

A
SPIRITUAL
HOUSE
PRESERVED

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HOUSE
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*A Century in
the River's Bend*

1916-2016

Edited by CALVIN KALSBECK



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A HOUSE BUILT BY CHRIST



Rev. David Overway

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

1 PETER 2:4-5

THANKS BE UNTO GOD! AND THANKS BE unto his Son, Jesus Christ our savior, who gathers, defends, and preserves us! For he has built us and preserved us for one hundred years as a church, as a congregation, as a spiritual house for himself!

All the praise and thanksgiving must be directed unto God in Jesus Christ, for he is the one who has built us up and preserved us. We have not built ourselves. We have not been preserved by our own doing. On this one-hundredth anniversary of our existence as a congregation, we are not lifted up with pride in ourselves. Nor will we praise our forefathers or ourselves as if the spiritual house of our church has been built and preserved by men. But Christ must receive all our praise, for he alone has built us up and preserved us to be a spiritual house for his Father.

A house of God is what he has made us to be. The church is a house wherein God dwells. So says Ephesians 2:22: "Ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16). This is also the idea of 1 Peter 2:5, as it speaks of our being built up as a "spiritual house." As a church we are a spiritual house, a house within which God dwells by his Spirit.

He dwells within us as our covenantal God. He reveals himself within us and unto us as our covenantal Father and friend. He communes with us, speaking to us and listening to us as he dwells within us as a congregation and graciously causes us to enjoy the fellowship of his family friendship.

As a spiritual house we are also a living house. 1 Peter 2:5 says that we are “lively,” or better, “living” stones. Each member of the church is a living stone, arranged together to form a living house. We are a house of God that is alive with a spiritual life by virtue of the Spirit’s dwelling within us.

Although this spiritual house is made up of many stones, yet it is one house. Each stone is so united to each and every other stone that one united house is formed: many stones, yet one house; many members, yet one church. This is true of our congregation at any point in time. This is also true of our congregation over the generations, even over the past one hundred years: many members, indeed, but all sharing such a unity that we have been, and are, one house—“a spiritual house” of God.

All of this is because we have been built by Christ. The verb in the original for “built up” in 1 Peter 2:5 is passive, indicating that the church does not build herself, but is built by another. Christ identifies himself as the builder in Matthew 16:18: “I will build my church.” He established the legal right to build us into the house of God through his suffering and death on the cross. By the cross he also gained for us the right to be used as living stones in Hope church.

That we are built by Christ, then, means that we are built in grace. Everything about his building us to be a spiritual house is gracious. Since his grace is always sovereign, particular, and almighty, so also is his building of us into a spiritual house. What a comfort!

Graciously and mightily he builds us upon himself, for he is the cornerstone of the church. Verse 4 refers to him as a “living stone,” while verses 6 and 7 make clear that this living stone is also the “chief corner stone.” He is the foundation of the church, the unmovable, solid rock upon which the universal church and every congregation within her is built.

We are established upon Christ, the cornerstone, because we are established upon his word (Eph. 2:20). Christ has built us up by establishing us upon the truth and a strong confession of that truth. The apostle Peter, as he wrote the words of this text, certainly remembered Jesus' instruction to him, when upon his confessing the truth of Christ, the Lord had said to him, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). So must we remember how precious the truth of Christ is to us as a church, for it is our very foundation, the rock upon which we are built. We stand as a church today because Christ has built us upon the truth, and we have been preserved for one hundred years because Christ has faithfully maintained us upon the cornerstone of his truth.

Upon this foundation of truth he has built us up as living stones, adding stone upon stone, generation by generation. According to his covenantal promise, he has added to our number over the years the elect children of covenantal believers, even while gathering the previous generation to take their place in that spiritual house of many mansions in glory. He has also added others who have joined our congregation over the years, and he has fit them into the spiritual house and remembered his promise to them, too, to save believers and their seed in their generations.

His building us up has included not only adding to our number but also adding to our strength. The verb for "built up" in 1 Peter 2:5 also carries the meaning of "to strengthen." How marvelously Christ has strengthened us. He has led us through many trials, difficulties, and sorrows. All the while and even *through* those trials, he has strengthened us. He has taught us to cling ever more tightly to the truth about himself as our only comfort in our pilgrim journeys. By his Spirit within us and among us he has worked in us a growth in our knowledge and love of this truth. Thereby he has strengthened us.

Christ is continuously building his spiritual house. Never does he rest; always as the faithful servant of God and savior of the church, he builds. The verb in the original also indicates this ongoing activity. In our past Christ has built us up. In the present he is building us up. This

is our comfort for the future, too, for he will continue to build us up as a spiritual house unto God.

Therefore we have been preserved. All the opposition of the gates of hell have not prevailed against us (Matt. 16:18), because Christ has built us, and Christ has preserved us as a spiritual house of God upon the Cornerstone of his saving truth. We are a house built by Christ!

Thanks be unto God! Thanks be unto his Son and our savior, Jesus Christ! For he has built us and preserved us! To him be all the praise!

EDITOR'S COMMENTS



A Baby is Born

IN THE FALL OF 2014 THE COUNCIL of Hope Protestant Reformed Church asked the congregation for volunteers to serve on the one-hundredth anniversary committee. On December 1, 2014, those who volunteered met and decided to divide into two committees, one to plan the activities for the celebration and one to plan a commemorative book. The two committees continued the evening by meeting independently to formulate initial plans of action to meet the council's mandate, that is, "as a committee [to] decide how you will handle the celebration." This mandate was the *council's* mandate, and as such it served as a reminder to the committee members that we were accountable to the council. Therefore, the committee regularly reported its progress and received in return the council's approval of the work.

The four members of the commemorative book committee (Susann Grasman, Calvin Kalsbeek, Evelyn Langerak, and David Moelker) considered the council's mandate with the result that the volume the reader is now holding, *A Spiritual House Preserved: A Century in the River's Bend*, was conceived. Little did we know at the time the monstrosity that would be born after a trying, sixteen-month pregnancy. But born it is and monstrous it is too.

It did not take the book committee long to figure out that publishing a fairly comprehensive book about Hope's one-hundred-year history in sixteen months was much more than the four of us could handle. Thus we enlisted help—lots of help. Once we determined what we thought needed to be included in the book, we enlisted an army of willing writers. Upon reception of their contributions, the committee added a multitude of pictures, picture captions, and sidebars that related to their writings. Throughout the pregnancy, however, it was

not uncommon for the committee members to think of something else to include in “the book” or to receive new ideas from the congregation. Fueled by those ideas, the committee members would ask at our next meetings, “What about this?” or “What about that?” or “Shouldn’t we include a chapter on...?” or...? And without fail we answered, “Yes, we should include that; the book will not be complete without it.”

So you see this monstrous baby is not all our fault. If the prospective writers had not been so willing, if the congregation had not been so free in sharing its ideas and memories, if our members had not been so willing to share their pictures; much of this would not have happened. But happened it has, and grateful we are for all the contributions.

The good thing is that as a congregation we can truly say, “This book is OUR baby!” And the story it tells is, by the grace of our faithful heavenly Father, ours too. Thanks be to him!

