PART III

MIGRATION AND ASSIMILATION
CHAPTER FIVE

“BUT THO WE LOVE OLD HOLLAND STILL, WE LOVE COLUMBIA MORE,” THE FORMATION OF A DUTCH-AMERICAN SUBCULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1840–1920

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The contours of the story of Dutch immigration into the United States in the nineteenth century are well known thanks to the comprehensive and excellent works of historians Jacob van Hinte, Henry S. Lucas, and Robert P. Swierenga. Their contributions have mapped out the geography, demography, and religiosity of the Dutch in America. However, it is possible to lose the track through the woods with their dense and detailed descriptions. The flourishing field of Dutch immigration tends to obscure the fact that this small immigrant group was able to survive as a distinctive subculture against the odds. It is my purpose to explain this phenomenon in this essay. The Dutch were not unique; dozens of European immigrant groups such as German Mennonites, German Lutherans organized in Missouri and Wisconsin Synod groups, Danish Lutherans, Swedish Covenanters, Amish and Hutterites had similar experiences, but did not match the reputation of an ethnic group as completely as the Dutch. While every so often tourists stumble over one of the Tulip Festivals in the United States and consider these fairs as typical Dutch events, these are recent cultural inventions rather than the core phenomenon of the subculture. Analysis of the history

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of Dutch immigration leads to a list of ten factors that contributed to the formation of a durable Dutch-American subculture.

Mass emigration from the Netherlands to the United States catches the eye more for being relatively late and little, than for its spectacular nature. While the Irish led the pack with over 200,000 emigrants in the 1830s, followed by 150,000 Germans, 65,000 British, and 45,000 French, the Netherlands contributed only 1,412 landverhuizers. In the following decade, the numbers from Europe swelled from half a million to 1.6 million, of which the Dutch had a share of 8,000. Similar small countries such as Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden soon overshadowed the Dutch in numbers. The Dutch suffered from the same general European economic crisis, and the potato blight, but also had to deal with political stagnation. This crisis was broadly European and pushed hundreds of thousands of emigrants from their homes and birthplaces. Compared to Irish, English, and Germans, the Dutch left relatively late and in fewer numbers. But they still belonged to the “old emigration” phase lasting till the 1880s, and created especially for the Protestant emigrants a remarkably durable Dutch-American identity in the century between 1840 and 1940 when a quarter of a million Dutch men and women made the move. Religious anxiety, caused by a serious split in the established Protestant church and fear for the future, motivated a group of dissenters to take the lead in the emigration movement, between 1831 and 1880. While these Seceders were outnumbered by other religious groups, (twenty percent were Seceders, sixty percent belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church, eighteen percent to the Roman Catholic Church), their share in the immigrant movement was fifteen times higher than their share in the Dutch population. They left a lasting imprint on the Dutch-American community.\footnote{Robert P. Swierenga, “Pioneers for Jesus Christ:” Dutch Protestant Colonization in North America as an Act of Faith,” in George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, eds., Sharing the Reformed Tradition: The Dutch-North American Exchange, 1846–1996 (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1996), 35–55. One percent of the emigrants were Jews. Appendix 2 in Stephan Thernstrom, ed., Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), 1047.}
The seed for a distinctive Dutch-American subculture was sown in the Netherlands. The explicit wish of the founders of the first Dutch settlements was to live together and use local autonomy to realize an ideal of a Christian (i.e. Protestant—Calvinist) community. To further this goal they founded an official and well-constructed association. Even though not every member chose to settle in the community, the aim of this enterprise was clear.\(^3\) The timing of their departure was favorable and their destination strategic in the light of the continuous expansion of America. Thanks to the organization and moral leadership, solidarity increased during the experience of the passage and subsequent difficulties of the pioneer phase. The first groups made able use of the directives of the descendants of the colonial Dutch in New York state, who hoped to increase the share of the Dutch Reformed Church in the marketplace of denominations. Common purpose created power to build. Pooling finances, based on reciprocal confidence between leaders and followers, all belonging to a religious minority, carried the community through the first five years of severe deprivation.\(^4\)

Though the size of the first groups that left in 1846–47 was considerable—a maximum of eight hundred in each group—their visibility and geographical origins from across the Netherlands carried their messages throughout the country, causing a rippling effect on potential emigrants ready to follow. These splashes in the Dutch pond drew wide attention in the media. The authorities considered emigration as a risky business, but soon it was seen as a viable, realistic solution to pressing social problems. The continuous exchange of letters—private and published—and the settlements in the Midwest in Holland and Grand Rapids in Michigan, and Pella in Iowa, encouraged others to take a calculated risk.


