

The Dutch and Their Faith:

Immigrant Religious Experience
in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Proceedings of the 8th Biennial Conference

of the

Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies

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Ronald Jager is a writer residing in Washington, New Hampshire. From 1965-1977 he served on the faculty of Yale University in Philosophy. His most recent book is *Eighty Acres: Elegy of a Family Farm* about growing up on a farm in the northern Michigan Dutch community of McBain.

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INTRODUCTION

The Dutch and Their Faith: Immigrant Religious Experience in the 19th and 20th Centuries was the 8th biennial conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies (AADAS). The conference was hosted by the Joint Archives of Holland on the campus of Hope College.

Our attempt was to bring together scholars and informed laypeople to discuss the wide variety of religious traditions and experiences among the Dutch. Although nearly every previous AADAS conference has touched upon the religious dimension, especially those in the Reformed vein, we had not attempted to isolate it as an important component of the ethnic life of Dutch immigrants.

As is true for nearly every immigrant group that ventured to American shores, religion played a central role for the Dutch. This can be seen in all the papers presented. For example the paper of Donald Luidens and Roger Nemeth, indicating that faith still plays a significant role among the descendants of Dutch. Some of these arrived well over a century ago, others who arrived in the wake of World War II's devastation and some among the trickle still arriving in the United States.

It was a pleasure to host both the presenters and the nearly 100 people who attended the conference. A fascinating presentation was given by our keynote, author Ronald Jager. You will find his comments on the following pages and they are sure to bring a smile. Other discussions contained here will wrinkle your brow or possibly provide a grimace that among the Dutch there could not be more harmony. Finally you may be pleasantly surprised at the depth of commitment and genuine affinity this ethnic group has had among themselves.

This compilation reaches beyond the Dutch Reformed which is the background of many AADAS members. Our intention was to incorporate as many different experiences as possible including Reformed, Catholic and Jewish traditions. I believe that we have accomplished this goal.

Audio recordings are available from the Joint Archives of Holland of all of the sessions including a substantial portion of the panel discussion on RCA-CRC union discussions which is not included here.

There are many who need to be thanked for their assistance in making the conference a success. These include the AADAS Executive Committee (Hendrik Sliemers, Conrad Bult, Steve Lambers and Gerlof Homan), the Joint Archives staff including associate archivist Craig Wright, Reba O'Shesky, and Leon Witteveen, and special thanks to Patti Carlson who graciously assisted me in typing, formatting and producing this volume.

Larry J. Wagenaar
Conference Coordinator
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