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H91-1118. Wichers, Willard C. (1909-1991).

Records, 1930, 1949-1987. 13.50 linear ft. **PARTIALLY RESTRICTED**

Abstract

Willard C. Wichers graduated from Hope College in 1932. He was very involved in the Hope College Board of Trustees, where he held the position of secretary, 1968-1982. Wichers was a major factor in the Dutch Language Program at University of Michigan, and brought many professors over from the Netherlands. He was made a Knight in the Order of the Orange-Nassau of Netherlands in 1947 and an officer in the same order in 1954. He served on the Holland Historical Cultural Commission, the Holland Area Historical Advisory Commission, the Michigan Historic Preservation Review Board, the Historical Society of Michigan, the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation, and a commissioner of the Dutch-American Historical Commission. He was also responsible for founding the Netherlands Museum, which is now the Holland Museum, in 1937. The Willard C. Wichers collection includes several boxes of Board of Trustees information, such as meeting minutes, correspondence, and committee records. There are many photographs, the majority of which are from the 1930 *Milestone*. Records of Hope's property transactions, Dutch Language Program professorships, and Wichers' correspondence are all included in the collection.

Accession No: H91-1118
Provenance: Willard C. Wichers
Donor: Willard C. Wichers
Photographs: 1,249 images, 68 negatives, 36 slides (Boxes 3, 4, 7 and 8)
Processed by: Ramona Angelescu, June 1999
Michelle Smith, March 2001

Biography

Willard Chester Wichers was born in Zeeland on March 20, 1909. He attended the public schools there and then went on to Hope College, where he graduated from in 1932, and the University of Michigan. He was married to Nell Elizabeth Van Haitsma in 1937, and they had two daughters, Elizabeth and Janet.

Wichers was chemistry major at Hope College and began his career by working as a night chemist at the beet sugar factory in Holland. On the side, he set up a small public relations business and within a few months, he had attracted the attention of the state directors of the Federal Writers' Project. Wichers was made the West Michigan supervisor of the Historical Records Survey Project. He felt very strongly about the importance of history and was affiliated with many organizations dealing with historical preservation throughout his life. He was a member of the Holland Historical Cultural Commission, the Holland Area Historical Advisory Commission, the Michigan Historic Preservation Review Board, the Historical Society of Michigan, the Netherlands Pioneer and Historical Foundation, and a commissioner of the Dutch-American Historical Commission. He was also responsible for founding the Netherlands Museum, which is now the Holland Museum, in 1937.

Wichers became involved with the Netherlands government in 1941, when Princess Juliana visited Hope College. He was persuaded to organize and publicize the event. The

Netherlands saw the need to establish an information center in the United States to promote trade and travel between the two countries, and Wichers spent a great deal of time in Washington, D.C. and New York helping to set up the service. By 1942, this resulted in the establishment of a midwestern office of the Netherlands Information Service in Holland. He held that position until his retirement in 1974, when the midwestern office was closed. After the closure, he continued on as Consul for Press and Cultural Affairs. During his time as the NIS director, he was responsible for 20 states, from New York to Colorado and from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. Much of his time was spent developing markets for Dutch goods in the United States and for American enterprises and products in the Netherlands.

Wichers was continuously involved in activities outside of the Netherlands Information Service. For instance, he was a major force in getting the De Zwaan windmill for Holland's Windmill Island. He also used his considerable influence in a successful attempt to keep the red lighthouse in Holland Harbor. Wichers was actively involved with managing Tulip Time for many years and served on Holland's Centennial Commission in 1947. He also gave his time to the Reformed Church of America, the Governor's Commission for Refugees and Displaced Persons, Grand Valley State Colleges Advisory Council, board of directors of the West Shore Symphony, and the Holland Council for the Arts, as well as many other worthy organizations. Wichers served as secretary of the Hope College Board of Trustees from October 1968 to July 1982.

Wichers received many honors at local, national, and international levels. He was made a knight and officer of the Order of Oranje-Nassau in recognition of his services to the Netherlands. Rotary International bestowed its Service Above Self Award upon him. Countless other honors have been awarded to him by other organizations.

Willard C. Wichers died May 19, 1991, leaving behind a lifetime of accomplishments. He had been labelled "Mr. Holland" as a result of his outstanding dedication, not only to the Holland community, but also to the Netherlands.

Scope and Content

The Willard Wichers collection includes several boxes of Board of Trustees information, such as meeting minutes, correspondence, and committee records. There are many photographs, the majority of which are from the 1930 *Milestone*. Records of Hope's property transactions, Dutch Language Program professorships, and Wichers' correspondence are all included in the collection.

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Box 1

Executive Committee, August 1972-December 1981 (45 folders)

Box 2

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes and Agendas, 1970-1975 (36 folders)

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