Acknowledgments

Many contributors to *A Spiritual House Preserved* deserve recognition for their valued writing. Their names are found along with their contributions. These include seven former ministers who in ignorance believed their work at Hope was finished when they took a call to another congregation; eight busy sons of Hope in the gospel ministry who without complaint agreed to make contributions; and at least thirty members of Hope church whose fingers have “touched” these pages, some in very significant ways. Three of them willingly used their photography and photo editing skills to enhance the book.

There are also many others who deserve our expressions of appreciation.

Gerald Elders and Hope Christian Reformed Church willingly shared the translated Dutch minutes of the early years of Hope church and permitted us to use interview quotes from their seventy-fifth anniversary book, *The History of Hope 1916–1991*.

Grandville Historical Commission was very accommodating in providing pictures relating to early transportation on the Grand River.

Dick Harms and the personnel of Calvin College Hekman Library

cheerfully gave of their time and expertise to locate and allow us to use pertinent pictures and documents relating to Hope's history.

Gordon Mast and First Jenison Christian Reformed Church researched their early minutes at our request.

Tom and Bonnie Moelker of Moelker Orchards repeatedly responded to our requests for pictures relating to Hope's early history. The best pictures of Hope's early buildings were received from them.

James Morren and Walker United Reformed Church provided pictures and information relating to Hope's beginnings and to Hope's charter members who came from the Walker church.

Gerald Roberts, who lives in the old Pelton house on the corner of Kenowa and Luce, shared pictures and information relating to the early history of River Bend.

Fourteen people, whose names are listed in chapter 7, courageously submitted to interviews and provided pictures for the book. Charles Terpstra submitted for this chapter the interview he conducted with his uncle, Dewey Engelsma, in the 1980s.

Daughter congregations, Faith, Grandville, and Grace, readily submitted to mother Hope's requests for histories of their congregations and appropriate pictures.

Philip Harbach was very gracious in submitting family photos and writing and submitting for publication a record of his father's work as a missionary of Hope church.

Charles Terpstra and the Protestant Reformed seminary upon request tirelessly answered many requests for information from the archives of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

On every page of this volume is evident the expertise of Katherine Lloyd, the typesetter. We thank her for the professional design, typesetting, photo editing, and photo placement. Her ideas, advice, accuracy, and timeliness were invaluable, along with her willingness to typeset and to "develop" the book chapter by chapter with the committee.

Thanks also to the many members and former members of Hope church and others whose contributions of pictures and memories added some spice where it was needed.

The anniversary book committee must be commended (even though that includes the editor) for its excellent work while under a lot of pressure because of time constraints. Busy they were deciding book and chapter titles, layout, researching historical documents and minutes, writing, gathering pictures and quotes, copyediting, proofreading, and a multitude of other tasks connected with the book. When you ask them about it, they will tell you that it was enjoyable work, but it was *work*, and lots of it, nonetheless. Thanks for a job well done!

Much could be written concerning what Hope's one-hundredth anniversary committee has experienced and accomplished over the past eighteen months, but we chose not to bore the reader with the details. We would all agree on this however that when we started, we did not really know what we were getting into. But get into it we did; and survive, even thrive, we did as well. As the chairman of the committee, words fail to express adequately my appreciation for their dedicated focus, energy, and exceptional faithfulness in carrying out the work assigned us by Hope's council. Thank you, one-hundredth anniversary committee!



Anniversary committee back left to right: David Moelker, Hank Vander Waal, Clare Kuiper;
middle: Brenda Bomers, Evelyn Langerak, Deb Vander Waal, Cal Kalsbeek;
front: Susann Grasman, Erin Rutgers, Valerie Van Baren, John Van Baren, Linda Kalsbeek

Members of Hope Protestant Reformed Church are encouraged, when occasion permits, to express their thanks to those listed above for their valuable contributions to this volume and the anniversary celebration.

EDITOR'S FOREWORD



THE STORY OF HOPE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH is only a tiny chapter in the massive, unfinished book that encompasses the history of the entire body of Christ.

This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be...

Furthermore, this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit.¹

In other words Hope Protestant Reformed Church does not stand alone. Using the inspired words of the apostle Paul, she is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20).

Hope’s spiritual lineage therefore begins with Adam and flows through the patriarchs and Old Testament Israel. Furthermore, she traces her new dispensational bloodlines through the apostolic church and the Roman Catholic Church. Following the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, her tradition is that of the decisions of Dordrecht and the Reformed churches of the Netherlands. As a result of the *Afschieding* (Secession) of 1834 in the Netherlands, Hope’s spiritual ancestors came to America in 1846 under the leadership of Rev. Albertus Van Raalte and settled in dense forests of western Michigan. After a brief time in the Reformed Church of America, in 1857 four small

1 Belgic Confession 27, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 58–60.

congregations formed what is today the Christian Reformed Church of America, and in this small denomination Hope was born on June 8, 1916.

During the centennial anniversary of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, we do well to pause, if just briefly, to consider what the Lord did for us at each of these junctures in our spiritual lineage.

We are not Jews, yet the Lord was pleased through the history of Old Testament Israel to reveal himself as a covenantal God who would deliver his people from their sins by means of the Head of the covenant, his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. His atoning death on the cross fulfilled all of the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies.

At Pentecost Christ poured out his Spirit on his church. This opened the way for us as Gentiles to be incorporated into Christ's church. Then by means of the Spirit-lead apostles the New Testament church received the fundamentals of the Christian faith as revealed in the New Testament scriptures. After the death of the apostles, false teachers arose to challenge many of the apostolic teachings, including the very divinity of the Lord himself. These challenges were purposeful, however, as they would lead Christ's church to make those challenged apostolic doctrines their own by means of church decisions and creeds. For example, at Nicea in 325 the church wrote the Nicene Creed to confirm the truth that Christ is not merely a creature of God, but that Christ himself is God. In 431 the church condemned the errors of Pelagius and established the truth concerning man's original sin and total depravity and thereby demonstrated man's need of a savior that is both God and man, "because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned should likewise make satisfaction for sin."² These precious truths continue to be preached and taught in our midst.

The development of errors in the church of our spiritual lineage persisted, however. In what became known as the Roman Catholic Church, during the late ancient period and the Middle Ages, many new false teachings arose. In addition to establishing the unbiblical, hierarchical

² Heidelberg Catechism A 16, in *ibid.*, 88.

form of church government in which the pope ruled and was made the head of the church, Rome promoted the worship of saints, the adoration of Mary, and the worship of relics. While many other errors developed, two of the most notable were the false doctrine of transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and the wine of the Lord's supper are changed into the flesh and blood of Christ) and the teaching that one is justified by faith and works. Hope Protestant Reformed Church and all those who trace their spiritual ancestry to the sixteenth-century protestant Reformation were by God's grace delivered from those errors through the faithful labors of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox.

After the great Reformation, Hope's spiritual lineage is traced to the reformational branch most influenced by John Calvin. Our forebearers in the Lowlands (Belgium and the Netherlands) adopted as their own two protestant creeds: the Heidelberg Catechism and the Netherlands (Belgic) Confession. This action would prove very costly as Roman Catholic Spain (ruler over the Lowlands) employed every means at its disposal (including the Spanish Inquisition) to extinguish all the Protestants there. Spain's goals, however, were contrary to our Lord's wisdom. When the dust settled, the Lowlands were divided into Spanish Roman Catholic Belgium and an independent protestant Netherlands under the leadership of William of Orange.

