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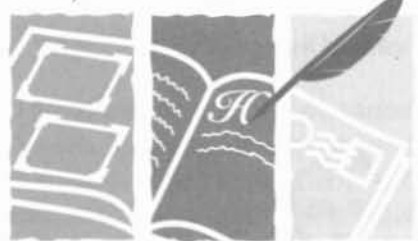
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The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

Volume 14 Number 2

Summer 2004

News from the Civil War: A Story of Two Soldiers

by Diana Rosenhagen

At first glance, this is a straightforward story of two Michigan soldiers from Kent County who fought for the Northern cause in the American Civil War. But it is also a story of a historical mystery and the keys that unlocked its answer. The mystery is this: why did the papers of two soldiers, who may have never even met each other, find themselves in the same archival collection 140 years after the fact?

Consider our first soldier, Georg Adam Zimmermann, born in 1829 in Köngen in the Kingdom of Württemberg (today the federal country of Baden-Württemberg in Southern Germany) as a son of a farmer, and who applied for immigration into the United States in 1852. Shortly afterwards, he left Köngen and settled in Ravenna, Michigan, with his wife, Eva Rosina. Their first son, Willhelm J., was born in 1859. Georg W. followed four years later, and by the time Georg Adam Zimmermann left his family in order to do his "great duty" to protect this country serving his Savior (as he puts it in one of his letters), Rosina Zimmermann was pregnant with a third child, their daughter Mary. Georg Zimmermann was enlisted on September 2, 1864, in Company H of the 21st Michigan Infantry Regiment, which he joined on October 18 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. With his regiment he moved to Savannah, Georgia, in December 1864. There is proof that he served as a nurse in February 1865 while stationed in Savannah. After he had joined his company, the regiment fought battles at Savannah, Georgia, and Fayetteville, Bentonville and Goldsboro, North Carolina. Zimmermann was mustered out in June 1865 in Washington, DC. He returned back home to his wife, who

had been trying to keep up the farm on her own with help from neighbors and friends. According to the U.S. Census of the following decades, the Zimmermanns had five more children between 1867 and 1880. Between 1870 and 1880 they moved from Kent County to Chester Township, Ottawa County, where Georg A. and his sons became successful farmers. Georg A. Zimmermann died in 1903.



Hope College/ Joint Archives

Henry and John Spicer, 1866

Now consider our second soldier, John E. Spicer, who was a native of Ohio, born on April 3, 1847. He was not yet eighteen years old when he, together with his elder brother Henry L., joined Company H of the 6th Michigan Cavalry Regiment on February 14, 1865. They fought battles against Southern troops as well as Native Americans in Virginia and Wyoming, respectively, before the regiment was discharged. Spicer was transferred to the 1st Michigan Cavalry Regiment in November 1865 and discharged on March 25, 1866, at Fort Bridger, Utah.

He went back to Michigan, where he married Helen A. Babcock in March 1867. The couple had three children, sons Fred and William born 1874 and 1875, and a daughter, Orilla, born in 1869. John E. Spicer stayed involved in the memory of the Civil War for the rest of his life. He attended annual reunions and collected brochures, souvenirs and newspaper clippings. Like Georg A. Zimmermann he was a farmer, but changed his occupation between 1880 and 1900. The nature of his business, however, is uncertain. John E. Spicer died on December 27, 1930, and was buried in Algoma Cemetery in Sparta, Michigan.

(Continued on page 2)

From the Director

This past year I have been reminded daily why I work for a liberal arts college like Hope College. I simply love the variety of daily interaction from local history researchers, Reformed Church in America scholars, and Hope College faculty, staff, and students. I believe the student interaction is the most important because of their infectious desire to learn more about the history we hold within the walls of the Joint Archives of Holland. I enjoy it even more when they come to me with answers to questions that have not only frustrated them, but also me, for some time. Which brings me to the lead article of this issue.

Diana Rosenhagen is a native of Germany and this past year was a teaching assistant in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages. When I was faced with finding someone to conduct the translation of several letters from German to English, Diana came highly recommended from department faculty member Lee Forester. As Diana worked through the daunting task of translating the 19th century German letters, I could see her frustration, but I was quite impressed with her ability to “break the code” of these letters and provide our researchers with some very interesting commentary on 19th century German immigration, life in Kent County, Michigan, and being a Civil War soldier.



