

# Jacob Quintus and the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* The Creation of the Model for the Dutch Language Press in the United States

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Jacob Quintus (1821-1906), son of a teacher in the hamlet of Zonnemaire in the Dutch province of Zeeland, has been largely forgotten in the Netherlands. In the United States his editorship of the first Dutch-American newspaper (1849-1861) saved him from oblivion. One might argue that Quintus was not unique, since many other publications were launched in the immediate years, but his publication was the first successful enterprise and acted as an inspiration to others who recognized the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* as the model for the Dutch language press in the United States. There are four additional reasons to justify an article about him.

Firstly, his activities reveal in detail the stream of information between the sources of emigration in the Netherlands and settlement areas in the United States. While the corpus of the fifty-some Dutch language publications has been well documented, little is known about the motives, the instruments, and the decisions an editor made. Quintus' work reveals in detail his considerations, while his later editorial work confirmed that he was a irrepensible newspaperman.

Secondly, his career documents the role of non-clergy in the pioneer phase of Dutch immigration. Thirdly, the location of this first newspaper is significant and Quintus' move to Michigan helps to explain why though the Badger State had been the target of the early immigrants, Michigan became the center of Dutch immigration in the US.

Finally, there is an additional academic reason for a renewed interest in his life. One of the new questions in migration history centers around the connections between areas and people that transcend national boundaries and national origin: the issue of transnationalism. Early ethnic newspapers functioned in this space between two nations and the way in which editors such as Jacob Quintus advanced transnational connections helps us to understand this process.

## *Origins*

Jacob Quintus was born in Zonnemaire, on the island of Duiveland, the most northern part of the province of Zeeland on Christmas Eve 1821. He was the youngest son of teacher Jan Quintus who died before Jacob's first birthday. At age ten also his mother Neeltje Slagboom (1792-1831) passed away, leaving Jacob an orphan in 1831. Thanks to an earlier marriage of his father, who was 65 when Quintus was born, he had enough relatives in the province to take care of him. A number of them were craftsmen living in Zeeland Flanders, others were teachers. The Quintus family were lower middle class, they owned their home in Zonnemaire ten acres farmland and some stock in rural industry.<sup>1</sup>

Jacob followed in the tracks of his late father and became an assistant teacher in Haamstede on the island of Schouwen. At age 18, he entered the lowest category of teachers, an assistant to a teacher. While he served alternately in various regions where his relatives lived, he became an assistant teacher in his native Schouwen in 1847. Jacob had ambition, but lacked opportunities. He had acquired diploma's for foreign languages, but the economic crisis kept many children from school and prevented him from making further promotion.

## *Emigration*

Jacob was a practical, well-informed, and well-connected person, full of initiative and with a good sense for business. In the late 1840s, emigration was the talk of the town, especially in Zeeland-Flanders, the south western section of the province, where laborers had been leaving for New York and Wisconsin before the exodus of Dutch immigrants under the leadership of the ministers Albertus Van Raalte and Hendrik Scholte inaugurated the era of mass migration. Wisconsin had attracted many settlers from Zeeland. Zeelanders settled in villages in the Milwaukee area: Gerardus Brandt from Kapelle in Bethlehem (or "Town Eight," eight miles north of Milwaukee), Jan Kotvis and Pieter Lankester from Middelburg, south of this city in Franklin Prairie. In 1845, similar groups from

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<sup>1</sup> *Zierikzeesche Courant*, 27 oktober 1837.

Western Zeeland Flanders had founded town Thirteen', two years later renamed "Town Holland," south of Sheboygan, and the name Oostburg emerged in 1847. The expectations for the development of Wisconsin were high and the Scholte and Van Raalte intended to settle in the state, until American contacts persuaded them to settle in Iowa and Michigan.

The departure of the large group of 457 from the center of the province, headed by Seceders in April 1847, made a deep impression on Jacob. His brother-in-law Leendert Dooge, who was a painter and an emigration agent, acquainted him with immigration as a viable solution for stagnation. His friend Pieter Souffrouw added valuable personal experiences. This watch maker had returned from Wisconsin to fetch his mother, two brothers and four sisters. On July 10, 1847, Souffrouw and Dooge put an announcement in the *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode* recruiting fellow passengers for a quick departure in August. A group of 80 artisans and small businessmen from various Zeeland towns (Axel, Oostburg, Terneuzen, Zierikzee, Bommenede, Zonnemaire) joined them.