Since this conflict with Spain connected the protestants in the Netherlands (church) with William of Orange (state) against their common enemy (Roman Catholic Spain), understandably these beginnings in the Netherlands led to a very close affiliation between the church and the state. This would not bode well for the church. Over time there developed in the Netherlands what could be called a state church. Resulting from this situation was a church that was rapidly corrupted by state interference in church affairs. The government in the Netherlands even determined if and when church synods could meet, with the result that false doctrine could be taught without fear of discipline. The errors of the Arminians were addressed by the Synod of Dordrecht (1618–19) only because Prince Mauritz favored those who supported orthodoxy. Through the work of this synod, Hope inherited

the doctrinal riches of the well-known five points of Calvinism. In the end however false doctrine prevailed in the Dutch Reformed churches until 1834 when under the leadership of Hendrik de Cock a secession (*Afscheiding*) occurred, which was the next step in Hope's spiritual succession. However, this secession was strongly resisted by the state church. As a result, those who left the state church were persecuted by being fined, imprisoned, and restricted in their worship.

Consequently some of the leaders and people of the Secession of 1834 left the Netherlands and came to America beginning in 1846. Men such as Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte (Holland, Michigan) and Rev. Cornelius Vander Meulen (Zeeland, Michigan) led the way. Their followers would experience many difficulties in western Michigan, but none greater than the internal conflict that divided them in 1857. In that year four small congregations separated from their union with the churches known today as the Reformed Church of America because in that denomination lodge membership was accepted, the Heidelberg Catechism was no longer preached regularly, changes were made in the Church Order and creeds, and hymns were allowed in the churches. When the dust settled those four churches began what today is known as the Christian Reformed Church of America. Hope Protestant Reformed Church began in 1916, just forty years later, in the Grand River's bend in what today is Walker, Michigan, with the name Hope Christian Reformed Church.

This abbreviated story of Hope's spiritual ancestry makes clear that there is no room for Hope's members to boast: what we have is the result of God's gifts to us though a "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1). It also demonstrates that the existence of Hope Protestant Reformed Church for one hundred years is by the grace of God "a spiritual house... acceptable to God" not because of anything special about Hope, but because she is "chosen of God, and precious" in his sight (1 Pet. 2:4-5).³

This book is Hope's meager, but heart-felt, expression of gratitude for God's faithfulness. All thanks and praise to him!

3 1 Peter 2:4-5 is the text Rev. John R. Brink preached on at Hope's organization, and it is the theme of Hope's centennial celebration.

Part One

THE HISTORY
OF A
SPIRITUAL HOUSE
PRESERVED

Editor's Introduction to Part One

Astounding it is to consider what God has done by incorporating us into his universal church.

Equally astounding it is to consider his faithfulness in gathering, defending, and preserving Hope as a local manifestation of the body of Christ in the Grand River's bend. No doubt, Hope's founders understood what it meant to be a local manifestation of the body of Christ, and were well aware of and committed to living that truth as it is expressed in the Belgic Confession:

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation, that no person, of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them.¹

Part one clearly demonstrates that Hope's founders and membership throughout her one-hundred-year history were committed to the duty to "join and unite themselves" to the true church. They understood that to do otherwise is to "act contrary to the ordinance of God."² At times this would prove costly. Yet they counted the cost and by the grace of God were found faithful.

Part one further demonstrates Hope's firm resolve in "bowing their

1 Belgic Confession 28, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 60–61

2 Belgic Confession 28, in *ibid.*, 61

necks under the yoke of Christ” and separating “themselves from all those who do not belong to the church,” as is abundantly clear in her history during the controversies of 1924 and 1953. While the controversies were costly in the loss of buildings, members, and friends, the losses were of little consequence when compared to what they retained by “submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline” of King Jesus.³

Humbling it is to consider that our majestic, mighty King has been pleased to work this wonder of his grace in a tiny corner of western Michigan nestled in a hook-like bend in the Grand River.

He alone is worthy of our thanks and praise!

3 Belgic Confession 28, in *ibid.*, 60–61.

Chapter 1

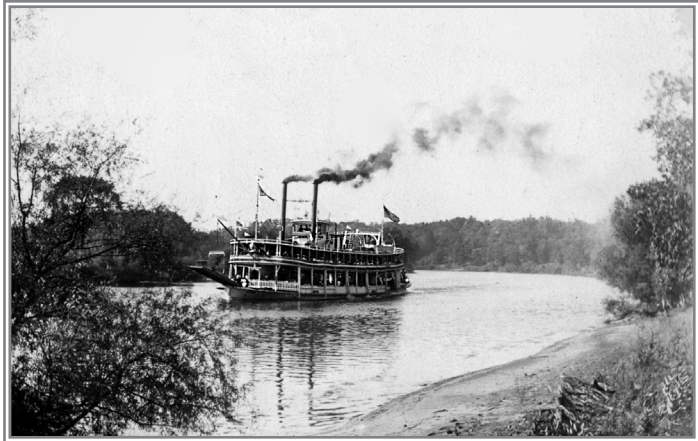


HOPE'S BEGINNINGS IN THE RIVER'S BEND

Calvin Kalsbeek

1916 MARKED AN *END* AND A *BEGINNING* in the Grand River's bend located in what today is Walker, Michigan.

Ending was the steamboat era that had begun in 1837 with the launching of the steamboat *Governor Mason*. *Governor Mason* soon had competition from the *Owashtonong*, which sported the first steam whistle to be heard in the Grand River Valley.



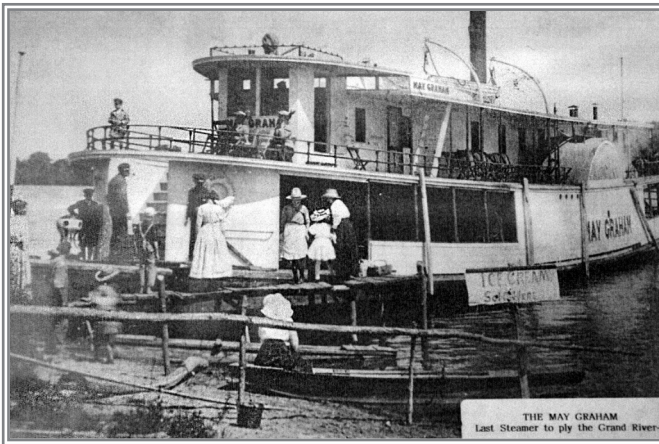
Sternwheel steamboat on the Grand River

These forerunners to steamboat traffic on the Grand were soon followed by a host of others. However, the whine of the first train whistle in Grand Rapids on June 27, 1858, spelled the death knell of the

riverboats. Although the riverboat traffic on the Grand River gradually declined, it hung on for another fifty years; but just barely.

“Some school children were afraid to go to school when they first heard the [steamboat’s] whistle, because they “thought it was a panther howling in the woods.”¹

May Graham was the last steamer to pass through the swing bridge in Eastmanville, and maybe, just maybe, Hope charter member, Jantje (Jennie) Engelsma, heard that last mournful whistle blast of the *May Graham* as it quietly navigated the river’s bend near the Engelsma’s farm where Kenowa Avenue dead-ends to the Grand River.



