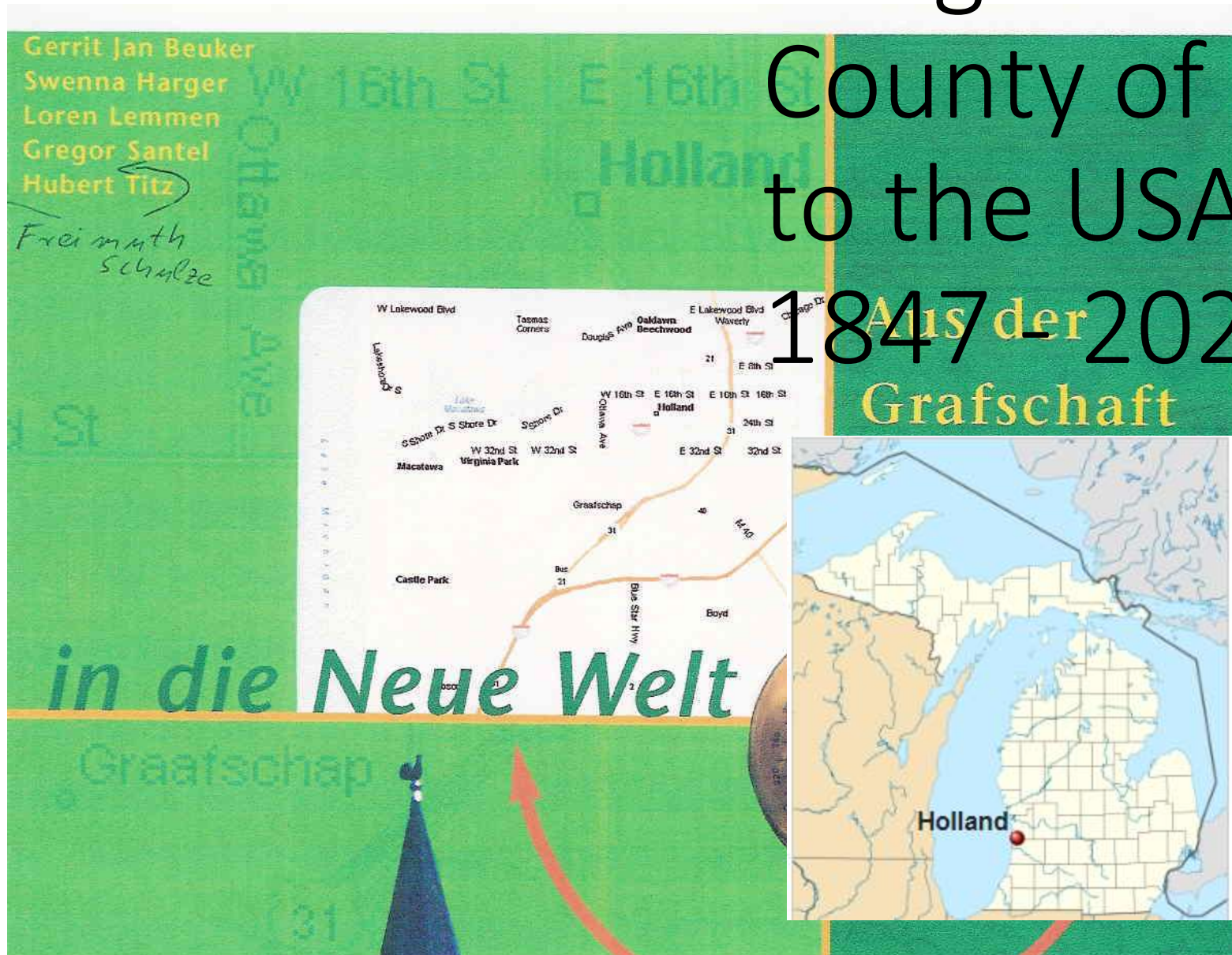


Emigration from the County of Bentheim to the USA 1847-2022

Pastor i.R. Dr.
Gerrit Jan
Beuker,
Neuenhaus



Part I: The religious aspect

The Old Reformed Church in the County of Bentheim



~ 20-25%

joint community of Emlichheim /
northern section of the county



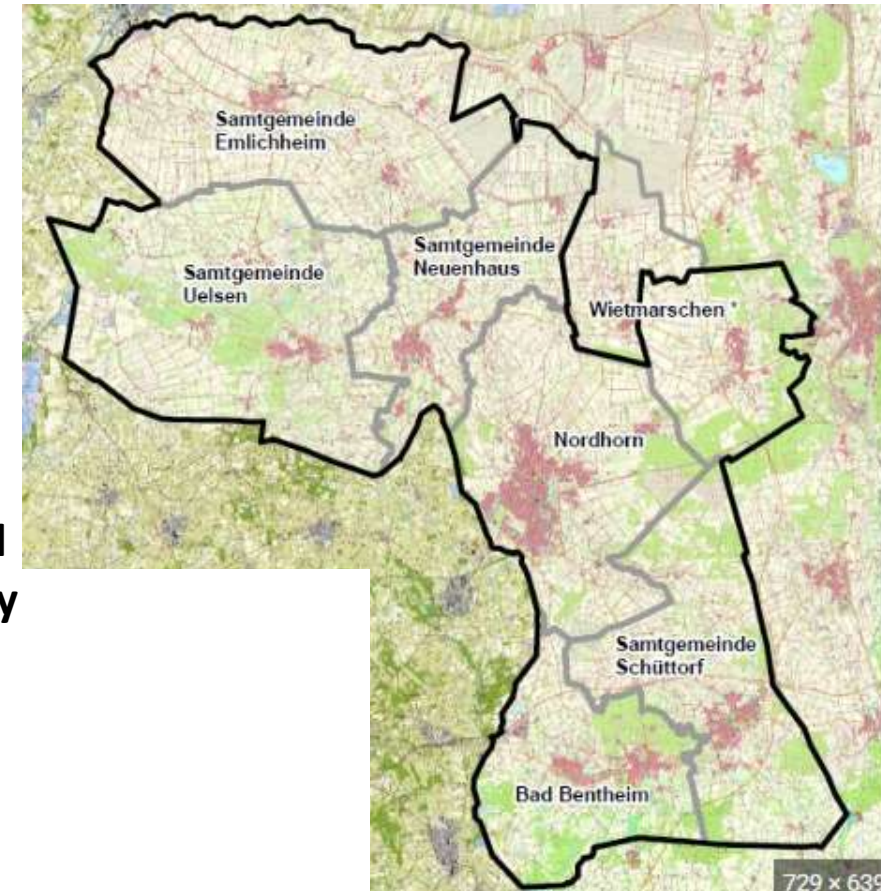
~ 5%

joint communities of Neuenhaus and
Uelsen / middle section of the county



< 1 %

Nordhorn, Bentheim, Schüttorf /
southern section of the county



→ 100 %

share of inhabitants who belong to the Old Reformed Church
– *in the past as well as in the present*

Splitting up: the Old Reformed Church **VERSUS** the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and in the county of Bentheim



Hendrik De Cock (1801-1842) was a leader in the 1832 secession from the Dutch State Church and a mentor to Vander Werp. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

The beginning of the separatist movement in the Netherlands

- in the 1830s some people felt unhappy with modern teaching
- in the Reformed Church there was “no food for heart and soul”
- wish to go back to more traditional ways
- only old traditional church songs
- preaching “with heart and soul”
- at first: new movement was forbidden / soldiers in „separatist“ homes / fines (Bußgelder) for rebellious kind of teaching

- Hendrik de Cock, in spite of all opposition, founded local Old Reformed Churches near Groningen in the Netherlands in 1834