While the call of freedom from America had reached the Dutch elite first, they were ambiguous about the new country and feared for its orderly future, hoping that the ruling classes could fend off the pressing influence of the masses.\(^5\) The other economic classes slowly but surely discovered “America’s” advantages to them in the lack of regulations, conscription and forced labor, and in the availability of land that caused the migration to draw especially from rural areas, which contributed eighty percent of the emigrants. Conditions in the United States compared favorably with the political and economic stagnation in the Netherlands and the oppressive attitude of the Dutch authorities, especially for a group of Seceders from the established church who had founded their own congregations since 1834 as a protest against the liberal trends in the mainline church and state interference in religious affairs, which went against their conscience and curtailed their plans for the future. While the oppressive policies of the authorities had ceased by 1841, the Seceders expected little encouragement from the government.

Suffering from the economic stagnation, groups of several hundreds of these Seceders made plans to leave the country and included other Protestants in their ranks. Their departure to America was well publicized and generated a lively debate about the pros and cons of emigration. Thanks to them, *landverhuizing* became an issue and was closely monitored by the national government. This signaled the birth of a tradition of well considered moves to the United States. The leaders of the Seceders, who joined them to prevent their scattering, linked up with the descendants of early Dutch immigrants in New York who had already reached a level of respectability in America. They used this network to build a community, which was their explicit goal. Transatlantic emigration became an attractive alternative for those who interpreted the signs of the times as being unfavorable for their old country.

It is no wonder that religious leaders who had recently broken off from the established church took the lead in organizing the exodus across the Atlantic. They had gained experience in carving out a niche in Dutch society and had developed a broad set of usable skills. For example, Rev. Cornelius van der Meulen (1800–1876) had worked

\(^5\) Several of them, such as the Dutch noblemen Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp and Carel baron de Vos van Steenwijk in 1784, made inspection tours of the new republic.
as a laborer, contractor, and trader before he entered the ministry in 1838. Between 1841 and his emigration in 1847 he served a group of twelve struggling congregations in the province of Zeeland and guided them from weak beginnings to stable and self-supporting churches. He developed a broad perspective on the world and defended a practical church order geared for growth. Van der Meulen and his colleagues and a number of gifted lay people drafted a plan for future communities and took their valuable experience with them to the United States.

These provisions preselected immigrants; they were more than mere desperate people, they had a plan. The growth of strong social and economic ties within the United States reduced the chances of failure and reassured poverty-stricken migrants to take the risk. A great variety of Dutch citizens disembarked at the port of New York to move further west. In addition to regional and family ties, religious bonds provided strong and useful connections, thereby shaping communities into a coherent subculture. This process was influenced by the following factors in America.

Settlement Patterns

Indispensable ingredients for the formation of a community were geographical centers that supported continuity, had capacity for growth, attracted assistance from established Americans and developed a working relationship with the authorities. Despite the hardships of the first generation, the experiences of the first wave of immigrants in America were positive. The considerable personal sacrifices eventually paid off. The economic growth, available space, and opportunities in America contrasted favorably with the economic depression, gloomy prospects, and growing number of restrictions in the Netherlands.

The organizational preparation of groups of Protestants in different regions in the Netherlands enabled the Dutch to spread their settlements

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almost simultaneously according to available funds and provincial con-
nections—Hollanders and Utrechters in Iowa and Illinois, emigrants
from the Eastern part of the Netherlands and Zeelanders in New
York, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Their time of arrival coincided with
a stage of economic and geographical expansion in the United States
that allowed immigrants temporary jobs and large tracts of land to be
occupied by groups. Protestant immigrants profited from information,
networks, and financial support of the colonial Dutch descendants.
Catholic and Jewish immigrants established a few communities of their
own, but their urban concentration and lack of institutions other than
local organizations limited their network opportunities. Therefore, I will
focus on the Protestant immigrants. In the course of the nineteenth
century, the balance between size, homogeneity and diversification
enhanced the vitality of this group.