Geoff Reynolds presents a copy of “Echoes of a Century” to Joan Kuyper, executive director of the Netherland-America Foundation

America Foundation, located in New York City, we were able to complete the project without cost to the archives. Because of that cost savings, the three-CD set is now available for purchase for the low cost of \$19.95. See page seven for more information and ordering details.

Lastly, the Joint Archives of Holland will be moving into the newly renovated Henri and Eleonore Theil Research Center in early October along with the A. C. Van Raalte Institute. Please see the related story on page six for more details about the move and its benefits.

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

A Story of Two Soldiers (continued from page 1)



Hope College/Joint Archives

Spicer family

The Link

Most likely the two soldiers did not even know each other. They had been born in different countries, even different continents; one was 18 years older than the other, and even though they were both volunteers, they served in different regiments at different places during the Civil War. At first glance there does not seem to be any reason why pictures, documents, memorabilia and letters belonging to these two men were found together in one box donated to the Joint Archives of Holland. The donor himself did not know exactly what the box contained; he had found it at an estate sale and was not related to its owner, Clarence A. Moore. However, Internet research into the U.S. Census lists of the years 1860 to 1930, combined with the close inspection of other items in the collection, such as autograph books, proved successful in finding a link. Moore is listed as Spicer’s grandson in the 1910 Sparta census list. The link between these two and Georg Adam Zimmermann, however, was more difficult to determine since it lies entirely in the female family line and is therefore influenced by movements and name changes. An autograph book belonging to Mary Porter nee Zimmermann reveals that she had a daughter called Delilah Zoë, born around 1886. Clarence A. Moore’s wife’s name was Zoë. The 1930 census implies that she must have been born in 1886 or 1887. It is not certain that Zoë Moore is Mary Porter’s daughter, but there is no other reason why Mary Porter’s autograph book should be found among the belongings of the Moore family.

This leads to the conclusion that John E. Spicer and Georg Adam Zimmermann were the grandfathers of Clarence A. Moore and his wife Zoë, to whom the collection belonged.

The Collection

The collection consists of various items connected to the Moore, Spicer and Zimmermann families, but only some of them are related to the Civil War. Only the items directly related to the soldiers of this article will be mentioned here.

There are several photographs and negatives on glass and celluloid, some of which show John E. Spicer as a soldier, a veteran at reunions and a family man. The most interesting of these pictures shows John Spicer and his brother Henry in their uniforms (see cover photo). The picture is not the typical Civil War soldier souvenir taken during the war, but a photograph made in a studio in front of a poster and framed in cardboard. The pencil inscription on the back reads: "Henry L. Spicer, John E. Spicer, just home from service."

John E. Spicer took pride in his status as a Civil War veteran. The collection includes an issue of the *Sparta Sentinel* (September 7, 1888) listing him among the veterans of Kent County (p. 8), the brochures *Memorial of the Company F, 6th Michigan Volunteer Cavalry* (1881, John Spicer, however, was enlisted in Company H) and *Roster of the Survivors of the 1st, 5th, 6th, and 7th Cavalry Regiments of Michigan* (1912), as well as a program of a Benefit Performance by the Camp Custer Mussed Band in March 1918 titled *World Democracy – First, Last and Always*. Several items give proof of Spicer's active participation in war reunions. The collection includes ribbons from the 5th, 7th and 13th annual reunion of the Northern Kent Association of Soldiers and Sailors, the *Programme of the 53d National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic* in Columbus, Ohio (September 1919), a report brochure of the annual meeting of the Custer Brigade (September 14, 1927) and a newspaper clipping about the Custer Reunion Luncheon 1925 from the *Grand Rapids Press*.

