

Fall 1991

# The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 03.03: Fall 1991

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## Recommended Citation

**Repository citation:** Wagenaar, Larry J.; Strowenjans, Delbert; and Wright, Craig G., "The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 03.03: Fall 1991" (1991). *The Joint Archives Quarterly*. Paper 8.

<http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/jaquarterly/8>

**Published in:** *Joint Archives Quarterly*, Volume 03, Issue 03, Fall October 1, 1991. Copyright © 1991 Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

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# The Joint Archives Quarterly

Volume 3 Number 3

Fall 1991

## Michigan Polar Bears and Northern Russia

The January program of the Holland Area Historical Society will focus on the Polar Bears, or American Expeditionary Forces - North Russia, that were an ill-fated part of post World War I history. Some of these men were drawn from the local area, especially Muskegon.

In conjunction with the presentation by Dr. Larry Penrose in the archives reading room, The Joint Archives will be creating a display featuring some of the Polar Bear items in the collection. In 1977 the first Hope College Oral History Project focused on veterans that were still alive at that time. In the collections are transcripts of these interviews.

There are also letters written by Delbert "Dutch" Stowen-jans recently donated by his son. These letters are a significant link to this interesting part of our history. It is through letters like the ones he wrote to his family that we are able to experience the bitter cold, stress and boredom that these soldiers had to experience.

History has tended to overlook this portion of our overseas involvements, especially in the light of later success.

Plan on attending the Historical Society program Tuesday, January 21 at 7:30 p.m. in the Archives reading room. You will be treated to a very interesting presentation and some very fascinating items on display.

### 1619 Bible on Display

December is being kicked off with a Bible display in the Archives. Focusing on the different styles of family and "Staten" Bibles the exhibit cases in the archives reading room will open a world for you and the actual books that were held in the hands of a believer in 1619. One of those items is an original, first printing of the King James Bible. This item is in our exhibit courtesy of the Hope College Rare Book Collection with which the Archives shares a reading room.

The King James Bible was a gift to the college library of Dr. Everett Welmers a long time supporter and alumnus of Hope. He is an avid collector of rare and unique books and it was through his interest in this area that he located two damaged King James editions and arranged for a conservator to carefully clean, repair and rebind them into one complete volume.

Other materials come from the archival collections of the Holand Historical Trust, Hope College and Western Theological Seminary. This combination of books and archival material is a case of sheer beauty. The care which was given to Bibles throughout the centuries has been remarkable,

(Continued on page 2)



"It is hell to hang on, but it's death to let loose"



Floyd Lewis, a Polar Bear, whose oral history interview is available in the Archives.

# The Joint Archives Quarterly

## From the Archivist

Recently I was speaking with a colleague and we were discussing the day to day issues which come up in operating a historical research center and he made an observation which I thought you might enjoy. His thought was that an archives touches the lives of many people beyond the patrons which come through our door. An individual comes in to do research and what that person writes, the stories told and the history learned often is shared with hundreds and thousands that the archives staff will never meet.



A local historian comes in and checks out the history of a locale here in Holland, a student is doing research for a class presentation, the museum staff asks for information to stage an exhibit or a scholar comes in looking for information for his new book — each of these people will in turn share what they have learned at the archives with an untold number of people.

Archives and Archivists are charged with preserving and helping others understand the past. It is a profession that has all the elements of a good mystery novel with a dash of science and good deal of organizational skills not to mention a few other things.

The Joint Archives now serves over three times as many people as it did in 1988 - patron research visits have increased from about thirty per month to nearly one hundred and sometimes more, each involved in learning in detail about the past. They each have a unique experience.

I encourage you to stop by the Archives on the lower level of Van Wylen Library at 10th and College. We are open to all whether you have a limited or detailed historical question or you just want to stop by to see our displays. Our doors are open for you to learn.

Larry J. Wagenaar

## 1619 Bible on Display

(Continued from page 1)

with brass fasteners and edges as well as fine binding techniques.

Other items on display include items from the Civil War, hymnbooks used in the churches and samples of how Bibles were bound in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Bibles will be featured throughout the holiday period until January 10.

## Volunteers

Volunteers! The Joint Archives of Holland has recently seen two new volunteers who are now working with the staff and collections. George Claver and Leon Witteveen started with us in October and both are working on significant projects which the staff has been unable to undertake recently.

George has been involved in keeping our vertical files up to date, clipping the local newspapers for significant topics. He is also involved in a project which involves some of our historical photographs. Working with the images of history can be enthralling, as George is finding out.