The split into an Iowa and a Michigan settlement proved a blessing
in disguise, since the two complemented each other. Iowa attracted the
more well-to-do, while Michigan drew immigrants with less money.
Thanks to the proximity of the railroad in 1870, Holland and Zeeland
could continue to grow, while Pella stabilized. Grand Rapids was even
better served by railroad lines and developed into a major center of
the furniture industry. Wisconsin remained largely agricultural and
lacked a visionary leader.

**Variation and Growth**

The stability of the first settlements guaranteed the growth and spread
of new Dutch settlements after the Civil War. The composition of
the early settlement had provided a center and a series of options for
new arrivals. The early settlers had to pay a high price in physical
suffering, but once they survived they enjoyed the best chances for
economic improvement by buying cheap land. The move to the cities
increased the scope of work for temporary and permanent laborers
within a community setting. The settlers in Iowa planned new colonies
more strategically than their cousins in Michigan, because the prairie
states were more dependent on agriculture than the eastern part of
the Midwest.

Not every initiative succeeded. The railroads could make or break a
settlement. Farmers needed access to markets, but railroads had their
own interests and negotiated the best deals for themselves. When they
did not have to compete with other companies, they kept the number of towns low and provided grain silos to increase the viability of a town. The recipe for a viable community was: “three to five lumberyards, one or two banks, two to three general stores and farm machinery dealers, plus as many more individual trades people as could be attracted—usually a single drugstore, hotel, newspaper, butcher, restaurant, and livery stable.”

Eager speculators and developers put more energy into selling tracts of land than into structuring a colony for survival. But thanks to the broader network, Dutch immigrants who had underestimated the risks, could relocate in another settlement. Thus even failures eventually strengthened the Dutch subculture.

An example of this circulation is the Kuner story. The town of Kuner in northeast Colorado was founded in 1908 to produce cabbages, sugar beets, and especially pickles for the canning factory owned by Max Kuner of Denver. His grand design included churches, an irrigation lake, a railroad depot, and a packing plant for canning pickles, sauerkraut, and refining sugar. Dutch immigrants looking for an opportunity to buy cheap land arrived from all corners of the United States and founded a church.

Some had abandoned ill-planned settlements such as the one in Maxwell, New Mexico; others came from urban areas in the Midwest. The investment company promised good crops and a permanent outlet, but issued more promises than expertise and funds. After 1912, when ownership of the land proved unclear, no plants were built, the water reservoirs remained shallow and wide, and droughts, grasshoppers and hailstorms destroyed the first crops, the Dutch began to relocate. Within a decade the colonists had resettled in Denver; Lynden, Washington; Luctor, Kansas; Amsterdam, Montana; and Redlands, California, or even returned to the Netherlands. While this enterprise folded in 1918, it did feed other settlements.

The great majority of the early Dutch immigrants avoided urban centers because they hoped to own farms. On the line to the Midwest, New York cities such as Albany, Utica, Rochester, and Buffalo developed into industrial centers producing textiles, steel, locomotives and machinery. The Civil War increased the need for ore, coal, and wood.
which was abundantly present in New York state. Factories offered much employment and their owners persuaded a number of Dutch immigrants to settle temporarily in these cities. After the Civil War, Dutch urban settlements flourished, most notably in Grand Rapids, Paterson, Chicago, and Detroit.

Ecclesiastical Glue

No other social institution contributed as much to the creation of a center and a common ideal for Dutch immigrant settlements as the church. Churches secured continuity, cohesion, and connections. Ministers who had separated from the privileged Reformed Church in the Netherlands channeled emigrants to the United States, where they easily persuaded the established clergy that they were “deserving poor.” The ministers provided both rationale and rations. Their mode of organization in a church body called a Classis, which gathered the local congregations into a mutual support system, assisted church ties and fostered loyalty and solidarity. Though outwardly the Seceders seemed a homogeneous group, they were divided into various factions. Some preferred isolation while others made efforts to connect with the mainline church and culture.

