needed some means, enough to purchase a ticket across the ocean and supply provisions for the trip. Seceders, who were no poorer on average than other Dutchmen, migrated at a rate ten times the national average. In the nineteenth century, 65 percent of Dutch immigrants to the United States identified as belonging to the *Hervormde Kerk*, 20 percent were Catholics, and just 13 percent were Seceders.²² Yet, despite their small number, the pious Seceders held considerable influence in Dutch American circles. They laid Calvinist foundations of Holland and Pella, and they were primarily responsible for keeping religious debates alive. As well, Seceders settled almost exclusively in the established Dutch colonies, while *Hervormde* immigrants were more likely to be found in large cities, or on farms distant from Dutch colonies. An early nucleus of Seceder immigrants provided the initial link for chain migration, while Protestants of similar socio-economic background followed in larger numbers. The Seceders had been consistently ridiculed in the 1830s as a movement of uncultured boers.²³

The Dutch immigrants of the 1840s and 1850s then were mostly middling farmers, handy and hard-working labourers, with a few ministers and a handful of minor businessmen. En route to the promised land in the American Midwest, they passed through American cities without learning much about their inhabitants except that the Americans appeared active and successful. Although Americans – particularly those Dutch-descent Reformed New Yorkers – were kind to the new arrivals, and helpful, few Yankees made any official notice of one additional little group of Europeans filling in America’s backcountry. On the frontier, however, Democratic politicians keen to pick up immigrant votes befriended the Dutch, and the Dutch returned their support in kind. Identifying with this ‘people’s party’, an anonymous Dutch American in 1854 wrote of the opposition as ‘monarchical Whig oppressors’.²⁴

Some Dutch immigrants carried with them the negative experiences of being rebuffed by Yankees, or as they sometime called them, ‘the English’. They took seriously the ridicule of the Americans. James Moerdyke, for example, never forgot the day his American co-workers laughed at him for using

22. Stokvis, *De Nederlandse trek naar Amerika, 1846-1847*. In addition, 2 percent were Jewish.

23. Robert Swierenga and Harry Stout, ‘Socio-economic patterns of migration in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century’, in: Paul Uselding (ed.), *Research in economic history: an annual compilation of research* (Greenwich CT 1976) 298-333.

24. *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 18 Apr. 1854.



Ill. 2 Pamphlet (1846) entitled 'Think before you start. A well meant word to my compatriots about the current disease in our fatherland called: emigration'. In the pamphlet an unknown Catholic priest warns both Catholics and Seceders against emigration to the USA. He compares emigration to treason and sees the wish to migrate as a contagious disease. Source: pfl 28337 (Pamflet, Bedrukt papier), Atlantic World, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag, copyright KB.

the wrong tool on the job.²⁵ There was always the potential for threat and ridicule, and American nativism in the 1850s was at a peak. The Dutch, like any other immigrant group, could be targeted. Immigrant Andries Wormser, for one, got the distinct impression that the Dutch were not 'highly regarded' in America. Visiting St. Louis, Wormser explained that some Dutch had to hide their connection to their minister, Hendrik Scholte, who had apparently built himself something of a poor reputation among the Americans.²⁶ Scholte had problems among the Dutch in Pella as well. He often identified more with the upper class Americans than with poor immigrants. Having heard Dutch farmers call each other by the title 'sir' or 'gentleman', Scholte's wife could not resist laughing. Scholte himself ridiculed the absurdity of these terms: 'Our farmers have not become gentlemen yet; they are still just farmers'.²⁷

Americans could be suspicious or fearful of the Dutch as they could of any immigrant group that might carry a threatening disease. The first Dutch to arrive in Grandville, Michigan, in 1849 were discovered to be carriers of cholera, and they were met with practical fear. The town of Grandville responded to the threat of disease by building a shanty-town along the Grand River to physically separate the sick Dutch travellers from the established citizens of the town.²⁸ Within a few days of their arrival, no less than eighteen Dutchmen had died while sequestered along the river. The resulting orphans were then adopted by other Dutch immigrant families, and not by the more numerous and stable Americans.²⁹ F.H. Cummings, an inhabitant of Grand Rapids wrote to his son in Peru, Illinois on July 2, 1849, noting the possibility of further troubles. 'No case of cholera here yet – but one has occurred at Grandville, a Holland emigrant just arrived. That colony [Holland] is increasing very fast; – 500 are expected soon'.³⁰

Nevertheless, the vast majority of interactions between the Dutch and the Yankees appear to have been positive. In addition to the New York Dutch, Americans from Buffalo to Detroit and Kalamazoo identified Van Raalte's followers as modern-day pilgrims and gave their leader a friendly welcome and

25. James Moerdyke, 'Autobiography', in: Henry S. Lucas, *Dutch immigrant memoirs and related writings* (Grand Rapids 1997) ii 424 (Original published in Assen 1955).

