

1-1-2004

The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 13.04: Winter 2004

Michael Douma

Geoffrey D. Reynolds
Hope College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/jaquarterly>

 Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

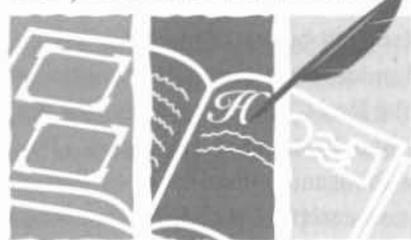
Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Douma, Michael and Reynolds, Geoffrey D., "The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 13.04: Winter 2004" (2004). *The Joint Archives Quarterly*. Paper 43.

<http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/jaquarterly/43>

Published in: *Joint Archives Quarterly*, Volume 13, Issue 4, Winter January 1, 2004. Copyright © 2004 Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Joint Archives Quarterly by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.



The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

Volume 13 Number 4

Winter 2004

Holland's Forgotten War

by Michael Douma

Since the founding of Holland, Michigan in 1847, numerous major wars have been waged. These include the American Civil War, two world wars, Vietnam, Iraq, and the list goes on. But which war caused the most outrage in Holland; which war captivated Hollanders more than any other, was anxiously tracked by the media and spoken about with true sadness? Surprisingly, a strong case can be made for the rather obscure, largely forgotten Boer War of 1899-1902.

The Boer War took place in South Africa and pitted imperialistic Great Britain against the Dutch-descent South African Boers. The British, attempting to procure a political hegemony in South Africa, encountered as an obstacle the South African Republics of the Boers. The Boers (Boer is the Dutch word for farmer) were descendents of soldiers and sailors employed by the Dutch East India Company who initially settled at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. The pressure of a growing English presence in South Africa during the mid-nineteenth century forced the Boers northward where they formed independent republics. When gold was found in Boer lands, British immigration to those regions rose sharply. But the stubborn Boers refused to grant equal rights to these gold-seekers, whom they referred to as 'uitlanders' (foreigners). Tensions escalated and the Boers took to the offensive with a major military campaign. Despite early successes, the might of the British army eventually defeated and subjugated the Boers. While the Boer War lasted only three years, it was bloody, expensive, and destructive. The British spent 191,000,000 pounds on the war and suffered 97,477 casualties, many of which were from illnesses. The Boers counted their own total dead at 34,166. The majority of these were non-combatants. By war's end, some 116,500 Boers had been interned in concentration camps, and thirty thousand Boer farmhouses had been burned to the ground.

Back in Holland, the reaction to this war was overwhelmingly pro-Boer. Although South Africa was a world away, common bonds of Dutch heritage led to sympathy for the downtrodden

Boer folk. Hollanders and Boers could both trace their roots to the revolt of the Netherlands against Spain, the glory of the saving of Leiden, and the wealth of the Dutch Golden Age. They also shared an antipathy towards England based on historical antagonisms. A Republican Party publication in Holland asserted, "The sympathy of we Dutch folk with the Boers is great and deeply rooted. It is natural and finds its explanation in origin, language, religion, sense of freedom, independence, and by that, still a traditional hate of England."

On these lines an anti-war movement in Holland began. The political arm of this movement had the goal of attempting to persuade the federal government to get involved with the war. Leaders like the local congressman Gerrit J. Diekema and Alden Smith called on more than just a military opposition to the British forces. Rather, they stated that the U.S. should recognize the South African states as independent nations and then act as a mediator between the two sides, British and Boer. Congressman Smith brought up this recognition issue in the House, urging that the U.S. send a consulate to Pretoria in recognition of South Africa.



Hope College/Joint Archives

Gerrit J. Diekema, c. 1899

In Holland and the larger Grand Rapids, citizens attended *en masse* the public venues that were set up for speakers to address the South Africa war. These meetings called for support for the Boers. But they did not always stick to the simple political pretenses of the anti-imperialists or anti-war

(Continued on page 2)

From the Director

In this issue, we present the story of the Boer War and Holland's participation in it. Written by Michael Douma, our student archival research assistant, this article will make most of you sit up and take notice of a miserable and long-forgotten war between the Dutch farmers and English army in South Africa. After reading it I was fascinated by how many of the citizens of the Holland area participated in the war through donations and public outcry, in both the newspapers and the pulpit.

