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Resort Central: Macatawa and Ottawa Beach

Summertime!!! You know what that means...warm sun, beaches, bikinis, BBQs, volleyball and lying in the sun. Holland is quite a resort town — there is no doubt about it...

But before Tulip Time, before the crushing crowds, camping at Holland State Park, and before bike paths this was a much different place. It was a tourist spot to be sure but it was one that depended on railways and passenger liners — not Chevys and Toyotas.

Here at the Archives we have a photograph taken around 1884 of tents set up near the spot of present day Point West. This was before Macatawa was built up — there were few cottages and most visitors were from “distant” Holland, some five miles away.

Yet by the turn of the century Macatawa Park and Ottawa Beach sported two large hotels (aptly named the Macatawa Hotel and Ottawa Beach Hotel), an amusement park, rail service connecting to Grand Rapids and Chicago, and a dune escalator railway named “Angel’s Flight.”

Passenger liners made daily trips between Holland and Chicago during the warmer months bringing hosts of Chicago residents to the attractions at the mouth of Black Lake (now Lake Macatawa). The nature of this influx was much different than today, people took American style vacations that were relaxed and centered around staying in one place. This was, of course, before the age of automobiles and interstates.

Promotional pamphlets, photographs, and newspapers provide some of the details. They describe the bath house on the Macatawa Park shoreline, the spectacular view from the top of the dunes as the liners let off their passengers to jump

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From the Archivist

The summer is fully underway at the Joint Archives and with it comes a new addition to the staff, Joseph Kuiper, a junior at Hope College, has joined us to undertake the Oral History Project and to work half-time as a regular Archives staff member. Reba O’Shesky, who has been with the Joint Archives since its inception, will also be here full time to assist with the many summer projects which are on the docket.

It is always exciting here during the summer. Patron use changes with a higher mix of genealogists among the local residents, scholars (who can travel during vacation), businessmen and students who are our most regular patrons.

We also turn our attention to many projects that we have been unable to get at during the year. This year they include getting out that supplement to the Guide which will include our vertical, biographical and photographic collections. It also means dealing with a large collection of water and smoke damaged historical negatives and working on several public access enhancements to make the Archives easier to use.

Over the past year we have had a number of groups come to the Joint Archives for research or to tour the facility. Presentations to groups at the Archives and at meetings elsewhere have given us the opportunity to give a more in-depth explanation of work at the Archives. Please feel free to call on us if your group would like to visit or if we can be of help in some way.

The bottom line for us is preserving our heritage by making sure that historically significant paper-based items survive. Recently the Joint Archives Council, the governing board of the Archives, adopted a more concise mission statement. It reads in part that the Joint Archives “has been created to serve as a history research center in order to collect, care for, interpret and promote the documentary heritage contained in these collections...” It is an exciting time for us as we work with donors to do just that — preserve our past, help tell its stories and work with researchers who are helping us understand where we have been.

Thanks for sharing our excitement!

Larry J. Wagenaar

Macatawa Park Oral Histories

The Hope College Oral History Project has been going on for more than 13 years as an annually funded program to investigate some area of local or college history. Each year a Hope student, most often a history major, is chosen to conduct oral history interviews, transcribe them and make these available as a primary resource for researchers of today and tomorrow.

This year the Oral History Project will be undertaken by Joseph Kuiper. His efforts will focus on Macatawa Park and its rich history as a cottage and resort area which has drawn people to the mouth of Lake Macatawa for more than a century.

Currently Joe is researching the history of Macatawa and boning up on the mechanics necessary to undertake oral interviews. This includes formulating brief questions that will allow the participant to describe and expand upon his knowledge and experiences of the past.

After preparing fully with historical background and a number of good questions he will begin to line up and conduct interviews with past and present residents of Macatawa Park and area citizens who have enjoyed spending time at such places as the Macatawa Hotel, Angels Flight, Jenison Park and taking rides on the Interurban.

This effort, which is funded by Hope College, is designed to capture the flavor and content of our past before these stories are lost. If you know of people that we should contact please call the Archives at 394-7798.

RCA Churches Preserve History

Several area congregations of the Reformed Church in America have moved their historically significant materials to the Western Theological Seminary Collection at the Joint Archives. Among these materials are original minutes of consistory, church newsletters, membership and baptismal records and bulletins.

These churches include Fourth, Hamilton, Harlem, Christ Memorial and Hope Reformed Churches. These are in addition to a significant number of congregational records already in the Western Seminary Collection including Central Park, Ebenezer and Vriesland Reformed Churches.

