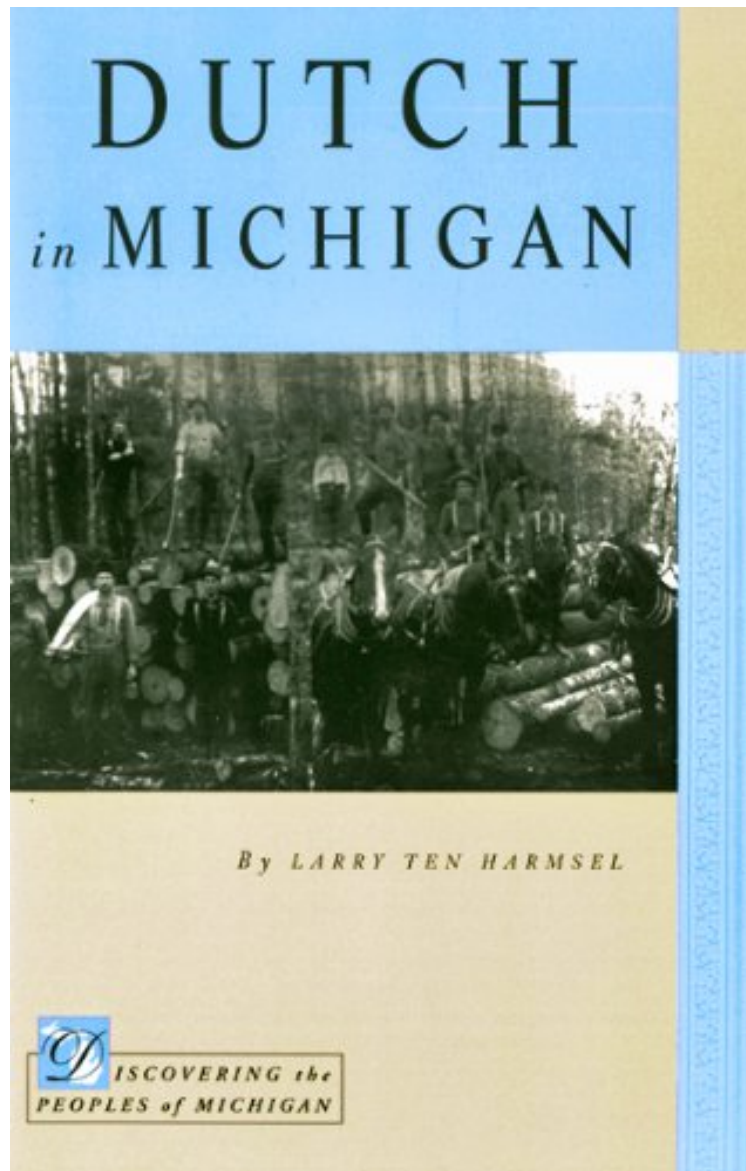


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Dutch in Michigan (Discovering the Peoples of Michigan)

Larry Ten Harmsel

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Larry Ten Harmsel : Dutch in Michigan (Discovering the Peoples of Michigan) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dutch in Michigan (Discovering the Peoples of Michigan):

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Review in Origins Magzine of Heritage HallBy Jan ReviewerIncluded in this illustrated booklet of less than fifty pages are a twenty-eight-page essay on the Dutch in

