

Winter 1992

## The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 03.04: Winter 1992

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# The Joint Archives Quarterly

Volume 3 Number 4

## Gerrit J. Diekema Focus of Spring Speaker New Facts Come to Light

The Joint Archives of Holland Spring Speaker Program will focus this year on one of Holland's most prominent historical figures. Gerrit J. Diekema, who served in capacities ranging from a local lawyer to Minister to the Netherlands, will be the subject of a presentation by Dr. C. Warren Vander Hill.

"Gerrit J. Diekema: A Reconsideration" is the title of Vander Hill's talk. Looking at Diekema's career — which spanned the years from Van Raalte to 1930 — the presentation will touch on a variety of aspects of his career. He will also discuss some new and revealing facets of Diekema that have come to light since he wrote his biography in 1970.

C. Warren Vander Hill is Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Ball State University. He is a graduate of Hope College and the University of Denver. Vander Hill also is one of two Diekema biographers. In addition to focusing his doctoral dissertation on this prominent Holland politician, he authored the book **Gerrit J. Diekema**, part of the "Great Men of Michigan" series published by Eerdmans Press.

The program will be held in Winants Auditorium of Graves Hall, across from the Van Wylen Library, at 3 p.m. on Friday, April 24. A reception will be held in the Archives reading room following the presentation.

The Spring Speaker Program of the Joint Archives of Holland is an annual event which focuses on a significant aspect of our history, especially as it intersects the collections at the Archives which is the union of the materials of the Holland Historical Trust, Hope College and Western Theological Seminary. Admission is free and a reception in



Gerrit J. Diekema (left) "going Hollywood" with visiting Texans in the Netherlands, 1930.

the Archives will follow the talk. Plan to join us for this fascinating program.

## Who Was Gerrit J. Diekema?

Gerrit John Diekema was born in Holland, Michigan in 1859. His father was Wiepke Diekema, a farmer who had immigrated from the Netherlands in 1848 at the age of 18. Wiepke was active in local government, serving as a Roadmaster, a Holland supervisor, a member of the county poor commission, and chairman of the relief committee of the township following the fire of 1871.

Gerrit received his bachelors degree from Hope College in 1881, his law degree from the University of Michigan in 1883, and an honorary law degree from Hope College in 1913. After passing the bar exam in 1883 he set up practice in Holland and formed the law firm of Diekema and Kollen in 1901 with his brother-in-law George E. Kollen. The firm later grew to

Diekema, Kollen and Ten Cate with the addition of Daniel Ten Cate.

The year 1885 was important for Diekema, he married his college sweetheart Mary E. Alcott and began his long political career with his election to the first of four terms as state representative. Diekema was Chairman of the Judiciary committee during the 1887 session, Speaker of the House in 1889 and minority leader in 1891. He continued to be active in state politics, serving as Chairman of the Republican State Central Committee from 1900 to 1910, and again from 1927 to 1929.

Locally, Diekema served from 1893 to 1930 as a member of the Hope College Council (later called the Board of Trustees).

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# The Joint Archives Quarterly

## From the Archivist

What an exciting time! Every time I turn around something new pops up about our past that fascinates me. It is simply exciting to be involved with uncovering historical news and telling the stories.

Part of our ability to do just that hinges on our staff here at the Joint Archives. For you to be able to walk through our door and have a meaningful and informative experience it depends on a knowledgeable group who know the collections and where to direct people with historical questions.

With a record number of patrons in February — over triple what we had per month only a couple of years ago — the need for competent staff has been underscored. We have grown from one archivist and a few students to an institution that depends on two professional archivists, four part time staff and a crew of six volunteers who take in and organize materials, do field work, help patrons doing research, facilitate research for our institutional members and assist in interpreting history. It has been a challenge to get our work done and keep on top of the many demands but reaction from our patrons indicates we are filling our mission to make history available in Holland's History Research Center.

Funding for our Associate Archivist Craig Wright from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission at the National Archives expires at the end of September. Our challenge is to find a way to make this critical position permanent.

We have submitted a follow-up one year proposal to the NHPRC and hope that this will be successful. We have also instituted the Tulip Time Slide Show in hopes that this will assist in raising money to support the position. The Council of the Joint Archives of Holland is eagerly looking for ways that will allow us to continue to provide a place that is adequately staffed so that we can help students, scholars, genealogists, local historians, the general public and member institutions with any questions which require looking at the documentary items of our past.

