

Origins

Historical Magazine of The Archives
Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary

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Origins is designed to publicize and advance the objectives of The Archives. These goals include the gathering, organization, and study of historical materials produced by the day-to-day activities of the Christian Reformed Church, its institutions, communities, and people.

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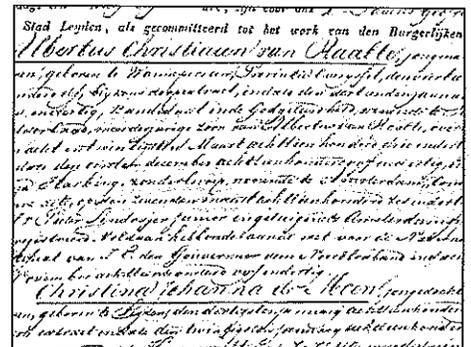
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Cover photo:
Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte



page 8



page 26

- 2 From the Editor
- 4 Albertus C. Van Raalte: Leader of the Dutch Emigration to the United States, 1847-1867
Elton J. Bruins
- 12 Albertus C. Van Raalte
A Look at the Autumn Years of His Life (1867-1876)
Michael De Vries
- 19 From the Recollections of Gezina Visscher Van Der Haar, 1820-1901
translation by C.L. Jalving, 1954
- 27 Children of the Day; Not of the Night: The Background of the Afscheiding, 1834
Leonard Sweetman



pages 34, 36



page 35

- 34 Henry Dosker, between Albertus C. Van Raalte and Abraham Kuyper
George Harinck
- 42 Book Notes
- 45 For the Future
upcoming Origins articles
- 46 Contributors

teaching practicum. Joining the staff as our second student assistant is Nateisha DeCruz.α

AADAS Conference

The 13th biennial conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies was held on campus June 22-23, 2001. Speakers from the Netherlands and the United States discussed Dutch impressions of North America, acculturation, Christian colleges, and Roman Catholic immigrants. Full text versions of most of the papers will be compiled into an Occasional Paper this fall and will be available from the Archives. The next conference will be in 2003 at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois.α



Richard H. Harms

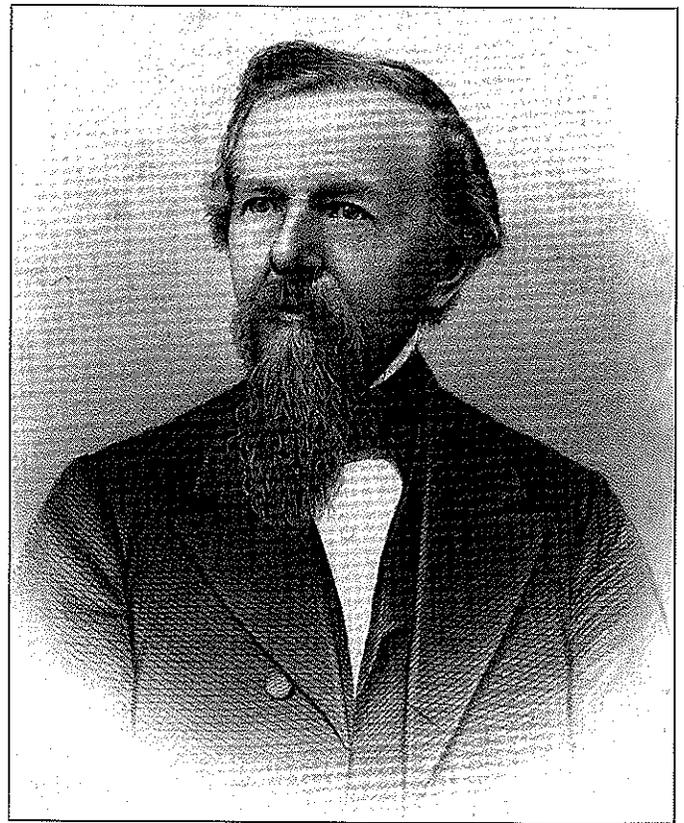
Albertus C. Van Raalte: Leader of the Dutch Emigration to the United States, 1847–1867¹

Elton J. Bruins

Albertus C. Van Raalte's significance as a key leader of the Dutch emigration to America in the nineteenth century extends from the establishment of the Holland Colony in 1847 to his retirement as a pastor in 1867. The far-reaching consequences of his thoughts and actions in all their breadth and depth have not yet been fully fathomed. His leadership in the Dutch settlement in Western Michigan consisted of his being not only a pastor and preacher but also an educator and a denominational and community leader. In order to gain some understanding of what his accomplishments were as leader of the Dutch emigration, we need to review some aspects of his early life in the Netherlands.²

Van Raalte at the time of his graduation from Leiden University in 1835 had every intention of serving as a pastor in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands as his father had done. As a candidate for the ministry, he applied for acceptance in the church of his ancestors but was refused admittance

based on his alleged failure to indicate during his examination that he would support the ecclesiastical rules in the mother church. Instead he threw his lot in with the Separatist movement which had gotten underway just the year before his graduation.³ The Separatists



Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

under the leadership of Hendrik de Cock of Ulrum and Hendrik P. Scholte of Amsterdam in 1836 accepted Van Raalte as a pastor into this infant but burgeoning movement.

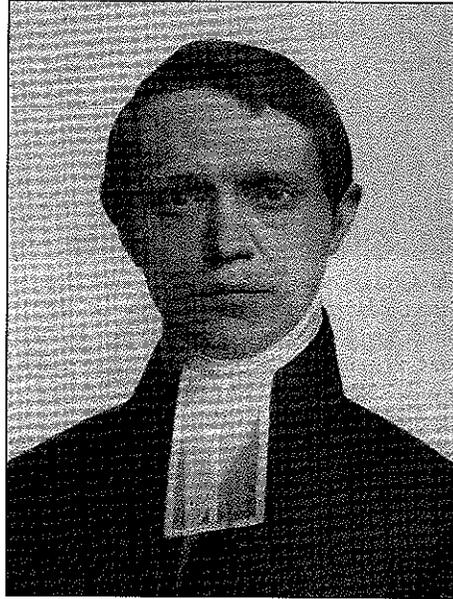
Elton J. Bruins, *Blekkink Professor of Religion Emeritus, Hope College, and Director of the A. C. Van Raalte Institute.*

On 11 March 1836, one week after being ordained as a pastor, Van Raalte and Christina de Moen were married. Soon after they entered their first field of service, which was made up of two small congregations in Genemuiden and Mastenbroek on the western edge of the province of Overijssel. In 1839 the Van Raaltes moved to Ommen to serve the Separatist congregation there. His pastorate there was successful, although he and fellow Separatists had to endure opposition from church authorities and the local populace. Van Raalte himself was fined and spent time in jail for preaching to crowds in fields or barns without permission of the authorities. His success as a pastor in Ommen is demonstrated by the theological school he established for young men of high school age who wished to enter the ministry.⁴

As part of his ministry in Ommen, he helped to establish Separatist congregations in the surrounding areas. There was interest in this movement, which was deemed more faithful to the teachings of the Calvinistic faith and the articles of the Synod of Dordt. The Van Raaltes left Ommen in 1844 and moved to Arnhem where he joined Anthony Brummelkamp, his brother-in-law, who was serving the congregation there as well as one in nearby Velp. The theological school also moved from Ommen to Arnhem.

The two years of the family's stay in Arnhem were difficult. The home they lived in was flooded occasionally when the nearby Rhine River overflowed.⁵ He had extensive responsibilities in the relocated theological school in addition to pastoral duties. The major problem that confronted the Van Raaltes, however, was due to the economic downturn the Netherlands was experiencing in the mid-1840s. The potato blight which devastated Ireland also struck Holland. Both the poor and the middle classes were

severely affected by the country's economic woes caused by the blight.⁶ The congregations of Arnhem and Velp, which were supporting both Brummelkamp and Van Raalte, could no longer afford both ministers. This resulted in financial difficulties for the Van Raaltes even though they had income from Christina's inheritance.



Simon Van Velzen, a fellow student at the Amsterdam Athenaeum, introduced Van Raalte to others concerned about conditions in the Dutch State Church. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

The tide of emigration from Europe to America, which began about the same time, swelled as economic conditions grew worse. The "American fever" touched many Europeans, German emigrants in particular, who passed through the Netherlands in large numbers on their way to America. Out of pastoral concern for the Separatists who were leaving the Netherlands both Van Raalte and Brummelkamp became interested in the whole matter of emigration. In 1846 they published a pamphlet entitled *Emigration, or why do we promote emigration to North America and not to Java?*⁷ The pamphlet contained fifty-six pages of carefully reasoned arguments supporting

emigration to America—a step that had been considered by many Netherlanders for some months.

The growing number of emigrants led the authors to declare in this pamphlet their responsibility to assist those who were leaving because of financial need. They fulfilled this responsibility by sending letters of recommendation with the emigrants so that the Americans would treat them kindly. Although Van Raalte and Brummelkamp loved their native land deeply, they foresaw only a bleak future for many of their countrymen and women because of the lack of jobs and low wages. In the winter prior to the publication of this key document, Van Raalte and a number of people he knew well "discussed every aspect of emigration"⁸ and formed a society to promote emigration. The members of the society drew up a constitution for the colony they planned to establish in America. Article seven of that constitution clearly notes that the colony would be Christian, populated by Christians, and governed as a Christian organization. The document is entitled "Rules for the Society of Christians for the Netherlander Emigration to North America."⁹ At this point, however, there was no indication that Van Raalte himself planned to emigrate and serve as the leader of the Christian community which was envisioned in this document.

