

Iowa Letters: Dutch Immigrants on the American Frontier, by Johan Stellingwerff, edited by Robert P. Swierenga, translated by Walter Lagerwey. The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, no. 47. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004. [Expanded and edited version of the original Dutch edition, *Amsterdamse emigranten: Onbekende brieven uit de prairie van Iowa, 1846–1873*. Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1975.] xxxii, 733 pp. Illustrations, tables, maps, bibliography, notes, index. \$49.00 cloth.

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For those interested in the early history of Dutch settlers in Iowa, *Iowa Letters* provides accessible firsthand accounts from the period 1846 to 1873. As the series title suggests, the work also illuminates the religious history of the Reformed Church, for the authors of the letters were Seceders from the Hervormde Kerk of the Netherlands and they brought their beliefs to the prairie. The letters run the gamut from examples of people who promoted and encouraged others to come to Iowa (Jan and Hendrik Hospers) to those who went back to the Netherlands after a short time and then discouraged others from emigrating (Andries Wormser). There are the typical reports of prices and living conditions, of births and deaths, as well as religious discussions and political debates. Rev. Hendrik P. Scholte, who was a leading force in the Pella migration, comes in for considerable criticism, for example as a "GREAT BIG SCOUNDREL" in Jan Berkhout's letter of 1850 (350).

This collection provides an English translation and significant addition to Johan Stellingwerff's original Dutch edition, which appeared in 1975. In the process the book grew from roughly 400 to more than 700 pages. More importantly, it grew to include the other side of the letter exchange in many cases. The additions, 60 letters from the Wormser family of Amsterdam and 45 letters from the Hospers family, round out the correspondence considerably, making visible the epistolary conversation crossing the Atlantic and across the prairie. The letters are presented in their entirety, with all the ritualized greetings and phrases, references to family and friends, and lists that editors often omit. The introduction and a few comments at the end of a selection sometimes add information that may be obscure to present-day readers, although the texts themselves are not heavily annotated.

The book includes an editor's preface by Robert Swierenga, the original foreword by H. A. Höweler, a revised preface from Stellingwerff, an introduction to the migration, six chapters of letters (arranged for the most part chronologically), a brief memoriam of three

key figures, some comments comparing Pella and Amsterdam, and a new biography of Johan Stellingwerff, the longtime librarian at the Free University of Amsterdam. The bibliography, in alphabetical rather than chronological form in this version, still only includes the pre-1975 works. A list of letters and a detailed index round out the book.

The late Walter Lagerwey, professor emeritus at Calvin College, translated most of the letters. The translation style is less literal than some, at times adding missing structural elements such as paragraphs, or changing names for consistency (as in Budde-Stomp instead of Budde née Stomp, as the Stellingwerff version sometimes used). Alterations typically are included in square brackets and increase information or readability, such as the correct spelling of names, missing words, or identification of Bible verses. At times they may slightly change the tone, as with the notice of a birth of a child "to our son Johan's [wife]" (414) instead of the more literal translation, "to our son Johan" (279 orig.); or "I cannot recall the maiden name of" (565) compared to the more literal "I don't remember whose daughter she is" (335 orig.).

Among the most prominent writers are Pella leader Hendrik P. Scholte (seven letters) and Albertus van Raalte, founder of the Holland, Michigan, colony (two letters). The relationship between the two is evident. Van Raalte pens his impressions of Pella with biting critique of Scholte; Scholte criticizes Van Raalte for recruiting for Michigan at the expense of Iowa. Letters such as the 215 in this collection were often shared well beyond the addressee.

The letter writers were, for the most part, urbanites, originally residents of Amsterdam, not the most typical immigrants. The letters come from long series by avid correspondents, including more letters by women than typically appear in such collections. Moreover, the book provides more negative letters than usual. These less favorable accounts also hint at how negative letters could be discounted and discarded by readers elsewhere as a more positive vision of "America" gained mythic proportions, and hence why they may be absent from letter collections more generally. The descriptions of the landscape, towns, and farm life, not to mention many religious themes, may be of interest or inspiration to many readers of this journal now that the letters are not limited to readers of Dutch. In sum, the work adds significantly to the sources available in English about Dutch immigrants in Iowa and about the founding of Pella in particular.

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