

Winter 2002

The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 11.04: Winter 2002

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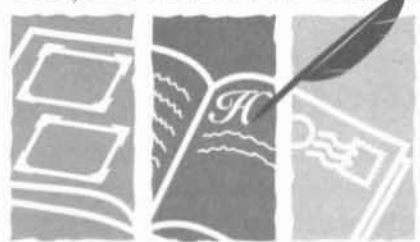
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The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

Volume 11 Number 4

Winter 2002

Contributions of a Legend: The Story of Metta J. Ross

by Matthew P. Nickel

On any day, the hallway leading to the theater department on the second floor of the DeWitt Student Center on Hope College's campus provides a quiet atmosphere, but on performance nights discussion, laughter, and meetings of friends grace the hall with noise outside the balcony entrances.

In this hallway, on the wall outside the balcony, are four holes and a rectangle of discolored wall, which was the home of a plaque honoring Professor Metta J. Ross. According to Richard Smith, Professor of Theater, the plaque was stolen several years ago, and has not yet been replaced because the department could not remember its precise wording. The lost plaque summed up the story of what many people recall: "a legend."

Contributions Ross made to the Hope community are numerous and lasting. As a professor of history (and at certain points English), Ross was a woman who was committed to education, for her students and herself. By founding the drama club *Palette* and *Masque* (forerunner to Hope's theater department) she sparked activity that became the standard of excellence known today. Among other achievements, Ross founded the International Relations Club (IRC is still active today), was a committed writer, poet and scholar, and was inducted into various educational, historical, and academic societies for her commitments to literature, history, culture, international relations, and the arts. Perhaps the greatest achievement Ross made was her relationships with people, especially her students.

Metta Ross' life at Hope began with a letter written to President Dimnent on June 25, 1925. At this time Ross was

teaching history at Holland High School. Granted a leave of absence to complete her degree, Ross hoped to stay in Holland and finish at Hope College. In this letter she made her request to study and teach to help defray the cost of tuition. After her one year at Hope, she graduated and received a teaching position at Hope.



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As a professor, Metta Ross became a legend among students and faculty of her time. She taught twenty-eight different history courses in her thirty-four year career, four of which she proposed, developed, and taught. Because of her commitment to her work, she continuously studied and researched.

Testimonies from Ross' students provide greater insight of her devotion to excellence. In 1949, Dean Hollenbach sent Ross a memo about a student who told the Dean his academic life was to please his father. He did not find interest there, but his studies became interesting and important in part due to Ross' teaching. She was said to awaken the interest and value in other students' educations as well, and many other students have testified to Ross' educational spirit. Upon Ross' retirement in 1960, she received a letter from Jack and Marian Hoekstra, both past students.

"Jack and I both were fortunate in having you as a teacher and we look back with enjoyment at the hours spent under you. You were an excellent teacher—one that instilled a desire to study in the student... we remember also your happy advertisement of Christian living, gracious personality, helpful spirit and friendly manner."

(Continued on page 3)

From the Director

Welcome to the new year! I hope all of your holiday travels went well and that 2002 will bring renewal to your lives.

In this issue you will be introduced to the rich life of past Hope College professor, Metta J. Ross (1890-1984), through the wonderful writing of our very own student assistant, Matthew Nickel. Matthew came to work for us last fall and we immediately presented him with the unorganized collection of Miss Ross. While processing her papers, Matthew became keenly aware of her talents as a writer and historian and thought something should be written illustrating her work. I think you will enjoy reading his story of her life and interests.

David Andrews completed his one-year contract with us at the end of November, and the college has made the decision not to fill my past position of collections archivist at this time. Due to less professional staff, we will soon be changing our hours of service to the research community. Effective February 4, we will be open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. This will not change the total hours we are available for research and will allow for earlier service for many. We are committed to providing the same fine service to our researchers that we have in the past.

Enjoy these first months of the new year, whether it be in a warm or slightly cooler climate!

Geoffrey Reynolds

Corrections

In the photo on the back page of JAH Quarterly Volume 11, No. 3, the woman riding alongside Louis Hallacy II in the Tulip Time parade was mistakenly identified as Lou's wife, Madeline Hallacy. In that photograph Lou's companion is former Tulip Time board member Mary Kempker.

The Louis Hallacy II collection was also mistakenly credited to Hope College, when it should have been credited to the Holland Museum.

Lastly, we apologize for referring to Congressman Guy Vander Jagt as a senator.