26. A.N. Wormser to H. Wormser, 20 Jan 1849, in: Johann Stellingwerf (author), Robert Swierenga (ed.), Walter Lagerwey (trans.), *Iowa letters: Dutch immigrants on the American frontier* (Grand Rapids 2004) 278-279.

27. H.P. Scholte to J.A. Wormser, 4 Aug. 1848, in: Stellingwerf, *Amsterdamse emigranten*, 110. Translation of 'Onze boeren zijn nog geen gentlemen geworden het zijn nog boeren'.

28. Lucas, *Dutch immigrant memoirs*, i 350.

29. John W. McGee, *Bend in the river. The story of Grandville and Jenison, Michigan, 1832-1972* (Grandville 1973) 57-58.

30. F.H. Cummings Papers, Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

occasional aid.³¹ Americans in west Michigan admired the work ethic, generosity, and cleanliness of the local Dutch. In Grand Rapids, the Dutch were known as responsible debtors, and Americans wanted to do business with them, especially to get their hands on gold coins. To an American boy who had seen little currency on the Michigan frontier, the arriving Dutch appeared 'overflowing with sacks and bags of gold'.³² Any wealth in gold was a short-lived advantage. The immigrants quickly used up their currency reserves, and for most of the early decades, hard cash among Dutch settlers in Ottawa-Allegan was 'scarce as feathered pigs'.³³

Because the immigrants lacked institutions in general, and because little aid arrived from state or national sources to aid their early building projects, they appealed to the Reformed Church in America (RCA) for funds, and thus initiated another kind of dependency relationship. The RCA was then centred in New York and New Jersey. The church was founded by Dutch immigrants of an earlier century, the New Netherlanders, and many of its members in the mid-nineteenth century still boasted of Dutch roots. Although Van Raalte and his immigrant flock were idealistic in many regards, Van Raalte's decision to lead his followers into the church reflected an understanding of practical economics. Van Raalte was in the unfortunate position of a petitioner who had little to offer the church except a promise of missionary zeal and denominational growth in the Midwest.

A second religious body, the Christian Reformed Church began in 1857 in secession from the RCA, but the new denomination remained small and fairly insignificant until the 1880s. In the meantime, there was among the Dutch Protestant immigrants practically one church, the RCA. On the one hand, the RCA was an Americanising influence, but the immigrants' reliance on the churches in the East reinforced in some ways the mental divide between immigrant and American. For example, in the summer of 1858, Jan Roost, a delegate of the Holland Harbor Committee, went east to solicit funds. Roost's task was to convince eastern RCA members that the growing settlement of Holland was destined to be a great city and the capitol of the Reformed Church in the West. Only through 'indefatigable perseverance' did Roost return with \$5000 worth of bonds.³⁴

Roost returned to the East in 1859 and encountered difficulties. Friends out east, like Dr. Thomas DeWitt and the particularly supportive Isaac Wyckoff, provided Roost letters of introduction as he presented his case before the

31. Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America: Dutch immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789-1950* (Ann Arbor 1955) 70-80.

32. Lucas, *Dutch immigrant memoirs*, i 387.

33. Albert Kampferbeek, 'De oude koloniale dagen vergeleken bij de dagen die wij thans beleven', *De Grondwet*, 22 July and 9 Aug. 1927.

34. *Grand Rapids Daily Eagle*, 4 Oct., 1858.

American congregations. But, Roost wrote Van Raalte, 'I find it verry hard to sell bonds. I have not sold anny in New york or Brooklyn, nothwithstanding I tried verry hard'. Roost, with his shaky English, and homesick for his wife and children, was losing patience. He reported to Van Raalte, 'if there is a person of ambition he might have mine place and I shall be glad to go home and leave the hard working of begging for someboddy else'.³⁵ Later that year, Van Raalte went east to take over the fundraising efforts.³⁶ Van Raalte's action reflected the obvious, that for the Dutch to prosper, they needed aid from the Americans, and they needed guidance from leaders like himself.

Geography as a determining factor of isolation

The cultural or mental distance between the Dutch and the 'Yankees' was matched by a moderate kind of physical separation from each other. Historians have long seen spatial concentrations of immigrant or ethnic groups as a measure of integration and community formation. A recent article by Marlou Schrover and Jelle van Lottum indicates that this relationship is not universal. In a study of immigrants to nineteenth century Utrecht, the Netherlands, the authors show that concentrations do not necessarily form lasting communities. Communities, of course, can benefit from spatial concentration, but they can also exist outside of spatial concentrations.³⁷ The strength of the Dutch American community was due in part to a few areas of high concentration. Geography clearly provided recognisable physical boundaries that helped circumscribe Dutch American communities. Spatial boundaries and concentrations, as well as physical and political borders were useful in forming 'mental maps' and delimiting Dutch American territory. Yet, the imagined Dutch American community ultimately superseded definite borders and existed in an ever-changing and dispersed form.

