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Local History is Alive and Online with Digital Holland, Michigan

By Allyson Hoffman

The Joint Archives of Holland is not guarded by a Smaug-esque dragon, but there is definitely a treasure trove of Holland archival documents within. This summer I had the opportunity to work with the treasures of the archives, learning about the history of Holland as a team of students, including myself, developed the website Digital Holland, Michigan.

Digital Holland, Michigan, or DHM as I like to call it, is the realization of a scholarly dream: to create a webspace that hosts research and artifacts about the Holland area. What makes DHM different from other websites that host information, such as Digital Commons @ Hope College, is that it includes different types of digital artifacts on each page—images, videos, and audio files—along with essays or summaries written by contributors. DHM was made possible by grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and is led by junior Mellon Scholar and associate director Erika Schlenker and myself. After the first two months of research and development, the website has an interactive map and more than 150 pages on the people, places, and events in Holland and at Hope College. The website also hosts historical maps of the area and image galleries of locations in Holland.

Dr. William Pannapacker, Director of the Mellon Scholars Program, and Geoffrey Reynolds, the Mary Riepma Ross Director of the Joint Archives of Holland, discussed for several years the possibility of students coming together to create a website housing digitized artifacts of Holland. I was a sophomore when I first heard about the potential project and wasn’t sure I could have a place in it. I’m not a history buff. To be honest, the history courses I took in high school bored me; I couldn’t relate to lists of names and dates and fill-in-the-blank worksheets.

In the spring of 2014, my junior year, I asked Dr. Pannapacker about the Digital Holland, Michigan project, and he said the project was waiting for a leader. I still wasn’t a history buff, but my classical studies, English, and philosophy courses were taught in such a way that the history was alive for me. History wasn’t boring anymore. I saw DHM as an opportunity to make history, local history, enjoyable for students and community members.

If you’re unsure if Holland history is still alive, look outside at those four-legged critters with fluffy tails: the squirrels. They aren’t native to Holland! Squirrels were brought from Ann Arbor to Holland in the nineteen-teens for a squirrel cage in Centennial Park. Well, the squirrels escaped and citizens kept feeding them. For some time, the city of Holland even reimbursed people who had purchased nuts to feed the friendly critters.

After a summer’s worth of work, I believe more than ever that DHM is a learning opportunity. But, for me, it’s

(continued on page 2)
not just about the history. I have picked up digital skills—Photoshop, iMovie, Garageband, HTML coding—that I will carry with me down whatever career path I take. I have honed research, relationship, and leadership skills. Best of all, I have started a project that is only just beginning, a project that will get bigger long after I graduate.

DHM is a pioneer resource for several reasons. It is sharing digital artifacts of Holland that have not been widely seen, publishing interviews many have not heard before, hosting videos long-forgotten. DHM is establishing relationships between student researchers and local historians, creating connections between campus and community. Finally, DHM calls for a digital humanities team composed of students from across the disciplines.

Creating a collaborative research team is like picking an all-star team for your sport of choice. You need players with different strengths to bring to the game and, no matter how diverse they are, all of them must share the same goal: success. This summer I had the honor of leading a stellar DHM team. The members represent disciplines from all areas—arts and humanities, sciences, and social sciences—a range of ages, and, of course, distinctive personal goals. Watch out, Holland: the work from these individuals will make you want to contribute to DHM, too.

Erika Schlenker received a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to conduct research and create the website. She is majoring in creative writing and communications. Erika says, “From working on DHM, I've discovered that history is exciting and fun, especially when you live in a community as rich with old artifacts and landmarks as Holland. I have a greater appreciation for the people and sites that make up Holland.” Her work lies in the very layout and design of DHM, along with pages such as “Juneteenth” and “The Warm Friend.”

Ian Bussan, a junior Mellon Scholar at Hope College, is a lead developer of DHM. He received a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to conduct research. He is studying history. Ian says, “DHM was an excellent application of research and writing skills key to my field of academic work, history, and a great opportunity to learn more about the historic sites of Holland.”

Julia Triezenberg is a senior at Black River Public School who hopes to study history and political science further in college. She is a volunteer at the Joint Archives of Holland. Julia says, “DHM was a fantastic way to immerse myself in my city's culture and make use of all of the resources I had around me.” She says her contribution to Digital Holland, Michigan introduced her to the world of digital humanities. Her work can be seen on DHM pages such as “Windmill Island.”