I also want to thank all of you who supported us financially during our fall fundraiser. As of February 12, we have received financial donations from 112 donors (see page 5). This money will go toward ongoing projects to increase researcher use and access to our collections. Thank you so much!

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

Holland's Forgotten War (continued from page 1)

advocates, and they became rallies for Dutch and American might. Local, national, and international speakers addressed the issue of shared past and religion. Perhaps the greatest commotion concerning the war occurred in the meetings of United American Transvaal League, an organization that appears to have had the goal of uniting various pro-Boer factions in America. Some of these meetings were nationalistic, some were more religious in nature, but they were far from debates or discussion forums—they were one-sided pro-Boer rallies. Typically, these meetings consisted of prayers, speeches by famous or influential persons, an offering collected for the Boers, and patriotic songs. One of the largest such meetings was on October 27, 1899, in Grand Rapids at Fountain Street Church at which 2,500 persons were present. Here a speaker exclaimed, "Dutch blood is not yet cold!"

While some of these meetings were conducted particularly for Dutch-Americans (sometimes even in the Dutch language), others were multi-ethnic, representing many people who felt wronged by the British. Local Polish, German, and Irish Americans joined the opposition. These immigrant Americans rallied around the theme of freedom. At the pro-Boer meetings they sang patriotic American songs like "*The Star Spangled Banner*."

At these meetings and elsewhere, collections were set up specifically to aid the Boers. Local churches got involved in the money-raising effort as well. Hollanders provided more

than money alone, they also sent boxes of clothing, books, and tobacco. Many Hollanders sent funds in traditional manners such as through the Red Cross, but others saw that the Boers needed more than basic medical relief. One collection raised nearly one thousand dollars for Boer women and children in concentration camps. Another fund sent aid to the four thousand Boer prisoners held by the British at Bermuda. Other methods of support were less direct as they had to circumvent British restrictions. An alternative but popular method of sending financial aid was funneling it through societies in the Netherlands. The money could then be channeled to Africa. It must have been a trusted method because one family, that of Rokus Kanters, a former mayor of Holland, sent fifty dollars to the Amsterdam South Africa Aid Society. A collection started by a Hope student, Anna Riemens, also made use of an intermediary. Called the "Snowball" fund, it gathered small contributions of usually twenty to twenty-five cents (mostly from women) to send to South Africa via the Netherlands. The proceeds were meant to support women and children affected by the war. Sympathizers from West Michigan and the Chicago area began pouring in money to Miss Riemens' collection. At its peak, the "Snowball" collection accumulated \$819.95 in a single week, and over eighty-five women from Holland were listed as contributors.

Financial aid for the Boers was not limited to the secular assemblies and collections. Churches also took up collections. It was common for churches to send relief monies around the world to victims of famines or natural disasters, and the RCA was active in financing missionary activities. But was the church overstepping its bounds by sending dollars to a combatant in a foreign war? Perhaps the churches thought they were not financing a war, but trying to alleviate the sufferings of victims of an impending disaster. Aid for the Boers could be found in the same list as aid for victims of famine in India.

Religion played a large role in uniting Hollanders under a pro-Boer flag. Local Boer supporters were quick to draw similarities in beliefs, governing structure, and styles of worship between the Dutch Protestant Churches in South Africa and the Reformed Dutch (RCA and CRC) churches in America. Many came to view the course of the war in religious terms as well. Perhaps the most common perspective was the David vs. Goliath motif. The *Holland City News* wrote, "As David and Goliath, and as Samson, the British will also be slain by the Boers." This comparison was easy to make in that the war was an obvious mismatch. Not only did Hollanders perceive the Boers as God-fearing people, but many also viewed England as a nation of reckless sinners. England was even compared to Babylon and Rome. Ministers in Holland often gave sermons supporting the idea

that it was morally justified to support the Boers. Even before the war began, at least one ecclesiastic, the Rev. E. J. Blekkink prayed that, "God will be on the side of the Boers and drive England out of the whole of South Africa."