Van Raalte and Brummelkamp appended a letter addressed to the Christians in North America giving more reasons why many wished to emigrate to America. They stated, "We will make an effort to acquaint you with ourselves as persons and with our circumstances and aims. This is necessary if you are to trust us and have confidence in us."¹⁰ The writers summarize the persecution they had suffered for their faith. They describe the ardent wish of the Separatist people to have independent Christian

schools for their children, schools which were forbidden in the Netherlands. They also point out a need to settle in a place that was not overpopulated, so that hard-working people could make a decent living. Worship free from government intervention, freedom to establish Christian schools, and the opportunity to earn a decent livelihood were the three main reasons for emigration.

There were at least two specific reasons for Van Raalte to make the decision that he and his family would emigrate. The first was that worsening economic conditions affected his own situation. Since the Separatist movement in the Arnhem area was too small to support a theological school and two pastors, the consistory asked Van Raalte to seek another situation. Ostensibly the more compelling reason for him to consider emigrating was the need to give leadership to the departing Separatist emigrants headed for America. In either case, during his serious illness in the summer of 1846, Van Raalte made the decision to emigrate. In August, though still very ill, he informed Brummelkamp that he and his family were going to America. Brummelkamp was stunned by the news.¹¹

Van Raalte had noticed, as he read letters from recent emigrants to America, that many were settling in widely scattered areas of a large country, either in rural areas or in major cities, such as Boston and New York in the East or Chicago and Milwaukee in the Midwest. Without the formation of a Christian colony as a focal point for the new settlers, the emigrants would be quickly assimilated into American culture. If that occurred, the Dutch Separatist emigrants would be drawn away from the Reformed faith. He realized that a Separatist leader from the Netherlands should go to America to serve as the leader of the emigration. The Van



Christina Johanna De Moen Van Raalte; her sisters married Anthony Brummelkamp and Simon Van Velzen, two of the ministers in the 1834 secession. Van Raalte joined the secession once he completed his studies and was denied candidacy in the State Church. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

Raalte family set sail for America on 24 September 1846.

The whole venture Van Raalte had in mind was clearly visionary. He could not have understood what the move to America would mean for him and his family. He undoubtedly left a disappointing situation in his homeland, but the problems he would face, though different, would be daunting. He was going to a large, strange country whose language he could not speak. If he migrated to a major city such as Milwaukee or Chicago, places already attracting Dutch immigrants, there would be homes and jobs for his followers. But Van Raalte decided to take his followers to an undeveloped, isolated area. This bold vision led him to have to meet a tremendous challenge when he encountered the harsh realities of the Michigan frontier.

What may have further influenced Van Raalte's decision to leave the Netherlands was the anticipated assistance of Dr. Thomas De Witt, one of the pastors of the Dutch Reformed

Collegiate congregations in Manhattan, New York, who had visited the Netherlands during the early summer of 1846. Though it is not known whether Van Raalte and De Witt met during that visit, we do know that Hendrik Scholte, then still a good friend of Van Raalte, had considerable contact with De Witt. Upon his return to America, De Witt assumed the responsibility for publicizing the arrival of Dutch immigrants in the Dutch Reformed Church weekly newspaper, *The Christian Intelligencer*. He published articles such as the "Appeal to the Faithful in the United States in North America" written in May 1846 by Brummelkamp and Van Raalte. It appeared on 15 October 1846 in the denominational paper. Thus many readers of this church paper were informed of the new tide of immigration. When Van Raalte and his party landed in the New York harbor in November, they were met by De Witt and Reformed Church in America members who befriended the new arrivals.¹²

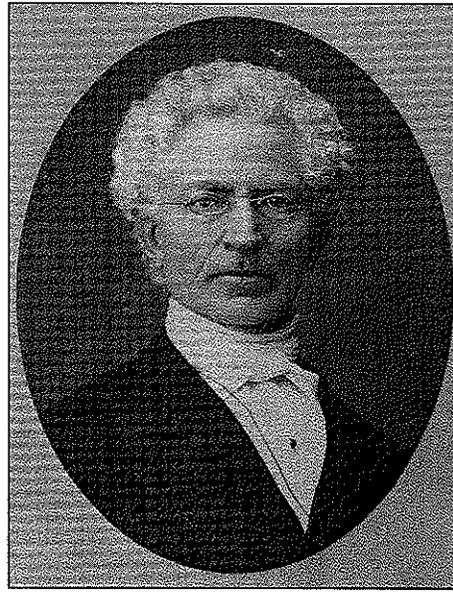
The Reformed Church in America had been founded in 1628 primarily by Dutch immigrants. Even though the denomination was more than two hundred years old by the 1840s, some members, including a few ministers like De Witt, were fluent in the Dutch language. The assistance of many members of the Reformed Church was indispensable to Van Raalte and his people. In addition to friends in the Reformed Church in the New York City area, many others gave assistance to Van Raalte as his party traveled across New York State and Lake Erie to Detroit. Two people were especially supportive, Rev. Isaac N. Wyckoff, pastor of the Second Reformed Church of Albany, and Theodore Romeyn, an attorney residing in Detroit.¹³

The Van Raalte party arrived in Detroit just before the close of shipping on the Great Lakes (due to the

oncoming winter). In addition to the assistance of Romeyn, they had the help of Rev. George Duffield, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Detroit, who was able to find work for the men of the Van Raalte party. A committee of leading citizens was formed in Detroit to aid these newly arrived immigrants. The Detroit committee was interested in having these Netherlanders, who had a reputation for being hard-working, upstanding, and devout people, establish their colony in Michigan—a state eager to attract worthy citizens.

Van Raalte had originally thought of establishing his colony in Alto, Wisconsin, an area praised for its good farmland by his former student Roelof Sleijster. After he and his party arrived in Detroit in December 1846, he took the advice of the Detroit committee seriously and agreed to look at places on the western side of the state where some federal land was still available. At the end of December 1846, Van Raalte took the train from Detroit to Kalamazoo where he was put in contact with Rev. Ova P. Hoyt, pastor of the Presbyterian Church. Hoyt recommended that he visit Judge John R. Kellogg in the village of Allegan, the county seat, some thirty miles north of Kalamazoo. Kellogg advised Van Raalte to consider an area in northern Allegan County and southern Ottawa County for settlement.

Walking through deep snow, assisted by an Indian guide, Van Raalte surveyed the area around Lake Macatawa (then known as Black Lake) in Ottawa County. He thought the people of the Holland Colony could develop a harbor at the mouth of this body of water where it emptied into Lake Michigan. The location provided ready lake access to such developing ports as Chicago and Milwaukee, although at that time sandbars blocked much of the channel between the lake and Lake Michigan. Extensive land in



Anthony Brummelkamp co wrote with Van Raalte the pamphlet defending Dutch emigration during the late 1840s. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

the Lake Macatawa area was for sale at prices which colonists could afford—\$1.25 an acre for federal land. However, some land had already been purchased by land speculators and was available for purchase at \$2.32 per acre.¹⁴

Exercising the role of a leader, Van Raalte decided to settle his followers in Ottawa County on the western side of the state. He brought his family to Allegan, where Christina Van Raalte and the children stayed for several months with the very hospitable Kellogg family. Van Raalte himself and a party of six people arrived in the area chosen for settlement on 9 February 1847. He named the area Holland. He arranged for the purchase of seven thousand acres, which would soon become the home of hundreds of people who shared his vision of a Christian community where the church would be central to its existence.

At this time, the inhabitants of the area chosen for settlement were nearly all Native Americans who lived in a village on the southern edge of Lake

Macatawa. There were a few white settlers, including a Congregational missionary couple, Rev. George and Mrs. Arvella Smith, and a government agent to the Indians, Isaac Fairbanks, and his wife Ann. The inhabitants of the area welcomed the newcomers and assisted them in every way possible. However, there were no homes for the new arrivals to rent or buy, no stores to purchase necessary goods, no bridges to cross the rivers and streams, and no business or industry to offer employment opportunities. There were no windmills for the grinding of grain or for the production of lumber to provide building materials. The Indians had cleared and cultivated a few acres but most of the land was virgin wilderness. The area was anything but hospitable to the newly arrived Netherlanders, who had great hope for the future.

Although they had experienced difficult circumstances in the mother country, the new colonists were tested as never before. The immigrants simply had no idea what life on the raw Michigan frontier would be like. Van Raalte immediately had to exercise all the organizing skills he possessed. First he helped people to build log homes and acquire land to clear for farming. As more immigrants arrived, nearby villages such as Zeeland, Vriesland, and Overisel were founded in the Holland Colony. Those who purchased lots in the village of Holland hoped to establish businesses to serve the larger colony. The work was difficult, but the deep faith of the new inhabitants saw them through the hardship and their strong work ethic provided the recipe for success in a few years.