Joshua Briggs is a Mellon Scholar sophomore at Hope College studying economics and geology. Josh hopes to find a job in the petroleum industry or academia, where he can travel frequently. He says, “My experience in the Digital Holland, Michigan community has been one of personal growth and enrichment. Collaborating with archivists and other research students has furnished me...
with new abilities in the research field that will benefit me for years to come. For this, I am very grateful.” Josh contributed to DHM pages such as “The Knickerbocker Theatre” and “Pillar Church.”

Stephanie Emanuele is a Hope College Mellon Scholar and senior student pursuing a degree in creative writing. She is eager to see how her work in the digital humanities will apply to her intended career in marketing or graphic design. Stephanie says, “Working on the DHM project is a unique and incredibly beneficial experience. As a writer, it has honed my research, writing, and editing skills. The knowledge I gained from seeing this work transferred digitally is something I intend to utilize in the future.” Her preliminary contribution is “The Peanut Store,” and she will continue contributing to DHM in the 2014-2015 school year.

Rachel Foster, a senior nursing student at Hope College, hopes to obtain a couple solid years of general experience in the area before seeking out opportunities as a traveling nurse and/or additional education in a more specific field of nursing. DHM is her first project in the digital humanities and she says, “DHM has led me to discover the massive amounts of history surrounding the Holland community. My interest in the archives has heightened tremendously.” Rachel’s work includes the “Kremer House” and “Holland Hospital.”

Rebekah Llorens is a senior at Hope College studying history. She enjoys her work at the Joint Archives of Holland and hopes to pursue archival or historical work after graduation. Bekah says, “From my work on DHM, I’ve learned more about my college town and the influence that its history still has today. I’ve loved looking for obscure facts and information that may not be known to the general public and sharing them with others.” Her work can be seen on “James Huntley.”

There are more individuals than the contributors that make up the DHM team. Geoffrey Reynolds, the DHM advisor, has done everything a research team could ask for, guiding us to the collections we need, pointing us to places with the artifacts the archives does not have, suggesting topics and research questions, and helping us make connections with community members. Lori Trethewey, the office manager of the archives, has made us feel at home in the archives, answering questions and bringing collections to us faster than we can recite the names of the former mayors of Holland. Director Christopher Shires and Archivist Catherine Jung of the Holland Museum have graciously allowed the DHM team to access the collections hosted there, providing us with research resources we would find nowhere else in the world. Dr. William Pannapacker have been constant supporters of the project, offering suggestions and direction on writing and design for the website. The staff of the technology lab in Van Wylen library—Andrea Antenan, Brant Biba, Olivia Husbands, Hannah Larson, and Coordinator Daphne Fairbanks—continue to offer technology support when the DHM team has questions. The Van Wylen library staff, including Director Kelly Jacobsma, Electronic Resources Associate Chris Gould, and Metadata Librarian Brianne Hagen, have all supported the project in various ways, the least of which has been offering feedback on the website. Each of these individuals is an essential link of the DHM team, ensuring the website’s success.

Our intent for DHM is that it will transcend a single-time project and become a continuous one, with new contributions each semester. So long as there is history in the area to research and publish, the work for DHM will continue. We desire to have not only students, faculty, and staff contribute, but also community members of all ages who are interested in research. We welcome digital artifacts from the community as well; if someone has images, audio, or video files from a historical event and wants to share them, we will add them to the website.

DHM is anticipated to be a pilot website leading the 13-member Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) in cross-institutional collaborative work. There is the potential for research about the whole region to be done; certainly, there is plenty of material to sift through.

If you’re asking why DHM is important, you’re really asking why history is important. In response, I have no argument that has not been given by scholars before. I only have the Digital Holland, Michigan team, the Mellon Scholars Program, the Joint Archives of Holland, and the many users of the website to share their experiences with the project. I encourage you to talk to them, view the website https://sites.google.com/a/hope.edu/digitalholland/ for yourself, and see why history is important to you.

About the author: Allyson Hoffman is a Hope College senior majoring in creative writing and classical studies and minoring in philosophy. As a native of Michigan, she’s excited to explore and share the history of incredible cities such as Holland. After graduation, Allyson intends to pursue an MFA in fiction and a PhD in rhetoric and composition.
Reynolds is the inaugural recipient of the Mary Riepma Ross Directorship of the Joint Archives of Holland. The endowed position was established by Mary Riepma Ross to maintain and preserve the college’s archival program, including the organization and preservation of the Riepma/Van Zwaluwenburg family archives.