This was clearly a business enterprise and not a religiously motivated exodus. Among the travelers was the 31-year-old Frans van Driele (1816-1900) from Goes, who was quite similar to Jacob Quintus. He came from an incomplete family and had learned at an early age to sustain himself. He worked as a baker's apprentice in various places and later as a traveling salesman in haberdashery and books. He used his savings to travel with this group to the United States and would become a leading Dutchman and elder in the Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Jacob Quintus fit perfectly in this group of aspiring settlers.

His party sailed from Zeeland on August 6, 1847 on the *Charles Humberston*. A strong wind in the canal stranded the ship on a sand bank close to Calais. The passengers were rescued by other ships and set ashore at Calais, where they were treated well with bread and warm milk, to continue their journey via Le Havre. Jacob's knowledge of French and German came in handy, talking to the authorities and negotiating with the other, mostly German, immigrants to find an alternative ship. This resulted in their departure on the *Robert Parker*, which sailed the company in five weeks to New York, where they arrived on September 27.<sup>2</sup>

Quintus had grown as a leader and after his landing he continued to seek opportunities as an information broker for his fellow countrymen. In Albany where his brother-in-law Dooge acted as agent for immigrants en route to Buffalo.<sup>3</sup> They became partners who contracted a person in New York to ship immigrants to Albany. They made reservations on freighters to Buffalo and the Great Lakes. In the process Jacob taught the new arrivals the basics of the English language. This project was successful because many Dutch immigrants were literate, but lacked English language skills. Soon, he published a Dutch-English dictionary to fill this need.<sup>4</sup>

The Dutch immigrant group in Albany was diverse and transient. It took till later in the 1850s before they organized their own congregation. Jacob's many contacts and the need for information led him to sell the *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode* in the United States. On July 24, 1848 the newspaper announced that J. Quintus in Buffalo (and in 1849 in Albany) sold three-months' subscriptions to the Dutch periodical for one dollar and ten cents. This Dutch newspaper from his home region had a 1,500 circulation and was a commercial success. It vented the frustration of the Dutch who were dissatisfied with the economic stagnation and high taxes in the Netherlands, from which the citizens did not benefit.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 26 August 1847 and Jacob Quintus, "Een terugblik over vijftig jaren," (An overview of fifty years) *De Grondwet*, 21 November 1911.

<sup>3</sup> Henry S. Lucas, ed., *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Works*, 2 vols. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1955; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1997), 2: 294-300 and 435-39.

<sup>4</sup> H. Picard, *De Hollander in Amerika. Leerwijze der Engelsche taal door H.P.; ten dienste mijner landgenooten ter drukking overgegeven door J. Quintus, onderwijzer in de Engelsche, Hollandsche en Fransche talen* (The Dutchman in America: Teaching method of the English language by H.P.; printed for my fellow countrymen by J. Quintus, teacher of the English, Dutch and French languages) (Buffalo, NY: O.G. Steele, 1848), 77 pp. Steele printed, bound, and sold books in the center of Buffalo on 206 Main Street. He sold school books, Bibles, maps, stationary and planned to publish a Dutch almanac in 1849. Quintus explained in the preface that the demand for this dictionary surpassed the supply from the Netherlands.

<sup>5</sup> Jan van Damme, 'De standenmaatschappij in de *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 1844-1846' (MA thesis, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 1978).

Since the weekly import of Dutch newspapers was costly and time consuming, Quintus tried publishing a Dutch language newspaper in New York state. However, he had to abandon the project when other publishers set up *De Nederlander in Noord-Amerika* (The Dutchman in North America) and ruined the reputation of this enterprise. They cashed subscription money, published eight issues and then cancelled the operation, to the disappointment of their subscribers.<sup>6</sup> Quintus realized that a trustworthy enterprise could work and discovered that the west offered a faster growing market and therefore more promising. He took this business with him when he decided to move to Wisconsin to join his future in-laws in the spring of 1849. He waited till his settlement to make a second effort to realize his plan to provide Dutch immigrants in the U.S. with news about their homeland, their new environment, and about each other.