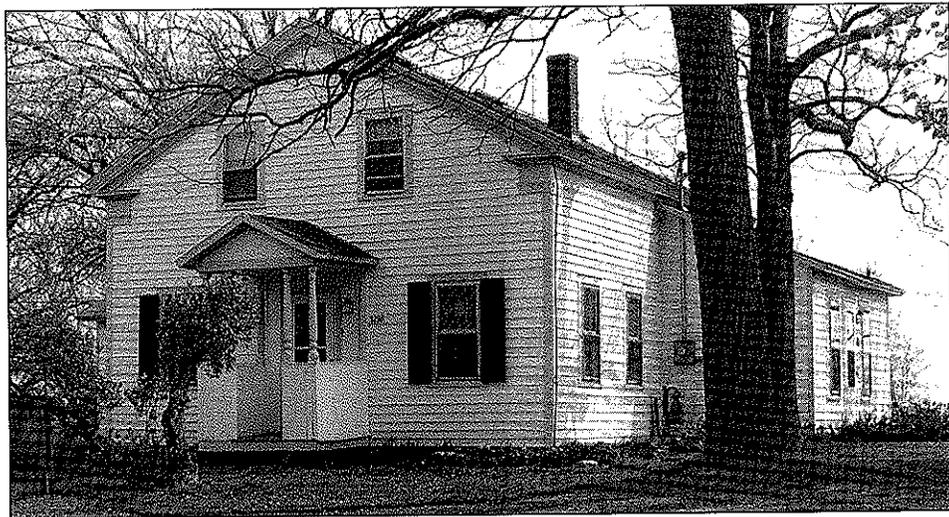
Christian faith was central to their lives, and the people of the colony, although struggling to become established in farms and businesses, immediately formed church congregations. Van Raalte organized these congregations

Origins

into the Holland Classis on 23 April 1848. Although only four congregations were represented in the first classis meeting, churches as far away as Milwaukee and Chicago were invited to unite with the classis. When the Wisconsin Classis was organized in 1854, it included all the immigrant churches on the west side of Lake Michigan, while Holland Classis included those east of the lake.¹⁵ In 1850 Van Raalte provided leadership in uniting the Holland Classis with the Reformed Church in America because he was convinced that the Reformed Church in America was orthodox. This action was soon contested by those who wished not to be a part of that union and in 1857 this culminated in a group of protestors founding a new denomination which in time was called the Christian Reformed Church.¹⁶

These religious disputes were in the future. The immediate concern was to establish homes, businesses, farms, and congregations. These efforts were followed quickly by the formation of an educational system for the colony. As mentioned earlier, a major reason for the Separation of 1834 was to have the right to establish Christian schools free from the dominance and control of the government. When Van Raalte and his people founded the Holland Colony, this goal was difficult to reach due to the poverty of the people. The colonists instead used the public school in the colony. Since the Dutch colonists were the large majority, they were able to give the schools a Christian dimension. Only Christian teachers were hired and the Psalms were taught to the children. In 1857 Van Raalte attempted to establish a Christian elementary school in the village of Holland. It did not thrive and the attempt was soon abandoned.

Early in the life of the colony, in fact, by 1851, Van Raalte succeeded in establishing a Christian secondary school and called it the Pioneer



A recent view of the (Old) Wing Mission, which was home to the Van Raaltes during the first days of settlement. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

School. By 1857 it was a full-fledged academy. He was able to get the Reformed Church in America to support this school. In a few years, some of the graduates of the Pioneer School enrolled at Rutgers College in New Brunswick, New Jersey, the collegiate institution of the Reformed Church. Most of these students, after graduating from Rutgers College, went on for theological training at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in preparation for pastorates. Since few ministers were willing to come from the Netherlands to serve congregations of the Holland Classis, much to the disappointment of Van Raalte and the congregations who needed ministers, the academy proved to be vital in providing future ministers for the Dutch immigrant churches. College classes were inaugurated in 1862 at the Holland Academy by Rev. Philip Phelps, the principal. The college was incorporated in 1866 when the first class of eight young men graduated. Phelps and Van Raalte were soon able to persuade the General Synod of the Reformed Church to permit theological education in the Middle West, and Western Theological Seminary developed out of this initiative.¹⁷

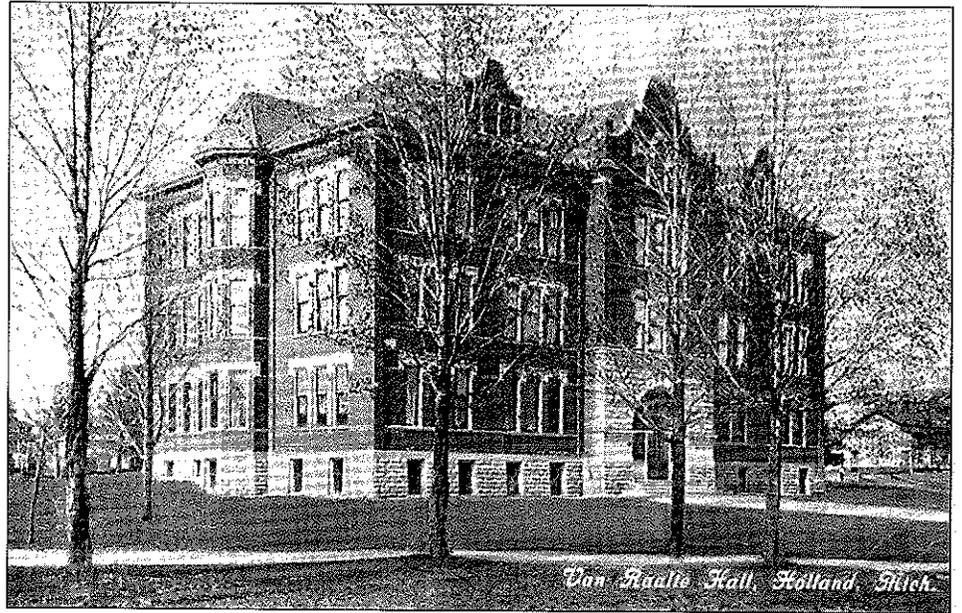
Although Van Raalte is best known

for his work as a leader of the emigration through his founding of the Holland Colony, his church work, and his educational endeavors, he is less well known for his leadership in many aspects of community development. Right from the beginning of the establishment of the colony, all aspects of the life of the community were of concern to him. His Reformed faith thrust him into community affairs in a role similar to that of John Calvin's in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation. There is no evidence that Van Raalte was attempting to duplicate Calvin's model, but it was firmly implanted in his mind that Holland would be a God-centered community.

This goal was not to be achieved by accident, so there had to be planning and executing of plans if the goal was to be reached. For instance, local government needed to be established soon after the founding of the colony. In the village of Holland, Van Raalte organized what was called the People's Assembly. Five men plus Van Raalte were selected as trustees and given the responsibility of platting the town, selling lots, and looking after the needs of the community. Citizens of the village were asked to contribute their labor a day or two a month in

public works for the good of all the citizens. The property where the city of Holland was situated was purchased by Van Raalte in the name of the trustees. The assembly was responsible for setting up the company store and for purchasing a company ship to be used by the colony in developing the shipping industry.

However, the best efforts of Van Raalte and his people to provide for communal needs, including the building of roads and bridges, could not overcome the many practical difficulties they faced daily. The store and the ship both failed to provide a profit and had to be given up. Many lots in the city remained unsold, which caused a financial crisis for the trustees. Outside real estate interests attempted to take over so the trustees approached Van Raalte with a plea that he assume the city's indebtedness. He agreed to this and thus became the sole proprietor of much real estate. With this added to other investments,

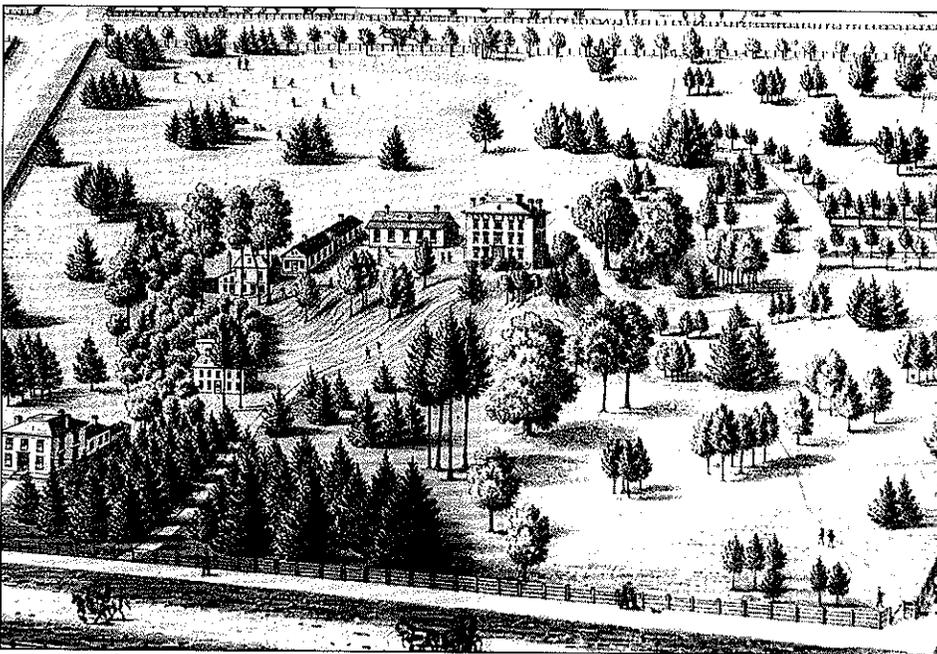


Van Raalte Hall at Hope College completed in 1903. Given the pastor's support for education, the building with his name was a classroom building. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

difficult to pay. He and his wife Christina, however, were very generous with their holdings and provided the first sixteen acres for the Hope College campus, the lots on which

the town, now called Centennial Park.