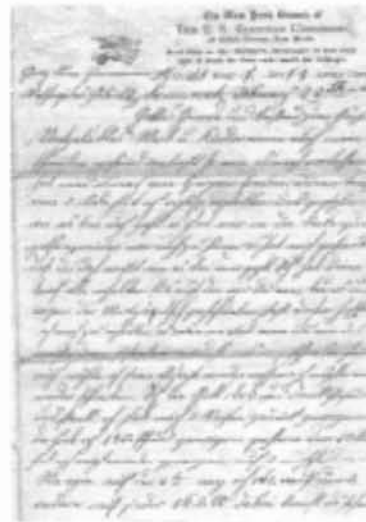
Other items related to Spicer are autograph books of his family, items connected to the Sparta Lodge, and an announcement of his burial service.

In comparison to the various memorabilia related to John Spicer there are few, but very interesting, pieces related to Georg Adam Zimmermann. Besides the before-mentioned autograph book of his daughter Mary, there is only a collection of fifteen letters written in German. Three of them were written by the soldier himself during his encampment in Chattanooga and Savannah in 1864 and 1865. Nine letters were written to him and his wife by various members of the Zimmermann family, among them his father and his brother, in Köngen/Germany from 1865 to at least 1884—one of the letters is not dated and most likely later than 1884—and three

letters about personal and farming issues were written by German friends of Georg Zimmermann in the United States.

Obstacles

When the letters were discovered they were hoped to provide invaluable information, but there were obstacles to overcome in order to retrieve this information.



Hope College/Joist Archives

Zimmermann letter, 1865

First, there was the degenerated condition of some of the letters. Most letters were fully intact, but in some cases parts were missing—cut or ripped off or destroyed by mold—or the handwriting was faded. Some translations, therefore, include blanks or suggestions to fill in these blanks by the translator.

Second, there was the handwriting. Until 1930, German students learned

to write in *Sütterlin*¹, today mostly known as "old German handwriting." The print version of this handwriting, called *Fraktur*, is close to the commonly known Latin Font and therefore easier to decipher. *Sütterlin*, however, is so different from any current handwriting that, even with the help of respective websites it is very hard and time-consuming to distinguish different letters if one is not trained in reading this special handwriting.

Third, there was the language. Not only are the letters written in German, but also in 19th century Southern German, which means that there are influences of the time as well as the dialect of the region. German dialects can be very different from each other, mostly in their intonation and pronunciation, but sometimes even in using different words for the same item. The agricultural word for aftermath, the second cut of grass (the first one is called hey), is called *Grummet* in many regions of Germany, but in the 19th century farmers from this region of Württemberg used the less common word *Öhmt* instead. This example also indicates how specific the agricultural terminology of the letters is.

Fourth, there was the lack of spelling and punctuation rules. Before Konrad Duden's *Orthographic Dictionary of the German Language* (1880) was officially named the basis of standard German spelling in 1901, people wrote as they spoke, which could differ vastly from region to region and

from person to person. This resulted in inconsistent spelling and punctuation throughout the whole corpus of letters.

The fact that Georg Adam Zimmermann had to speak and listen to a lot of English while he was with his regiment complicated the matter even more, because it turned his German into a mild form of something one might call Pidgin German. He thought of major items or concepts related to his status as a soldier in English and therefore used the English word. But since he had never learned how to spell English correctly, he spelled those words according to the German sound system. It was not hard to see that "Fenz" means "fence" or "Plänteschens" are "plantations," but it was very hard to determine the source of words like "blende" (plenty), "Bostistsstämps" (postage stamps), "fisediert" (visited) or "Sisesch" (secessionist). In addition to just using English words, he even translated some English words back to German, which resulted in the confusing use of some German words. In one of his letters, for instance, he states that he likes his job as a nurse, partly because it is less work than being kitchen help. There are two meanings of the word *like* in English: first, the verb *to like*, i.e. to appreciate or to love, and second *like* as a comparative pronoun as in "he looks like you" or in the compound *alike*. The verb would be translated into the German word *mögen*, the pronoun into (*ebenso/gleich*) *wie* or *gleich*. The English phrase *to be like* (i.e. to equal) is therefore translated into *gleich sein* or *gleich*. Georg Zimmermann translates the verb *to like* mistakenly into *gleich* (to equal), literally stating that he equals his job.