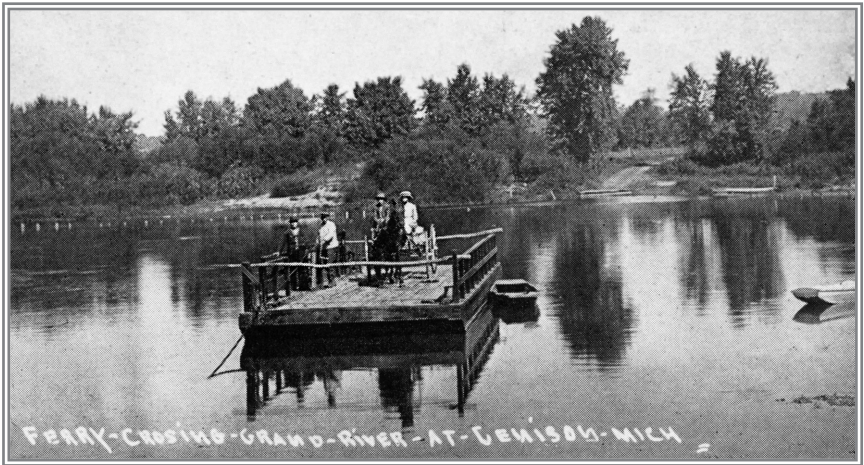
The *May Graham* was the last riverboat to travel on the Grand River.

Beginning in the river’s bend in 1916 was a newly instituted church of our Lord Jesus Christ. During the years prior, its founders had little interest in forming a new congregation, but a decision of the Michigan State Highway Department would change that.

¹ *Grand River Scrapbook* (1894), quoted in Don Chrysler, *The Story of Grand River: A Bicentennial History* (n.p.: Don Chrysler, 1975), 11.

In 1912 the State Highway Department built a ferry to cross the river between River Bend and Jenison. Christian Reformed families [north of the Grand River] began attending the Jenison Christian Reformed Church instead of churches in Grand Rapids. However, the Highway Department abandoned the ferry service in 1914 leaving the people who had been attending the churches in Jenison to decide whether to return to the Grand Rapids churches or to form a church of their own.²

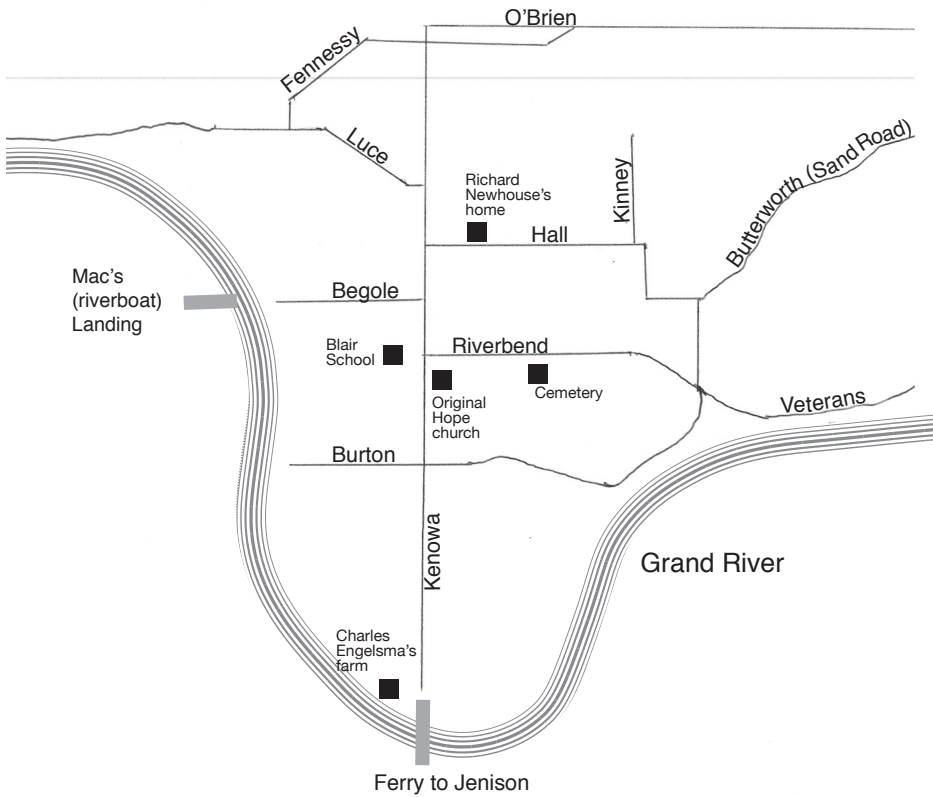
The existence of the ferry had made it possible, though challenging, for Jenison Christian Reformed Church to provide for the spiritual needs of the believers trapped in the river's bend: "The good pastor was given permission to hire a horse and buggy one half day of each week to make pastoral calls, including [to] those who lived beyond the river and came to Church by means of a Ferry Boat."³



The ferry was located at the south end of Kenowa Avenue. It enabled people in River Bend to get to Grandville and Jenison.

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- 2 Grandville Historical Commission, *Bend in the River: The Story of Grandville and Jenison, Michigan 1832–1972*, ed. John W. Mc Gee (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 242.
- 3 *Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Jenison Christian Reformed Church 1875–1950*, 12.

Map of River Bend



Trapped in the River's Bend

Believers in “the bend” were cut off from Jenison Christian Reformed Church by the Michigan State Highway Department’s decision to discontinue the ferry. Furthermore, distance, poor roads (if they could be called roads), and lack of good transportation (mostly horse driven) made it very difficult for Reformed believers in “the bend” to regularly attend the churches in Grand Rapids.

"I can remember one time in the winter they came to church with a team of horses and a sleigh. The snow was so deep in the road they had to go out into the field. The snow was right up to the horses' bellies. So they had all they could to get home from church. That wasn't funny either. They never cancelled church—nobody had a phone. It was unheard of."⁴ —Celia Bergman

Providentially, a group of Christian Reformed believers about four miles to the north of River Bend were facing a similar problem. They "had difficulty getting to town on Sundays and also during the week to have the children catechised."⁵ Their solution to these problems was to organize as a new congregation near Walker Station (intersection of Kinney and Remembrance) under the leadership of Rev. John R. Brink, home missionary of the Christian Reformed Church. They organized as the Walker Christian Reformed Church on November 18, 1912. Among their fourteen charter member families was Mr. and Mrs. Richard Nieuwenhuis (Newhouse). At that meeting Richard was elected as one of Walker's first deacons. Others trapped in the river's bend would soon follow Newhouse's lead and join Walker Christian Reformed Church.



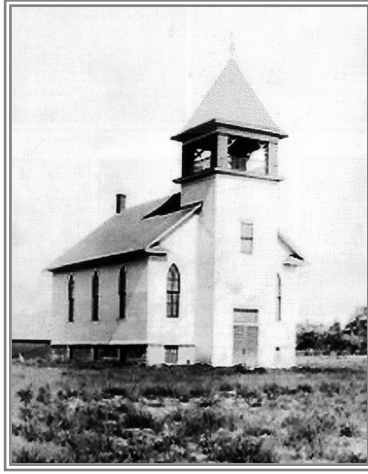
Gridley's hill was on Riverbend Drive between Butterworth and Kenowa. The picture faces west toward Kenowa Avenue and Blair School.