It is our hope and commitment to continue to make the materials here at the Joint Archives of Holland as accessible as possible to all in our ongoing work to preserve the documentary heritage of our community.

Larry J. Wagenaar  
Archivist



## Who Was Gerrit J. Diekema?

(Continued from page 1)

He also served one term as Mayor of Holland from 1895 to 1896. From 1897 to 1898 he was President of the Michigan State Sunday School Association.

On the national political scene, Diekema was an active speaker in every campaign beginning with his support of McKinley in 1896. President McKinley showed appreciation for Diekema's efforts by appointing him to the Spanish Treaty Claims Commission in 1901. Diekema had to resign this position in 1907 in order to run as the Fifth Michigan District Representative to the U.S. House of Representatives. The vacancy was created when William Alden Smith was elected to replace the late Senator Russell A. Alger. Diekema won the election and was re-elected for the next full term in 1908. He was defeated in the 1910 election by Democrat Edwin F. Sweet. During his tenure as Congressman Diekema served in the House Judiciary Committee. It was while in Washington that Mrs. Diekema died in 1910.

Diekema continued to be an active speaker, serving as Chairman of the Speaker's Bureau, Chicago office, for the Republican National Committee. He also was Taft's campaign manager for the state, ran for governor in 1916, and was an active speaker during World War I. Diekema married Leona Belser in 1920. Holland honored Diekema with a civic banquet and the presentation of a silver loving cup in 1923.

It seemed that the pinnacle of Diekema's career was attained in 1929 when President Herbert Hoover appointed him as the United States Minister to the Netherlands. Diekema proved to be extremely popular with the Dutch people and served successfully in this capacity until his untimely death at The Hague on December 20, 1930.

It is estimated that approximately 8,500 people paid their respects to Mr. Diekema as he lay in state at Hope Memorial Chapel (later named Dimnent Memorial Chapel) on January 4, 1931 and that nearly 3,000 attended the funeral the next day. The funeral sermon was delivered by the Rev. John M. Vander Meulen and Sen. Arthur H. Vandenberg also paid tribute at the service. A memorial plaque honoring Diekema was placed in Dimnent Memorial Chapel and dedicated during Holland's 125th anniversary celebration in 1972.

There are papers of Gerrit J. Diekema in the archival collections of both the Holland Historical Trust and Hope College. The Hope materials primarily document Diekema's political activities through a series of correspondence from 1903 to 1930 and four scrapbooks containing newspaper articles from 1900 to 1911. This collection also contains items of Gerrit's father, Wiepke Diekema, including an 1880 diary.

The Trust materials focus on Diekema's oratory skills. This collection contains over 100 of his speeches and traces the evolution of William Schrier's **Gerrit J. Diekema, Orator** from a college term paper at the University of Michigan to the published book.

### Staff

Larry J. Wagenaar, Archivist  
Craig G. Wright, Associate Archivist  
Reba O'Shesky, Research Assistance  
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Brandie Benedict, Research Assistance  
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# The Joint Archives Quarterly

## The Processor's Table

by

Craig G. Wright  
Assistant Archivist

People are often amazed at the amount of information they can find about a wide variety of subjects here at the archives. It is surprising how sometimes information with personal impact pops up. This is a story of one of those pleasant surprises and illustrates the old adage that "it's a small world."



I am a member of the Exhibits Committee for the new museum and the exhibits designer expressed a desire to work with glass plate negatives. Well, included with the more than 400 linear feet of materials donated by the Willard Wichers family are quite a few of these negatives. I decided to do a rough inventory of what these images were to see if any were of interest to the designers.

Almost all of the photos are of Grand Rapids area, but they do include images of Macatawa, Ottawa Beach, Zeeland, and Saugatuck. There are also lantern slides of 31 men who served in World War I. Most interesting were several shots of a young boy named George Claver. I found this especially interesting since one of the volunteers at the archives is also named George Claver.

At first I wondered if it was "our" George, but since the boy looked from 8 to 10 years old and the negative was from about 1910, that would make that person about 90 years old — definitely not our George. When I showed him the negative he informed me that it was his father!

What good fortune. George knew that these photos were taken by Charles Vandervelde who was very active in the Grand Rapids Camera Club.

It seems there were five Vrieling sisters: Jennie, Anna Grace, Maria "Mayme" Johanna, Fran and Josephine. Jennie married Charles Vandervelde; Grace married Albert Frank Claver, George's grandfather; Fran married Anthony Hoebeke; Josephine never married; and Mayme married Henry Wichers, Willard's father. After Henry and Anthony had passed away, Fran, Mayme and Josephine lived for many years in the Wichers' home in Zeeland. This is probably how all those glass plate negatives ended up in Willard's possession.