The ten percent of Dutch Seceders who left the Netherlands in the first decade after 1846 dominated the emerging communities in the Midwest. This first wave of immigrants was determined to make their stay a success and welcomed American opportunities; those who came later expected more Dutchness than they found and distrusted the link with the East coast, which in their opinion polluted the pure body of believers. In 1857 four congregations abandoned the Reformed Church and founded the conservative and Dutch-oriented Christian Reformed Church. This latter denomination matured in the 1870s and became a substantial competitor to the old colonial Reformed Church. Some smaller settlements suffered under this fragmentation, but generally the freedom to choose a church encouraged both denominations to actively recruit new immigrants into their fold. Both of them founded a mission station in New York to meet new immigrants.10

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This growth policy drew both denominations deeper, and almost naturally, into American voluntary strategies. The lessons learned by the Reformed Church in coping with diversity—most visible in the differences between the established East Coast and the recently settled immigrant Midwest—were repeated by the Christian Reformed Church three to four decades later when it adapted its liturgy, organization, interdenominational cooperation, missions, and social work to American models.

Moreover, the choice between two churches allowed Dutch immigrants to differ in religious opinions, but still be part of the same Dutch-American subculture. The new arrivals could choose how quickly to assimilate by joining one of the two denominations. Moderate Pietists (mostly present in the Reformed Church) easily connected with the revival tradition in American Protestantism. Confessionalists, who circumscribed their contacts with other believers and unbelievers, kept the outside world at a distance. This was the policy in the Christian Reformed Church. The Calvinist church structure granted autonomy to local churches under a strong denominational umbrella. Apart from organizational cohesion, facilitated by a religious framework, the Dutch-American churches also made a substantial contribution to the shaping of Dutch-American identity by distinguishing themselves from other groups with respect to marriage arrangements, schooling, and high expectations of commitment of time, money, and loyalty. Most books in the Dutch language printed in the United States were religious, strengthening the religious nature of the Dutch-American culture even more.

The Roman Catholic hierarchy in the United States revived a corporate organization, placing social activities organically in a normative order, protecting the individual against undesirable intrusions of the state and the secular world. The Dutch Catholics in rural areas in Wisconsin followed this line, while the scattered Dutch Catholics in the cities took a more liberal approach. Their ethnic identity was built in cultural societies, organizing Kermis and Carnival. Outside these

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churches, and a few Presbyterian churches, only a handful of secular institutions such as Holland Societies offered meeting places for Dutch Americans, primarily the business elite.12

Were the churches the pillars of the Dutch subculture? Not exclusively so. While churches played an important role in offering an ideological and organizational framework and provided a center, they needed people in the pews. The church was the first organization to come and the last to go. It was the key symbol for a viable community, while the families provided the building blocks for the subculture.

**Family Ties**

More than any other European immigrant group the Dutch emigrated in family units, which created stability, prosperity, and continuity. The family emigration was a result of choices in the Netherlands. Since the Dutch were not forced out, they could make a rational choice. The best condition was to move as a family. Between 1835 and 1880, four-fifths of all Dutch immigrants traveled in the company of relatives and many of the rest were en route to relatives or acted as quartermasters for their family.13 After 1880 the share of the unmarried increased. The share of Frisian singles in the period 1880–1914 increased from nine to twenty-three percent, but this did not mean a devaluation of the family. Many of them found a wife among the Dutch immigrants or let their fiancée come over at a later stage.14 With a favorable “marriage market” in the United States, promising prospects, and easy procedures to arrange a wedding, the marriage rate was high. Only one percent of Frisian households in the United States in 1900 were single-family households. Almost all Dutch immigrant women found a partner, and only six percent of the men remained single.15 By contrast, the Italians,  

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with a lopsided sex ratio of seventy-eight percent men and twenty-two percent women, were “birds of passage,” often returning to their home country, or working away from home on railroads and in mines. Dutch families stayed together and suffered less from separation. Family dwellings in the United States were more spacious than in the Netherlands, not uncommonly double in size, and granted family members more personal space. Family life as known in the Netherlands could be continued in the new world, but never went unchallenged.

Women enjoyed greater equality and children gained more importance thanks to their cash contribution to the family income and their language mediation. Some parents let their children grow more independent while others chose to shield them from American culture. In either case family life changed. Women of the second generation, especially, chose to work outside the home until marriage or the birth of a first child. A 1907 survey among women sixteen years and older in Dutch families who had their main source of income in the furniture industry in Grand Rapids, Michigan, showed that forty-one percent of them were employed, whereas only six percent of women born in the Netherlands, and nineteen percent of the American women worked outside the family.