The locals called Butterworth Drive Sand Road.

4 *The History of Hope 1916–1991* (Grandville, MI: Hope Christian Reformed Church), 7

5 City of Walker Historical Committee, *Echoes of the Past: A Bicentennial History of the City of Walker, Michigan*, ed. Warren Versluis (1976), 82.

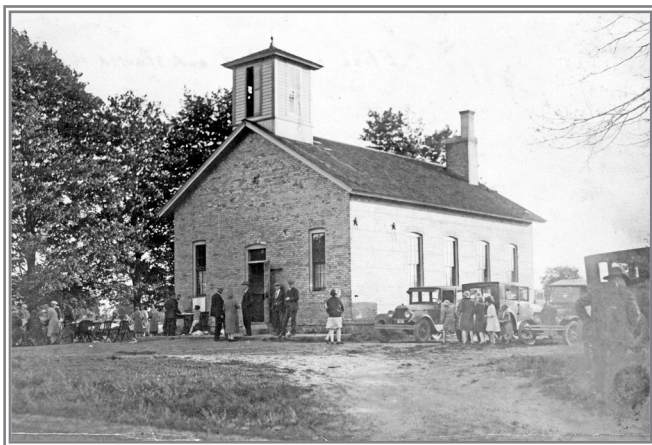


Some of Hope's charter members came from Walker Christian Reformed Church.

The stay at Walker church of some of those trapped in “the bend” looked to be short-lived, however, as Rev. Brink’s memoirs make clear.

In the winter of 1916 I received a telephone call from a person [Richard Newhouse] living about two miles north of Jenison and about seven miles west of Grand Rapids. He wanted to know whether it would be possible to start a mission in his neighborhood, a rural community where several Christian Reformed families were living. As I had a number of fields under my care and was busy every Sunday, I agreed to come over on Wednesday evenings to preach for them. The man who called said that we could use his home as a meeting place. I soon found out that these people were hungry for the gospel message. There were also a goodly number of children at the meetings. The attendance grew, and soon we were compelled to move. A public school hall [Blair School, site of the present Riverbend Public School on Kenowa Avenue] was used, and soon Sunday services were started.⁶

⁶ J. R. Brink, “Memoirs of Rev. J. R. Brink,” ed. Ralph V. Brink and Ruth Brink Hoeksema (private collection, 1985), 69.



Blair School was located at the intersection of Kenowa Avenue and Riverbend. The congregation of Hope worshipped there when it did not have a building of its own.

But sparks flew when home missionary Brink reported to Classis Grand Rapids West of the Christian Reformed Church concerning that work. Brink explains what transpired at that classis.

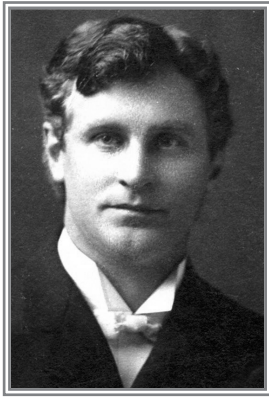
When the report of these services came to Classis there was strong opposition. The argument was that they were located only a little over a mile from Jenison. They could easily go to the Jenison church, across the river. However, this comment overlooked two things: the old ferry, which had plied its way across the river at Grandville, had stopped running; the nearest bridge was at Wealthy Street in Grand Rapids, a trip of at least thirteen miles to get to the Jenison church. Also several of the people attending the services were not members of Jenison; some were “nominal” members of churches in Grand Rapids, many had not been attending any church for some time, and several were unchurched. So, after a lot of wrangling at Classis, to which I had become accustomed by this time, Classis finally allowed this to become a mission of our church.⁷

⁷ Ibid., 69. See Rev. J. R. Brink’s report, “Hope, Grandville, Michigan,” in appendix 1.

Apparently Rev. Brink had a sense of humor as the unedited version of his memoirs record his thoughts in response to those at classis who thought the people in River Bend could attend Jenison Christian Reformed Church: "As far as going to Jenison is concerned, it would be an easy matter to attend there provided those people had airplanes, which none owned."⁸

The April 27, 1916, *Banner* reported as follows concerning those interesting developments with respect to the mission endeavors of the Christian Reformed Church in River Bend:

When, therefore, urgent and repeated requests came from our people, and not knowing whether prospects were favorable or



Rev. John R. Brink

not, the missionary [Rev. Brink] went out to preach for them on Wednesday, January 25.⁹ A fairly good number had gathered at the home of Mr. Newhouse, and interest shown from the very beginning was very noticeable. In order not to take any time from the other fields, this midweek service was continued for three weeks, each time succeeded by an after-meeting where plans for the future were discussed. It was decided to choose a location for a church building, and Mr. John Moelker was generous enough to donate a parcel of ground for the erection of a church building.¹⁰ A building committee got a plan

8 J. R. Brink, "Hope—Grandville" (unpublished and unnumbered memoirs).

9 The date of Hope's first worship service is in question. Rev. Brink reported the date as Wednesday, January 25. That day did not exist because January 25, 1916, was a Tuesday. Hope's minutes record the date as Sunday, January 23, 1916.

10 Subsequent events indicate that Hope did not build its first building on that parcel of ground. Article 4 of the minutes of the September 12, 1916, congregational meeting reads: "A committee, consisting of two members, R. Niewenhuis and I. Korhorn, is appointed. This committee is mandated to purchase an acre of land from C. Korhorn

ready according to which a complete church building could be put up for some \$500 by buying lumber from the Grand Rapids Salvage Co., and doing most of the work themselves. Presumably this will be carried out next fall and winter. At the present time one service is held in the schoolhouse and the other at the home of Mr. Newhouse. Like in Walker, one service is held in the English language.

There are about 24 families in this district, of which a few families belong to Jenison, a few to city congregations and two to Walker. For several months, however, the Grand River, which lies between Jenison and Tallmadge [River Bend], is impassable. The distance to the city churches is too far to attend regularly, and so this community was rapidly developing into the "unchurched" class. By Sunday services, soon to be followed by catechism classes and Sunday school, this deplorable condition is checked. Some who had not attended church services for years, have already started again, and so the compliance with the command of Christ, "Go ye," is already bearing fruit. The people are enthusiastic about their successful beginning; our students are full of hope for its future, and if the Church at large has anything in common with her Master, whom she professes to follow, there is reason for rejoicing that the light of God's indispensable Word is shedding its radiant and benevolent beams into this region also.

Will the mission station develop into a congregation? We dare not prophesy and are not called upon to do so.¹¹

While the author of this *Banner* report was in doubt about the future of that endeavor, clearly the families in "the bend" were not, as their plans for a church building predated their organization as a congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(northwest corner)." The reference is to the northwest corner of C. Korhorn's property on the southeast corner of Kenowa Avenue and Riverbend Street.

