

Whence and Hence

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When our president of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies and chairperson of the tenth biennial conference, Dr. E. William Kennedy, asked me to give a brief retrospective of the organization, we both reflected on a possible title. Bill came up with whence and hence only he placed hence before whence in the program brochure. After I looked up these ancient English words to make sure what they meant, I placed whence before hence. In other words, where has the organization come from and where may it possibly be going in the future? We are a relatively young organization but since this is the tenth conference, it may be in order to take a look at ourselves, our history and reflect on the future.

I. Our pre-history.

First, I would suggest that a brief look at our "pre-history" is in order. AADAS has historical roots in the Dutch-American Historical Commission which was founded in the early 1960s by Willard C. Wichers, director of the Mid-West Division of the Netherlands Information Service, located in Holland, Michigan. This commission, or DAHC as we call it, was formed in order to engender greater cooperation in the collection of documents by Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, Hope College, Western Theological Seminary and the Netherlands Museum [now the Holland Museum]. At the time DAHC was founded, memories were very tender because the Albertus C. Van Raalte papers had been given to Calvin College by William B. Eerdmans for the reason that Hope College had demolished the Van Raalte home, an action that had angered Mr. Eerdmans, Sr. It was a painful time: the Netherlands Museum or Hope College lost the Van Raalte papers to Calvin College and Hope College had the temerity to destroy the Van Raalte home, a gift of Mr. Eerdmans to the college, and use the site as a soccer field.

The Dutch-American Historical Commission, however, thrived under Mr. Wichers' leadership and our five institutions in the Grand Rapids-Holland area have forged a very fine relationship. There is a gentleman's agreement that each institution collect only in her/his own field and respect the other institutions by only taking materials pertinent to their own fields. Meanwhile, the Calvin archives under Herb Brinks' leadership and the Joint Archives consisting of the Hope College, Western Theological

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Seminary, and Holland Museum collections under Larry Wagenaar's leadership are thriving and growing collections. These two archival centers contain a great source of material on the Dutch in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

II. A brief review of ten conferences.

The members of the Dutch-American Historical Commission suggested the idea of holding a Dutch-American studies conference at Calvin College in 1977. Prof. Henry Ippel of Calvin and a member of DAHC headed the first conference as well as the second one in 1979. Prof. Scholte-Nordholt, the scholar at Leiden University, was the special guest at the 1977 conference. Dr. Pieter Stokvis of the Hague was the outstanding speaker in 1979. After the second conference, Pieter de Klerk, theological librarian of Calvin Seminary and president of the DAHC, led the efforts to write a constitution and as a result of his work, AADAS became incorporated. Dr. Ippel established the newsletter which had a run from 1980 to 1991. Conrad Bult, reference librarian at Calvin College, has served nobly all these years as secretary and treasurer. Calvin College has been the primary support institution. AADAS is deeply indebted to these two persons and Calvin College for all this valuable support since our founding.

AADAS has done well. Every two years the president assumed the responsibility of setting up the next biennial conference. As I just mentioned, Henry Ippel hosted the 1977 and 1979 conferences, Phil Webber served as chair of the third conference at Central College, Pella, Iowa, in 1981, I did the fourth one at Hope College in 1983, Nella Kennedy served here at Northwestern in 1985, and Henry Sliemers hosted us at Trinity Christian, Palos Heights, Illinois, in 1987.

Then we had a hitch. Mr. Piet Madderom of Wereld Contact invited us to meet in the Netherlands for the 1989 conference. Members of AADAS indicated some interest in going to the Netherlands for a conference. But that conference did not materialize for some reason. However, Dordt College under the leadership of Prof. Louis Van Dyke assumed the responsibility in 1990. Larry Wagenaar hosted the eighth conference at Hope College in 1991, Herb Brinks at Calvin for the ninth conference in 1993 and Bill Kennedy has graciously arranged this fine conference at Northwestern College for our second visit to Orange City.

What has solved financial problems for us is the award of grants from the Iowa and Michigan state Endowments for the Humanities. We are grateful for NEH support through these state organizations. The grants have enabled several of us to publish the proceedings also.

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III. Now, hence?

One matter for future concerns has always been: who will serve as the next president and organize the next conference? We are safe for two years more. Larry Wagenaar has invited all of us to come to Hope College, Holland, Michigan, in 1997. The next conference will be an observance of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Dutch emigration to the Middle West under the leadership of the Revs. Hendrik P. Scholte and Albertus C. Van Raalte.

But we have problems. The mailing list has dwindled considerably. Few people are paying dues even though the fee is only five dollars. The newsletter no longer appears. Henry Ippel has done great duty here but it is time for someone else to pick up that responsibility. Most important is the need of the support of some institution to provide the systems to keep up a good mailing list, to send out dues notices regularly, to publish a newsletter, and to make sure that a president is chosen to organize the biennial conferences. Here again, Calvin College must be praised for the support all these years but Herb Brinks and Henry Ippel are now retired and Conrad Bult needs to be consulted if he is willing to continue with his gracious services having served now as secretary and treasurer for eighteen years.

May I, as director of the Van Raalte Institute for Historical Studies at Hope College, make a suggestion? Mr. Peter Huizenga of Oak Brook, Illinois, one of the founders of WMX Technologies (formerly Waste Management), who has a keen interest in Dutch-American history, spoke at the 1987 conference at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights. At that time, he presented his very interesting personal history of the Waste Management company. Mr. Huizenga, a Hope College board member, has sponsored the Van Raalte Institute and endowed it generously. Dr. Robert Swierenga, who is taking early retirement from Kent State University after this academic year, is joining the Institute next June as the A. C. Van Raalte Research Professor and Adjunct Professor of History at Hope College. He will be working fulltime on his research and writing projects. Since I personally consider Bob to be the "dean" of scholars of Dutch-American immigrant history without minimizing the status of many of you here present this evening, it is a privilege to have him join the Institute next year. When Bob comes on staff, it is also our hope to add a translator/secretary to the program as well in addition to having a proper office set-up at Hope College for the Institute's program.

Dr. Swierenga concurred with my thinking that the Van Raalte Institute may be in the position to become a major support partner of AADAS and serve our organization by keeping the address list, sending out the dues' notices and engaging a person

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to produce a newsletter so that we can be in better touch with our members. By the time of the 1997 conference in Holland, the Institute should be in a position to make a formal invitation likely to this effect if this suggestion has merit for you AADAS members.

Whence? --ten fine conferences beginning in 1977 with the eleventh one already in planning stage for 1997. Hence? --a more secure future with strong institutional support, we hope, and an enlarged vision: namely, that all things Dutch-American are of interest to us.

Thank you for your attention.

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