By moving this material to the Archives these churches insure that their history will be preserved in a state-of-the-art facility which has been constructed to preserve historical archives and become available for research to help understand that history.

The records are placed in the Western Seminary Collection at the Joint Archives under a custody arrangement where the Archives preserves the materials and actual ownership remains with the congregation. This follows the rules of the denomination that requires a church to retain these records while providing that they will be well cared for and easily accessible.

Interested congregations of the Reformed Church in America in the area may wish to contact the Joint Archives at 394-7798. Christian Reformed Churches with questions about their historical materials are encouraged to contact Heritage Hall at the Calvin College Library.
The Processor’s Table

by
Craig G. Wright
Assistant Archivist

I met a great man last month. He has been dead since 1967 but his wisdom still holds true, especially in the wake of the Persian Gulf War. His name is Abraham Johannes Muste and I met him while processing his papers which are part of the Hope College collection. What follows are a few of the things I learned about this remarkable man and form only a small part of his story.

Muste was born in Zierikzee, Zeeland, The Netherlands in 1885. The family immigrated to America and settled in Grand Rapids in 1891. He was admitted to Hope Preparatory School in 1898, the youngest student at that time. He transferred to Hope College in 1902 and graduated after only three years at the age of 20.

A.J. was a very active student while at Hope. He won the Michigan State oratorical contest, edited the Anchor, captained the Flying Dutchman basketball teams which won two state of Michigan championships, and was valedictorian of his graduating class of 1905.

The year 1909 was very important for Muste. That was when he graduated from the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, married Anna Huizenga in Rock Valley, Iowa, was ordained in the Reformed Church in America, and installed as first minister of the Fort Washington Collegiate Church in New York City.

Muste was the ultimate pacifist and protested against every major war of this century while he lived. A.J. joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an interfaith pacifist organization in 1916. In 1917 he resigned from the Central Congregational Church due to his pacifistic views and the following year lead the Lawrence, Mass., textile workers strike. Among the many places he has protested are famous landmarks like Red Square in Moscow, the United Nations, Times Square, and the White House.

The idea of hatred was alien to Muste’s philosophy. As he told his children, “When you’re primarily resisting, you have to be careful not to hate, not to win victories over human beings. You want to change people, but you don’t want to defeat them.” It is a revealing fact that he never attacked the personality of any of his detractors. It is also telling that despite disappointment over his son’s desire to enlist in the Navy at the age of 17, Muste honored his son’s wishes and signed the enlistment papers.

Muste has had an impact on major figures in the peace movement and many called him the “American Ghandi.” The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a college student when he first heard Muste speak. The fact that the struggle for civil rights in this country has been so bloodless when compared to some other areas of the world is largely attributable to Muste, as this comment by Dr. King illustrates: “It would say unequivocally that the current emphasis on nonviolent direct action in the race relations field is due more to A.J. than to anyone else in the country.”

In 1948 Muste stopped paying Federal income tax due to the fact that they were used to finance the machineries of war. Every year he sent a package to the Internal Revenue Service containing the following items: a bible, a copy of Henry Thoreau’s “Essay on Civil Disobedience” and a three page typewritten letter outlining the principles that prevented him from making a contribution to the armaments of the United States. It wasn’t until 1961 that the United States Tax Court ruled that the government had a right to back taxes but collection against Muste’s small, retirement income was never attempted.

In 1964 the Johnson administration tried to stop Muste from completing a peace walk from Quebec to Guantanamo by issuing an injunction which would prevent him from boarding a boat for Cuba. The necessary authorization would have to come from Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who had this to say when he read the request: “Let me get this straight. You mean you want me to sign that piece of paper to tell an 84-year-old man he can’t walk 800 miles?...I don’t think the security of the United States is going to be endangered by an 84-year-old man. I’m not going to sign this piece of paper.”

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Resort Central
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on the Interurban cars waiting on a special dock built into the bay, the rides at Tunnel Park or the ferry which brought people from across the channel. The Getz Farm zoo was a couple of miles north along a divided, forested Lakeshore road — remnants of this avenue still remain.

In recent months the minutes of the Macatawa cottagers association, the land owner's corporation and scrapbooks of the Macatawa Hotel have been placed in the Holland Historical Trust Collection at the Joint Archives. This has added greatly to our understanding of the area's history. Many photographs are also on hand. To complement these original items the Archives is coordinating the Hope College Oral History Project which will provide for oral interviews — allowing us to preserve first hand accounts and give future generations primary resources with which to work.