11 J. R. Brink, "A Mission Station in Tallmadge," *Banner* 51 (April 27d, 1916):273.

Escape in the River's Bend

Before 1916 the Grand River isolated the founders of Hope from meaningful life in the church of Jesus Christ. Led by the Spirit of Christ, their solution to this intolerable situation was to bring the church of Jesus Christ *into* the river's bend. The steps they took to accomplish this are found in the records they kept from the time of their first meeting on January 23, 1916, to the time of their organization on June 8, 1916.¹²

After the worship service in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Newhouse (on Hall Street, one-eighth mile east of Kenowa Avenue) led by Rev. John R. Brink on Sunday, January 23, the twenty-one people present agreed that "it would be advisable and necessary to establish a



Former home of Richard Newhouse where worship services were held before the church was built

Mission Station in the vicinity of River Bend" because the distance to the Walker church and the churches in Grand Rapids made it almost impossible for them to regularly attend church. Consequently they "passed unanimously" a proposition "to call into being a Mission Station."¹³ After choosing Charles Bowman as secretary and Richard Newhouse as treasurer, they appointed a committee and gave them the mandate to "investigate the cost of a church building, and to find a suitable place (location) where such a building could be erected." The committee consisted of John Moelker, Jacob Zaagman, Mathys Van Eeuwan, and Richard Newhouse.

¹² See Hope's Preorganizational Record in appendix 2.

¹³ Unpublished consistory minutes of the Mission Station of River Bend (January 23, 1916). These and subsequent minutes to January 1921 were translated by Rev. Sebastian Cammenga, a former minister of Hope Christian Reformed Church. All references in *A Spiritual House Preserved* to consistory and congregational minutes prior to June 8, 1916, are to the unpublished records of the Mission Station of River Bend.

They next met one week later in the home of Newhouse on Wednesday, February 2. Rev. Brink led twenty-five attendees in a divine worship service, after which "J. Moelker present[ed] a plan for the hopefully soon to be built church building," the dimensions of which would be 32' x 40' and "would be erected as practical as possible for this purpose." Article 4 of their record states:

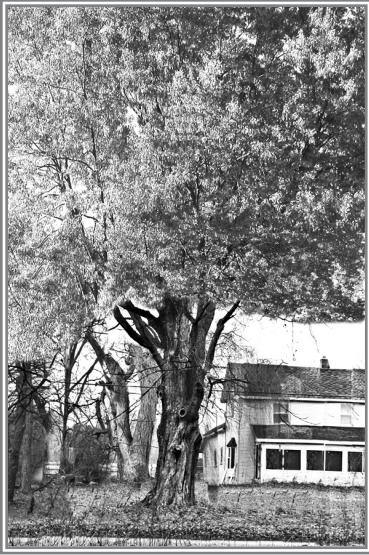
Since brother elders from the Walker congregation are present at this meeting, it is suggested by one of those brethren, to join ourselves as a Mission Station of River Bend, with one or the other churches. If we then needed help or support, one could apply to one of those churches. If we would place ourselves under Classis West, we would be acknowledged as a Mission Station.

Subsequently they decided to join themselves "as a Mission Station to the congregation of Walker," and they appointed as "delegates to the Classis, the brethren C. Bouwman and R. Nieuwenhuis."

The following Wednesday, February 9, another divine worship service led by Rev. Brink was held in the home of Newhouse. After the worship service, the fifteen members present decided to erect the church building on a piece of land "given gratis by J. Moelker" and to "request Classis for a \$300 loan" for the building to be constructed. It was also decided to "conduct an English service in the forenoon; a service in the Holland language in the afternoon."

"We used to have church sometimes under the big tree in Richard Newhouse's yard on nice summer afternoons. One time Seminarian Monsma was preaching...He stopped in the middle of the sermon and he said, 'Do you think that storm's going to bother us? Is it going to rain?' Richard Newhouse said, 'No. I think it's going over. You just go ahead and preach.' Sounds funny now, doesn't it? I didn't think it was funny...It didn't rain. Richard was right."¹⁴ —Celia Bergman

¹⁴ *History of Hope 1916–1991*, 2.



This tree in the front yard of Newhouse's house on Hall Street witnessed some of Hope's early worship services.

During a meeting held on April 25, 1916, in the home of Richard Newhouse, those present decided “that, since the summer is at hand and the [theological school] gives its students vacation, to have a student here during the next three months regularly.” Most importantly, they “decided to request Classis West for permission to be organized as the Christian Reformed Church of River Bend.”

Following the approval of Classis Grand Rapids West, and in the presence of a committee from West Leonard Christian Reformed Church, Hope organized on Thurs-

day, June 8, 1916, in the home of Richard Newhouse. Rev. J. R. Brink preached on 1 Peter 2:4–5: “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Christ Jesus.”

“I was 14 when we moved to River Bend and there was no Hope church yet. We didn’t go to church—just stayed home. Then a few people started the church. Korhorns, Moelkers, Kuipers, and others. They used to get seminarians with a horse and buggy from Grand Rapids.”¹⁵ —John Riddering

Article 2 of the organizational meeting that followed the sermon of Rev. Brink informs us of those who presented membership papers at

¹⁵ Ibid., 1.

that meeting. Coming from Walker Christian Reformed Church were Charles (Charley) Bouwman and his wife, Adrian Heyboer, Rijtse (Richard) Nieuwenhuis and his wife, Pieter Ruiter, Jan (John) Moelker with his wife and eight baptized children, Jantje (Jennie) Engelsma, and Wietse Visbeck who came as a baptized member. Joining from Coldbrook Christian Reformed Church were Jacob and Jacoba Zaagman with five baptized children. Pauline Ploegstra came as a baptized member from Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church. Johannes Van Dyke came from the Netherlands Reformed Church, and his wife, Jacoba Maria Wilhelmina Bating, and their four baptized children came from the Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerk*) in the Netherlands. After reviewing those membership papers, the committee from West Leonard “approve[d] and accept[ed]” them. Then followed the election of office-bearers: John Moelker (president) and Charles Bouwman (clerk) were elected as elders and Richard Newhouse as deacon.



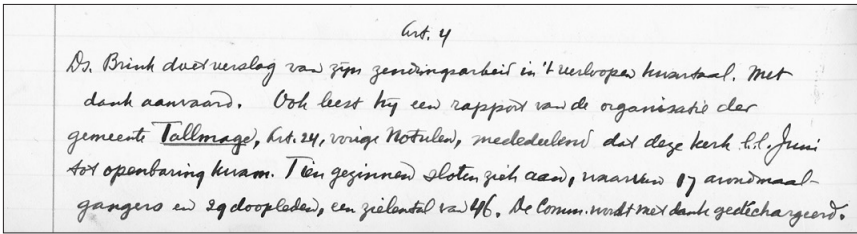
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Newhouse



Jan (John) Moelker, his wife, and eight oldest children were charter members of Hope



Jantje Engelsma



The minute of Classis Grand Rapids East in which Rev. Brink informed the classis of the organization of Hope. Prof. Herman Hanko gave the gist of the minute as follows:

Rev. Brink reported on his missionary work in the... [cannot read the word, but it has something to do with progress]; received with thanks. Rev. Brink also read a report of the organization of the Tallmadge congregation (article 24 of the preceding minutes), saying that this church had been organized [literally, came to revelation] on June 8, [1916]. Ten households with seventeen confessing members [literally, Lord's supper goers] organized with twenty-nine baptized members, for a total of forty-six souls. The committee was thanked.