Families with children could more easily convert labor into wealth. The home-loving quality of the family advanced the growth of property. In rural areas, the continuity of the family farm knitted the community together. The expectation of improvement and the willingness to make personal sacrifices helped immigrant families serve a common goal, beneficial to all. Family ties compensated for the emotional losses caused by emigration and stimulated investments for the future. The presence and importance of children encouraged the founding of social and cultural institutions, such as schools and libraries, and the transfer of tradition.

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Language and Schools

The transition from the Dutch language to English came gradually. The Dutch language was not considered an essential part of the identity of Dutch Americans. The Dutch language policy was mainly motivated by the desire to maintain communication between the generations and keep access to religious and cultural sources, in this order of importance. The use of English was not a case of “whether” but of “when.” The first generation of immigrants was highly motivated to acquire English language skills in order to function economically, socially, and politically in the United States. Later followers expected to arrive in “little Holland” and were linguistically more conservative. People in isolated rural areas stuck to the Dutch language longest because the multiple generations present encouraged this. These areas made the final shift to English in the 1950s, while most other places had made the transition during or right after World War I.

The conviction to keep a distance from the world, mentally not physically, led to a network of Christian schools, both Catholic and Calvinist. Dutch immigrants had three motives in establishing schools of their own: to train their children in the basics to function in America, to teach the Dutch language as long as needed to link the different generations, and to provide their children with a distinct world view. While the educational infrastructure in the United States in the nineteenth century strengthened the formation of a Dutch subculture by providing necessary skills, it eventually undermined the internal cohesion within the ethnic group. The original group settlements had listed specific arrangements about education in their charters, including provisions to teach the English language, and local control over the appointment of staff and the curriculum. In the cities, the Dutch lacked these instruments and had to face a rapid erosion of the Christian atmosphere, which prodded them to launch their own schools.18

The first parochial schools folded in a few years because negative arguments were insufficient to solicit continued support for an alternative educational system. In these Dutch schools, language was the key distinction. Increased integration and a new impulse to become actively involved in American society demanded a different approach, while

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the founding of an umbrella organization created a support system for mobilization, fund-raising, and curriculum development. The Dutch school system reached its prewar climax in 1929, when 14,000 children received Christian education in eighty-nine schools, which increasingly became parent led.19

In Denver a Dutch community emerged around Bethesda, a sanatorium for the Christian Reformed. The Dutch founded a Christian grade school in 1910, which counted two hundred students and seven teachers by 1930. As long as newcomers poured into the settlement, Dutch was taught, but when the need disappeared, English lessons became the norm. Bible teaching was the center of the curriculum from the start and remained the distinctive feature of the “Dutch” schools. A high regard for education stimulated the build-up of a comprehensive school system. The literacy rate was more than ninety percent. The movement to found grade schools began early, but accelerated after the turn of the twentieth century because the public schools lost much of their religious atmosphere. The early need for ministers stimulated the founding of seminaries, which gradually expanded into liberal arts colleges that encouraged Christian high schools to prepare students for these colleges. These complete systems of separate education were only possible in settlements with high concentrations of Dutch immigrants. The main source of support for these schools was and still is the Christian Reformed Church. The Reformed Church officially supported public schools, because the East Coast establishment frowned upon sectarian education and gave priority to integration and quality. This church provided additional training in its own colleges, Central College (1853) in Pella, Iowa, Hope College (1866) in Holland, Michigan, and Northwestern Classical Academy (1882) in Orange City, Iowa. These institutions developed from preparatory schools to full colleges, while retaining their association with the Dutch Reformed churches and their seminaries. The main body of the Christian Reformed Church consisted of recent immigrants, who had more need for immediate (Christian) education than advanced degrees. It invested most in primary education and valued a separate identity, founding Calvin College in 1876, which developed into a four-year college in 1921.

Dutch Roman Catholics similarly invested in parochial education, which was primarily delivered in the English language, especially since the state of Wisconsin required teaching in English in 1854. The Dutch Norbertine monks who arrived in this state in 1893 founded St. Norbert’s College five years later, but did not cultivate Dutch ethnic identity, because the college provided education to an ethnically mixed population.