Leon Witteveen is involved in processing incoming and current collections. Working with the professional staff, he has been sifting through materials, organizing them and producing what we call collection registers. These are detailed inventories with abstracts and personal histories which assist the researcher in their work.

Both Lee and George have become important additions to the extended staff. If you are interested in volunteering at the Joint Archives, please call Larry Wagenaar at 394-7798 or stop by the Archives.

## A Letter Home from Russia

One of the Polar Bear letters of Delbert Strowenjans:

November 25, 1918

Dear Mam, Pap and Billie:

Just a few lines to let you know I am well and comfortable, except my feet which are cold even when I am in a warm house. It is seven below and it is one o'clock, p.m. It will be 40 below in midwinter before long they say. We wear felt boots, fur cap, felt and leather jacket and have lots of wool socks, gloves etc., so don't worry about me getting froze up.

E.W. and G.S. are up at the front now but don't think they will have to fight much more this winter. They have been out more than I have and had more adventures.

I have written you several times since I have been here but do not expect much mail from me...there is not much means of transportation here as the river is frozen up and we are almost one hundred miles from a railroad.

I hope you are all well and [I] would give the four months pay I have coming to be with you for Thanksgiving dinner Thursday. We are promised a good feed however. Turkeys, rabbits etc. Game is plentiful here.

Have been quite busy lately building block houses etc. Also patrol and guard duty.

Must quit if I want to get this mailed. Be back in the Spring.

Dutch

The winter's cold was one of the biggest problems that the Polar Bears faced. This letter was stamped "examined by 11," a military censor.

# The Joint Archives Quarterly

## The Processor's Table

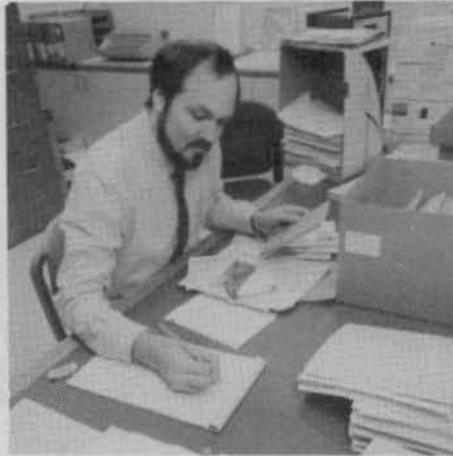
by  
**Craig G. Wright**  
Assistant Archivist

Life has become very busy around here as the processor's table has multiplied to become six processors' tables. Three student assistants, one volunteer, Larry, and yours truly have all put in time this fall retroactively processing collections. Retroactive processing means working with collections which were already a part of the Archives, but needed further work. This might be transferring materials from potentially damaging acidic folders to non-acidic folders, verifying dates and information contained in current descriptions, or even transferring the collection to a more appropriate home such as the biographical files or the genealogy section.

The most prolific worker of the fall has been Rebecca "Reba" O'Shesky, who is responsible for the Hope College collections. Reba has worked on 170 collections, mostly personnel files. One of the larger collections she has worked with this term is the Hope College Preparatory Department records. Reba is a senior who has worked at the Archives only one month less than Larry. She is in the process of applying to graduate schools and hopes to attend a library school in order to become an archivist.

I would like to take a moment to recognize the excellent work of Laura Bachelder, one of our student workers who, after a year and a half at the Joint Archives, is leaving to study in London in January. She has been a skillful processor of materials in the Historical Trust collections. In the year I've been here she has processed more than 60 collections and produced eight registers, which are detailed descriptions of larger collections. Laura also set up the Trust genealogy collection. Her dedication, energy, and sense of humor will be sorely missed. Bon Voyage Laura, make the most of your wonderful opportunity in England.

Fortunately as we say adieu to one worker, we greet several new faces who have begun working at the archives this fall. Freshman Chad Boorsma from Grandville has learned quite a bit in the past four months, and not just in his



classes at Hope. Due to his personal interest and past research in the Reformed Church, Chad has been given responsibility for work in the Seminary collections. He has already worked on more than 20 collections and is finishing up his first larger collection, the Henry Bast papers. He has also learned about our accessioning paperwork and is often involved in the initial stages of work when new materials arrive at the Archives.

Replacing Laura in January and working on the Holland Historical Trust collections next term will be Erinn Raymond, who joined us this fall and had been doing inventory and secretarial work.