Valentines Past

As we approach February 14, we thought it would be fun to share some cards from years ago. These valentines are part of a charming scrapbook donated to the Joint Archives by Shirley Minnie.



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Contributions of a Legend (continued from page 1):

Ross' contact with students was strong and, with many students, letters were exchanged for years after graduation. Students never seemed to stop showing their gratitude for Professor Ross' love of teaching and "subjective interest in her students."



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Ross at a college mixer, c. 1940

Alumni taught by Ross frequently expressed the value of her teaching, both inside and outside the classroom. The foremost remarks are how she cared for her students. Ross was often said to have challenged her students to a high level of academic achievement as well as the challenge to enjoy and commit to scholarship and learning. The third remark of students is the impact Ross made about values, wholesome lives, and compassion.

Ross' professorship did run its course with struggles though. In 1935 Ross received her master of arts degree in history from the University of Michigan, and at that point stood one semester of residence and thesis away from her doctor of philosophy degree. Later she would spend years hoping for and requesting a sabbatical in order to complete her doctorate, but the leave was never granted. In 1942 Ross was moved to teach in the English department to make room for a new professor of history (also an athletic coach). This was a bittersweet move for Ross, whose first love was to teach history. Ross also spent a little over a year running Hope College's library. By 1945 Ross had not returned to the history department and began to feel her position at the college was not valued. Bruce Raymond, a former head of the history department, took a leave of absence during the fall of 1944 and spring of 1945 expecting Ross to return to the history department and temporarily take over his work. Neither occurred.

In a letter to President Irwin Lubbers in 1945, Ross made it aware that she had other opportunities to pursue if she was not to return to the history department (which was promised by President Wichers). Ross had been granted a fellowship

from the American Council of Learned Societies to write a book on the issues of climate and government in Latin America, and still had an opportunity to complete her doctorate. Ross also was offered a position at the Santiago College for Women in Chile beginning in 1946, as well as an offer to teach as an associate professor of English at Hope College. Ross loved her work, but would not stay at Hope without a promise made good, to teach history again—an offer which was made good.

In 1954, Ross, being one of the most senior in both years and academics (minus a doctorate) requested consideration for the position of department head. According to Hope's Executive Committee, Ross was turned down in the hope of finding a "male with a doctorate" for the position. It is in such situations that Ross was best known for her feminist views.

Ross pursued ideas of equality among men and women politically, socially, and mentally. In many ways, Ross was successful with this pursuit. For example, she was elected to the Ford Committee, the only woman and only individual without a Ph.D. The Ford Committee was a group established in 1955 by a grant from Ford for the study of Hope College's curriculum. Later, psychology professor Barbara Wilson was added to the committee.



Hope College/Joint Archives

President Lubbers presenting Ross with the Life Membership certificate in Palette and Masque organization with chapter president Doug Cameron ('49) in 1948

Professional concerns were mended over time, and Ross remained at Hope College until she retired in 1960. With her retirement came renewed and strengthened interests. She maintained a strong social life between Grand Rapids and Holland, as well as her attachment to her research and reading. Ross was a woman who loved travel, and retirement gave her new opportunities to explore the world. Ross also kept up her woodworking hobbies that included jackknife carving and furniture making. The fruits of her hobby furnished much of the cabin she shared with her friend Miss Janet Mulder on Drummond Island off the east coast of the Upper Peninsula.

Faculty and friends of Ross have remarked at the "utopia" Mulder and Ross attained around their cabin during summer visits. Ross had spent many summers on the island, and here after retirement she kept up her outdoor life of bird watching, fishing, and boating as she had for many summers previous.

Drummond Island held a close tie to Ross' heart, and with her ties came a great deal of what Ross did best: research. Since the late 1920s, Ross had studied the history of the island she grew to love because she felt that myths were evolving around the mysterious Drummond Island. With her studies evolved a detailed collection that later was organized by Barbara Good Van Heest. Ross had intended on developing her studies in a book, but even with the material she held onto for fifty years, she was unable to make the manuscript materialize. In her files she has several short starts to manuscripts, but unfortunately nothing complete. With news clippings, newsletters, correspondence, and other valuable sources the material is a very complete understanding of Drummond's early history beginning with the War of 1812.

Ross' poetics respond to her experiences making it apparent that she was quite aware of the details that surrounded her on Drummond Island. Her love for the nature there, the people, and aura of the island can truly be seen through her writing and research of the island.