Private and Public Communication

Intensive and extensive communication helped to keep the scattered parts of the subculture connected. High literacy rates, an improved postal service after 1875 which made mail delivery cheaper, faster, and more secure, and the increased need for information encouraged a massive transatlantic correspondence, connecting the immigrant communities to each other and to the old country.

Between 1871 and 1919 a total of twenty-three million letters from the Netherlands were sent to America, an amount almost matched by the twenty-two million return letters. After 1870 the volume doubled every decade, thanks to the increase in immigration and the improved services.20 In years of economic decline the number of letters from America surpassed those from the Netherlands to warn prospective immigrants. Dutch immigrants received 56,684 newspapers and periodicals from the Netherlands in 1885 and returned 41,468. Apart from public information, these periodicals contained private news about deaths, births, illnesses and anniversaries of relatives and acquaintances.21 An immigrant in the small Dutch colony in Platte, South Dakota reported that the local post office received an average of one Dutch newspaper each day.22 Many citizens with some means subscribed to a Dutch periodical and passed the news on to their friends and relations. Following and stimulating the emigration wave of the 1880s Dutch newspapers provided specific information on the United

21 Verslagen aan de Koning betrekkelijk de diensten der posterijen…1886.
22 Albert Kuipers in De Wereldburger, 17 January 1890, 653.
States by printing letters and testimonials. After 1890 regular and cheap passage enabled immigrants to make return trips. About seven percent of the Dutch men employed in the Grand Rapids furniture industry in 1909 had made the trip back, and Dutch visitors also came to see for themselves.23

Starting with the publication of the Sheboygan Nieuwsbode in 1849, weeklies based in Dutch settlements provided local news, practical information, and civic training. The exchange of news from different regions, reflection on trends in America, and the passing down of old and explanation of new traditions assisted the immigrants in identifying with a larger hyphenated group. The indigenous Dutch-American press was part religious, part market oriented. The Sheboygan Nieuwsbode followed a Dutch model, the Žierikzeesche Courant. Most other Dutch-American periodicals were sponsored by a political party. In Holland, Michigan, the Democrats supported De Hollander and the Republicans the more successful De Grondwet. Each region had a newspaper which circulated news from the Netherlands and the various Dutch settlements, thanks to an intricate exchange system and a wide network of agents. Pella’s Weekblad provided news in Iowa, as did the Orange City Volksvriend. Grand Rapids had no Dutch language newspaper of repute, but housed the most widely read religious periodical, De Wachter, read in nine thousand households. Chicago had Onze Toekomst, and Paterson, New Jersey, Het Oosten. Periodicals for laborers were few and short-lived. For a period of thirty years De Volksstem in De Pere, Wisconsin, was the forum for Dutch Roman Catholics in the United States, until it merged with the Belgian Catholic publication the Gazette van Moline. Both were solidly Democratic.

The decline of the Dutch-American ethnic press in the 1950s along with Dutch books, which were printed on the same presses, was caused by the loss of local autonomy, a drop in the number of immigrants, and increased competition from larger newspapers. But they had filled a crucial role in promoting new areas of settlement and building a national Dutch network.

23 Immigration Commission, table 65, 15:527; table 39, 15:584.
Prosperity

The growing American economy offered Dutch immigrants variety and space to make a living and enabled them to invest their surpluses for common purposes. The best chances for economic improvement lay in agriculture in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when with modest means tracts of land could be bought, which quickly increased in value. Additional industries and services rounded off a balanced local economy. After the Civil War, the emerging cities offered large scale job opportunities both for the unskilled, such as picking up garbage or teamstering in Chicago, and for the skilled and semiskilled in the machine shops of Pullman (Calumet, Illinois) or in the Paterson, New Jersey silk works, the furniture industry in Grand Rapids, and construction industry in Detroit. This concentration of similar jobs tied communities closer together and provided entry level jobs to new arrivals. These arrangements offered buffers between local households and the broader society, especially since local shopkeepers of ethnic origin introduced them to American products. From the turn of the century onwards, the second generation profited from the increasing educational opportunities and advanced in various professions. Dutch Americans gained access to better jobs in the American economy and were tied closer to it, even as they supported their own communities.