It also should be noted that Van Raalte was one of the persons who served as bankers for the Holland Colony. He and his wife were able to provide loans for many members of the community to help them get established financially in farms and businesses. Official banks did not develop in the community until the 1870s. More important, he led the effort to make the city of Holland a port city. He had the practical business sense to know that if Holland was to succeed as a Christian community it needed a good financial and business base. Crucial to that goal was developing the harbor. Therefore, the first citizens deepened the shallow channel between Black Lake and Lake Michigan, by hand. As early as 1850 Van Raalte led the efforts to get federal funds so that a good channel could be made between the two lakes. The Holland Harbor Board of which he was a member was successful eventually in achieving the goal of an adequate harbor through which ships, even large ocean-going vessels, could enter regularly to load or unload cargoes.



An 1870s depiction of the Hope College campus. Van Raalte had founded the college as part of the church's mission in the Midwest. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

he became a major property holder in the Holland Colony. Consequently his tax bills were large, sometimes proving

Pillar Church, Hope Church, and Third Reformed Church are located, and the market square in the center of

Van Raalte, as the leader of a large group of Dutch immigrants, also had his detractors. Some members of his congregation were critical of his activities in the community and especially of his business ventures. By 1862 he was under such criticism that he seriously considered moving to South Africa to serve as a missionary. Some members of the church and community viewed his dynamic leadership as being too domineering. A tribute made to him at the end of his life says something about the kind of personality he exhibited. It notes that if he had gone into the army, he would have been a general.¹⁸ His style of leadership was compromised at times when it was perceived as being too authoritarian and even dictatorial in nature. Many people, though, who did appreciate and value what Van Raalte did for the Holland Colony, could overlook the negative traits he exhibited from time to time.

In many ways Van Raalte was a leader like Moses of Old Testament fame. The statement on the memorial plaque placed in Pillar Church three years after his death in 1876 sums up well the significance of Van Raalte as leader of the emigration: "In memory of Albertus C. Van Raalte, first pastor of this congregation and father of our settlement, a servant of the Lord, mighty in words and deeds." §

Endnotes

1 Another version of this essay appeared as "Albertus C. Van Raalte: Leader of the Emigration, 1844-1867" in *The Sesquicentennial of Dutch Immigration: 150 Years of Ethnic Heritage. Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies* edited by Larry J. Wagenaar and Robert P. Swierenga (Holland, MI: Joint Archives of Holland - Hope College, 1998), 13-28.

2 Most of the documents used in researching this paper are in the Van Raalte collections in the Archives at Calvin College and the Joint Archives of Holland. Key secondary sources are: Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America: Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789-1950* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955; reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989) and Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985).

3 Those persons who left the Hervormde or State Church and initiated the Separatist movement in 1834 were known as *Afgescheidenen*.

4 For a detailed study of the ministry of Van Raalte in the Netherlands, see H. Reenders, "Albertus C. van Raalte, als leider van Overijsselse Afgescheidenen 1836-1846," in *Van scheurmakers, onruststokers en geheime opruijers . . . De Afscheiding in Overijssel*, ed. Freerk Pereboom, H. Hille, and H. Reenders (Kampen: Uitgave Ijsselakademie, 1984), 98-197.

5 A. Brummelkamp [Jr.], *Levensbeschrijving van wijlen Prof. A. Brummelkamp* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1910), 194-5.

6 Bertus Harry Wabeke, *Dutch Emigration to North America 1624-1860: A Short History* (New York: The Netherlands Information Bureau, 1944), 90-93.

7 *Landverhuizing, of Waarom Bevorderen Wij de Volksverhuizing en Wel Naar Noord-Amerika en Niet Naar Java?* (Amsterdam, 1846).

8 Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 59.

9 *Grondslagen der Vereeniging van Christenen voor de Hollandsche Volksverhuizing naar N. Amerika* is the Dutch title. The full text can be found in *Levensbeschrijving van wijlen Prof. A. Brummelkamp*, 205-09.

10 Henry S. Lucas published the letter in his collection of immigrant writings, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 14-20.

11 Henry E. Dosker, *Levensschets van Rev. A. C. van Raalte, D.D.* (Nijkerk, C.C. Callenbach, 1893), 65.

12 Prior to 1867, the Reformed Church in America was known as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church. Its informal title has always been the Dutch Reformed Church. The congregation De Witt served in Manhattan was known as the Collegiate Church because several congregations were governed by one consistory and the pastors rotated as preachers in the various collegiate congregations. The collegiate system now consists of four congregations.

13 For a general survey of the Van Raaltes coming to America and settling to Michigan, see Jeanne M. Jacobson, Elton J. Bruins, and Larry J. Wagenaar, *Albertus C. Van Raalte: Dutch Leader and American Patriot* (Holland, MI: Hope College, 1996), 29-47.

14 Information on the land purchased by Van Raalte can be found in the Van Raalte Collection in the Archives at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

15 The Reformed Church in America already had two classes in the Midwest prior to the founding of the Holland Classis, namely the Illinois and Michigan Classes.

16 For an account of the union of the Holland Classis with the Reformed Church in America and an account of the early history of the Christian Reformed Church, see Robert P. Swierenga and Elton J. Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 36-107.

17 Wynand Wichers, *A Century of Hope 1866-1966* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 27-74. For summaries of the histories of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary see, Elton J. Bruins, "Hope College: Its Origin and Development, 1851-2001," *Origins* 19, no. 1 (2001), 4-13; and Donald J. Bruggink, "Western Theological Seminary," *Origins* 19, no. 1 (2001), 14-21.

18 This statement was drawn from a quote which appeared in *The Holland City News*, 11 November 1876, four days after the death of Van Raalte.

Albertus C. Van Raalte

A Look at the Autumn Years of His Life (1867-1876)¹

Michael De Vries

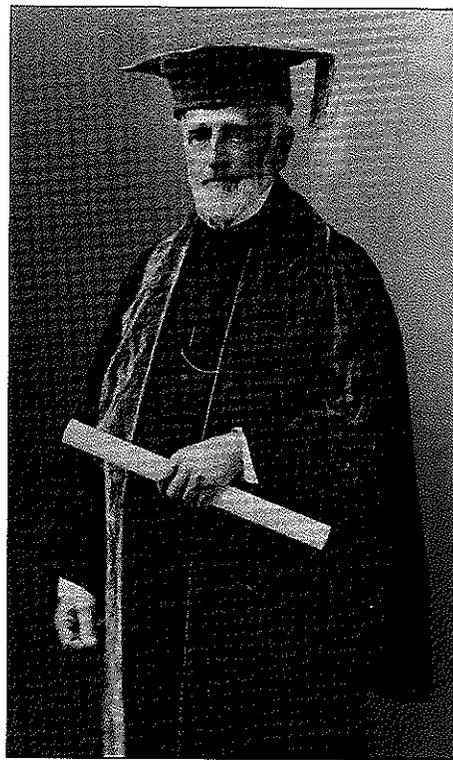
At Centennial Park in Holland, Michigan stands an impressive statue of Albertus C. Van Raalte, a gift from the Peter H. Huizenga family donated in 1997 in conjunction with the sesquicentennial celebrations of the city.² The statue is nine feet tall, though the man was only five feet, three inches in height. The statue's size is emblematic of how Van Raalte's contributions to the community are now seen as very significant. This was not the case, however, during his life, for on several occasions he was subjected to harsh criticism, and even vilification.

Others have discussed Van Raalte as the pioneer-preacher, especially his role in the Afscheiding (Secession) in the Netherlands as well as his early years of ministry in the wilderness of West Michigan.³ His later years, however, have received scant attention even though they provide an important insight into his personality. I propose to highlight Van Raalte's *autumn* years, 1867-1876, and will focus on some of the troubling, painful events of these years in the life of a remarkable person.

Today it may seem odd that Van Raalte (born 17 October 1811) started talking about being "old and tired" when he was only in his fifties, but he was becoming aged for that time.⁴ Thus it is not surprising that Van Raalte was feeling the physical effects of a hard and challenging life. In a letter to his friend Philip Phelps he

notes, "I am growing old and stiff and dull. By keeping me in harness I will be finished up and soon obliged to retire. Old men have to die by inches."⁵

In October 1866, Van Raalte and his wife Christina Johanna returned from



Rev. Philip Phelps gave stability to Hope College after he arrived in 1859 but was caught up in the swirl of criticism following the loan of college money used for the Amelia Colony. Photo: Joint Archives, Hope College.

a six-month trip to the Netherlands. It had provided a much-needed respite, and seeing family and friends again after a twenty-year separation had been

Michael De Vries is a retired CRC minister. He is currently working on a book about Pillar Church—Its Early Years, 1847-1897.