Of course, due to his intimate knowledge of the situation, George got the task of compiling a more detailed inventory of the images. The archives has benefitted from his work and George gets to fill in a few details about his family genealogy, not to mention get some excellent photos of early family members — including his father.

## Record Number Use History Research Center

A record number of people visited the Archives in the month of February to do research in the collections. The staff assisted 116 researchers who were investigating a wide variety of topics. In the first year of operation of the Joint Archives in 1988-89 it was normal to have an average of 30 visits a month. The February figure represents well over triple the initial visitor figures.

These numbers do not include special visitors and tour groups who visit the Archives to learn more about what we do at Holland's History Research Center. It is not uncommon for anywhere from 50-100 additional visitors — that are not counted as researching patrons — to stop by and see our displays and presentations.

Researching patrons at the Joint Archives often spend several hours — sometimes several days — delving into the past using diaries, photographs, maps and other archival material. The staff works with each one to make sure the patron is able to locate the information sought, whether that be for an academic scholar writing a book or a middle school student preparing a display for History Day.

"I am excited that the community and our member institutions — the museum, college and seminary — are using the Archives so much," commented archivist Larry Wagenaar. "The Joint Archives, in addition to being the first of its kind to combine public and private collections, is one of the busiest repositories of its size in Michigan."

## 'Archives 101'

The basic archival skills workshop, *Archives 101*, is again being held on June 22. This day-long session is designed for people who have to care for archival materials — letters, photographs, record books, film, etc. — and do not have professional training as an archivist.

People who may be interested in attending include individuals in historical societies, churches, governmental units and business.

In a broad scope it will cover not only the basic principles and practices of caring for archival materials but will also give detailed information on the how-tos, recommendations on where to get supplies, how to properly handle materials, where and how to store them and basic preservation steps for damaged items.

Three professional archivists will be on hand. The presenter will be Richard "Dick" Harms, archivist/historian at the Grand Rapids Public Library. Joint Archives director Larry J. Wagenaar and Associate Archivist Craig G. Wright will also be present to answer questions and assist.

The workshop runs from 8:30-3:30 on Saturday, June 22. Registration is \$25 and includes materials, lunch and refreshments. For an informational brochure or to register contact the Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College Campus, Holland, MI 49423. (616) 394-7798.



Downtown Holland at the turn of the century.

*Prior to his retirement in 1990, Leon Witteveen was principal of Holland Christian Middle School.*

those who share my interest in local history. My work at the Archives has been very enjoyable and a real learning experience for me. I hope that it will be helpful to

work. But gradually things began to fall into place. I learned that there are three separate collections: Hope College, Western Seminary and the Holland Historical Trust. I learned that processing materials means making them more accessible to patrons of the Archives. With the help of Larry and Craig I learned to organize collections, write abstracts, and create registers so that a researcher is able to have some idea of what a given group of material contains before beginning his or her work.

When I first decided last fall to become a volunteer at the Joint Archives, I really had no idea what to expect. I had only a vague idea of the purpose of the Archives and practically no knowledge of its contents. My first reactions were amazement at the incredible amount of material and fear that I would never be able to locate anything!

Leon Witteveen

## A Volunteer's Perspective

is \$2. *History in Pictures* will not be shown on Sunday. Admission program will run hourly from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. *Holland's* Beginning May 7 and running through Saturday, May 16 the show during the first week of our extended Tulip Time. We encourage members of the community to come and see

was completed by Ted Nielsen and the Archives staff. effects by Larry Malfroid and River City Studios. Production narrated by Tom Beyer with musical background and sound Time and Holland's more recent changes. The pictures will be the development of the beach resorts, the growth of Tulip years, the Great Fire of 1871, the semi-centennial celebration, the Great Fire of 1871, the semi-centennial celebration, the development of immigrants from the Netherlands it traces the first

ture of immigrants from the Netherlands it traces the first tions of the Joint Archives of Holland. Starting with the depar- heritage through images drawn from the three archival collec-

The show is designed to tell the story of Holland and its the Joint Archives of Holland in the Knickerbocker Theater. the title of a 15-20 minute slide show that is being presented by

## Tulip Time Slide Show

*Celebrating Our Heritage: Holland's History in Pictures* is

## The Joint Archives of Holland

HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER

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Gerrit J. Diekema:  
New Facts Come to Light  
Spring Speaker Program