Next time you're out at the lake front think of what it must have been like...riding the train, seeing the big boats, at the top of an amusement park ride...or better yet, stop by the Joint Archives and we'll show you!

Processor's Table
(Continued from page 3)
Hope College has honored A.J. Muste, perhaps its most famous graduate of all time, in a variety of ways. At the time of his death in 1967, Muste was the only minister of the Reformed Church in America to have appeared on the cover of Time magazine. A book fund was developed in 1974 to purchase books dealing with peace and reconciliation for the library, an annual A.J. Muste Peace Lectureship began in 1985, and an alcove in the Van Wylen Library was dedicated to Muste in 1987.

In closing, I again turn to the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.; "Few men in our time have so eminently qualified as peacemakers and so well deserve the promise of Jesus in the beatitudes that they shall be called the sons of God as A.J. Muste...The whole world should mourn the death of this peace-maker, for we desperately need his sane and sober spirit in our time." The words ring true even though 24 years have passed since they were spoken.

Joint Archives Loses a Friend
The Joint Archives has lost a friend. Council member Willard C. Wichers passed away on the evening of May 18, 1991. A long-time advocate of history both locally and state-wide, Dr. Wichers played a significant role in forming the Joint Archives.

His achievements have been many including his first work in Michigan history coordinating the National Historical Records Service survey for the WPA in 1935. He went on to serve the Michigan Historical Commission, Historical Society of Michigan and the Historic Preservation Review Board.

Locally Dr. Wichers was best known for his tireless work on behalf of the Holland community. In 1937 he founded the Nelherlands Museum and later became the director of the midwestern office of the Netherlands Information Service. His many accomplishments include the acquisition of the de Zwaan windmill for Windmill Island and saving the Holland Harbor lighthouse.

His passing is a great loss for all of us in the Holland community.

The Joint Archives Council
Governing Board of the Joint Archives of Holland
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Archives 101.... Saturday, June 22

If you have archival materials under your care and you are not trained as a professional archivist this workshop is for you. The Joint Archives of Holland in Holland, Michigan is sponsoring a hands-on workshop to assist individuals who face the task of caring for archival materials but lack the training and knowledge on where to turn to give their treasured manuscripts, records, and photographs the best possible care.

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 go to get supplies, how to properly handle fragile documents and the best methods for storage. It will allow for the participant to ask specific questions in an informal manner throughout the process as well as provide hands-on experiences.

Three professional archivists will be on hand on June 22. Dr. Richard H. Harms will be the instructor of the sessions. He has conducted several with this format and his workshops have consistently been highly rated. Joint Archives Director Larry J. Wagenaar and Assistant Archivist Craig G. Wright will also be on hand to answer questions and assist.

We encourage those people in churches, business, historical societies and governmental units who care for archival materials to consider attending this workshop. It will be very informative and cover all aspects of preserving archival materials including collection, appraisal, processing, legal considerations and storage to name just a few.

Come join us for an interesting day! The fee is $25 which includes materials, lunch and refreshments. The workshop is from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Mail registrations to: Archives 101, The Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College Campus, Holland, MI 49423.

Summer Hours

Monday-Friday
1 - 5 p.m.

Mornings
by appointment

RCA History on Exhibit

Hope College and Western Theological Seminary are hosting the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America during the second week of June. In conjunction with this the Joint Archives has on display in the reading room photographs, letters, diaries, and memorabilia which illustrate the rich history of the Reformed Church and the long association Hope and Western have had with the denomination.

The exhibit will focus on four themes. Unique stories of congregations and how the Archives helps area churches preserve their history, mission activity in the RCA, and the ties of the college and seminary to the oldest protestant denomination in the United States.

Display materials are from the Hope College and Western Theological Seminary Collections of the Joint Archives.

The public is invited to stop by and see the displays at the Joint Archives located on the ground floor of the Van Wylen library at the corner of 10th and College. Admission is free.

Mr. Thomas Jones was featured as the Joint Archives' Spring Speaker at its annual "big event" on April 24, 1991. Mr. Jones illustrated his talk with slides describing the history of the automobile in Michigan. During the reception which followed in the Archives reading room, Mr. Jones was presented with traditional wooden shoes.
An early auto sign a mile south of Holland, possibly around 1915, directing motorists to a lake shore route through Grand Haven, Shelby, Ludington, Petoskey and north to Mackinac Island.