

**Robert P. Swierenga.** *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City.* Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002. xx + 908 pp. \$49.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8028-1311-4.



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## A Tale of Churches and Waste-Haulers

This book about Dutch Chicago from the 1840s to roughly the 1980s has the size of a bible and that fact may be symbolic in more than one way. It is mainly about Dutch Calvinist immigrants and their endeavor to constitute a covenanted community guided by God's Word as spoken by their ministers, and it is Swierenga's tribute to his ancestors and the Dutch Calvinist subculture in Chicago and beyond. Robert Swierenga is professor emeritus of history at Kent State University and presently A.C. van Raalte Research Professor of History at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. Colleagues, volunteers, and students of Hope College and Calvin College assisted in translating records and letters, and in video- and audiotaping interviews with former inhabitants of Dutch neighborhoods. Some of them were businessmen or waste-haulers (the Huizenga family for instance) who count among the benefactors of the A.C. van Raalte Institute and other Dutch Calvinist institutions. All this material found its way into 755 pages of text and another 63 pages of appendices about garbage and cartage companies,

churches, schools, missions, societies, clubs, and church membership between 1853 and 1978. Presently, Reformed congregations include only 23,000 members, or 10 percent of the city's Dutch ethnics. I wonder how many of the estimated 250,000 Chicago inhabitants of Dutch descent will identify with this tale of ethnic neighborhoods, churches, and schools. About three-quarters of their ancestors were Calvinists who managed to keep complete Americanization at bay for more than three or even four generations. The urban working-class West Side community relocated five times from the center to the suburbs, while more rural ethnic neighborhoods joined the white flight in the post-World War II era. The story about the community building and successive relocations around Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches and related Christian schools is told in great detail and invites historians to compare this process of voluntary ghettoization with the road taken by other ethnic groups.

In the 1840s Dutch immigrants started to flock together in the West Side, Roseland, and South Holland where they engaged in truck gar-

dening. By 1900, about 14,000 of them had gathered in ethnic neighborhoods. More than half were self-employed and all were very church-minded; those open to Evangelical influences worshipped in Reformed churches and those more attached to Dutch pietist and doctrinal traditions and church-related education worshipped in Christian Reformed churches. Some ministers such as Bernardus de Bey (1818-1894) were important community leaders. His daughter Cornelia, who was trained as a medical doctor, became one of Chicago's leading female reformists along with Jane Addams. A seemingly endless parade of other ministers who built churches and schools and who quarreled about doctrine, the introduction of English language services, and the dangers and temptations of the American world reminds the reader that many of them were inward looking. Of course the ministers tended and followed their flocks who were fleeing blacks and other white ethnics moving out of central cities and who themselves were moving up in society. Thanks to Christian schools and colleges, the Christian Reformed were longer able to avoid intermarriage and keep their covenanted community Dutch. Although they still cling to Christian education and Calvinist or Neo-Calvinist ideas about church and society, they too have moved closer to the Evangelical mainstream just as the Reformed did before.

Inspired by faith and family, in the world but not of the world, Dutch wage-earners constituted an obedient labor force whose members strived to become self-employed. Some, especially those originating from the province of Groningen in Holland, were extremely successful in that respect. Teamstering brought the Chicago Dutch economic prosperity. Hauling garbage and freight became the mainstay of Groninger employment. By the 1930s the Dutch almost monopolized the waste hauling industry. Dutch scavengers formed an association to regulate business and limit competition. The Dutch association that owned or controlled most dumps managed to buy out their

Irish competitors in spite of their political connections and, in the 1960s, also bought out their Italian competitors who were backed or run by the mob. Most of the 450 Dutch-owned companies that were counted since 1890 merged into the Waste Management conglomerate during the 1970s.

According to one of the directors involved, Peter H. Huizenga, Dutchmen had garbage in their blood, but the reasons are lost to history (p. 576). As Swierenga cites this statement as a matter of fact, he misses a vital point in explaining why Groninger immigrants found this niche. In the provincial capital that goes by the same name, turning garbage into compost and selling it to farmers had developed as a very profitable business run by the municipality. With this example in mind, Groninger immigrants confidently entered this lowly business. I wonder if some of them had been waste-haulers in Groningen. Due to the book's scope it reads as a storehouse of documentation about Dutch Calvinist institutions and organizations. That may be interesting for insiders, but outsiders may wish for a more succinct narrative and more analysis and comparison. Outstanding features that need to be studied in this way are the voluntary ghettoization and the remarkable white flight from the West Side, and the stunning performance of Groninger waste-haulers beating their Irish and Italian competitors. Apart from this general criticism, I have some minor criticisms: consumption was not a plague of poverty, but a disease that wrought havoc among all classes (p. x); Reverend Henry Pasma, mentioned on page 215, published a very interesting autobiography (*Close-Hauled*, New York, 1930); the accounts of insiders dominate while there are also accounts from renegades such as the novelist Peter DeVries and letters from Dutch outsiders (socialists for instance) that give a different, less favorable picture of the "covenanted community." All the same Swierenga has compiled an overwhelming documentary story of Dutch Chicago that pays tribute to generations of

hard-working and hard-praying immigrants and provides other historians material to ponder and explore further.

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