Dedicated in 1856, Pillar Church, except for additions at the rear, looks much the same today as it did when Van Raalte served as the pastor to the congregation. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

refreshing and uplifting. Their health had improved considerably while abroad, but they also realized how much they had “Americanized.” Like so many others, they discovered, as Thomas Wolfe observed, “You can’t go home again.”

During the years preceding this trip, Van Raalte had suggested to his consistory at the large First Reformed (Pillar) Church in Holland, Michigan that he would welcome help in his pastoral duties and asked that a younger pastor be called to assist him. His suggestion fell on deaf ears, leaving him to carry on with the heavy load. To be sure, the congregation would soon divide amicably into three, with the organization of Third and Ebenezer Reformed. But even so, Van Raalte still felt the need for help amid all his pastoral duties as well a host of non-pastoral commitments. Unexpectedly, he made a stunning announcement at the consistory meeting of 27 July 1867. Citing a

desire to end the strife within the congregation and his own overwork, Van Raalte, feeling it was physically impossible to continue as the minister, “resigned.” He used the word *resign*, but he went on to explain that a “formal dissolution” was not necessary because there never had been a formal connection between the minister and the congregation. Apparently, when the colony was established the community began to worship as a congregation and accepted Van Raalte as the minister even though there had been no formal call and installation as dictated by Reformed church order. Regrettably, the church records of the first years (1847-1850) at Pillar Church, which might shed some light on this, are lost.⁶ But because he had served as the pastor of the congregation for twenty years and was the religious leader of the community, it seems odd that Van Raalte would split such a fine hair at this point. Perhaps he was attempting to avoid an effort to

prevent his resignation as had happened previously when he offered to resign.

Van Raalte may have been frail and tired, but his resignation did not mean retirement; instead he anticipated that it would provide new opportunities and new challenges, preferably some distance from West Michigan. He was eager to get away from the pettiness in Pillar Church as well as some of his bitter conflicts with city council and its new mayor over taxes and the boundaries of his homestead. He volunteered to become a home missionary for Classis Holland, and he decided to establish a *new Colony* in Amelia County, Virginia.⁷

The desire to move to the South, still reeling from the Civil War, is difficult to grasp, but Van Raalte, ever the visionary, saw considerable possibilities; he envisioned a flourishing colony in the South like Holland in Michigan. Unfortunately, he was seriously mistaken. A crop failure and the lack of business acumen on the part of several new Dutch settlers caused the Virginia colony to falter; in a few years it dwindled away. Some of the settlers became hostile toward Van Raalte, blaming him for their failures. He became their scapegoat, and his life was threatened, according to some available accounts.⁸ Van Raalte and his family returned to Holland, Michigan in August 1869.⁹

The failure of the Virginia colony cast a deep shadow over Van Raalte’s career. When he returned to his home in Holland, on Fairbanks Avenue, he no longer held the status of the *dominie* of influence in his community. Instead he was viewed as a minister returned home in failure.

Further, there was Van Raalte’s and college president Philip Phelps’s questionable loan of \$2,100 from the Hope College endowment fund to aid the suffering, cash-strapped Virginia settlers. There is no evidence of fraud

Origins

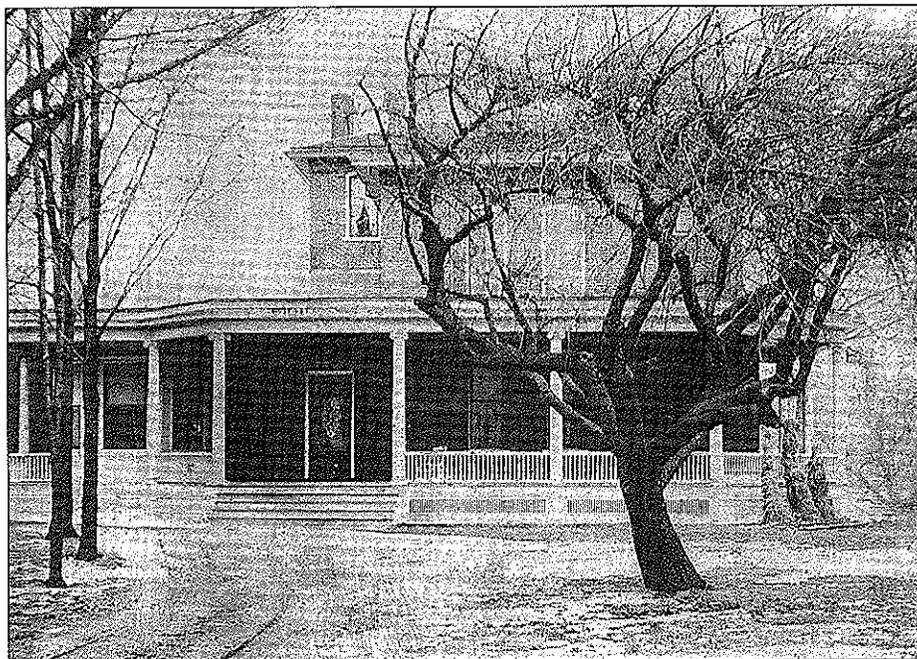
in this and the loan apparently had adequate collateral and was repaid in full, but Reformed Church leaders were not pleased with using funds earmarked for the college for non-college purposes. Their displeasure was expressed in no uncertain terms and Van Raalte came under a cloud of suspicion and endured a great amount of criticism for this entrepreneurial venture. Phelps, also, faced a storm of protest over finances and eventually was forced to resign.¹⁰

Further, Van Raalte also had to deal with his wife's failing health. For many years she suffered from an unspecified lung complaint, which may have been a chronic bronchial condition such as asthma or even tuberculosis. The damp climate of Michigan and the swampy terrain with its extensive tree canopy undoubtedly aggravated this. Further, the damp winds blowing off Lake Michigan, which still produce gray and dreary days characteristic of Michigan, must have further worsened her condition, keeping her mostly homebound during her last years.

When she was fifty-six, this respiratory ailment worsened and she asked God to release her from her earthly life. She had always been a devout and pious woman, and she experienced a sense of serenity as she felt that this desire was being granted. She calmly died at 10:30 in the morning on 30 June 1871.¹¹ The funeral service took place on 3 July 1871 in Pillar Church

with a large crowd attending. Van Raalte never fully recovered from the loss of his "beloved consort," as he had been fond of calling her since their wedding on 11 March 1836.¹²

He trudged on for another few years, but the sun in his life had set.¹³ He continued to make pastoral calls even though he was depressed and in deep mourning. While visiting a dying parishioner and seeing her peace of mind, he whispered to her, "If you see my dear wife in heaven, and if the saints still remember the earth, tell her that I always think about her, and that to be loosed [from this



The Van Raalte house located east of the Hope College campus. Like the campus, the house was not destroyed by the 1871 fire. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

earthly life] and to be with Christ becomes more and more precious to me."¹⁴

A little more than three months after his wife's death, tragedy struck again. Due to three years of exceptionally little rainfall and hot summers, the Midwest was a tinderbox of dried grass, underbrush, and dead trees. Fires, probably caused by lightning, erupted in several places. On Sunday afternoon, 8 October 1871, the same

weekend that much of Chicago burned, flames were discovered in the low brush area southwest of Holland.

Before the flames could be extinguished, they were stoked into a conflagration by a strong westerly wind that intensified to almost tornadoic force. The fire raced eastward and northward and by three o'clock the next morning virtually the entire city was reduced to ashes.¹⁵ The fire had destroyed 210 homes, 75 stores and shops, 15 factories, 5 church buildings, 3 hotels, 5 docks and warehouses, one tug, and several other boats, and 45 miscellaneous buildings.

Only one person, an aged widow, Mrs. Sara Tolk, died. The total loss was valued at \$900,000, of which only \$35,000 was recovered from insurance. Such scant insurance coverage was typical of the time and many of the pious immigrants eschewed insurance as an attempt to mitigate the will of God.

Citizens wept as they saw the devastation. Whether Van Raalte shed any tears is not recorded.

Twenty-four years of hard work had been destroyed in a few hours. But Pillar Church remained unscathed, as did Van Raalte's home and the buildings on the Hope campus.¹⁶ Van Raalte spoke words of hope at the meeting of the citizens on Tuesday morning, 10 October. He challenged the disheartened people by saying, "With our Dutch tenacity and our American experience Holland shall be rebuilt."¹⁷

Privately, however, the 60-year-old founder of the community was at his



The glass purchased by Calvin College for the display case that housed the Van Raalte letters and window frames which were damaged and now frame campus display cases. Photo: Photo Archives, Calvin College.

... and in a confidential letter to his brother Philip Phelps he wrote that he considered how he could possibly go on. The pain overwhelmed him, but he knew that the people expected him to go on and provide leadership in these desperate times.¹⁹ To Anthony Heumannkamp, his brother-in-law, who was living in the Netherlands, he wrote words bordering on hopelessness. He explains that his pain cannot be expressed by words. In fact, he goes on to say that he thought his life was about to close and that "his end was near."²⁰

After the initial shock had worn off,

however, some of the old spirit of this aging leader returned. In the local newspaper, *De Hope*, he addressed the community with words of encouragement, for he saw in the midst of the darkness a ray of hope:

Our dark cloud glitters on all sides with shining light! It is true; we are deeply humiliated, broken and slain. But do we lose when our hearts are enriched and adorned with humility, submission, trust, and delight in God? . . . Despite the dark cloud, God continues to be good to us. He is full of compassion. He knows our needs. He cares for us.