Just who were the Boers? For some time Hollanders struggled with this question. Though Hollanders supported the Boer cause wholeheartedly, they were curious and suspicious of the differences between themselves the Boers. Though the Boers were of Dutch descent, much was made of the fact that they were not pureblood Dutch. Gerrit Van Schelven, the editor of the *Holland City News*, took it upon himself to



Hope College/Joint Archives

Gerrit Van Schelven,
c. 1899

inform the city about the bloodlines of the Boers. He wrote that African and French Huguenot blood in the Boers affected their temperaments. He thought that perhaps their nomadic tendencies and incivility could be traced to black blood. Because these Dutch descendents were far removed from their Dutch-American counterparts, their culture and character was much affected. The Boers had lived for so long without a central government that could efficiently

levy taxes or create laws, that force became the only way to deal with them. Boers were seen as "huiselijk" (domestic) as well as anti-political and rather dumb. One less sympathetic local newspaper portrayed the Boers as dumb enough to repeatedly fire at a British scarecrow. In addition to these somewhat disapproving appraisals, the Boers were also stereotyped as hard-working, God-fearing, and simplistic, and therefore the Dutch Calvinist conventional wisdom viewed the Boers in a positive light.

The most important tools for furthering the pro-Boer movement in Holland were newspapers. The Boer War was a ripe topic for the presses. No local paper missed out on its chance to address this issue, and each one chose its own particular religious or political slant. Yet, despite their individual agendas, all of the newspapers were pro-Boer and essentially they "...differed only in the severity of their denunciation of English policies." The sheer amount of material that one newspaper, the Dutch-language *De Grondwet*, printed about South Africa during the early stages of war was impressive. The war was the number one, front-page story for nearly a year. Reports from the war often covered the entire front page and continued inside. In fact, once the editor even apologized for the war coverage taking up too much space!

Pro-Boer sympathies also arose at Hope College. Hope, the premier academic institution of Holland, also embodied and

professed the thoughts of the city's elite that supported and ran the college. It was no secret that college president Kollen was staunchly pro-Boer, and that Gerrit Diekema, the political spokesman who frequently addressed the issues of South Africa, was on the college's Board of Trustees. The college even allowed pro-Boer groups to meet on campus.

Of all the students at Hope, the members of the Ulfilas Club (Men's Dutch Language Club) were the most concerned about the war and showed the strongest support for the Boer cause. Three of these Ulfilas members appeared serious when they claimed that they wanted to go to South Africa to fight alongside the Boers. Short of money, they asked for the required transport funds from "some patriotic Hollanders or liberty-loving Americans." There is no indication that they ever received such funds. Although Holland appeared passionate in its opposition to the war, little was done to try to send combatants to the join the Boers.

Late in the war, Holland's Boer-pride began to fade. The outcome of the war became more evident, and songs of nationalism and Dutch unity slowly turned over to prayers and lamentations. There was true sadness for the Boers' plight. One Holland poet wrote that the Boers were now "exiles and beggars." The news from the war became scarce as the British had surrounded the Boers and pressed them into a guerilla war. The Boers' voice went silent as the British held a monopoly on information. Hollanders could only be increasingly distraught and saddened by the news. In April 1901, John Mulder, editor of *De Grondwet* wrote, "Messages this week from Transvaal are very thin. The thinner the better." Essentially, all news from South Africa had become bad news. Many were convinced that the Boers' cause was hopeless. The Ulfilas Club wrote, "Is the independence of the Boers in the Transvaal [a Boer Republic] in a hopeless situation at this moment?"

In South Africa, a new development in warfare made the situation appear even more discouraging. Concentration camps, built in the end of 1900 initially to protect civilians from the ravages of war, were claiming civilian lives at an alarming rate. Because the Boers had put up fierce resistance in a guerrilla war, the British initiated all-out war. To prevent Boer citizenry from aiding its army, the British burned and pillaged everything that might be of use to the Boers and sent the homeless survivors to government-built camps. Any black African who was seen as a threat to British rule in the region met a similar fate.

Indifferent and inadequate care in the camps led to epidemics of measles and pneumonia. By June 1901, there were one hundred and twenty deaths per thousand camp prisoners. The next year this figure rose to 344 per one thousand. In

total, 118,000 whites and 43,000 blacks were placed in camps. When Emily Hobhouse, a British nurse working in South Africa, made the British public aware of such methods of barbarism, there was a public outcry, and England faced a political nightmare. Although the British reversed the flow of the concentration camp internees, they were faced with the problems of releasing thousands of people into countryside devoid of food, burned and ravaged by war. The British tactics had backfired, causing unneeded suffering and global political outrage.