The imagined Dutch American world began in the mind prior to immigration. Migrants in the 1840s and 1850s travelled in groups and relied on word of mouth for finding a reputable shipper. By the 1860s, Dutch shipping agencies had specialised in carrying migrants to the new world. These emigrants were not fleeing imminent danger and had time to plan.³⁸ In explaining how to travel to the United States and then from one Dutch community

35. Jan Roost to Albertus C. Van Raalte, 11 July 1859, Albany, NY. Van Raalte Institute Collection.

36. *De Hollander*, 19 Nov., 1859.

37. Marlou Schrover and Jelle van Lottum, 'Spatial concentrations and communities of immigrants in the Netherlands, 1800-1900', *Continuity and Change* 22:2 (2007) 215-252.

38. Robert P. Swierenga, 'Going to America: travel routes of Zeeland emigrants', *Nehalennia: Bulletin van de Werkgroep Historie en Archeologie* 114 (1997) 19-30.

to the next, immigrants relied on verbal directions and formed mental maps. The humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains that immigrant's mental maps were crucial for motivation and logistics of immigration. Immigrants 'did not go blindly. They had images of their new homes based on hearsay, letters from relatives, and immigration literature. These attractive images were a cause of their desire to move'.³⁹ Immigrants, of course, probably did not have well-developed maps in their heads, but they used landmarks and metaphors for explaining locations, giving directions, and storing information. Verbal and written news from cities with Dutch settlements made those locations appear more prominent than their actual population figures would indicate.

Van Raalte's Holland was the first colony founded by the new group of Dutch immigrants and the first space to be imagined as belonging to the Dutch. Grand River and the Kalamazoo River served as ultimate boundaries to the north and south, respectively, while the Black River in the middle was a somewhat navigable waterway whose basin was roughly congruent with the limits of the colony. To the west, the border of the colony was drawn naturally by sandy soils and ultimately by Lake Michigan. To the east, the Dutch came into contact with marginal swamplands or property already claimed by American farmers. As the colony grew, the Dutch claimed some of this 'American' land through purchase. Holland, all the while, served as a local market centre, with villages radiating out up to nearly twenty miles away, but always within a day's walk or ride.

Language helps explain how the immigrants conceptualised their new home, and this new colony. Holland, Michigan itself was known in local parlance as 'de stad' or 'the city'. In the earliest years, this term carried a somewhat cynical tone as immigrants discovered how small and 'village-like' was the Holland they had imagined as a real Dutch 'city'.⁴⁰ In addition to 'de stad', immigrants also spoke of 'de kolonie', the imagined sphere of all Dutch immigrant property and relations in Ottawa and northern Allegan counties. The sense that this was Dutch dominion was predicated on individual land ownership and the application of labour to re-shape the landscape and to claim the wilderness.

Both Holland and Pella were routinely described as settlements in the wilderness. The wilderness was also a metaphor for the unknown. By controlling the land, the Dutch controlled their destiny. Progress was measured in the number of trees felled and of acres cultivated. The geographer Henk Aay has shown how Dutch American land ownership formed and defined the Ottawa-Allegan colony. In addition, my earlier research indicates substantial

39. Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Images and mental maps', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 65:2 (1975) 205-213.

40. Engbertus Vanderveen, 'Life reminiscences', in: Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, i 490; Anne de Vree, 'My experiences', in: Lucas, *Dutch immigrant memoirs*, ii 196.

overlap between Dutch-owned landed property and wealthier patrons who built brick houses. Both studies attest to a dense and expanding pattern of Dutch immigrant land ownership.⁴¹

In the Ottawa-Allegan colony, the Dutch had the necessary space and time to incubate a new culture. There had been Americans in Holland from its humble beginnings, but there were more Americans in the Pella colony, both proportionately and in real numbers. The Reformed Church first attracted immigrants in Holland, and there the Christian Reformed Church was born. In addition to having less contact with Americans than did their kin in Pella, the Ottawa-Allegan colony had more zealots, and therefore displayed more of the quarrelling, secessionist attitude that characterised Dutch American inter-denominational politics in later years.