It is remarkable that Dutch immigrants played virtually no role in trade relations between the Netherlands and the United States. Dutch investors invested seventy-two million dollars in 1871, when the international money market was liberalized, and this amount more than quadrupled by the end of the century. Until the 1880s Dutch merchants sold gin, tin, and coffee to the Americans, supplemented by tobacco, nutmeg, herring, and diamonds, adding up to Dfl. 64.6 million in exports. Imports were more than four times higher: Dfl. 283.5 million in imported raw materials, animal fat, petrol, cotton, and fertilizer. American exports counted for 6.5 percent of the total, while imports were calculated at 11.3 percent. But trade and immigration had little overlap. Immigrants imported only a limited number of articles for their own use: silver ornaments, Dutch bibles, and Gouda pipes for smoking.

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Although the chances for quick improvement slackened in the course of the nineteenth century, the circumstances in the United States were better than those in the old country. Between 1840 and 1890 land and labor meant economic advancement, and in the long run improved training and experience continued these prospects.

**Politics**

Dutch-American politicians complained about the lack of political involvement of Dutch immigrants, but these complaints were only justified for the end of the nineteenth century. Political participation clearly had a high priority among the first immigrants, who saw the benefits of local autonomy. The first generation of Dutch-American editors gladly accepted the sponsorship of competing political parties. Fear of anti-foreign legislation and chances for local development motivated the newspapers. After the Civil War most Protestant Dutch immigrants changed their loyalty from the Democrats to the Republicans, who took more action in expanding the country’s infrastructure and were politically more stable. Their approval of moral and economic structures brought them closer to evangelical allies such as Presbyterians and Methodists in the Republican Party, while Dutch Catholics consistently supported the Democrats. However, in both instances, their small size and predictable voting patterns, made the political parties take their vote for granted. Representatives from the Dutch community could count on a safe and stable power base, but there was no need to walk the political path to secure emancipation or protect an identity.25

**Group Identity**

Identity depends on the twin concepts of separateness and continuity. Initially, the Dutch immigrants did not invest much energy in emphasizing a separate Dutch-American identity. They did not need to defend themselves against discrimination or to close ranks against threats. Their

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‘whiteness’ was taken for granted. Because their separateness was voluntary and visible, enforced through their own churches, extended by their schools, but never intended to be a waterproof isolation, it needed no emphasis. The first public reflection took place in 1871. The Reformed minister Henry Uiterwijk published a series of articles in the weekly De Hope in anticipation of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Holland, Michigan, scheduled for 1872.²⁶ He believed God had assigned character to peoples through a slow process of growth conditioned by geography and government. The result for the Dutch was a combination of features such as profundity, carefulness, thrift, steadfastness, and seriousness, in contrast to Americans who were quick, enterprising, generous, indulgent, and lighthearted. But instead of emphasizing these differences, he looked for similarities and praised the desire for independence and liberty that Dutch and Americans had in common. He never doubted that the immigrants would be Americans, and issued warnings to avoid the American vices of greed, speed, pride, lack of respect, and especially the denial of one’s own history. He defined a particular kind of Dutch-American manifest destiny: “to become an inspiring part of the American nation through our people’s extraordinary character and common affinities [volksgevoel], acknowledging the influence of our divine calling.”²⁷ He envisioned a partnership as in a marriage, through Dutch settlements, evangelism, Christian upbringing, learning to use English, and adoption of civic pride.²⁸

Ten days after Uiterwijk’s last installment the common bonds between the immigrants and the host nation were confirmed through the generous contributions of Americans for rebuilding the city of Holland, including his own parsonage, which was virtually destroyed by the same fires that burned down Chicago. Two hours of fire destroyed twenty-five years of hard labor. Only a few streets, Hope College, and Van Raalte’s Pillar Church were spared. The $40,000 of private American relief funds made the Holland City News confess: “thank God that our misfortune befell us in a Christian land, and among Christian people, whose sympathetic hearts made willing sacrifices for our relief.”²⁹

²⁷ De Hope, 21 September 1871.
²⁸ De Hope, 28 September 1871.
²⁹ De Hope, 7 December 1871. See Donald L. Van Reken’s collection in The Holland Fire of October 8, 1871 (privately printed, 1982). Holland City News, 12 October 1872.
Holland rebuilt and regained its former prosperity after a decade. The achievements of the heroic pioneer past and the recent reconstruction contributed to a sense of continuity with the Dutch nation.