FOUNDING THE FIRST OLD REFORMED CHURCH COMMUNITIES IN THE COUNTY OF BENTHEIM



The first Old Reformed local churches in the County of Bentheim

1838: Dutchman Albertus van Raalte founds the first congregation in Uelsen

1840: Hendrick de Cock founds the congregation of Bentheim (†1841)

1845: Emlichheim, Hoogstede

1849: Wilsum, Veldhausen

Pastors as prisoners:

1838-1848 no religious freedom for these separatists

Members of the Old Reformed Church were not allowed to meet for church services with people from other families. If caught, they had to go to prison or had to pay fines (Bußgelder)

examples:

- **Harm-Hindrik Schoemaker**, a farmer from Haftenkamp, (1800-1881), lay preacher
- **Jan Berend Sundag**, pastor for the Old Reformed Church, (1810-1893) imprisoned between 1838 and 1848 for over 30 times, sometimes some days, weeks or even months

later discrimination :

- continuing discrimination after 1848 because the elite, that is mayor (Bürgermeister), city councils, police, was made only of members of the Reformed church
- Jokes being made about the “Koksche” until today – as you may know or may have experienced

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "A. Van Raalte".

The Neuenhaus prison above the Uelsener Tor in Neuenhaus, zw. 1800 und 1850
torn down in 1868



push factors that drove people from the county of Bentheim to the US besides **religious freedom**:

- poverty (county of Bentheim was called poorhouse of Germany (still in the 1950s))
- way out for the younger children born on a farm
- marriage restrictions
- getting rid of the very poor (passage to America was cheaper for the local communities than feeding them / providing for them in general)



total population of the county of Bentheim

1880 30.000

2020 135.000

total emigration between 1880 and 1900:

**Lower County: 4000
(poorer part of the county)**

**Upper County: 1000
(wealthier part)**



Jahr	Auswanderer aus der Grafschaft Bentheim
1832	1
1833	1
1834-35	0
1836	13
1837	2
1838	4
1839	9
1840	1
1841	1
1842	17
1843	11
1844	20
1845	29
1846	10
1847	145
1848	79
1849	55
1850	22
1851	12
1852	23
1853	14
1854	17
1855	12
1856	21
1857	89
1858	10
1859	45
1860	27

1860	27
1861	9
1862	4
1863	20
1864	68
1865	110
1866	166
1867	118
1868	73
1869	76
1870	43
1871	18
1872	34
1873	27
1874	34
1875	25
1876	15
1877	14
1878	7
1879	38
1880	100
1881	280
1882	229
	2198

2002 Plus 25%

1883	104
1884	54
1885	14
1886	34
1887	13
1888	15
1889	26
1890	35
1891	64
1892	59
1893	43
1894	16
1895	3
1896	3
1897	2
1898	2
1899	8
1900	11
1901	4
1902	6
1903	4
1904	16
1905	4
1906	9
1907	1
1908-11	0
	550

1940-47	0
1948	1
1949	1
1950	2
1951	9
1952	15
1953	25
1954	28
1955	9
1956	2
1957	4
1958	9
1959	2
1960-64	0
1965	5
1966	0
1967	1
1968-77	0
1978	2
unbekannt	273
	388

immigration waves

1847: almost the whole Old Reformed Church Community of Hoogstede emigrated – one year before official religious freedom in 1848

1866: the County became part of Prussia and many were afraid of its militarism, did not want to be recruited into the Reich's Army.

1880s: The Reformed Church in the county of Bentheim lost its independence, became part of the state church



pull factors:



- the idea of **absolute freedom**
- **Promised Land imagery** as promised to the people of Israel
- an independent system of **Dutch** or **Christian Reformed Churches (from 1858)**
- the **American dream** of becoming rich through one's own hard work
- **earlier immigrants' stories**
 - white bread, meat every day (mostly true)
 - being the owner of one's own farmland (true)
 - stories of the big city of Holland (lies)
 - what they **did not tell**: having to clear the land, felling trees, work as farmhands, or in furniture factories
- around 1910: average middle class people could afford a car