If we can employ another metaphor and say that Holland, MI was the largest Dutch 'cultural island', then it is also well to say that Dutch American communities were scattered across the Midwest like the islands of an archipelago. Together these islands formed a network of safety, common heritage, and family and religious connections. In 1854, the Dutch Consul in Milwaukee, G. van Steenwijk, explained that the Dutch settlements in Wisconsin were communities of mostly Protestant, honest, hard-working immigrants. The number of Dutch varied by settlement: Holland Township (1500-2000), Brown County (1000-1500), Milwaukee (500-600), Milwaukee Township (80-100), Franklin Township (80-100), and Waupun (300), but all had regular church services and subscribers to the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*. Van Steenwijk noted however that: 'Every now and then one meets a countryman who does not belong to a Dutch settlement, and lives in the country'.⁴²

Pieces of these Protestant communities were reassembled parts of earlier communities in the Netherlands. The act of religious secession in the Netherlands (the *Afscheiding* of 1834) had already established a sense of community among congregations linked across provinces by ministers, publications, doctrine and shared piety. Seceders, again, were a minority in America, where Dutch Protestants of all stripes joined together in new ecclesiastical bonds. In addition to their religious connections, the immigrants were now connected by the shared experiences of immigration and survival in a new land. Perhaps the best indication that the scattered Dutch immigrant settlements were aware of each other comes from the extensive detailed listing of

41. Henk Aay, 'The making of an ethnic island: initial settlement patterns of Netherlanders in West Michigan', *The Great Lakes Geographer* 2:2 (1995) 61-76; Michael Douma, *Veneklase brick: a family, a company, and a unique nineteenth century Dutch architectural movement in Michigan* (Grand Rapids 2005).

42. Minister Consul G. van Steenwijk to J.C. Gevers, Washington D.C. 16 June 1854. Netherlands National Archive The Hague, Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, U.S. Legation. Collection 2.05.13, file no. 24. Translation of 'Eindelijk ontmoet men nu en dan een landgenoot die tot geene Nederl. nederzetting behoort, en op het land leeft'.

local people and places which community leaders recalled and related for the 1897 Semi-Centennial celebrations. Authors could recall how many miles separated one settlement from another, the names of the original inhabitants, their occupations, and often an anecdote about their character. They kept tabs on the number of colonists, but also the number of churchgoers. They knew when Van Raalte had visited, when they called on a minister, and when the first Dutch church service was held.⁴³

Because of distance and isolation, the Dutch could imagine themselves a separate people within the borders of the United States but on the periphery of its cultural influence. And while they were subject to the laws and restrictions of the land, they were without representation in the political process, as immigrants had to wait five years to become naturalised citizens and voters.⁴⁴ The arrival in 1849 of a USA topographical survey team sent to chart the potential of opening Holland's harbour illustrates the tone of the encounter between the Dutch and Americans. Hoyt Post, one of the few Americans then in Holland, described in his diary the majestic appearance of a 'mysterious fleet' in the harbour. Like an expedition to the uncivilised ends of the earth, two little black sailboats each with a 'broad stripe of white and a narrow stripe of red' painted below the gunwales sent ripples through the waters of the tranquil bay.⁴⁵ The official representatives from Washington were welcome visitors whose appearance was a symbolic recognition of Holland's existence as a colony that had been struggling for two years to sustain itself in the wilderness. It was not only a sign of economic prospects, but also a symbol of ambassadorship, the American nation welcoming a Dutch colony within its borders.⁴⁶ The Dutch were thrilled to be recognised by their new countrymen and have Holland placed on an official map.

From the Ottawa-Allegan *kolonie*, the Dutch came to Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1848 and 1849 for provisions and employment. By 1853, there were perhaps 600 Dutch in that city, including some one hundred families and many domestics and hired hands working for American families. But the Dutch settled apart from the Americans, with a tendency at first to organise along provincial lines, proud Groningers near proud Groningers, and stubborn Frisians near stubborn Frisians, for example. In time, however, the Dutch churches and schools made Dutch Americans of provincial Dutch immigrants.⁴⁷ The Dutch community of Grand Rapids showed that even

43. Lucas, *Dutch immigrant memoirs*, 197.

44. Sinke, *Dutch immigrant women*, 51-52.

45. Hoyt Post Diary, 1 June 1849. Holland Michigan Museum Archives.

46. Village of Holland daybook, April 1847 – Feb. 1850. Original in the Van Raalte Collection, Heritage Hall Archives at Calvin College, B-13, Folder 218. Entry for 1 Dec., 1849.

47. David G. Vanderstel, 'Dutch immigrant neighborhood development in Grand Rapids, 1850-1900', in: Robert P. Swierenga (ed.), *The Dutch in America: immigration, settlement*,

without the leadership of a Van Raalte or Scholte, the Dutch desired to keep one foot in American territory, and another foot firmly planted in their own communities. The letters of immigrant Jan Wonnick from the early 1870s indicate the attractiveness of the established Grand Rapids Dutch community for new immigrants. Religious instruction was strong in Grand Rapids, wrote Wonnick, and the Dutch farms around the city had grown prosperous.⁴⁸ A similar pattern developed in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where there were by 1852 some 52 Dutch families and 300 members of the Dutch church. From Zeeland, Michigan, a Dutch carpenter came to Kalamazoo for work in 1851. Once there, the Dutchman continued to read *De Hollander*, and in letters back to his family in Leiden he reported on events in the other Dutch settlements in Michigan.⁴⁹ This young Dutch carpenter was typical of the members of the early Dutch American community in Kalamazoo, who initially dispersed to earn money from American employers. The Kalamazoo Dutch community came together by the 1870s, however, as Dutch immigrants moved into more clearly defined ethnic residential neighbourhoods.⁵⁰