This emphasis on continuity was itself a sign of assimilation. When the Dutch Americans had secured their place under the sun, they ventured to appeal to mythical stories to carve out a niche for themselves among the builders of America. The Dutch benefited from historical events to underscore their status as real Americans. They could cite New Amsterdam as the prototype of future America (free, enterprising, diverse, and democratic), and the heroic role of the Dutch Reformed Church in the War of Independence as evidence for their support for the new nation. However, these ideas were only sparingly used. The New Yorkers did it to emphasize their elite position against newcomers. The Midwestern Dutch, especially the Christian Reformed, considered theological purity much more important than historical privileges. Only occasionally did they feel a desire to show their value as citizens who combined the best qualities of the Old World and the New. In the twentieth century they had fully arrived, as the 1907 song to commemorate the half century of the Christian Reformed Church showed. In singing the praises of the United States, it united colonial and recent immigrants:

Come ye who boast of Dutch descent,
Sons of New Netherland,
And ye who reached our friendly shore
with western pilgrim band
Unite with us in festive song,
Song which the heart elates
And sing the praises of our land
Our own United States,
Our own United States.

We love the land across the sea
We glory in its past;
We pray for its prosperity,
May it forever last!
But tho we love old Holland still,
We love Columbia more,

31 Ibid., 78.
The land our sons and brethren fill
From east to western shore,
From east to western shore.  

The feeling of loyalty to the United States was so common, that it needed no song to remind the Dutch Americans of their Dutch their past.

Summary

These ten factors contributed to a Dutch comprehensive Protestant immigrant network, which had matured by 1920 and which was strong enough to survive the immigration restrictions that limited new immigrants in the next decade. The volume of Dutch immigration to the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a modest 200,000 (ranking 16th on the list of nationalities), but thanks to its small size, Dutch immigrants were able to know many of their countrymen personally, using church and family to build a durable subculture.

Conditions in the United States compared favorably with the political turmoil and economic stagnation in the Netherlands and the oppressive attitude of the Dutch authorities in the middle of the nineteenth century. The concerted action and detailed plans of the group of Seceders, which was still in the process of developing its identity, were well publicized and generated a lively debate about the pros and cons of emigration. Thanks to them landverhuizing received a label and was closely monitored by the Dutch government, while it also provided an ideal that motivated community building and reciprocal solidarity. This idealistic beginning started a tradition among Dutch citizens of considering a move to the United States as a realistic option. The leadership

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32 Henry Beets, Herinneringen: Holland-American Songs, Holland Songs with English Text, Series 1 (Chicago: Paul H. Wezeman, 1907). It was the opening song in the Semi-Centennial Commission, Gedenkboek van het Vijftigjarig Jubileum der Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk A.D. 1857–1907 (Grand Rapids: 1907), reprinted in Walter Lagerwey’s collection, ‘Nem Nederland, ‘k verget u niet. Een beeld van het immigratiemonument in Amerika tussen 1846 en 1945 in verhalen, schetsen en gedichten (Baarn: Ten Have, 1982), 62. It was sung at the 400th commemoration of the birthday of William of Orange on 24 April 1933 in Chicago, but not at the visit of Princess Juliana on 12 May 1942. The “Wien Neerlandisch Bloed” was sung at the 60th anniversary of the Holland and Zeeland colonies held in Zeeland in August 1907.
connected with the descendants of earlier Dutch immigrants who had already achieved respectability in America. Its use of this network to build a community was an explicit goal.

Circumstances in the Netherlands did not push people out, but allowed them to make calculated decisions. Since land was the strongest incentive, most immigrants moved in family units. This Dutch folk migration was comparable to the Scandinavian emigration movement. Religious identity supported a separate educational system, a national ecclesiastical network, and the temporary retention of the Dutch language, until it no longer served as the major mode of communication among the immigrant generations and in the church. Aided by a rich body of ethnic periodicals, an intensive letter exchange with the old country, a select number of settlements, and institutional support, the Dutch in America compensated for their relatively small numbers by retaining their cohesion for over a century.