Setting off for America

first step:

selling about everything one owned, buying dried food (meat, beans) for 2-4 months, taking photos of loved ones farewell and departure for ever



popular route until 1854 →

→ Vechte River → IJsselmeer → Amsterdam/ Rotterdam → Le Havre (France) → New York (sailboat 2-4 months)

1854 77.000 emigrants take off from **Bremerhaven**

1858 steamship line started

(reducing passage to 14 days)

1862 opening of a train line between Bentheim and Bremerhaven

1880s end of any trans-Atlantic *sailing* traffic

← **Auswandererhalle Bremerhaven** opened in 1850 for up to 2000 people, biggest building in town at the time, emigrating was big business - emigrants sometimes had to wait for departure for weeks



ELLIS ISLAND



in service from
1890 to 1854:
point of entry
for 12 million,
mostly
European
immigrants



opened as a
museum in 1990

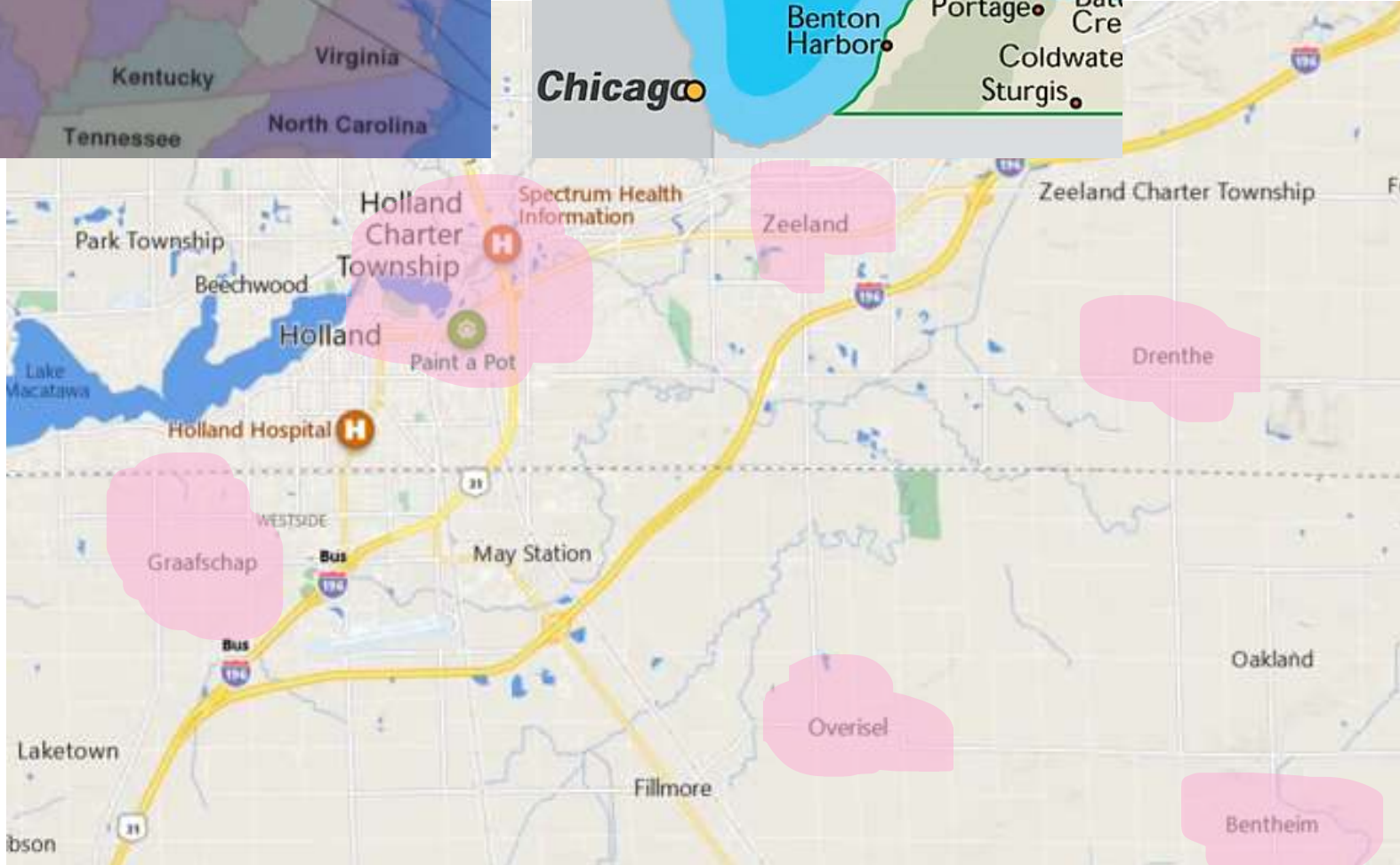
„B“ für „back“ (zurück)
„Ct“ für „trachoma“ (Augenentzündung)
„E“ für „eyes“ (Augen)
„F“ für „face“ (Gesicht)
„H“ für „heart“ (Herz)
„K“ für „hernia“ (Leistenbruch)
„L“ für „lameness“ (Lahmheit)
„P“ für „Pneumonia“ (Lungenprobleme“)
„Pg“ für „pregnant“ (schwanger)
„Sc“ für „scalp“ (Kopf)
„S“ für „senile“ (senil)
„X“ für „suspected mental problems or
insanity“ (Verdacht auf mentale Probleme
oder Geistesgestörtheit)