Leon Witteveen, former principal of Holland Christian Middle School, has begun volunteer work this fall. I'm not sure that Lee knew quite what he was getting into, but he is enjoying his work at the Archives. He is already working on his sixth collection and has produced four registers.

George Claver is another volunteer who has recently begun helping us here at the Archives. He is responsible for keeping our newspaper clippings up to date and is also working with the Trust photograph collection.

We are extremely pleased with the amount of work that has been accomplished this fall, 268 collections have been processed. It is even more amazing when you consider that processing is only one of our responsibilities, certainly less than half of a worker's time is spent on this task. My next big project for the winter is cataloging our collections so they can be loaded onto OCLC, an inter-

national database used by well over 10,000 libraries in North America. When this project has been completed, researchers at any OCLC library working on subjects like Dutch immigration, the Reformed Church in America, or Great Lakes cruise ships (to name only a few) will be able to find out what we have here at the Joint Archives and determine whether a research trip to Holland should be arranged.

## Conservation Workshop February 29

Dr. Richard Harms will be conducting two workshops in 1992 for the Joint Archives. The first of these will be a Basic Conservation workshop designed to help anyone who is faced with handling, cleaning, repair and other issues related to archival materials.

Topics will range from how to clean a document or photograph to methods of "encapsulation" — the procedure whereby paper items are protected within mylar plastic. Participants will be encouraged to bring with them particular items they have had problems with. The workshop will have hands-on experiences with time for individual attention.

Dr. Harms will be dealing with a wide cross-section of preservation problems. The result will prepare individuals in museums, archives, historical societies and private collectors to deal with some of the common problems of damage, age and neglect.

The fee for the half-day workshop is \$25 and will include all materials. For more information contact the Joint Archives of Holland.

## Educational Programming 1991-1992

**Feb. 29, 1992** Basic Conservation Skills. Learn how to do basic cleaning and repair of archival materials. \$25 fee required. Richard Harms.

**April 24, 1992** The Gerrit Dickema story - Minister to the Netherlands, member of Congress, prominent leader. One of Holland's premier citizens. This is our Spring Speaker Program, admission is free. C. Warren Vander Hill.

**June 20, 1992** Basic Archival Skills Workshop. Designed for those who have to care for archival materials who do not have training. \$25 fee. Richard Harms.

# Michigan Polar Bears And Northern Russia

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## New Collections

We have received many exciting and interesting donations this fall. If we listed each and every one, there would not be room for much else in this issue of the Quarterly. However, the readers may be interested to learn about some of them.

Ruth Athey has donated some John Mulder materials to the Western Theological seminary collection. This gift includes books, pamphlets, blueprints, and materials relating to the construction of the seminary building. The Zachary Velduis papers were donated by Fran Baron. This is an eclectic collection which contains materials pertaining to Zeeland, Hamilton, Overisel, Hope College and seven different churches. Dr. Robert Coughenour has donated his correspondence files, which span years 1977 to 1991.

Probably the most important addition to the Hope College collection are the papers of former Lieutenant Governor William C. Vandenberg, an ardent supporter of the College. Over ten linear feet of material was donated by Mrs. Jack Daniels, daughter of Mr. Vandenberg and Hope College alumnus.

The archives has also received twenty-two "Polar Bears" letters written by Delbert "Dutch" Strowenjans, donated by his son Donald. "Polar Bears" is the nickname used for American troops who fought in the Soviet Union during the Russian Civil War. These letters were written both to "Dutch's" family and his girlfriend Lillian Bax. We have also received material, including many



First Holland auto license bureau Dec. 31, 1929

photographs, pertaining to former President Gordon Van Wylen. These files were transferred to the archives by the college's Office of Public Relations.

There seems to be a continuous stream of material coming in from the community for the collection of the Holland Historical Trust. This fall the Old Kent Bank of Holland donated some records of the People's State Bank. There is approximately 12 linear feet of material, which dates back to 1905. In addition to documenting some of Holland's business history there are a few interesting odds and

ends such as a 1930 telephone directory, a 200 year calendar which shows what day of the week any specific date from 1800 to 2002 falls on, and a 1929 photograph of the first Holland auto license bureau. Mrs. Jack Daniels has donated items from the Isaac Fairbanks family to the Trust collection. These materials include a sermon by Isaac, eight diaries of Isaac Henry Fairbanks, and the Fairbanks family Bible. Additional papers relating to Lida Rogers, of Tulip Time fame, were donated to the Historical Trust collection by Roszella Kortman.