Let us praise and worship Him, because God glorifies His name! He works in this world, and He forms and adorns hearts for His heavenly Kingdom.²⁰

On 17 September 1872 thousands of people gathered at the spot where the colony had begun twenty-five years earlier, to commemorate the silver jubilee and to celebrate the continuing recovery from the fire. The ceremony was named "Ebenezer—Thus far has the Lord helped us" (1 Sam. 7:12). Van Raalte was invited to give the commemoration address. He rose to the occasion and stirringly summarized

the remarkable achievements of building and rebuilding the community. He expressed thanks and deep-felt gratitude for what had been accomplished, which was far beyond what had been dreamed possible. On this joyful occasion the founder of the colony challenged the people by saying:

Beloved, who follow us in this inheritance, we are ready to give it over to you with joy. But do not forget we received it from God. We received it as a training school for eternity, as a work place for God's kingdom; we received it prayerfully from God's hand and desired to realize God's will with this inheritance. This shall bloom and prosper in your hands, provided that God, his day, his kingdom, his Christ, his work, remain your precious portion in life. Sin, the scandal of the nation, is the destroying rust of your joy and strength. Neglect of prayer becomes neglect of God and faith. We expect better things from our young people than such destruction of our inheritance. It shines in your hands, like God's city on earth.²¹

The frail leader was remarkably upbeat. He made no mention, for example, of the dissention and acrimony that was still rife within the



A view of Holland's Seventh Street in 1876, the year Van Raalte died. These structures had all been built since the 1871 fire. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

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Van Raalte gave a major speech in English to the veterans of the 25th Michigan Infantry at their reunion in Market Square (now Centennial Park). Ten years had passed since the end of the Civil War, and the veterans still remembered fondly how Van Raalte had been a fervent supporter of Lincoln and the Union. In the audience were his sons Dirk and Ben, who had fought valiantly; Dirk had lost an arm. Again his speech was well received.

During the last months of his life, the following year, the local newspaper kept its readers informed about Van Raalte's failing condition. In spite of the criticisms, the citizenry was genuinely interested in the pastor's condition. They realized that he had been the leader whose fierce determination, broad vision, and capable efforts were the foundations of the community, despite the fact that his influence had waned considerably during the immediate past.

Roelof Pieters, the pastor of Pillar Church since 1869, called on his colleague and friend on a regular



The Van Raalte statue in Holland's Centennial Park was dedicated in 1997. It was sculpted by James L. Cafgen Sr. from a 1922 model by Leonard Crunelle. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

basis, and visited him only a few days before he died. On that occasion Van Raalte refused to spend the day in bed, and instead sat at the table in his armchair, fully clothed and wearing riding boots, even though he was very frail. His pious conduct and serene attitude impressed Pieters:

How shall I convey the impression of that visit? The questions he posed to me and the short words of wisdom that he spoke are branded in my memory. They are too holy for me to be able to write them down here. At that time I regarded him as the model of a dying Christian warrior.²³

When his condition worsened, Van Raalte called his children close to him for some final words of farewell. He did not want to wait till the last moments of his life to share with them the thoughts of his heart. The day before his death, Van Raalte was very quiet. He spoke only a few sentences. One clearly



Albertus Van Raalte. A State of Michigan historical marker described a few years after his death as "A Servant of the Archives, Calvin College.

understood sentence was, "Mijn bootje zwabbert [dobbert?] nu op de schuimende golven, spoedig zal het in de haven zijn." (My small boat now is tossed about on the foaming waves; soon it will be in the harbor.)²⁴ When he saw his children cry, he said, "O, do not weep, children; when I close my eyes, be assured that I will join in with the hallelujahs before the throne."²⁵

On Tuesday morning, 7 November 1876, four of his seven surviving children gathered around his bed. Benjamin arrived just as his father breathed his last; Christine Gilmore, who lived in Illinois, was en route and the oldest son, Albertus, was absent, having disappeared in the fall of 1869, leaving his pregnant wife, Helena, with their four young children in Holland.²⁶ Van Raalte suffered severe physical pain during his last days, but he remained mentally alert to the end. At 7:30 A.M. he looked at his children one by one and smiled. He uttered some words that no one understood, lifted his finger heavenward, and then breathed his last.²⁷

He had led and directed efforts to carve a community out of the forests of West Michigan and founded what is now the thriving city of Holland. His untiring leadership made the RCA flourish, particularly west of the Allegheny Mountains. Hope College and Western Theological Seminary began and flourished due to his ardent support (and fundraising) for Christian higher education. And even though Van Raalte deeply regretted the religious split that led to the CRC, that denomination and its school also carry forward the Reformed witness. Perhaps he would have a twinkle in the eye watching the basketball games between Hope and Calvin.

The bronze statue of Van Raalte in the Centennial Park of Holland, Michigan depicts him with one hand resting on the Bible and with his other arm outstretched, and his hand pointing forward. It is an apt portrayal of a preacher whose towering pioneering spirit, piety, and plain hard work inspired his flock to accomplish much.[§]

Endnotes

1 I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Elton J. Bruins, Director of the A.C. Van Raalte Institute at Hope College. He has allowed me to use the library of the Institute, and he has also generously given me access to his own numerous files on the life of Van Raalte.

2 Jacob E. Nyenhuis and Jeanne M. Jacobson, *A Dream Fulfilled: The Van Raalte Sculpture in Centennial Park* (Holland, MI: Hope College, 1997).

3 H. Reenders, "Albertus C. Van Raalte als Leider van Overijzelse Afscheidenen 1836-1846" in *Van Scheurmakers, onrustokers en geheime opruijers....: De Afscheiding in Overijssel*, F. Pereboom et al eds. (Kampen: Kok, 1984), 98-197. For a similar version in English, see H. Reenders, "Albertus C. Van Raalte: The Homo Oecumenicus among the Secession Leaders," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 277-298. Robert P. Swierenga, "From Colony to City: Holland's First 25 Years." A paper presented to the 1997 conference of the Historical Society of Michigan, Hope College, September 20, 1997.

4 In the middle of the nineteenth century life expectancy for males was 38.3 years and for females it was 40.5 years, according to historian George S. May, "Historic Michigan Greets the Dutch: The Political, Economic, and Social Context of the 1840s," in Robert P. Swierenga, ed., *For Food and Faith: Dutch Immigration to Western Michigan*. (Holland, MI: The Holland Museum and A.C. Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, 2000), 85-87. To be sure these averages are so low in a significant degree due to the high rate of infant and child mortality of the time. For instance, Van Raalte and his wife lost three of their children in infancy or early childhood. But people in their sixties were generally considered elderly at that time.

5 He was fifty-four when he wrote this.

6 The records of Pillar church begin on November 5, 1850. The minutes indicate that a new clerk had been appointed "due to the departure of Elder Terhorst" (sic). Elder Verhorst may have been struck by lightning and Albertus Pieters in *Historical Booklet*, (Holland, MI: First Reformed, 1947), 9, suggests that he and the earliest minutes of Pillar Church perished together. But it seems more likely to me that these minutes fell out or were removed from the minute

book. The fragile book is now held together by tape and is certainly the first record book since the next volume, of much sturdier quality, is marked as volume II in Van Raalte's own handwriting. The originals are in the Joint Archives of Holland at Hope College.

7 Elton J. Bruins, "Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte: Funding His Vision of A Christian Colony" in *The Dutch and Their Faith* (Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies: 8th Biennial Conference Proceedings, 1991), 58-59.

8 Pieter Zuidema's account, "Pieter Zuidema's Settlement in Virginia," written in 1941, was published in Henry S. Lucas, ed. *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), vol. II, 290-294.

9 Further impetus to return came from Christiana Van Raalte, who was deeply concerned about her oldest daughter Mina's husband Pieter Oggel. Oggel was very ill in Holland, Michigan and died on 3 December 1869.

10 Elton J. Bruins, "Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte: Funding His Vision," 58-59; especially footnotes 37 and 38. Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America* (1928), (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985 rev. ed.), vol. II, 527-534. See also *A Century of Hope 1866-1966* by Wynand Wichers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 102-107.

11 Karsten T. Ruhmohr-Voskuil and Elton J. Bruins, "Is a 'Joyful Death' an Oxymoron? The Christina de Moen-Van Raalte Story," in *Patterns and Portraits*, Renee S. House & John W. Coakley eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., [2000?], 87-95.

12 A copy of the VanRaalte-De Moen marriage certificate in Albert Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte And His Dutch Settlements in the United States of America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947), 34, clearly shows the date as 11 March. As Hyma notes, some have erroneously put the date as 15 March.

13 Henry E. Dosker, *Levenschets van A.C. Van Raalte, D.D.* (Nijkerk: C.C. Callenbach, 1893), 239.

14 Ibid, 239.

15 For a remarkable eyewitness account see: Gerrit Van Schelven, "The Burning of Holland" in Henry S. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), vol. II, 2.