Located in the Theil Research Center, the Joint Archives of Holland contains materials about Hope and Western Theological Seminary, in addition to preserving information concerning other aspects of local history. The archives also assists other area organizations with their materials. In addition to Reynolds, the staff includes a part-time office manager and student assistants as well as several volunteers.

The archives 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. The Holland Historical Trust moved its materials to the Holland Museum in January 2003.

The archives moved to the Theil Research Center, which also houses the college’s A. C. Van Raalte Institute, in the fall of 2004. The Theil Research Center is located at 9 E. 10th St., between Central and College avenues.

Reynolds, who also holds an appointment as an associate professor at Hope, has been with the archives since 1997, when he joined the staff as a collections archivist with the rank of assistant professor.

He is active in professional associations and in historic preservation at the local, state and national levels as well. He is currently chairperson of the Holland Historical Trust Board of Trustees, treasurer of the Dutch-American Historical Commission, web site coordinator for the Dutch Heritage Coordinating Council, executive director of the Holland Area Historical Society, membership chairperson for the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies and on the Board of the Michigan Shipwreck Research Association. His numerous previous activities include having served as president and vice president of the Michigan Archival Association, and as president of the Michigan Oral History Association.

He has received awards including a Broadcasting Excellence award from the Michigan Association of Broadcasters in March 2011 for featuring programming focused on Holland history on WHTC radio, and an Award of Merit from the Historical Society of Michigan in October 2003 for the film “Tulip Time in Holland.” In April of this year, he received a Mentoring Award from the college’s Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Scholars Program for his work with students.

Reynolds is the author of several articles and has made many presentations regarding aspects of area history and topics related to archives. His scholarly interests include Michigan’s boat-building industry in particular. Among other presentations through the years, he delivered the address “Plastic Fantastic: Holland, Michigan’s Boat Building Industry and the Use of Reinforced Fiberglass Plastic” during the statewide June 19-21 symposium “Michigan Modern: Design that Shaped America,” held at Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids. In 2013, he was the guest curator for the exhibition “From Craft to Industry: The Boat Builders of Holland,” featured at the Holland Museum from June 13, 2013, through March 1, 2014.

Prior to coming to Hope, Reynolds was a records and information specialist with Infoflo Consulting Inc. in Southfield. He had also been a grants process leader with the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn; an archivist with Schroeder Information Services in Detroit; and an assistant archivist with Little Caesar Enterprises Inc. in Detroit. He was also executive museum director of the Harsha House Museum in Charlevoix, and was a social studies and English instructor at Boyne Falls High School.

He completed his master’s degree in library and information science at Wayne State University in 1995. He completed his bachelor’s degree at Central Michigan University in 1989.

Mary Riepma Ross, who died in 2013 at age 102, spent her career as an attorney, most of it in New York City, and was also active in philanthropy in the arts and education. A daughter of Sears F. Riepma and Mary Elizabeth (Van Zwaluwenburg) Riepma, she had several years previously contributed the family archival materials to the Joint Archives. Sears F. Riepma, a 1900 Hope graduate, was a minister in the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church and the Episcopalian Church.

*Hope College press release, Greg Olgers (8/20/2014)*
Boats to its product line up. In 1983, S2 Yachts
added Slickcraft, 14’2” Powerboats called Tiara Yachts, and Pursuit Fishing
sailboats. S2 Yachts then constructed a second facility in Ft. Pierce, Florida, and, in 1977, added Pursuit Fishing
Boats to its product line up. In 1983, S2 Yachts

\[ \text{H95-1256. Nykerk Family (1913-2004)} \]

Papers, 1936-2012. 6.50 linear ft.
Gerald and Rose Witteveen Nykerk, Reformed Church
in America missionaries to Arabia (Iraq, Kuwait, Oman,
and Bahrain) were influenced by Dr. Paul Harrison and
Tena Holkeboer, both career missionaries of the
Reformed Church in America. Gerald H. Nykerk served
as a medical doctor and Rose worked as a
medical assistant. In 1961, they were onboard the ill-
fated British passenger ship, the Dara, which burned and
sank in the Persian Gulf after an explosion from
undetermined causes. After her husband’s death in 1964,
Rose continued to work in the missionary field as
hospital administrator in Bahrain for eleven more
years. The collection consists of correspondence,
brochures, minutes of missionary meetings, interview
transcripts, newspaper clippings, and photographs of
Gerald and Rose Nykerk, as well as slides and
photographs of the mission stations where the Nykerks
served. The collection contains extensive information
relating to the tragedy onboard the Dara, including a
paper written by Mrs. Nykerk about the incident. The
collection also includes many essays written by both Dr.
and Mrs. Nykerk on various other topics.