Ross' legend illustrates her love of Drummond Island, and Hope College, but her legend is no longer commemorated. The wording of the missing plaque was recently discovered in the Joint Archives by this author. It read:

Metta J. Ross
 Professor of English and History
 Hope College 1926-1960
 Founder of Palette and Masque
 First Theatre Organization at Hope College
 1939
 Distinguished by her Dedication to Teaching
 International Relations, Culture and the Arts

Miss Metta J. Ross lived a poetic life, a legendary life as many remember Ross. She loved the people around her, she worked to teach all her students more than just classroom material, and she encouraged her students to do the extraordinary. For Ross, she made her life an example of the extraordinary.

Matthew Nickel, of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, is an English major in his junior year at Hope College. He is also a student research assistant at the Joint Archives of Holland.

New Books Available

2001 AADAS Proceedings

NEW! The proceedings of the 13th Annual Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies are now available for purchase. The conference, "The Dutch Adapting in North America," was held at Calvin College in June 2001. **\$5.00**

No Shadow of Turning

by Trudy Vander Haar

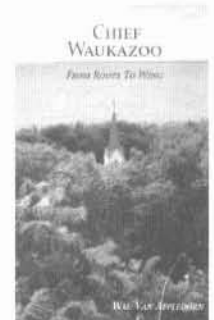


NEW! This softcover book, based on the diary of Geesje Van der Haar, reads like a historical novel. It is a well documented story of an American family who emigrated from the Netherlands in 1846, and is a story of courage and faith. Regular retail is \$14.95. **\$11.95**

Chief Waukazoo-From Roots to Wing

by William Van Appledorn

NEW! This softcover book illustrates the rich heritage of Holland's first inhabitants. From their formation of the main three Native American nations of Michigan to their exit from the Holland area to the Leelanau Peninsula, this 63 page volume gives you a flavor of their relationship with the federal government and the new Dutch immigrants. **\$9.00**



Haven, Harbor, and Heritage:

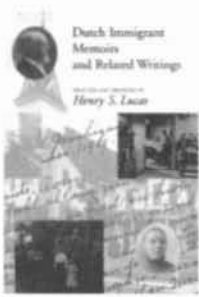
The Holland, Michigan Story

by Larry B. Massie



Massie recounts in vivid prose Holland's incomparable saga. A special feature tells of the fascinating stories behind the many successful commercial ventures that underpin the area's renowned quality of life. This keepsake volume is illustrated with more than 250 historic and contemporary photographs and prints. (Hardcover, 200 pages). Regular retail is \$29.95. **\$22.95**

More Titles Available



Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings
Selected and arranged
by Henry Lucas
with new translations

This 1,129-page volume compiles a rich number of first-hand accounts of Dutch immigrants detailing everything from the early days of settlement and the great

Holland fire to the Dutch migrations to Wisconsin and Iowa.
Originally \$45.00. **\$15.00**

A. C. Van Raalte: Dutch Leader and American Patriot

Jeanne Jacobson, Elton Bruins,
and Larry Wagenaar

This fully annotated biography of A.C. Van Raalte is a well-illustrated, 256-page hardcover volume. The book covers many events in the life of the pastor who led the Dutch to Western Michigan, including persecution in the Netherlands, the harrowing journey to America, struggles in the first years, Holland and the Civil War, the great fire of 1871, and Van Raalte's legacy today. **\$29.95**



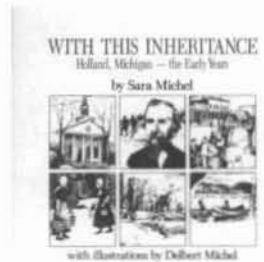
In Christ's Service: The Classis of Holland, Michigan, and Its Congregations 1847-1997

The history of eighteen Holland area churches is included in this 36-page publication recounting 150 years of service by congregations of the Holland Classis of the Reformed Church in America. **\$5.95**

With This Inheritance: Holland, Michigan--The Early Years

Sara Michel
with illustrations by
Delbert Michel

This 72-page softcover book is a lovely overview of Dutch immigration to the Holland, Michigan, area with many photos and pen and ink illustrations. Describes the area before the settlement, the journey to America, and the challenges up to and including the great fire of 1871. **\$11.95**



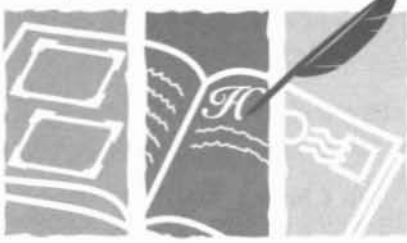
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Make-up demonstration to Palette and Masque members, c. 1941