16 Elton J. Bruins, "Holocaust in Holland: 1871" in *Michigan History* (1971), 288-302. J.A. Wormser, *Een Schat in Aarden Vaten. Eerste Serie. In Twee Werelddeelen: Het Leven van Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte* (Nijverdal: E.J. Bosch, 1915), 232.

17 Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, vol. II, 5.

18 Van Raalte, "Lichtzijde der donkere wolke" (Bright side of a dark cloud), *De Hope*, November 9, 1871. Translated by Simone Kennedy, but slightly altered by the author. On file at the Van Raalte Institute of Hope College.

19 Dosker, *Levenschets*, 233. See also: Leonard Sweetman Jr., "The Road On Which We've Been: From Secession to Emigration," (unpublished manuscript in possession of the author, 1996), 364.

20 Van Raalte, "Lichtzijde der donkere wolke," *De Hope*, November 9, 1871. Translated by Simone Kennedy.

21 Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, vol. II, 491.

22 Gijsbert Haan, *Stem Van Een Belasterden* (Grand Rapids, MI: C. Nienhardt, 1871) An English translation is available at the Archives of Calvin College, entitled *Voice of One Slandered*. See also Richard H. Harms, "Forging a Religious Identity: The Christian Reformed Church in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch Immigrant Community" in *The Dutch-American Experience*, Hans Krabbendam & Larry J. Wagenaar, eds. (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 195-196.

23 Dosker, *Levenschets*, 308.

24 Ibid, 309.

25 Ibid.

26 There has been speculation on whether he deserted his wife, or died suddenly while on a trip. The only fact that is certain is that the family never heard from him again.

27 Jacobson, et. al., *Albertus C. Van Raalte*, 229.

From the Recollections of Gezina Vloscher Van Der Haar, 1820-1901*

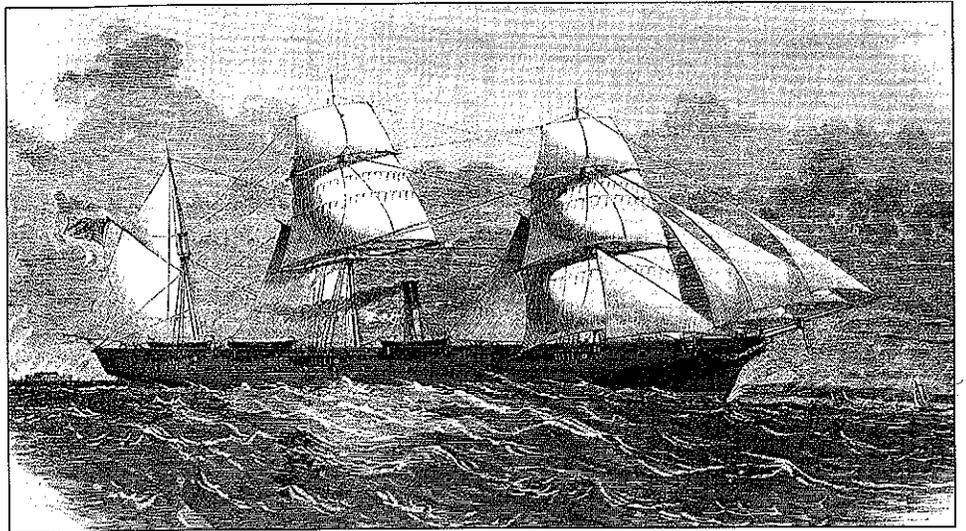
Reprinted by C. E. Jalving, 1954

The following excerpts present a parishioner's view of A.C. Van Raalte from his first congregation until his death. They are drawn out of a much larger account of her life. Dates have been inserted to provide a framework.

Genemuïden, 1836

Now we called Van Raalte who was then a candidate for the ministry. He had preached for us three times and his work had been richly blessed. He accepted the call and, after he had

unrighteous in His sight. One evening these words came forcefully to my mind, "Oh, thou afflicted and disconsolate, behold, I will lay thy stones in beauty." These words gave me much comfort as Jesus was willing to do everything for me. Oh, if only I could have more faith. Shortly after that Van Raalte preached on Romans 12, about the cloud of witnesses we had round about us and exhorted us to lay aside the cloak of sin and unbelief and to look to Jesus as the chief leader and finisher of our faith.



Iroquois, a typical mid-nineteenth century steam-sail ocean vessel that carried immigrants to the United States. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

taken his examinations, he and his bride came to serve us for two and a half years, much to my personal benefit. By means of his searching sermons he caused me to learn to know myself more and more, so that I would bring all my troubles to God, knowing that I was but sinful and

Now the time came that the government began to persecute the seceders. The government sent soldiers who were quartered in the homes of the seceders, in one home three, in another four, etc. This caused great confusion. Four were stationed in Father's home. Rev. Van

Raalte preached in Mastenbroek to the farmers there. For a long time we had met in Grandmother's barn but the burgomaster and the soldiers broke up the meetings there while we were singing Psalm 46. The people felt strengthened in their faith. After the dominie prayed they all went home. Now a rule was invoked which forbade that more than nineteen people could meet together under penalty of a fine. Now we went from place to place, mostly at farms, to hold meetings and listen to the preaching. Sometimes the preachers were arrested or fined heavily. The seceders paid out thousands of guilders in fines for the sake of the truth.

Now Rev. Van Raalte was going to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the congregation at Mastenbroek. He preached on the text, "Let us then go outside the encampment and bear His shame." I felt richly blessed; I wished nothing more than to be saved by that precious and despised Jesus. When Van Raalte was ready to administer the sacrament and invited all believers to come to the table, adding the words, "Not in ourselves but in Him we come to Jerusalem," I could no longer restrain myself. Unworthy as I felt myself to be, I partook of the sacrament and received a full measure of comfort.

1844

Dissension had become rife among God's people [ie. the seceders]. One was a follower of Van Raalte, another of [Huibert J.] Budding, another of [Lambertus G.C.] Ledebouer. Differences of opinion were aired and further separation occurred although the majority stuck with Revs. [Hendrik] De Cock, Van Raalte, [Anthony] Brummelkamp and [Simon] Van Velzen.

During that time we read a monthly which was put out by De



Benjamin was the first of the Van Raaltes' sons to volunteer for the United States Army during the Civil War. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

Cock, Van Raalte, Brummelkamp, Van Velzen and [Hendrik] Scholte and contained many articles about churches and schools. My brother came to our house often to read them. Sometimes articles appeared about America and we would talk about them. We were prosperous from a material standpoint and had plenty to eat, but were not without distress of spirit.

1847

Then came the rumor that Van Raalte wished to go to America. My husband and brother wished to verify this and so made a trip to Arnhem where Van Raalte was then living. I was so against going to America that I warned them not to give any indication that they wanted to go too. I felt so firmly attached to our home in the Netherlands that I would rather die than go to America. But look what happened. The men came back and were of the opinion we should go if God would show the way. Now we prayed about it and asked God for His light and counsel. We had a good

living and it seemed there was no reason why we should go to America. But the Lord wanted us to go. I prayed much that God might give us light. There was no question that conditions in church and school were deplorable in our village as well as in all of the Netherlands. There was so much coercion. We had gained some freedom of worship but under certain limitations. Children were not permitted to go to school unless they were vaccinated first against smallpox and most of the seceders lacked freedom of conscience to have this done.

Then it pleased God to make me realize it was His will that we should leave the oppressive atmosphere of the Netherlands with other people and emigrate to free and roomy America, where people, with God's help, could enjoy more freedom and better their economic condition.

We had left on the 4th of October and arrived in Baltimore on the 18th of December, 1847. On Christmas day we were still there and we praised and thanked God that we had arrived safely. We wrote letters to our parents. We stayed in Baltimore four days and then took the train to Cumberland. From there we were loaded on farmers' wagons. . . . Then we arrived in Pittsburgh and from there took a boat to St. Louis. . . . It was cold [in St. Louis] but we immediately rented some rooms because we had to wait until we received letters from Van Raalte or Scholte. . . . In St. Louis we met several other Hollanders who were also waiting for letters from Van Raalte or Scholte. We stayed in St. Louis six weeks.

Now we received a letter from Van Raalte saying that he had established a colony in Michigan and that the people were to come there. . . . At Chicago we took a steamboat to Grand Haven and from there to Port Sheldon where we stayed several days. From

there my husband and some others made a trip to the colony to see how they were making out and what kind of land there was. . . .

My husband bought land a good mile from where the city of Holland is now located. . . . On Sundays we all met with Rev. Van Raalte. His preaching and prayers were so excellent that it gave us renewed courage. Many people came together and all were happy that God had brought them to free and big America because many had been reviled and persecuted in the Netherlands, while here they could worship God as they pleased. . . .

Many could not adjust themselves to the change in climate nor to the different food. Neither was the housing adequate or the best. In some families there was much distress. We were grateful for the help and support God had given us. Rev. Van Raalte was happy and his sermons were so lively that we were strengthened in

our desire to serve God more. . . . Every day more people came—many of God's people. . . . yes, it was a happy time for many although there was illness in many families. Every Sunday Van Raalte preached to the great benefit of all the people. He also celebrated the Lord's Supper . . . outside under the trees. It was a real feast for us and we thanked God for it. . . . Now a church was being built, all of logs, a half hour's walk from the city, next to the cemetery. Van Raalte preached regularly.