\[ \text{H05-1564. S2 Yachts, Inc.} \]

Records, 1985-[ongoing]. 2.00 linear ft.
Leon Slikkers started at Chris-Craft in the joiner
department making cabin tops in 1946. In the early
1950s, Slikkers began building 14’ runabouts in his
garage after work. In 1954, at the age of 27, he registered the
Slickcraft name, and the following year he left a
promising career to open his own shop and fulfill his
dream. He sold his house and started a small factory on
Washington Avenue in Holland, Michigan. Slikkers
began experimenting with a new material called
fiberglass in 1955. Within three years, the company put a
few of the boats into production and, in 1961, stopped
building with wood completely. In 1969, Slikkers sold
Slickcraft to the AMF Corporation. He stayed on as
president to head up three AMF companies (including
Slickcraft), but eventually realized that the large
corporation’s business principles did not match his own
and left after four years. He started over in February
1974 building sailboats under the name S2 Yachts, Inc.
Within ten years, S2 was one of the top five sailboat
manufacturers in the United States, known for building
quality cruising vessels, as well as racing boats.
Gradually, the company began producing high-quality
powerboats called Tiara Yachts, and phasing out the
sailboats. S2 Yachts then constructed a second facility in
Ft. Pierce, Florida, and, in 1977, added Pursuit Fishing
Boats to its product line up. In 1983, S2 Yachts

\[ \text{W14-1414. Tysse, John W. (1900-1958).} \]

Papers, ca. 1932-1958. 0.50 linear ft.
John W. Tysse was born in South Holland, Illinois, on
November 29, 1900. He graduated from Hope College
in 1929 and earned a BD degree from Rutgers University
in 1932. He was licensed by the Classis of Chicago in
1932 and ordained by the Classis of Orange in 1932. He
served as a Reformed Church in America (RCA) pastor
for congregations in New York. The collection includes
biographical information and sermons.

\[ \text{H13-1851. Van Lente, Janice.} \]

Papers, 1954-1966. 0.50 linear ft.
The majority of this collection surrounds the John H.
Kleinheksel and Anna Sophia Van Raalte family. Anna
Sophia was the youngest daughter of Holland founder,
Rev. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte. She married John
H. Kleinheksel from Fillmore Township. He was the
head of the mathematics department and a professor at
Hope College, along with being vice president of Hope
College until his death in 1916. John was director of the
Peoples State Bank and Sunday school superintendent of
Hope Church. Also included in the collection is
material of Gerrit J Diekema and John B. Nykerk,
both renowned in the Hope College community. There
are additional documents pertaining to the life of Frank
De Moen Kleinheksel, Helena Pieters Kleinheksel,
Gretchen Ann Kleinheksel, Delia Ossewaarde
Kleinheksel, Albertus C. Van Raalte and family,
Albertus C. Van Raalte Gilmore and Clarence J. Lokker.
Materials include photographs, correspondence, lineage
trees, obituary and funeral records, marriage services,
baptism service, military correspondence, and warranty
deeds. Additional documents pertaining to Clarence J.
Lokker’s biographical information have been added.
Photographs within this collection show John H.
Kleinheksel, Anna Sophia Van Raalte Kleinheksel, Paul
Edwin Kleinheksel, Anna Vera Kleinheksel, Frank De
Moen Kleinheksel, John Lewis Kleinheksel, Gerrit J.
Kollen, Maria (Mary) Wilhelmina Van Raalte, and
additional members of the Van Raalte family and its
descendants.
Ronald P. Brown was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1933. He attended Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and majored in science. He graduated magna cum laude with an A.B. and majors in chemistry, mathematics and physics in 1955 and was offered teaching assistantships at twelve universities. At the University of Wisconsin, he worked toward a doctorate and taught in the science department on a teaching fellowship. At the end of his first year of graduate school, he felt called to enter the ministry and moved to Holland, Michigan, where he attended Western Theological Seminary. He was ordained by the Reformed Church in America in 1959 and accepted a call to the Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Michigan. From 1962-1966, he was the pastor of the Beverly Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. During the years 1966-1971, Brown served as pastor for Calvary Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois. In 1971, he was the founder and governor of the Calvary Free Academy, a K-12 Christian school of 200 students and was the pastor-founder of the King’s Community of Chicagoland, a 300-member, multi-racial independent congregation. Emphasis was on training lay leadership for home meetings and on corporate worship. He also founded a drug abuse ministry for girls in 1972. From 1967 until his death in 1981, Brown conducted a daily, listener-supported, hour-long question and answer call-in radio broadcast called Question Line, which was named the most influential Christian radio broadcast in Chicago. The collection is made up of Question Line digest booklets, 1969-1973, and audiotape cassettes and reel-to-reel tapes of Brown’s sermons, 1968-1982. These sermons are also stored as digital files on a computer hard drive.