Like Holland, the settlement of Pella, Iowa met its naturally boundaries between two rivers, the Des Moines to the South, and the Skunk to the North. In 1851, in a letter requesting a Dutch consulate in Pella, Hendrik Scholte described the colony as the central point of the Dutch in Iowa, with a strong link to the settlement of Amsterdam on the Des Moines River. Among the Dutch in Pella, it was difficult to imagine that one was in the centre of America.⁵¹ By 1870, the Pella Dutch had claimed all the available farmland in the area. It grew from a population of 1,057 in 1850 to well over 4,000 by 1870, as some 1,526 new immigrants arrived in the city in a twenty-year period.⁵² Immigrant Jan Nollen described the early days of Pella as a beehive of activity ready to send out its bees.⁵³ In other words, the active capitalist Dutch had taken possession of the lands around Pella and were prepared to establish granddaughter colonies further west. Those who stayed in Pella showed a

and cultural change (New Brunswick 1985) 125-155.

48. Herbert J. Brinks (ed.), *Dutch American voices: letters from the United States, 1850-1930* (Ithaca NY 1995) 242-252.

49. *Leydsche Courant*, 15 Aug. 1849, 6 Jan. 1851, and 25 Oct. 1852. The newspaper does not identify the author by name.

50. John A. Jakle and James O. Wheeler, 'The changing residential structure of the Dutch immigrant population in Kalamazoo, Michigan', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59:3 (1969) 441-460.

51. Hendrik Scholte to unknown recipient, 29 Jan. 1851. Netherlands National Archive, Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, u.s. Legation. Collection 2.05.13, file no. 59.

52. Richard L. Doyle, 'Wealth mobility in Pella, Iowa: 1847-1925', in: Swierenga (ed.), *The Dutch in America*, 156-174, 157.

53. J. Nollen, *De Hollanders in Iowa: brieven uit Pella van een Geldersman* (Arnhem 1858) 142-167, cited in: Lucas, *Nederlanders in America*, 331.

desire to remain in a homogenous, church-dominated community.⁵⁴ This atmosphere enabled the persistence of a Dutch cultural enclave. Indeed, in the early 1980s, when Philip Webber conducted interviews of remaining speakers of 'Pella Dutch', he found that many described the local landscape in terms of 'ours' (Dutch) and 'theirs' (Americans).⁵⁵

The mental map of Pella was also shaped by its location on the frontier. The landscape was open and in need of landmarks and division. Early twentieth century Dutch American historian Jacob Van Der Zee explained:

It was indeed a unique experience for these Hollanders to come from a foreign land, where they had spent their lives closely confined in cities and towns and on small well-kept farms, to the solitude and isolation of life up on the American frontier.⁵⁶

Property lines helped the Dutch establish mental maps defining their territory, but as Van Der Zee perceptively notes, there were 'irregular, imaginary lines' which created the boundary between farmland and the 'unused West'.⁵⁷

Concentrated settlements and ethnic networks were a salve for the wound of separation. Scholte and Van Raalte chose rather uninhabited sites where they could claim a distinct section of land, plant a church, and 'maximise ethnic solidarity'.⁵⁸ Holland and Pella established the model of a Dutch American community. The physical boundaries of each Dutch immigrant community to follow were unique, but followed the established pattern of requiring at least one church building to survive. The church was the central meeting place that tied the community together. As the nineteenth century progressed, Dutch settlements came into closer contact with each other. The founding of Holland, Michigan's Hope College and its seminary school in 1866, reflected a desire for Dutch American ministers from the Midwest to be educated in the Midwest, and not be schooled at the RCA's seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey. When much of Holland, Michigan burned to the ground in 1871, the editors of the *Pella Weekblad* were distraught about their 'sister colony' and the sufferings of their 'countrymen of the same Orange roots'. Reporting on the tragedy was, they explained, 'the most difficult and saddest task'.⁵⁹

54. Doyle, 'Wealth mobility in Pella, Iowa: 1847-1925', 156-174.

55. Philip E. Webber, *Pella Dutch: the portrait of a language and its use in one of Iowa's ethnic communities* (Ames IA 1988) 46.

56. Jacob Van der Zee, *The Hollanders of Iowa* (Iowa City 1912) 68-69.

57. Van der Zee, *The Hollanders of Iowa*, 78.

58. Brinks (ed.), *Dutch American voices*, 2.

59. *Pella Weekblad*, 21 Oct., 1871.