Because of this language confusion, together with spelling inconsistencies, the condition of some letters, the unfamiliar use of the language and the outdated handwriting it proved hard, even for a native speaker of German, to deliver a readable German transcription of the letters, let alone translate them.

Once the letters were transcribed, new problems arose translating them. The fact that some of the letters had been fully or partially translated before did not help, because those translations usually left out the problematic phrases or words and even contained completely wrong translations due to misreading. Also, repeated common phrases did not translate well into English, the lack of punctuation made it necessary to cut originally uncut sentences, parts of poems or songs could not be transferred into English without losing rhythm and rhyme scheme, and the uncertainties that had been left in the transcript by the above-mentioned problems brought guessing into the translation. The translations therefore contain footnotes to indicate problematic cases.

What the letters tell

In relation to the Civil War the first three letters of the corpus, written by Georg Adam Zimmermann himself to his wife in Michigan, provide the most detailed information. The earliest one was sent from Chattanooga in late 1864. At that time Zimmermann was 35 years old. The letter is not dated, but the fact that Zimmermann joined his company on October 18, 1864, and left the town with his regiment in November 1864 allows us to determine the approximate time the letter was written. Zimmermann does not write about the war itself, neither in this letter nor in the following ones written from Savannah, Georgia, after his regiment has been involved in a battle on February 5, 1865. Rather he asks questions about life at home, talks about his faith in God or gives impressions of his daily life. He starts the Chattanooga letter with asking his wife who of their acquaintances had been drafted recently. He then talks about the weather and his impressions from Chattanooga:

"I haven't been cold yet despite the bad weather. During the last two weeks it has been raining almost every day. Once in a while the weather is good, it is like in June, but everything looks so bad and ruined. The Plantations are deserted, the Negroes gone, the grass is long, the weed I mean."

He then asks about the conditions back in Michigan and gives some advice to his wife, who now has to manage the farm all by herself, with two children, pregnant, and only with the help of few neighbors and friends. He speaks mainly in allusions, so that one cannot be certain what exactly he is talking about, but it seems as if his wife has to sell land in order to support the family while her husband is away. Finally he offers moral support, first by reminding her to trust in God, and then by mentioning a man he is staying with, whose wife is pregnant, too, in the devastated South and with seven children to manage.

The second and third letters were written in Savannah, Georgia, on February 16 and 22, 1865. In the second letter he mentions for the first time that he is working as a nurse. He seems to be well and comfortable, indicating that he was sick or wounded not long ago.

He describes the conditions in the hospital as follows:

"Thank God and praise him, I am well again and as strong as I was before. I am as beefy as I was in winter at home. We have had plenty of food for a while"

now, and the job is easy. I am still a nurse. The patients like me very much, and therefore, with the help of God, I can do my job very easily. They wanted to use me for cooking [sic], but the hospital steward said I was too good a "Nurse" [...], he could not spare me, and I did not care, because when it soon gets war here it is pretty hot to be close to the fire. There are quite some more than 100 men to cook [sic], and there are 5 cooks total. The water has to be brought here from far away, and therefore I like my old job well enough."

He then goes on describing his environment and everyday life in Savannah:

"It is already getting pretty warm here; I have already seen that people prepare gardens. And there already are spring flowers. Yesterday I saw the most beautiful rose in a dooryard and also some sort of yellow star. To my surprise I had to pause for a little while. Last night there was some fierce lightening and everything starts to become alive. The weather is wonderful. The stuff in Savannah becomes cheaper, too: bread, butter, cheese etc.—[the prices for] everything are falling. Most soldiers are gone with Sherman and money is scarce for most people, and that is why most merchants have to lower their [prices]..."

This leads him to express his hopes to return home safe. While writing about his faith, which is a very common topic in all his letters, as well as in the ones from Germany, he for the first time mentions why he volunteered to fight in this war:

"Dear wife, I am still willing to serve my savior even if I do it in weakness, but I consider it a great duty to do this and gladly do it, because here is not my home country to know this..."

He also mentions the charity work of the U.S. Christian Commission, whose notepaper the two letters from Savannah are written on.