Holland Area Historical Society 2014-2015

The Holland Area Historical Society focuses on the history and heritage of the Holland area. Its programs are designed to inform the membership through a series of quality presentations, tours, and other events focusing on the area’s past. If you are not a member, we encourage you to join our group and participate in an exciting year of programs!
orchestras have called Holland home over the years, too. Join Kay Walvoord, the organization’s president and CEO, as she reviews the history of the HSO, as well as smaller organizations and their influences on the orchestra.

World War II Life in the “Old Home Town” – Part 2
Tuesday, February 10, 2015 – 7:30 p.m.
Winants Aud., Graves Hall, Hope College
263 College Ave., Holland
In observance of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, local historian and author Randy Vande Water concludes his presentation of Holland’s civilian and military participation in World War II. Topics will include Selective Service (Draft), civil defense and bonds, Tulip Time, National Guard and Pearl Harbor.

PLEASE NOTE LOCATION CHANGE.

Remarkable Ramona Park
Tuesday, March 10, 2015 - 7:30 p.m.
Maas Center Auditorium, Hope College
264 Columbia Ave., Holland
Situated on the shores of Reeds Lake in East Grand Rapids, from 1903 through 1954, Ramona Park resembled Holland’s Jenison Electric Park. Join author Mrs. Gail Snow as she tells the story of this west Michigan amusement park through narrative, photographs, newspaper clippings, and stories. Signed books will be available for purchase.

Elzinga & Volkers: A Unique Experience
Tuesday, April 14, 2015 - 7:30 p.m.
Maas Center Auditorium, Hope College
264 Columbia Ave., Holland
Elzinga & Volkers is a locally owned and operated Michigan corporation with headquarters in Holland, Michigan. Since its establishment in 1945, Elzinga & Volkers has been committed to creating lifelong clients through the simple principles of their mission statement: Listen, Solve, Satisfy. Join Paul and Marshall Elzinga, the company’s past presidents, for a look back at the rich history of this company.

The Early Years for an Irish-American Family in Holland: The Donnellys
Tuesday, June 9, 2015 – 7:30 p.m.
Maas Center Auditorium, Hope College
264 Columbia Ave., Holland
Donnelly Corporation was founded by Bernard P. Donnelly in 1905 in Holland, Michigan, as a manufacturer of mirrors for the then-thriving Michigan furniture industry and later the American automobile industry. Join third generation family member John Donnelly as he tells the story of an Irish-American family from Chicago coming to Holland.

HOLLAND AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The major goal of the Society is to bring together persons with an interest in history and at the same time promote awareness in the general public of the cultural heritage of the Holland area. In accordance with this goal, the Historical Society sponsors, on a regular basis, a variety of lectures, field trips and other historical activities. Monies collected through membership fees and fundraising activities go towards financing the activities of the Society. The Holland Area Historical Society is not affiliated with the Holland Museum or Holland Historical Trust.

For more details about the meetings or membership, contact Geoffrey Reynolds at the Joint Archives of Holland (616-395-7798).

MEMBERSHIPS

Individual: $15 per year - entitles you to vote, hold office and participate in all activities sponsored by the Society.
Family: $20 per year - covers all members of family; benefits same as Individual with one vote per family.
Sustaining: $30 per year - this category is for individuals who would like to provide greater financial support for the Society.
Life: $300 - enables you to enjoy regular membership benefits on a continuous basis.
Student: $5 per year - benefits same as Individual.
Senior Citizen (55 years and older): $10 per year - benefits same as Individual.
Non-Profit Institutional: $15 per year.
Corporate: $50 per year.

Name________________________________________
Address________________________________________
City__________________State________Zip__________
Phone_________________________________________
Email__________________________________________
Membership Type _______________________________

Mail to: Holland Area Historical Society
c/o The Joint Archives of Holland
Hope College
PO Box 9000
Holland, MI 49422-9000

BOARD OF DIRECTORS TERM EXPIRES
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Geoffrey Reynolds, Director ex-officio
Digital Holland, Michigan has brought local history alive and online to researchers around the world.