#### *To Wisconsin*

Jacob's departure from New York fit in the typical pattern of Dutch immigrants. Most of them had sufficient funds to take passage, but not to buy property. A temporary stay in the east, building canals or railroads generated the capital to invest in farms and business in the Midwest. Frans Van Driele, for instance, had labored at the Delaware & Hudson Canal for nine months before he moved on the West Michigan.<sup>7</sup>

Jacob Quintus traveled further to Sheboygan where members of his immigrant party had settled. It is likely that he had an eye on Pieter Souffrouw's sister, Catharina, whom he married shortly after his arrival in the spring of 1849.

When he arrived in Sheboygan, the town had just 700 inhabitants. He realized that his clientele needed more than the (old) news from Zierikzee. So on 16 October 1849, he launched his own newspaper, only changing the place name to *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*. He made it into a business, opened a printing shop and offered additional services as a public notary. Quintus joined his brother-in-law Souffrouw in local politics. They both supported the Democrats against the Whigs and hoped to increase Jacobs' business enterprise in this way.

#### *The First Dutch Newspaper*

This first Dutch-language newspaper began as a double paged sheet, with news from Dutch immigrants in the area and local advertisements, summaries of the news from Dutch and American newspapers. Within a year the volume doubled to four densely printed pages. Quintus' recruited an extensive network of local correspondents and retailers, wrote his own articles and cut and pasted articles from other sources. A short poem illustrated this method: "De Redacteur zit neer, met kranten overladen, Bijna verdwaald in 't nieuws, van alle nieuwsbladen." (The editor sits down, swept by many newspapers, almost lost in the news from all the periodicals).<sup>8</sup> Thanks to his circle of mostly Zeeland agents, who received a free subscription as compensation, Dutch immigrants received information about the movements of this group. He gradually expanded his information sources from Zeeland newspapers to American ones and used his Buffalo contacts for news about the east. Of course, he used this medium to promote Wisconsin in his newspaper here and in his home country.<sup>9</sup>

In promotional aspects Wisconsin differed from Iowa and Michigan, where ministers spread the word. One should not overestimate the persuasive powers of the two most prominent leaders Scholte and Van Raalte, because most immigrants followed their own rationale. However, there were differences and it turned out that immigrants without the same religious aspirations as the orthodox Protestants chose the Badger State as their place of settlement. Dutch businessmen such as Quintus and Milwaukee lawyer and Dutch consul Gijsbert van Steenwijk were instrumental in promoting settlement in this state.

Quintus' Wisconsin promotion praised the double shipping transit for its mining and agricultural products via the Great Lakes and via the Mississippi in the west. He announced that large

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<sup>6</sup> Prospectus published in 1848 according to the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 16 October 1849.

<sup>7</sup> In the fall of 1851 Leonard Dooge moved to Ravenna, close to Muskegon in Michigan, and continued to Grand Rapids. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 1: 356-8.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in J. Breur, 'De *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*. Het eerste Nederlandstalige nieuwsblad in de Verenigde Staten 1849-1861', (MA thesis, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 17 October 1850.

tracts of land were still available and cheap. The air was much healthier than in Michigan, which was plagued by “fever and ague” caused by stagnant water. He claimed that this reason had encouraged hundreds of Michigan citizens to move west. Even more promising for farmers was that the state of Iowa and Wisconsin would soon be connected to the East via railroads.<sup>10</sup>

Through the years, Quintus developed a good compass for economic opportunities and political currents. He maintained an excellent national newspaper network, both in the Netherlands and increasingly within the United States. He closely monitored the immigrant flows as he had done back home, where his brother-in-law Leendert Dooge had been an immigrant agent. In Wisconsin Quintus printed statistical overviews for the state which kept him informed about new business opportunities. In addition to his printing business, Quintus sold coffee and Dutch gin. In 1855 he was ready for expansion and he dropped the name Sheboygan from the title and hoped to attract a broader clientele with the name *Nieuwsbode*.<sup>11</sup> More than the other newspapers Quintus' newspaper looked beyond the horizon at railroad planning, new legislation, the court system, education, and promising new economic activities such as growing tobacco or producing cheese.