Information networks

The flowering of letter exchanges and the proliferation of Dutch language newspapers indicate a desire among the Dutch Americans to remain connected in the new county. Early immigrant letters were filled with names, places, prices, and instructions on traversing and living in the new land. Letters were addressed to individuals, but were often read aloud or passed on to friends and relatives. Since information was at a premium, Dutch immigrants spent much effort in establishing links for mail delivery. Mail service was intimately linked with the roads, and was a driving factor in road development and improvement. The mail linked Dutch immigrants and helped form their sense of community. The postal service was also a nationalising force, integrating the immigrants into a national system.⁶⁰

In the earliest years, Holland, Michigan's mail was carried in on foot from a post office at Manlius, fifteen miles to the south. William Notting and his wife Jenneke were responsible for the route, which brought the mail downtown to the store of Henry D. Post. Years later, Anna Post, Henry's wife, recalled the sight, 'Poor Vrouw Notting, how tired she was and how the perspiration ran down her face as she sat down to rest'.⁶¹ In the early 1850s, mail came to the city once or twice weekly by a stagecoach whose arrival caused quite a commotion.⁶² The 'postwagen', as the Dutch called it, delivered more than just mail; it was also a transport service for bulk goods. The first driver on the Allegan-Grand Haven route, P.F. Pfanstiehl, advertised that one could even 'ride along' with the coach, if one paid for the service.⁶³ Not until 1870, when the Allegan and Grand Haven Railroad ended the need for stage drivers, did the mail arrive on a regular and frequent basis.⁶⁴

Dutch language newspapers allowed for the reprinting of letters and the wider dissemination of ideas. Benedict Anderson explains how newspapers play an important role in establishing community.⁶⁵ The newspaper's date, he says, provides a linkage through time. Thousands of other Dutch immigrants across the country were weekly engaged in the same ritual of filtering through common stories. Newspapers announced whose mail was still awaiting pick-up, when ships had arrived and what provisions they brought with them. They also carried news from the Netherlands, particularly regional and

60. David Henkin, *The postal age: the emergence of modern communications in nineteenth-century America* (Chicago 2006).

61. Mrs. H.D. Post, Response at Century Club banquet, April 15, 1898. Holland Michigan Museum Archives, collection T88-0160.

62. William Van Eyck, 'Transportation in colonial days', in: Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, i 444-445.

63. *De Hollander*, 15 Dec. 1853.

64. *Holland City News*, 23 Oct. 1875.

65. Anderson, *Imagined communities*, 34-36.

provincial stories, which allowed the immigrants to feel a continued connection with what they had left behind.

The first Dutch American newspaper was published in Wisconsin in 1849, but this *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* faded out by 1853. Holland's *De Hollander*, begun in 1850, was the only Dutch American sheet until *De Stoompost* of Grand Rapids in 1858, and *The Pella Gazette* from 1855 to 1857. All of these had been local efforts, but the readership would occasionally include Dutch from other colonies. Van Raalte wrote in 1850 that among other benefits of a local paper, *De Hollander*, would 'promote the colony' and 'bind the outlying settlement together'.⁶⁶ It accomplished both tasks, but *De Grondwet*, established in Holland in 1860, became the first national Dutch American newspaper. While the advertisement revenue came only from local sources, the readership dues trickled in from across the country, and later from Canada. The birth and expansion of *De Grondwet* in the 1860s, with its personal interest stories and reports from Dutch settlements, both caused and was caused by the growth of long-distance connections among Dutch Americans.

Positive 'bacon letters' sent back to the Netherlands boasted of abundance in the new fatherland, and a sense of collective well-being. For example, Teunis van den Hoek wrote in 1866 that not a single Hollander in his city, Englewood, Illinois desired to return to the Netherlands.⁶⁷ Information exchanges also enabled many immigrants outside of the major Dutch settlements to feel connected to the Dutch American community. A Dutchman living in Lancaster, New York who travelled through the Midwest in 1857, apparently had little difficulty finding and visiting ministers in west Michigan and the Dutch consul in Wisconsin.⁶⁸ Published letters and pamphlets further encouraged Dutch migration and developed national and international networks. From Pella, Iowa, Henry Hospers led settlers to northwest Iowa in 1871 and established 'Orange City', after the name of the Dutch royal family. In a pamphlet used to recruit Dutch Protestants to the new settlement, Hospers glorified the advantages of his state. According to Hospers, Dutch immigrants would find countrymen in 'Oranjestad' who were helpful and willing to educate newcomers in American ways.⁶⁹

66. Albertus C. Van Raalte, 'Address', *De Hollander*, 30 Nov. 1850.

67. Teunis van de Hoek, Junction Station (Englewood, Ill.) to parents in Goudriaan, Zuid Holland, 25 Sept. 1866.; Brinks (ed.), *Dutch American voices*, 116.

68. *Leydsche Courant*, 16 Nov. 1857.

69. Henry Hospers, *Iowa: de vraag: zal ik naar Noord-Amerika gaan? Kort en praktisch beantwoord door een geboren Nederlander* (Gorinchem 1875).