the fateful health check:
1-2% were not allowed to enter the
states



WHERE THEY STARTED THEIR NEW LIVES

- 1846 city of Holland founded by Albertus van Raalte
- For generations, many Dutch and German immigrants settled in the area
- founded places like Graafschap, Bentheim, Drenthe, Zeeland, ...



Graafschap CRC



totally new church
(with indoor basketball court)
opened in 1996



copy of the
original log
cabin that
served as a
church for
the CRC
Graafschap



Being Dutch or *Deutsch* / German ?

- Until around 1900, most people's mother tongue in the County of Bentheim: **Dutch !!! Can you believe it?!**
- In Emlichheim ORC, **Dutch** sermons (Predigt) and church songs until the **1960s!**
- Also in Michigan: Dutch and/or German **spoken in schools, Dutch and German church and newspapers!**
- After the outbreak of WWI: speaking German or Dutch **not allowed** in the public/at schools, only during **German/Dutch lessons** at school
- Since WW I, parents often lied to their kids, did not tell them they had German ancestors, but instead told them they were ***Dutch!***
- ... taking advantage of the similarity of „Dutch“ and „Deutsch“



After World War II

- CARE packages immediately after the end of World War II
- Americans official guests at 650th jubilee of the city of Nordhorn in 1979
- reverse visit in 1980 (80 people) further visits from Bentheim to Michigan almost yearly since 1978, every other year since 2003,
- Regular visits from Americans from Michigan have to Europe and Bentheim about every other year , the last visit in 2017
- founding of Bentheimers International Society in 2003, intense research, registering more than 5000 names of emigrants
- school visits by the LMG to Michigan around 2000 and in 2005, in 2022 trip to the US, but not to Michigan



A GROUP OF THE LMG IN MICHIGAN IN 2005 – SOME SNAPSHOTS



the whole group



the teachers
Mack / Pfe



grave of a US soldier with family roots in the county of Bentheim



lighthouse on the shore of Lake Michigan



bridge to the Upper Peninsula, the northern part of Michigan



visiting the Amish - a religious group founded in Germany that does not accept electricity and modern life in general

SOURCES:

- Gerrit Jan Beuker/Swenna Harger/Loren Lemmen/Hubert Titz et al.: „Aus der Grafschaft Bentheim in die Neue Welt: 1640-2002“, Nordhorn 2002.
- Swenna Harger/Loren Lemmen: „Auswanderung aus der Grafschaft Bentheim nach Nordamerika“, Nordhorn 1996