Lizzie Van Zijl in an English concentration camp,
De Grondwet, 8/20/1901

In Holland, graphic images in the local newspapers reinforced the evils of these British concentration camps. One such image in *De Grondwet* on August 20, 1901, contained the following in its caption: "...Lizzie Van Zijl, about eight years old, [is] one of our small skeletons. [Her] legs [are] disproportionably long. Many thin out in this way...It is sad to see the children..." Such pictures, and the accompanying first-hand accounts of the war's innocent, emaciated and feeble victims, left indelible marks on the hearts and minds of Boer sympathizers. "In the [concentration] camps I see the destitute and forsaken women and children," wrote Ulfilas member L. Boeve.

Curiously, while the Boers' chances of victory deteriorated, the pro-Boer movement in Holland lost the will to finance the war. Did the Hollanders decide to abandon their cause? The previously overwhelming "snowball collection" of Anna Riemens faded, managed a mere \$4.25 in one week in August 1901. It gathered meager, almost inconsequential amounts until the end of the war. As with secular funds, church contributions also dried up. In 1899, South Blendon Reformed Church, in a Dutch colony just outside of Holland, had a collection for the Boers, but it had no collection for the other years of the war. Other local churches continued to give minimal support. Contributions in 1900 included \$11.25 from Ebenezer Church, eighty dollars from Drenthe

CRC, and eleven dollars from CRC Noordeloos. The following year, *De Grondwet* expressed its disappointment in the lack of collections at some prayer services. Perhaps the frugal Dutch realized that the Boers would suffer less if the British quickly won the war. After all, there had been little positive news from South Africa for over two years.

Although victory didn't come for their Boers, Hollanders were relieved that the Boers had endured and received a negotiated settlement. Though the Boers were now subjects of "His Majesty King Edward the Eighth," they were full citizens of South Africa with the same rights as the *uitlanders*, and the British at the Cape. The Afrikaans (Boer) language was given status in schools and courtrooms, no special taxes were levied to pay for reparations, and no trials would be held for those who would surrender and proceed home. Representative local governments would be formed under the watchful eye of the British-influenced South African Republic. The editor of *De Grondwet* wrote "the Boers are content, so we must be also."

After 1902, very little appeared about the Boers in the Holland newspapers. The reaction to the war surely lived on in the memories of those who took part in Holland's anti-war movement, but stories about South Africa did not survive the passing of generations. Perhaps the war was dear to the hearts of the Dutch consciousness, but as Hollanders became more American, the stories of heroism they told took on American pretenses. The Dutch had to worry about their distant cousins, but the Americans soon had more tangible worries of their own.

Two years after the war, in 1904, Holland had a population of 8,966, an increase of more than twenty-five percent in the last ten years. The immigrant community remained strong. Foreign-born persons in Holland numbered 2,322 versus the 6,644 that were native-born Americans. In many ways Holland was still attached to its Dutch roots. Because of a common heritage, the Hollanders were inclined to support the Boers to a greater extent than most other Americans. With the Boer War as a rallying call, turn-of-the-century Holland saw rejuvenation in Dutch pride, an arousal of "ethnic consciousness." However strong these ethnic feelings may have been, Hollanders were unable to substantially affect the course of the war. Too many obstacles stood in their way. Faced with the difficulties of extending tangible support to a distant land, Hollanders were left with little more to do than hold their own meetings to discuss their growing frustration with a distant, foreign war. The Boer War tested their patriotism, but the outcome was never in doubt: they were Americans, no longer Dutchman and not Boers. They would send money and resolutions of sympathy, but not people. They could do no more, nor were they expected to.