Letters and the Civil War

In addition to forming local, ethnic, and religious institutions and identities, the Dutch immigrants were also actively becoming American, and the Civil War was a major catalyst in assuming this new national identity. Although the Dutch were perhaps underrepresented in the military nationwide, many immigrant groups sponsored volunteer movements to help keep the Union together, to fight for their new 'fatherland'. Dutch Americans settled almost exclusively in non-slave states, and generally supported the Union cause, although the majority voted against Lincoln in both 1860 and 1864. After an initial wave of patriotism and volunteerism, many Dutch avoided the draft and spoke ill of the war effort.⁷⁰ In the summer of 1862, the Dutch Consul in New York reported that in Michigan, young men were daily approaching the consul there, asking for certificates of protection to remain at home. Although some had taken out papers for U.S. citizenship, or had parents who had been naturalised, the young Dutch men hoped that claiming Dutch citizenship would keep them out of the draft.⁷¹

Sources from the Civil War show the extent to which the Dutch American community was integrated. For example, seventy-five Dutch Americans left Pella, IA, to fight for the Union, but 138 fled during the war to seek comfort and safety in Oregon and elsewhere in the West. These out-migrants left in duress, but returned in 1866 to Pella and Marion County by ship to central America, wagon across the Panamanian isthmus, and finally to New Orleans. They returned in 1869 via Sacramento and aboard a train on the recently finished transcontinental railroad.⁷² In this instance, the war could only temporarily disrupt the sense of community that had already been established and wished to reconstitute itself.

Dutch American soldiers and civilians relied on each other to keep informed. Hollanders also fought together and sought each other's company during the war. For example, W. van Appeldoorn of the Michigan 25th infantry wrote that Jan Nies and other Dutch soldiers had visited his company while serving in Kentucky.⁷³ The Civil War correspondence of Zeeland, Michigan's soldier Willem Roon, indicates that the pious Dutch felt alienated from the 'sinfulness' of camp life and sought comfort among those with similar

70. Michael Douma, 'Dutch American identity during the Civil War and the Boer War', in: Hans Krabbendam, Cornelius A. Van Minnen, and Giles Scott-Smith (eds.), *Four centuries of Dutch-American Relations, 1609-2009* (Amsterdam 2009) 375-385.

71. 5 Aug. 1862. Netherlands National Archive, Collection 2.05.13. New York, file no. 61.

72. Brian W. Beltman, 'Civil War reverberations: exodus and return among the Pella Dutch during the 1860s', in: Hans Krabbendam and Larry J. Wagenaar (eds.), *The Dutch-American experience: essays in honor of Robert P. Swierenga* (Amsterdam 2000) 117-142.

73. W. van Appeldoorn to H. van Lente. Bowling Green, Ky., 5 Feb. 1863, in: Janice Van Lente Catlin (ed.), *The civil war letters of Johannes Van Lente* (Okemos MI 1992) 151.

religious beliefs. Roon wrote home about the particular sermons preached in camp and was excited to have met a Dutch minister while visiting Cincinnati.⁷⁴ Dutch soldiers wrote letters to each other and these circulated through the camps or were read aloud. Some letters home were even published in *De Grondwet*.

Jan Nies of Holland, MI provides an example of how a Dutch soldier imagined his home, his home village, and the larger Dutch American community. In 1864, Jan Nies wrote home from Tennessee to his mother in Michigan that he could still envision the family farm. 'Although we are divided from each other by a great distance, and now for a long time as well, yet house and home can not, and shall never, I think, be forgotten'.⁷⁵ The mental image of his home and of his community provided Nies with a sense of purpose and identity as he marched through the South.

In many ways, Jan Nies was typical of a Dutch farmer in Michigan, and his views of the Dutch community might be considered representative. He was sixteen years old in 1852 when he traversed the Atlantic with his family and helped to cut trees to clear a farm in the Michigan forest. His reason for immigration was in line with many others in the Holland, Michigan area: his family belonged to the separatist Calvinists who had faced persecution in the Netherlands and who sought religious freedom in America. Encouraged or reinforced by pro-Union sermons of Albertus C. Van Raalte, Nies felt a patriotic stirring. Ray Nies, one of Jan Nies' sons, later explained: 'At the very start of the war, Father immediately enlisted at Grand Rapids in the second Michigan cavalry (a company almost exclusively of Hollanders) and stayed with it till the end of the war'.⁷⁶

Although he was hundreds of miles away, Nies still offered advice to his family; he tried to run the family farm through the mail.⁷⁷ Nies also regularly sent money home (usually in ten dollar increments), and had considerable worry that the money would not reach its destination. Soldiers, in general, would rather entrust their letters to a homebound comrade than to the mail service. The American mail service, however, was often the only option. Because the whole enterprise operated on trust, there was plenty of opportunity for dishonesty and thievery among postal employees, and room, in turn, for patrons to find loopholes to abuse the service.⁷⁸ The chance that a letter

74. Willem Roon Letters, 23 July, 1863. Joint Archives of Holland (JAH) HO4-1535.5.

75. Jan Nies Letters. Holland Museum Archives Collection T88-0138. Camp near Cleveland, TN. 12 April, 1864. Translation of: 'Al is het dat wij een grooten afstand van elkander gescheiden zijn en nu al een langen tijd doch het huis (home) kan en dunkt my zal nooit vergeten worden'.

