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Theologian Digs in New Jersey Archives

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Incidentally....

by James Koldenhoven

"Theologian Digs in New Jersey Archives"

Dr. James De Jong, associate professor of theology at Dordt, was awarded a NEH grant, plus travel cost to do research on the Scottish theologian, John Erskine. In addition to his independent research, part of "Perspectives on Religion in American History," De Jong also participated in a seminar at Princeton University where he carried on his research during the summer.

Erskine led evangelical Calvinism in late eighteenth-century Scotland, but, according to De Jong, historians have overlooked him in favor of more liberal Scottish Presbyterians. De Jong thinks perhaps historians have obscured the influence Erskine had on Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed churches in America.

This summer De Jong examined the contact the Scottish clergyman had on theologians at Princeton Theological Sem-

inary. "One of the fellows I'll look at is John Witherspoon, the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence," said De Jong in an interview.

De Jong spent some time at the archives at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, a Reformed school at New Brunswick N.J., to determine how much Erskine influenced John Livingston, the leader of the Dutch Reformed Church in America, and other Dutch Reformed thinkers. De Jong thinks Erskine is so significant that he is now trying to discover whether it would be feasible to write a biography on him. It has been nearly 200 years since the last biographer wrote on Erskine, and De Jong thinks that work was not very scholarly anyhow.

If he decides to begin on such a book, he would lay the groundwork in the coming

academic year and then travel to Scotland in the summer of 1978 to glean more information.

A graduate of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich., De Jong specialized in the history of missions from 1640-1810 while obtaining his doctorate in theology from the Free University in Amsterdam.

The National Endowment for the Humanities set up the competitive program to allow opportunity for studying in major libraries to college teachers who do not have access to such facilities. The foundation hopes "they will sharpen their understandings and improve their ability to convey their understandings to college students."

A Changing Curriculum

Responding to constituent appeal, departmental studies, and the work of special committees, Dordt College is moving ahead in several curriculum developments.

Social Work is one such development. Until now Dordt has offered studies in Sociology, without extending these courses into field work. Besides an introductory course and opportunities to get practical experience, the department will offer courses in child and family welfare, and gerontology. Ken Venhuizen is the new instructor in this area.

Theatre and Art are not new to Dordt College, but courses of study in these areas are new. Beginning this fall, courses will be offered in two- and three-dimensional art, art history, drawing, and other courses. Norman Matheis is the new addition to the art staff. He will teach with Joanne Alberda.

Theatre Arts is also offered for the first time this fall, with two new staff members added. They are Verne Meyer and Mike Stair. Mr. Meyer will do technical directing in the department and work in educational theatre, while Mr. Stair is the departmental designer. Both men, as well as Mr. Koldenhoven, will direct pro-

ductions. Course offerings will include scene and light design, acting, theatre history, and creative dramatics, among others.

Animal science, soil fertility, agricultural ecology, and other courses will make up the new Agriculture Department at Dordt. Duane Bajema will provide the instruction in these new courses.

Other curricular changes are reflected in offerings at Dordt College. The Music Department will give instruction in liturgical music, the Speech and Communications Departments have revised their programs into a single department, and French will be offered for the first time.

Some of the curricular changes reflect shifting emphasis, while others are entirely new. Together these changes are indicative of a larger concern of the faculty which has begun open discussions on the question of curriculum goals. With this question in mind, curriculum study meetings have been held throughout the summer and will continue into the 1977-78 school year. Goals are being formulated on the basis of the college's purpose, intending to reflect, eventually, a closer relationship between the academic, Biblical perspective of the college and its offerings.