While the *Nieuwsbode* had many American features, there was much continuity between the *Zierikzeesche* and the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*. As the Zeeland newspaper took sides for the workers against the upper classes, Quintus supported the Democrats against the aristocratic Whigs. At the beginning of 1850, he wrote: “... we believe that each reader has long felt, that we adhere to the teachings of *Jefferson* ... He, the true democrat, acknowledges all the classes of his fellow citizens, and treats the poor with equal respect as the rich. He spreads with speed the truths of the democratic faith and contributes to the maintenance of the correct principles and the everlasting continuity of our free institutions and laws.”<sup>12</sup>

Of course his preference was also guided by the profitability of his political association. Local newspapers could only survive thanks to political subsidies. Quintus' efforts to get himself elected in a local offices, failed, even though he also printed the English-language *Democratic Secretary*. In 1854 he joined the Republican Party out of frustration with slavery, but possibly also in aspiration of an elective office.<sup>13</sup> He served as clerk of court for two years, but was defeated and he returned to the Democratic Party in 1857, because of the party's radical ideas about abolition, its campaign against immigrants and opportunism. This double conversion made his readers nervous and many canceled their subscription. The political vicissitudes were a foreboding of more change.

### *Move to Michigan*

During the unstable 1850s, Jacob Quintus found out that Sheboygan was not the best place to realize his ambition. The next phase in Quintus' life reveals the shifting economic balance between Michigan and Wisconsin. In May 1857, Quintus visited Grand Rapids and became convinced that this city had a great future and would develop into the second largest city in the state, thanks to its cheap and abundant waterpower, cheap building materials, and good connections. He saw three railroads approach the city and connecting the various corners of the state, generously funded by land grants. The city boasted of excellent educational opportunities, a variety of churches and well-stocked department stores, among them one called the “New Dutch Store” in the city center, owned by his brother-in-law Leendert Dooge. Many Hollanders found jobs in the city's factories and workshops. Also, the surrounding area was prospering and the hopes of a good port increased the prospects for Holland harbor.<sup>14</sup>

In the spring of 1858, Quintus decided to sell his newspaper to his German coeditor and translator A. Pott and take his family on a trip to the homeland,. The summer of 1858 was a turning point in his life. Not often did immigrants decide to return to their home country so soon for a visit. On

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<sup>10</sup> *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 9 and 16 April 1850.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 March 1855.

<sup>12</sup> *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 29 January 1850.

<sup>13</sup> The first issue of the *Democratic Secretary* appeared on 7 October 1853, but it folded after a year. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, preserves the one and only copy. Quintus became the secretary of the County Convention of the Republicans on 25 October 1854 (*Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 31 October 1854). The voters elected him on 7 November 1854 as Clerk of Court with 930 against 737 (*Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 14 November 1854), but he was defeated in 1856.

<sup>14</sup> *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 16 juni 1857.

June 3 Quintus, his wife and four-year-old daughter Jennie landed in Rotterdam and visited relatives in the province of Zeeland for a period of three months. After their return in the US they resettled in Grand Rapids.<sup>15</sup> Whether the economic crisis and the crop failures of 1857 stimulated his departure, or whether he had alienated his readers by moving back and forth between the Democratic and Republic Parties, or whether his decision was triggered by his political defeat, or his failing health, is not easy to decide. Most likely, all these factors added up to his decision to move and it appeared to be good one.

Quintus did well in Grand Rapids where he continued to deal in newspapers. For seven years he published the *Americaansche Stoompost* (American Steampost) from 1859-1866, and one again in 1884 with the *Nieuwe Courant*.<sup>16</sup> Because only one issue of this later publications survived, little is known about his publishing activities in Michigan. However, the *Stoompost* closely resembled the *Nieuwsbode*. Despite the term "American" in the title, it brought mainly a variety of Dutch and European news stories, listed new immigrants and lost relatives, clipped stories from other Dutch-American periodicals, and printed many commercial announcements. It claimed the largest circulation among Dutch newspapers in the Union. There was more continuity with the Wisconsin period in Quintus' efforts to combine commercial, editorial and political initiatives. As in Wisconsin, his political career in Michigan quickly faded. Though he served as school supervisor in 1861, he failed to be elected in other functions.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, his business enterprise flourished. He dealt in real estate, opened an office as notary public (mainly to retrieve inheritances in the old country), sold life insurance, and was an agent for various shipping companies. According to the tax assessment records his property jumped from \$ 500 in 1850 to \$ 6,000 ten years later and \$ 40,000 in 1870.<sup>18</sup> He remained at the core of the Dutch (business) community, though religiously he moved a bit outside the mainstream. He left Fountain Street Reformed Church for the mystic group of the Swedenborgians. The thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Dutch settlement on the First of October 1877 took place in his home at Prospect Street 18, in Grand Rapids' best neighborhood. This confirmed his position of prestige and wealth.<sup>19</sup>