76. Ray Nies Manuscript, Chapter 1. Holland Museum Archives, collection T88-0138.

77. Jan Nies letters, Camp near Rienzi, ms. 30 Aug. 1862.

78. Wayne E. Fuller, *The American mail: enlarger of the common life* (Chicago and London 1972) 238-240.

could ‘miscarry’ was very real. By repeating important phrases in subsequent letters, Nies hoped that the most crucial information would come through.

Letters containing cash were commonly addressed to Aldred Plugger, a businessman in Holland who ran his store as a bank and a focal point for all news coming from or going to the front. This explains why Nies could write that he had sent the money to Plugger, and that Plugger ‘knows what to do with the money’.⁷⁹ On more than one occasion, the west Michigan Dutch soldier Walter Weener sent mail home via furloughed soldiers in his company, addressing the mail to the trusted Kalamazoo businessman Paulus Den Bleyker.⁸⁰ While soldiers like Nies and Weener had little choice but to put their faith in the us mail service, they knew that everything would be all right as soon as their soldiers pay reached the hands of hometown Hollanders. It appears that the Dutch American soldiers imagined the Dutch community as a ‘safe sphere’, which would take care of its own. The letters having been written in Dutch meant that no one else but the intended audience was likely to decipher the script or understand the contents of the letter.

As a soldier Nies ‘learned much about his new country, its size, its people, and the language, customs and other matters which proved useful to him in years to come’.⁸¹ The dozen other Dutchmen in Nies’ company provided a nucleus of support and comfort, in an American, English-speaking world. Letters were an intimate link to the home culture; they helped alleviate the pressures of rapid assimilation.

Conclusion

This article has addressed the question of how Dutch Americans communities initially formed and came to share cultural elements. Many of the Dutch who migrated to the United States came from isolated Dutch communities. This is especially true for the Seceders, who formed a small proportion of the Dutch migrants, but managed to influence to a very large extent the construction of Dutch American ethnic identity. In the United States, these migrants again sought isolation, because they thought this would guarantee the religious freedom they sought. They concentrated in remote areas and distanced themselves from others in American society. They did not establish ties with Dutch immigrants, who were Catholics or Jews. They did try to preserve an identity, but this was not necessarily a Dutch national identity, nor a Dutch regional identity, but an identity rooted in a religious Dutch Protestant cul-

79. Jan Nies letters, Camp near Cleveland, TN. 28 March 1864. Translation of ‘Dus weet Mr. A. Plugger wat hij met het geld doen moet’.

80. Papers of Walter Weener, Joint Archives of Holland, Collection H07-1659.1.

81. Ray Nies Manuscript, Holland Museum Archives.

ture. The remoteness and isolation of the communities did not mean that they were not in touch with each other. People travelled between the communities, while newspapers and letters connected them on purpose. Dutch Americans did not seek to reproduce Dutch society, but did want to reproduce the religious atmosphere of Protestant communities in the Netherlands.

The concept of 'transnationalism' has been useful in migration studies to help explain migrant identity. For instance, H. Arnold Barton has argued that Swedish Americans took great efforts to project a positive image of themselves in the old country, and that their identities were constantly negotiated in a dialogue between Swedish and American life.⁸² Dutch American immigrants, however, seldom operated between the Netherlands and the United States. Instead, their identities were formed in a discourse between American society and an imagined Dutch American sphere within it. While others have shown that migrants can operate between nations, or beyond national borders, none have shown that migrant communities can imagine their own borders and interpret their identities within at least one non-national frame of reference. The term 'translocalism' might be used to explain the origins or organisation of the Dutch American network, but as the term has been used previously, it fails to incorporate the function of a primary source of identification forming within such a network. Dutch immigrants, although they were from various provinces, imagined themselves as a community with common roots and a common future. In this case, fractured identity in the country of origin did not result in fractured identity in the country of settlement. The Dutch in America did not all know each other, nor could they have since they were too much spread across too great a distance. But while logistics limited their physical interaction, Dutch Americans were aware of each other's presence. They became proud, loyal Americans symbolically attached to their roots in the Netherlands while constructing and maintaining another kind of imagined identity, an imagined Dutch American community.

About the author

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82. H. Arnold Barton, *A folk divided: homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940* (Uppsala 1994).