Article 4 of the record of Hope's birth concludes: "Candidate Terps-tra speaks a few words to the congregation after which the above named brother closes with prayer after we had sung Psalm 122:1. The benediction is pronounced over the youthful congregation by Rev. J. R. Brink."

It would not be until four months later that this new manifestation of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ would be given an official name. With little fanfare article 5 of the October 5, 1916, minutes record, "The church at this place was given as its name, 'The Hope Christian Reformed Church of River Bend.'"¹⁶

A Place for Worship in the River's Bend

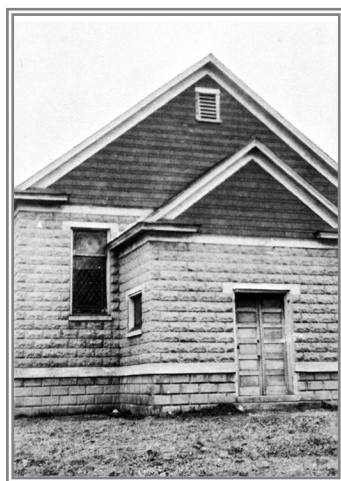
Initially worship services were conducted in the home of Richard Newhouse. Later arrangements were made to use Blair School (Riverbend Public School) for worship in the mornings.

However, the schoolhouse was not available in the afternoons because some Methodists in the area used it at that time. The activities of the consistory and the congregation to provide a place for worship are recorded as follows:

¹⁶ Unpublished consistory minutes of the Hope Christian Reformed Church of River Bend (October 5, 1916). All references in *A Spiritual House Preserved* to consistory and congregational minutes from October 5, 1916, to January 24, 1925, are to the unpublished records of the Hope Christian Reformed Church of River Bend.

The need for a more proper and permanent house of worship continued to occupy the minds of the young congregation, and it was towards that end that much time and effort was put forth. On the evening of June 25, 1917, the consistory presented the congregation with building and financial details previously worked out in committee and consistorial sessions. Several proposals preliminary to building were adopted first: —to put a steeple on the church—to put wooden shingles on the roof—to face the area above the entrance with cement, etc. Understandably, concern was expressed for the congregation's ability to pay for the proposed structure. Then with knowledgeable faith, the decision was made to proceed with building the church at the estimated cost of \$2,300...

Volunteer labor was used extensively, holding labor costs to a minimum...Mr. C[harles] Bouwman, I[saac] Korhorn, and C[harles] Engelsma landscaped the area around the building; Claus Hoeksema of Grandville Avenue Christian Reformed Church painted the new building inside and out, free of charge. Mr. Hoeksema used his



Hope church built in 1917

God-given artistic talents ably by also painting the picture of an open Bible on the interior front wall of the church inscribed with the words, "Choose You This Day Whom Ye Will Serve."

"The building was very plain. There was no heat in the basement. The inside was very drab. (We had) individual seats."¹⁷
—Celia Bergman

¹⁷ *History of Hope 1916–1991*, 6.

“The old church had a full basement...the furnace was on the Kenowa Road half and the east side had two rooms—a consistory room and a kind of ante room...for Sunday School classes. High ceilings, high windows, cold and drafty. There was no running water or anything, just an outhouse.”¹⁸
—Walter Bergman

Later, when necessity arose and money allowed, a room was prepared in the basement for catechism, a new organ was installed, new gasoline lights were added, and siding was put on the horse barn.¹⁹

“It had about eight stalls, didn’t it? Cold in the winter time. It was to get the horses out of the wind while people were in church. People were concerned about their animals.”²⁰
—Dewey Engelsma

“Every church had a horse barn. The one for Hope church was right behind church. The horse barn was a shed with a roof that kind of came up on the open end. It had maybe, less than ten stables.”²¹ —John Riddering

18 Ibid.

19 Richard Bloem, “A Brief History,” in *Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI: Fiftieth Anniversary* (1968), 3. See also *Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker MI: 75th Anniversary 1916–1991* (1991), unnumbered pages.

20 *History of Hope 1916–1991*, 2.

21 Ibid., 3.

River Bend den 23 Januari 1916

Den 23 Januari 1916 wordt er een Godsdienst oefening gehouden ten huize van R. Nieuwenhuis. De bediening die wordt verricht door D^{ny} J. R. Brink. En deze bij een komst waren er 21 toe hoorders aanwezig.

Na de Godsdienst wordt er een vergadering gehouden om eenige verbetering aan te brengen op kerkelijk terrein in de omgeving van River Bend.

Art 1. Als Pres. voor deze vergadering werd D^{ny} J. R. Brink gekozen.

Art 2. De Pres. vraagt zou het wenschelijk en noodzaaklijk zijn om in de omgeving van River Bend, een Landing Station op te richten ten eersten zou het wenschelijk zijn om deze reden daar het geregeld toe kerk gaan hier in deze omgeving bijna onmogelijk is. Daar de kerk van Wolker en die van Grand Rapids te ver zijn van ons verwijerd. zijn om die geregeld te bezoeken en vooral voor de kinderen en ook voor de valwacker Personen opdat de Catecheten aan die zerkten kunnen gegeven worden.

Art 3. Na dat dit alles in bespreken wordt gebracht en het noodzaaklijken van te hebben gezien om voor te gaan in te plaatsen on der den tegen de Heer alhier een Landing Station in het leven te roepen. Het welk dan in stemming overdt gebracht en met algemene stem

Art 4. Als Secba werd C. Bouman gekozen en als Penningmeester R. Nieuwenhuis

Art 5. Daar hier in deze omgeving van River Bend geen gebouw is om geregeld Gods dienst in te houden werd er een Commissie benoemt die opgedragen

werdt om te onderzoeken wat een kerkgebouwen kotten en een gerechte plaats te vinden waar zulk een gebouw zou kunnen worden opgetrokken om daer geregeld te vergaderen. De Comm. bestaans uit de volgende vier personen J. Molker, Jan Bouman, J. Zaagman en R. Nieuwenhuis. als bouw Comm.

Art 6. Na rondvragen wad deze vergadering afsluut van D^{ny} Brink gelaten met dankzeggen door J. Kuiper, J. R. Brink, P. van C. Bouman, etc.

Home missionary, J. R. Brink, wrote about the dedication of the new church building in the *Banner* under the heading “Hope Church at River Bend.”

December 5 [1917] will long be remembered by the members of the above named congregation, formerly called Tallmadge.

Upon the evening of that day a goodly number of people gathered to commemorate the goodness and mercy of God, “the Giver of all good and perfect gifts,” to dedicate their new house of worship...

A corner lot of one acre gives abundant room for church buildings, stables, and all the other buildings necessary in course of time, if the church grows stronger.

The church is of very substantial construction, being built of cement blocks. Although not large, it has a very neat appearance, both within and without, and the whole, including lot and opera chairs, cost about \$2,000.

La Grave Avenue furnished the pulpit and carpet which formerly covered its church auditorium. A splendid pulpit Bible was given by Mr. and Mrs. C. Bouwman, and a complete communion set by the consistory of the First Church of Kalamazoo...