Joint Archives of Holland Honor Roll of Donors 2004

Mr. Curtiss B. Allen	Mr. and Mrs. Paul Elzinga	Dr. Eugene Scholten
Mrs. J. Anne De Witt Appleton	Mr. and Mrs. James Evenhuis	Sibsco LLC
Mr. Charles Aschbrenner	Mr. and Mrs. Paul Foster	Mr. and Mrs. John E. Smallegan
Mrs. Barbara Archer	Dr. Norman C. Gysbers	Mrs. Lois Tysse Strom
Dr. and Mrs. William Arendshorst	Mr. and Mrs. Louis Hallacy II	Mr. and Mrs. Martin Stulp
Mr. Dan Baldwin	Dr. and Mrs. I. John Hesselink	Dr. Robert P. Swierenga
Mr. and Mrs. Chester L. Baumann	Mr. and Mrs. James Hinkamp	Mr. and Mrs. Donald Sytsma
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon G. Beld	Dr. and Mrs. Renze L. Hoeksema	Ms. Margaret Taylor
Mr. Fred S. Bertsch, Jr.	Mr. and Mrs. James Hoekstra	Dr. Henry ten Hoor
Dr. and Mrs. Vernon L. Boersma	Mrs. Jenifer S. Holman	Mrs. Leona Terpsma
Mr. Melvin Boonstra	Mr. Glenn Homkes	Mr. and Mrs. James E. Townsend
Ms. Pauline Bosch	Mr. and Mrs. Lester Hoogland	Mr. and Mrs. Myron D. Van Ark
Mr. and Mrs. Vern Boss	Ms. Phyllis M. Huff	Mr. Hugo M. Van den Dool
Bradford Co.	Mr. and Mrs. Vincent L. Iannelli	Mr. and Mrs. Jay R. Vander Meulen
Mr. and Mrs. Judson T. Bradford	Mr. and Mrs. Norman Japinga	Dr. Arend A. Vander Pols
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon M. Brewer	Mr. and Mrs. Ted Jungblut, Jr.	Mr. and Mrs. Terry Vande Water
Mr. and Mrs. Donald A. Brinks	Dr. and Mrs. Earl Wm. Kennedy	Mr. William G. Van Dyke
Dr. and Mrs. William C. Brownson	Mr. and Mrs. Martin Klaver	Dr. and Mrs. F. Phillip Van Eyl
Dr. and Mrs. Donald J. Bruggink	Mr. Michael Kollen	Rev. and Mrs. Gerald Van Heest
Dr. and Mrs. Elton J. Bruins	Mr. Rodger Kramer	Mr. Julius Van Oss
Mrs. Penney Buhler	Mr. Robert D. Kroeze	Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Van Slot
Mr. Harvey J. Buter	Dr. Margriet Lacy	Mr. and Mrs. Bruce van Voorst
Ms. Betty D. Cook	Rev. and Mrs. James C. Lont	Drs. Gordon and Margaret Van Wylen
Mr. Gerald Cooper	Dr. and Mrs. Gary J. Looman	Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Van Wyngarden
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald L. Dalman	Mr. and Mrs. Michael Lozon	Ms. Laura Verplank
Mr. and Mrs. Judson S. Davis	Dr. and Mrs. Robert C. Mahaney	Mr. and Mrs. David H. Voorhees
Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. De Bruin	Ms. Tamara A. Nederveld	Mrs. Dorothy Voss
Dr. Kathleen De Haan	Mrs. Carolyn Nienhuis	Mr. and Mrs. Ron Voss
Ms. Karel Deich	Mr. Daniel Paul	Mrs. Evelyn Vukin
Mr. and Mrs. Paul R. De Maagd	Mr. and Mrs. Joel Ploegstra	Mr. and Mrs. Frank L. Wagenaar
Jack and Henny De Roo	Mr. and Mrs. Don Postma	Mr. and Mrs. Larry Wagenaar
Dr. Daniel A. De Vries	Ms. Mary Raper	Mrs. Elsie Weeber
Mr. and Mrs. Roger L. De Vries	Mr. and Mrs. Jerrald H. Redeker	Dr. and Mrs. Ron Wiegerink
Mr. and Mrs. William J. De Vries	Mr. and Mrs. Craig Rich	Mr. and Mrs. Henry I. Witte
Mr. and Mrs. Jack H. De Witt	Mr. and Mrs. Donald Riddering	Mr. and Mrs. Tom Wolters
Mr. Anthony Stephen Di Salvo	Mr. Wally Rooks	Mr. and Mrs. Richard Zingle
Greg and Amanda Dykhouse	Mr. and Mrs. Hans Peter Schaich	
Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Dykstra	Dr. James Schmiechen	

Thank you for your generous support!



HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER
Hope College • Western Theological Seminary

P.O. Box 9000 | Hope College | Holland, MI 49422-9000

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Hope College

Contact us at (616) 395-7798 • Fax (616) 395-7197 • E-mail: archives@hope.edu • www.jointarchives.org



Hope College/Joint Archives

Hope College basketball team, 1914-1915