One of the significant waves of immigration from the Netherlands to the United States of America in the mid nineteenth century found its way to the state of Iowa, under the leadership of dissident Protestant minister Reverend Hendrik Pieter Scholte (1805–1868), who named his new “kolonie” Pella. As the community grew, an offshoot was established, christened Orange City. Today these two Iowa towns still proudly celebrate their Dutch heritage. Pella, just south of the capital city Des Moines in central Iowa, and Orange City, in the far northwest of the state, both register their ethnic roots through many conspicuous visual signs, including the cultivation of geographical landmarks, such as traditional architecture and even windmills (Fig. 1); the practice of traditional arts, such as carving wooden shoes; and the observance of annual rituals deploying an array of recognizably Dutch symbols—most notably, their spring tulip festivals.

Especially for those who may never have visited either of these communities, the first purpose of this article is simply to familiarize readers with them, with a brief review of the histories of their origins. But I focus here initially on windmills and wooden shoes and tulips because they are among the many visible signs through which these communities assert their Dutch heritage. As an art historian, my concern is with their visual culture. What is its role in the cultural life of these people? More particularly, how does visual culture function to perpetuate social memory, assert social cohesion, even inculcate societal values? What can it teach us about the power of visual culture within societies in general, but in migrated populations such as these in particular?\footnote{Acknowledgements to Anne Rosenberg for her assistance with research and photography in Pella and Orange City, and to the Iowa Research Experience for Undergraduates funding from the University of Iowa which made this project possible. A preliminary draft of the first part of this article was presented as a talk at the...}
Fig. 1  Orange City Visitor’s Center and Chamber of Commerce, Orange City, Iowa. Photo: Julie Hochstrasser.