The program did not contain very many numbers, but the whole was gratefully received by the people and visitors, the chocolate milk and cake at the end of the meeting not excepted.

Several American people showed their interest by attending the service and joy was manifested on the faces of all those present.

From the report of Mr. R. Newhouse we noticed that \$500 was received from the Church Erection Fund, and another \$500 was taken up on a note. The rest of the money was all paid by our people, with the exception of a few bills, which will be paid in the near future. Not a bad record for a church only a year and a half old...

River Bend is a good field, far enough away from other congregations, and our church is the only one in this community... one church for a community, using both languages, and not overburdened with debt, can accomplish a great deal of good and is a real necessity, worthy of our support.

It has already accomplished much good by saving some people who were in grave danger of drifting away from the church, and by feeding the "lambs of the flock."

May the great Shepherd bless this church abundantly and cause it to be a blessing in its community.²²

Thriving in the River's Bend

Hope's consistory was busy in those early years accepting new members. Consistory minutes tell the delightful story:

- July 11, 1916, article 2. "The church membership of Gelke De Jong and wife, and Hendrik Goeree and wife are accepted."
- July 11, 1916, article 6. "Three persons appear to make profession of faith. They include Mr. and Mrs. Goeree and Mr. Jan Dyke."
- August 11, 1916, article 4. "Mr. and Mrs. I. Korhorn made confession of faith at this meeting."
- August 29, 1916, article 4. "Confession of faith is made by Mr. and Mrs. J. Van Dyke."
- April 3, 1917, article 3. "Elder Bouwman is mandated to pay a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Bergman, since that brother and sister were new members coming from the Walker congregation."
- June 2, 1917, article 2. "Confession of faith was made by Mrs. K. Byl."
- June 4, 1918, article 5. "Confession of faith is heard before the consistory by Miss Celia Zaagman."



Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Korhorn

²² J. R. Brink, "Hope Church at River Bend," *Banner* 52 (December 13, 1917):798.

- July 2, 1918, article 3. “Confession of faith was made before the consistory by Mr. and Mrs. C. Korhorn.”
- July 1, 1919, article 2. “Confession of faith is made by Mrs. H. Heiboer, nee Jinnie Schelhuis.”
- August 4, 1919, article 3. “The following persons appeared to make confession of faith: Mr. and Mrs. J. De Jong, Mr. and Mrs. C. Engelsma, Mr. A. Schut, Mr. L. Fichbeek, Mr. A. Snip, Mrs. J. Haggerty (nee F. Fichbeek), Mr. H. Moelker, Mr. J. Kuipers.”



Mr. and Mrs. Charles Engelsma

But thriving under the preaching of their own minister is another story. Although never mentioned explicitly in the consistory’s minutes, it appears that the church fathers of Hope did not believe they could support a minister of their own in those early years. Apparent this is from article 6 of the August 11, 1916, consistory meeting: “We accept for information that, in case the Walker congregation should extend a call to a minister, Mr. Bouwman is to write the called minister regarding the congregation here at Hope.”²³

At its August 29, 1916, meeting the consistory voted to call a congregational meeting for September 12 at which meeting the congregation would be asked to decide “what the congregation of Hope shall pay for the work the minister of Walker will do here, when and if Walker is supplied with a minister.” Sadly, article 2 of that congregational meeting leaves us hanging in limbo with this: “The question regarding Rev. [Peter] Hoekenga, since he has accepted the call of the Walker church, is postponed until a following meeting.”

There was a following meeting, but there was no further mention of obtaining the services of Rev. Hoekenga. The one-hundredth

²³ J. Brink and C. Bouwman, unpublished consistory minutes of the Christian Reformed Church at River Bend (August 11, 1916). References in *A Spiritual House Preserved* to consistory and congregational minutes from June 8, 1916, to October 5, 1916, are to the unpublished records of the Christian Reformed Church at River Bend.

anniversary book of Walker United Reformed Church supplies the likely reason the idea of obtaining assistance from Rev. Hoekenga was aborted:

Rev. Hoekenga's ministry at Walker lasted only seventeen months... Only a few months before coming to Walker, he needed a life-saving operation in Chicago, which prevented him from continuing his mission there [Chicago]. At Walker, he spent several weeks bed-ridden, and according to Dr. Henry Beets...he was near death. Although he recovered, his weak health forced him to resign from Walker in February 1918.²⁴



Rev. Peter J. Hoekenga, minister of Walker Christian Reformed Church from 1916 to 1918

In March 1918 Rev. Jacob W. Wyngaarden accepted the call to Walker Christian Reformed Church and was appointed by classis as Hope's moderator. Hope's consistory enlisted his services for a few years to teach catechism on Saturday mornings.

Also, the consistory often arranged to utilize the services of Christian Reformed seminary students. Getting them to River Bend was not always so simple, however. Often horse and buggy transportation was used, at other times they came to Grandville via the interurban and then rowed by boat across the Grand River to River Bend. Utilizing seminary students when available, however, resulted in some unusual scheduling for catechism at times. The June 2, 1919, consistory minutes relate that arrangements were made to have seminary student John C. Medendorp at Hope for the summer months. Thus it was "decided to conduct two catechism classes, Wednesday evenings for the young people above sixteen



Rev. Jacob W. Wyngaarden

²⁴ Walker United Reformed Church, *Celebrating Our 100th Anniversary, 1912–2012*, 10.

years; and Sundays, after the afternoon service, for the married members, especially for those who as yet have made no confession of faith.” Concerning student Medendorp’s labor at Hope the *Banner* reported:

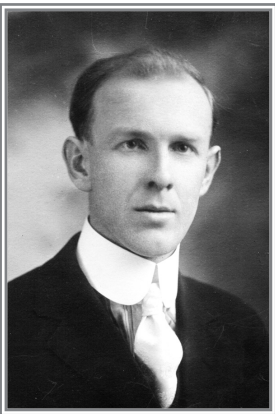
The little River Bend church, also called “Hope”...has been benefitted greatly by the service of student John Medendorp who labored here during the summer vacation. Over a dozen of people have confessed the Lord as Savior, among them a number who formerly cared little or nothing for God and his service. No wonder the “Hope” people are full of courage for the future.²⁵

The fact that the consistory decided in April 1919 to “allow \$10 for use of an automobile for Missionary Brink” demonstrates that Hope relied heavily on his assistance during those early years as a congregation. The minutes also make clear that the consistory was busy standing in the gap when seminarians and ministers were not available.

Finally, after limping along that way for five and a half years without a pastor of its own, the congregation decided at a June 14, 1921, meeting to call a minister and gave the consistory the right to make a trio. It is not surprising that the first call was extended to Candidate John

C. Medendorp, since by that time they knew him well from his work among them. After he declined the call, a new trio was formed consisting of Candidates George M. Ophoff and Jacob Van Dyke and Rev. Dirk Jonker, from which Candidate Ophoff was called.

George Ophoff’s acceptance of Hope’s call and his subsequent installation opened a new chapter of Hope’s preservation in the river’s bend.



Rev. John Medendorp

25 A. Peters, “Grand Rapids Notes” *Banner* 54 (September 18, 1919):590.