Michigan, two pages of Dutch recipes, three pages devoted to Louis Padnos, three pages on logging, two pages of notes and a four-page section titled, "For Further Reference." In a few words, Ten Harmsel, a professor of English at Western Michigan University, summarizes what he considers essential for an understanding of the Dutch immigration experience in Michigan during the years 1846-1920. For Ten Harmsel, a quick backward glance at Dutch history and a bit of probing of the immigrant psyche are all that is needed to explain Dutch immigration and today's social, religious, political and economic behavior exhibited by the descendants of the Michigan Dutch. Though brevity has its virtues, it also has its perils, which are especially evident in the author's selection of materials and his emphases on particular aspects of the Dutch immigrant heritage. Those matters that Ten Harmsel touches upon very lightly or not at all reveal much about what he thinks about the Dutch in Michigan. Although the causes for Dutch migration to America over the past century-and-a-half are complex, this work presents this harsh oversimplification: One could say that the people who led boatloads of Hollanders to Michigan were among the few American immigrants to flee a spirit of tolerance in their native land. (p. 3) In point of fact, many of these early immigrants had been arrested, fined and imprisoned in the Netherlands because of their religious convictions and were not allowed to operate their own schools. Very little is said about the mental baggage these immigrants carried across the Atlantic. Neglected for the most part are immigrant piety, influence of religious thinking in the Netherlands during the entire nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the impact of the writings of Dutch theologian-editor-statesman Abraham Kuyper. Early arrivals in the Kolonie did exhibit a seceder heritage, but more needs to be said about their economic motives and the acute agony of Americanization shared by these early immigrants and those who came later. Before emigrating to America many of these folk had never left their home village or hamlet in the Netherlands. Further, religious strife was evident in most ethnic immigrant communities in America, not making the Dutch settlement unique in this respect by any measure. Though the Dutch saw value in learning English, the transition was more complex than implied by the author. Jaap van Marle, student of language, has demonstrated that the Dutch clung to their native language longer than other immigrant groups. For many Dutch folk, their native language was an embodiment of their religious heritage. Though a very few Dutch-language periodicals and newspapers are mentioned in the booklet, many more of equal significance flourished. For those interested in Dutch-American journalism, Harry Boonstra's *Dutch-American Newspapers and Periodicals in Michigan, 1850-1925*, nowhere mentioned in this essay or list of resources, is extremely valuable. Nothing is said about the Michigan Dutch-American publishers such as Baker Book House, Eerdmans, Kregel and Zondervan. Omissions are also found in the author's remarks about novelists who have written about the Dutch in Michigan. David Cornel De Jong is mentioned, but absent from the text are works on the Dutch by Arnold Mulder and Bastian Kruithof's *Instead of the Thorn*. Nor does Ron Jager's *Eighty Acres* appear here. A line or two in the text are devoted to Feike Feikema and Peter De Vries, both Calvin College graduates. Of Feikema's works, only *The Primitive* gives the Michigan Dutch a significant presence and De Vries has little to say about the Michigan Dutch in *The Blood of the Lamb* or anywhere else in his fiction. In short, the author's consideration of De Vries and Feikema at the expense of writers who, like David Cornel De Jong, wrote specifically about the Michigan Dutch, is both puzzling and open to question. Undocumented statements include the remark that prior to the time Van Raalte made the decision to settle in Michigan, Wisconsin's Dutch population was dominated by Catholics (p. 6), and the author's assertion that as a result of the 1857 schism "one-third of the Dutch community broke loose from the RCA." (pp. 13-14) Since these both go counter to the established historiography of the Dutch in Michigan, at the very least, citations are needed. The narrow area focus of this essay is Grand Rapids-Holland. For instance, lacking is any mention of Jan Vogel, Missaukee County pioneer involved in the lumbering business. Information about Missaukee County Dutch enclaves such as Vogel Center and Falmouth is not found nor is anything said about Ellsworth and Atwood, Dutch colonies in Antrim County. Likewise, for a word about Rudyard, the only Dutch colony in Upper Michigan, the reader must look elsewhere. Even within the Grand Rapids-Holland area, significant elements are not included. There is nothing on Dutch furniture workers and truck gardening, the two largest areas of employment. Overlooked also is the 1911 furniture strike in Grand Rapids, which illuminates the Grand Rapids Dutch community under stress. Shared worker grievances and clerical opinions about the right to strike say much about the religious-economic environment of the Grand Rapids Dutch, but not in this work. A section is devoted to logging, yet this was not a major economic enterprise for the Dutch in Holland or Grand Rapids. Careful editing also would have improved this work. *Tulip Time* in Holland began in 1929, not 1920 as stated on page 18. Footnote 14 cites page 54 of Herbert Brinks' *Write Back Soon: Letters from Immigrants in America*. Page 54 does not contain the cited material. A recipe for pea soup, a Dutch-American staple, is not found among the recipes presented. Why is Louis Padnos, a Russian Jew who settled in Holland, included but not the Hekman or Eerdmans families, or for that matter, the founders of Amway? Not a single item published after 1990 is listed in the "For Further Reference" section, though there is a separate unannotated listing of fiction, poetry and Yankee Dutch items. Recognized scholars of the topic like Brinks and Swierenga have written and edited many more items than those included. Also not mentioned are any publications of the Association for Dutch American Studies or the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. The Dutch in Michigan deserve more than this book has to offer. Its brevity and selection of material tantalize the reader and leave anyone who reads this book with more questions than answers. If you purchase this rather expensive publication, read it with

discernment and carefully consider both what is said and not said about the Dutch in Michigan.

Even though they are historically one of the smaller immigrant streams, nineteenth-century Dutch migrants and their descendants have made parts of West Michigan their own. The first Dutch in Michigan were religious dissenters whose commitment to Calvinism had long-reaching effects on their communities, even in the face of later waves of radicalized industrial immigrants and the challenges of modern life. From Calvin College to Meijer Thrifty Acres and the Tulip Festival, the Dutch presence has enriched and informed people throughout the state. Larry ten Harmsel skillfully weaves together the strands of history and modern culture to create a balanced and sensitive portrayal of this vibrant community.

About the Author Larry ten Harmsel was born in Zeeland, Michigan, and has been a lifelong student of Dutch culture in America. He has also studied, taught, and traveled extensively in The Netherlands. He is the founder and director of the Grand Tour of Europe, sponsored by Western Michigan University, where he serves as Professor of English and Associate Dean of the Lee Honors College.