After the death of his wife Catharina in 1903, Jacob Quintus moved in with daughter Jennie in Plainwell, Michigan, where he died in 1906, aged 85. He had shown that it was also possible to make connections among the Dutch immigrants outside the religious networks and that a newspaper in the Dutch language was a necessity.<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion

Jacob Quintus' departure from Wisconsin ended the Dutch-language press in the state for fifteen years. It would be 1878 before another Dutch-language periodical, *De Standaard* would be printed. This newspaper served Flemish and Dutch Catholics. In the meantime the center of the Dutch Protestants had moved permanently to Michigan. The *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* had not intended this shift, but contributed to it nonetheless by reporting on the successes of the Dutch there and in other places. The Dutch Protestant colony in Wisconsin developed differently from Michigan and Iowa. The pioneers there did not settle with a overarching plan for the development of the area, as in Holland and Zeeland,

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<sup>15</sup> Pott returned the newspaper to the Republicans, but it folded on 8 May 1861. Jacob's wife Catharina Wilhelmina Souffrouw was born in Oostburg, Zeeland, on October 8, 1824, where she kept a store. The 1850 census listed a son of two years old: John Varded. He died in infancy, as did two daughters. Suzanne M. Quintus died on March 13, 1851, 8 months old and Jane C. Quintus on September 3, 1853, 10 months old. Sheboygan County Historical Society, Burial list Wildwood Cemetery, Sheboygan Co, Wisc., block 4. A third daughter Jennie was born in 1854. The second son John was born on April 7, 1859 and became an engineer. *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 5 June en 3 July 1858.

<sup>16</sup> The only surviving issue of the *Stoompost* is the one of 27 December 1865 preserved in Clarke Historical Library, Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

<sup>17</sup> *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 27 September 1884. In 1862 Quintus lost the campaign as the Democratic candidate for clerk of Kent County with 2,568 votes against 3,152 votes for Peter Pierce and in 1866 Pierce defeated him again with 4,129 against 2,619 for Quintus.

<sup>18</sup> Cd-rom *Immigration Records: Dutch in America, 1800s* ([Novato, CA?]: The Learning Company, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Dwight Goss, *History of Grand Rapids and Its Industries* (Chicago: C.F. Cooper, 1906), 863-864, and Albert Baxter, *History of the City of Grand Rapids* (New York and Grand Rapids: Munsell and Com. 1891).

<sup>20</sup> *Sheboygan County News*, 28 februari 1906. Hij ligt begraven op Hillside Cemetery, Plainwell, Michigan, in Allegan County, de woonplaats van zijn dochter Jennie die met Dr. Arthur Hazelwood was getrouwd.

Michigan, and Pella, Iowa. They lacked strong and visionary leaders who represented them in the state and maintained unity in times of pressure.

The average immigrant in the Badger state had sufficient means to survive without the strong solidarity in other states. In addition, railroad lines relatively late to connecting the area around Sheboygan with eastern and western markets. The Wisconsin Dutch lacked the symbiotic (and mutually beneficial) relationship between urban and rural settlements, as in Michigan between Grand Rapids, Holland and their satellite villages. This capped the growth in Wisconsin. These circumstances attracted immigrants who were less excited to follow strong clerical leadership. The churches were divided and did not generate the power necessary for further cultural development. Editor Quintus fit into this critical attitude towards ecclesiastical authority.

It is unlikely that Jacob Quintus was aware of all these factors. But he had the best overview to compare the conditions in the various Dutch settlements. While his unique *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* did not survive the Civil War, he must have felt the satisfaction that other periodicals took over his role as channel for the Dutch-American community.<sup>21</sup> The first successful Dutch-American editor began his enterprise copying a Dutch example which he soon adapted to American needs. Quintus' career represents the high value of immigrants who transcended their own localities.

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Schoone-Jongen, 'De Volksvriend and Dutch-American Connections', in Robert P. Swierenga, Jack Nyenhuis en Nella Kennedy, red., *Dutch American Arts and Letters in Historical Perspective* (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2008), 183-190.