MAARTEN NOORDTZIJ, THE PRESIDENT, OF THE HOLLAND-AMERICAN LAND- AND IMMIGRATION-COMPANY*

by Peter de Klerk

There is a scarcity of historical research concerning the Dutch immigration to Colorado during the years 1892-1893. Manuscript sources, such as letters, official documents, ship passenger lists, court house records, and especially newspaper accounts (to be used, of course, with extraordinary caution), have supplemented the limited immigration data that has formed the basis of the current research. These manuscript materials have been the primary sources in studying the weal and woe of the Dutch immigrants to Colorado. Even though a good number of the Dutch immigrants stayed in Colorado for only one year, while others were already resettled in Iowa after having been there only a few months. This, in a sense, tragical and pathetic episode has some remarkably variegated happenings.

* A Dutch translation of this article will appear in Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland.


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This paper attempts to treat the involvement of Maarten Noordtzij, the President of the Holland-American Land- and Immigration Company, under whose auspices the immigrants had come to Colorado, with this Dutch immigration. As a respected professor at the Theological School of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Kampen, Noordtzij was a man of considerable influence not only in the Reformed denomination but also in Christian education and Christian politics.

Maarten, born on October 14, 1840, in Rotterdam, was the only child of Ary and Adriana Noordtzij. Since he was a child of much prayer (Adriana was thirty-four years old when her son was born), his parents often wondered whether they would be allowed to keep him. Thirteen times he had to be rescued out of the water. Being a fair child with sparkling brown eyes he caught the attention of a few traveling showmen, was kidnapped by them and later on returned to his parents. Then a severe brain disease brought him to the brink of death but he recovered fully from this ordeal. When he and his parents moved to Vlissingen, Province of Zeeland, in 1851, he there came under the influence of the preaching of Willem H. Gispen, who became his spiritual father. In September, 1862, at the age of twenty-two, he enrolled in the Theological School at Kampen. With a keen mind, and a strong body that only needed a few hours of sleep, he became a candidate of theology in 1867. He served three congregations: St. Anna Parochie, Province of Friesland (1867-1869); Heereveen, Province of Friesland (1869-1873); and Schiedam, Province of Zuid-Holland (1873-1875). At that time the 1875 Synod of 's-Hertogenbosch, Province of Noord-Brabant, appointed him to the chair of the Old and New Testament at the Theological School in Kampen. His real interest was hermeneutics, isagogics and particularly archaeology, which led Abraham Kuenen, professor at the University of Leiden to remark when Noordtzij's son, Arie enrolled at the University of Leiden: "Thus you are the son of that gentleman in Kampen, who believes in pots and pans?".

When Noordtzij died on February 9, 1915, the last link between the fathers of the Afscheiding and his generation at Kampen was severed. In

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3 Harm Bouwman, “Prof. M. Noordtzij”, in Almanak van het Studentencorps "Fides Quaerit Intellectum" voor het Jaar 1911 (Kampen: Ph. Zalsman, 1910), pp. 176-177.
5 Ibid., p. 338.