The third letter is the longest of the three war letters. Again he gives his wife advice how to handle the farm at home, again he mentions that the food is good, even giving specific record of his gaining weight during the past three weeks. Again he praises the charity work of the U.S. Christian Commission, being especially pleased by their handing out books and Christian writings, stating that they help him to get better at reading English. He then describes the celebration of George Washington's birthday (February 22nd) in Savannah as follows:

"Now, today we also celebrated Washington's Birthday here in a secessionist state. A beautiful park was opened, in which two cannons were put up to fire [a salute]. There was good music and also a fountain. There was a little lake in the middle of the park like in the king's castle in Stuttgart, and the water spurted out of 40 different openings into the air; sometimes very beautifully. There were a great number of people together. But there was no speech delivered; nevertheless it was something wonderful in a state like Georgia."

Again in great detail he describes the spring in Savannah, sending his wife a rose in the letter as a proof that roses are indeed blooming in Georgia at this time of the year.

Back to his life as a nurse, he describes a seemingly rare doctors' visit:

"... today 6 doctors were here, examined the sick that were in the worst condition, and recorded their cases; those who had almost recovered were not even visited² and also not recorded."

His hope is, that as a nurse he might be able to go north with the patients once they can be transported, which brings him back to talk about family matters back home and how he can support his family while away—by money which he will get shortly, and by advice to his wife in business, practical and moral matters. After he expresses his hope that his wife will give birth to a girl, and that she will take care of herself at all costs, he closes the letter with a little evening prayer in English.

(Continued on page 7)

Joint Archives of Holland and A. C. Van Raalte Institute to Relocate

The Joint Archives of Holland and the A.C. Van Raalte Institute at Hope College will relocate in the fall, sharing new quarters in a move designed to enhance our accessibility and historical research.

Our two programs expect to be moved into the college's Henri and Eleonore Theil Research Center, located at 9 E. 10th St., by early October.

While we have been pleased with our current locations, both Dr. Jack Nyenhuis, Director of the A.C. Van Raalte Institute and myself are enthusiastic about the new space, and about the increased opportunities we will have to work together.

Our current home in the library is outstanding and has served well since the Joint Archives opened, but we're excited about what the Theil Research Center is going to make possible. Having the Joint Archives and Van Raalte Institute and their resources together should benefit community researchers, Hope students and Hope faculty as they conduct primary research in local history as well as Dutch-American history in general.

The scholars involved with the Van Raalte Institute are themselves active in research at the archives. Dr. Nyenhuis sees multiple benefits in housing the two programs together.

"The members of the Van Raalte Institute use the archives as a vital part of our research efforts because they contain many of the records essential for the kind of research that we carry on," he said. "At the same time, our research interests reinforce the work of the archives and our publications help demonstrate the importance of preserving records and other materials for use by historians and other scholars as they explore where we came from, who we are and what our heritage is."

"Having us in a single facility will engender the kinds of conversations and scholarship that will deepen and enrich the understanding of the history of the college and of the community as we carry on our work collaboratively," Nyenhuis said.

The building is being named for Eleonore Theil and the late Henri Theil, in honor of an estate gift they have made to the college. They had also established, in 1981, the Willard Wichers Fund for Faculty Development at Hope in honor of

Willard C. Wichers, a longtime friend whose lifelong commitment to preserving area history included founding the Netherlands Museum, forerunner of the Holland Museum and the museum's archives. Wichers died in 1991.

Henri Theil, who died in August of 2000 at age 75, was an economist and modern pioneer of econometrics, the statistical analysis of relationships in economics. Widely published, he held teaching appointments at institutions including the Netherlands School of Economics in Rotterdam (now Erasmus University), the University of Chicago and the University of Florida, from which he retired in 1994. He received an honorary degree from Hope in 1985. Eleonore Theil, his widow, continues to live in St. Augustine, Fla.

The new building has two levels. A receptionist's desk and a reading room with four tables for researchers will be located on the upper level, as will the offices of the staffs of both the archives and the institute, and a library conference room for the staff. The lower level will house the collections in two rooms — with an inert gas fire suppression system just as in the current space — and will also have space for processing materials.

The Joint Archives of Holland opened in the Van Wylen Library on Oct. 3, 1988. The space on the lower level was designed for the archives, which at the time housed the collections of the college, seminary and Holland Historical Trust. Significant additions have included the records of Dr. Robert H. Schuller, who is the founding pastor of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif., and a 1947 Hope graduate, and of former U.S. Congressman Guy Vander Jagt, who is a 1953 Hope graduate; the archives also now assists other area organizations with their materials. The Holland Historical Trust moved its materials to the Holland Museum in January of 2003.

The A.C. Van Raalte Institute was established in January of 1994 and is fully supported through gifts to the college's endowment by Peter H. and Heidi Huizenga of Oak Brook, Ill., J.C. and Laura Huizenga of Grand Rapids, Ginger (Huizenga) and James L. Jurries of Holland, and Suzanne (Huizenga) and Herman Kanis of Holland; and their mother, the late Elizabeth Huizenga. Originally housed in Van Zoeren Hall, the institute moved to 100 E. Eighth St. in March of 1996. Dr. Elton J. Bruins served as founding director until July of 2002, when he was succeeded by Nyenhuis.

The institute has a part-time staff of 13, including Nyenhuis, two research professors, four senior research fellows, an editorial assistant/office manager, three translators and two student research assistants.

A Story of Two Soldiers (continued from page 5)

The family letters from Germany provide little additional information about Georg Adam Zimmermann's time as a soldier, and not much evidence on his later life either. Nevertheless, a few facts should be mentioned here. It appears that the Zimmermanns' house burned down in 1867. Seemingly nobody was hurt. Eighteen sixty-nine seems to have been a hard year for the family as well, since they had to write to Georg Zimmermann's father in Germany for money, which he sends them via money order, although he is struggling financially himself. By 1880 the family seems to have recovered. A cousin mentions in his letter that "here [in Köngen] hardly anybody comes into a fortune like yours [Zimmermann's]." In the same letter it also appears that Zimmermann receives a share from his father's possessions when his estate is distributed among his heirs before his death. Finally, it appears as if other members of the families of Georg Adam and Eva Rosina Zimmermann have moved to the United States as well. A man called Fritz, belonging to Rosina Zimmermann's family, seems to stay with or close to the family and is mentioned twice. A relative of Georg Adam, Johannes Zimmermann, is also mentioned, though he seems to have returned to Germany after failing in the United States, though this is not certain since a part of the letter that tells his story is missing. (Ten further men and women with the family name of Zimmermann from Köngen/Württemberg applied for immigration into the U.S. according to the Württemberg, Germany Immigration Index.) Apart from that, the letters mainly contain information on family births, deaths, marriages, and financial matters, as well as prices for crops and notes on currencies and the change of lifestyle in the area around Köngen.

Although the connection between our two soldiers has been found, the story of their lives remains incomplete. Unfortunately, the information on both Georg Adam Zimmermann and John E. Spicer is fragmentary and requires more research to be completed, but it is new information on two soldiers and survivors of the Civil War who might otherwise have been forgotten.

Notes

¹ for more information and letter samples see <http://www.peter-doerling.de/Englisch/Sutterlin.htm>

² see footnote 18

Recordings from 1947 Telling Holland's Story Available on CD

A radio program created to celebrate Holland's history more than 50 years ago has been preserved so that it can be enjoyed again by a new generation. The Joint Archives of Holland has transferred from LP to compact disc the broadcast program "Echoes of a Century," which was prepared in commemoration of Holland's centennial in 1947. The program is now available for purchase from the archives as a three-disc set.

"Echoes of a Century" was professionally recorded by the Netherlands Information Bureau (NIB) to illustrate the story of Holland, from the origins of the Dutch settlers' decision to immigrate to the New World to the then present-day.

"Echoes of a Century" is similar to an old-time radio show, complete with narration, in-character portrayals, reenactments and music. "Echoes of a Century" is narrated by Ben Grauer (1908-77). As a radio announcer for NBC, his career included narrating several programs, and he reported the arrival of the New Year from Times Square in New York for NBC radio for several decades.

Order Form

"Echoes of a Century"

\$19.95

**(MI residents must also add 6% sales tax
for a total of \$21.15)**

plus \$5 for shipping and handling

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Address _____

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