Holland, 1850

Our children now went to school in the city. The one boarded at the teacher's house and the other with my sister. Friday evenings they came home. I talked with them a great deal about religion and taught them verses to learn by heart for the catechism classes which Van Raalte held on Saturdays at his home. . . .

The dominie and his wife came to visit us often and we enjoyed each other's company. My sister had married a carpenter and visited us often although they lived in the city. My husband's brother had a farm next to ours and we were often together. . . . Many more people had come to the colony from all parts of the Netherlands and they were mostly very poor. The money was rapidly disappearing and business fell off in our store. . . .

When Maria was eleven months old she was stricken with bloody dysentery. . . . That afternoon I went to attend the prayer meeting and told the others of my plight, asking them to pray with and for me to make me submissive to God's will. When I came home Maria was the same but that evening became worse. We called the doctor and he gave her medicine. She lingered for twelve days, sometimes better, then worse. . . . One o'clock at night she was taken from

us. . . . At the funeral there were many people present, also Van Raalte and his wife. They told me how wonderful it was that I had such great faith that our little girl was now with Jesus, saying that they had just come from a home where that was not the case and how difficult it was to comfort such parents. . . . I could again rejoice in God.

. . . . We remained in Holland and were so busy that my oldest brother sometimes had to help us. My youngest brother had gone to California despite our protests. It was a period of bad times. Many banks had failed and there was a lot of counterfeit money in circulation. Sometimes we couldn't tell whether we



The Schaap farm house is located between Holland and Zeeland. While Dutch brickwork design is from patterns sold by the brick maker, the L-shaped floor plan is typical of houses built in Michigan during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

were handling good or bad money. . . . Van Raalte was also a great comfort to me in those days at the weekly Bible study sessions. He also came to our home often.

The new church [Pillar Church], to which everyone had contributed voluntarily, was completed this year. We gave about \$50.00. A school for higher education [Hope College] has also been built. It is attended by students who wish to become ministers or teachers. We had always had the thought in mind to have our oldest boy go there. He was now twelve and he himself also expressed the desire to attend.

I was in a good mood all summer. That summer the Lord again blessed us by giving us a healthy boy on the 12th of August 1856. . . . Rev. Scholte from Pella also visited us that year. He preached for us too but the people didn't like him. He was not as orthodox in his preaching as Van Raalte. The people here still clung to the old fashioned doctrine.

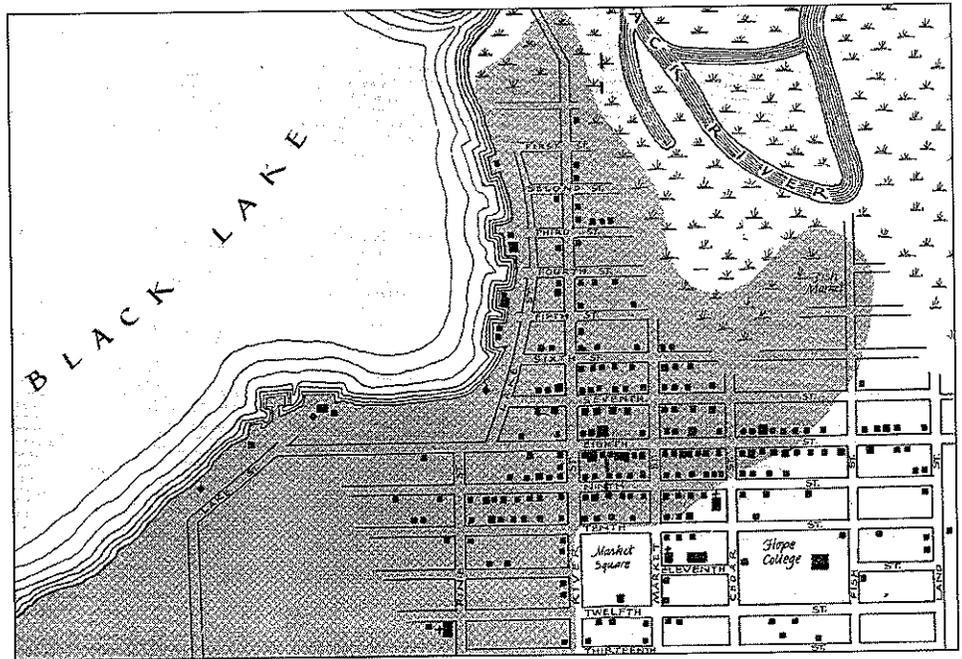
That winter Van Raalte made a trip east to try to collect money for the academy and to try to get teachers and professors who could teach theology. Mrs. Van Raalte and other women spent a day at my home. We spent a pleasant day talking religion much of the time. When the dominie got back there was a decided change in the school. Mr. Van Vleck, a pious man, was made president of the school. He also had a fine wife. . . . We continued to enjoy good health and Van Raalte's preaching was enjoyed by us and many others.

1861

Now the Civil War broke out and many of our young men volunteered to serve their country for right and freedom. Several Hollanders also volunteered. . . .

1862

. . . Oh, God comforted me in that



The extent of the destruction following the fire of 1871. A few houses, including Van Raalte's, two churches and Hope College were spared. Map: Donald Van Reken, The Holland Fire of October 8, 1871 (Holland, MI: privately published, 1982).

dark time. When we went to church the next Sunday, Van Raalte's sermon was based on the words, "Those who have accepted Christ, to them has God given strength to become children of God." This sermon comforted me. I might believe that I was a child of God and that all things would work together for good.

1863

. . . She [a daughter, who taught in Overisel] received a call to teach in North Holland. . . . She came home often on Sundays to hear Van Raalte preach. He was her best teacher. We enjoyed his sermons greatly during those times because he also had two sons in the army.

1866

Rev. Van Raalte preached every Sunday. He and his wife came to see us the next winter and we had a pleasant time talking about religion. . . . Many people still came from the Netherlands. Rev. Van Raalte and his wife visited the Netherlands in 1867.

We went to bid them farewell and they were both in a wonderful frame of mind. Oh, I felt such close ties during the prayer of Van Raalte and my faith was so strengthened that sometime we would be able to praise God eternally for all the love and mercy he had shown us. They left and God protected them, as there was a cholera epidemic in the Netherlands and they had traveled all over. He preached in several places. He also visited our village and called on my mother and brothers and sister. They got back in September to our great joy and had brought my husband's sister and family with them. . . .

The following winter we held a congregational meeting to discuss the sending of a missionary to the South. When Van Raalte had gone to the Netherlands he had resigned as pastor. The work had become too much for him and he had urged that a second church be established. But nobody wanted to do that. After much discussion it was, nevertheless, decided that it was the best thing to

do. Now the Classis decided that Van Raalte should be that missionary to the South. Now subscriptions were taken for the formation of a new church [in Holland] which was built in 1868.

1871

Mrs. Van Raalte died the 27th of July after a lingering illness. She was a true believer and a happy Christian. In days of health and of illness she always sang a great deal. It was a heavy blow for the family since the daughter who had lost her husband the previous year was also living with them. Rev. Van Raalte felt the loss of wife and mother keenly. Rev. C. Van der Meulen and Rev. Vander Veen had charge of the funeral services. They spoke highly of Mrs. Van Raalte and in comfort to the survivors.

It had been a very dry summer in 1871. We usually had plenty of apples and peaches but they ripened very early. There was so much heat and smoke that it seemed as if the woods were all afire. The first of October there was a fire at the south end of the city with much attendant danger, but with strenuous effort it was luckily put out. But the hot weather and smoke continued. And still no rain. Our eyes smarted; here and there, there were forest fires which caused the smoke pall and the fires kept coming closer. Now a strong wind came up and the city was in real danger.

It was Sunday October 8th and the people were hastily dismissed at the afternoon services. All of our family had gone to church, I was home alone. I prayed God constantly that He avert the tragedy of a fire and save His people from such a calamity. Now my husband and children came home and told me how near the fire was to the city. One son had stayed in town to help fight fire. My husband and several others went back also and

didn't come home till ten o'clock in the evening. All came home except one—they had decided to set a watch in the city. We went to bed but neither I nor my oldest daughter could sleep. We looked out of the windows to see whether we could see any fire but the smoke was so dense that we could see nothing of the city. We feared the worst for the city and prayed to God for deliverance. Beyond the city we could see flames in the distance.

The wind was so strong that we wouldn't hear the fire bell but at twelve o'clock my husband and sons got up since it looked to us that matters were getting worse. They went back and alas it was true. The west end of the city was a mass of flames—the church which I had loved so much, many homes, stores, factories hotels—and all became a prey of the sweeping flames within a short time. My husband had gone by horse, but soon came back and told us what was happening. He said that my brother's home, my sister's home and his sister's home were all burned. Our boys had stayed in the city to help all they could in saving the possessions of the people. We felt deep sympathy for everyone and wished they could all be with us especially relatives and our dearest friends. My husband went back to the city with a wagon to see what he could do about helping save possessions.

The people had all fled the burning city—to Van Raalte's home, to my brother and my husband's brother who all lived on the other side of the city. On the way to town my husband met Mr. Van der Veen who had always been a good friend of ours. He had lost everything—house, store and all his merchandise. My husband asked him where his wife was and he said she was at Van Raalte's. . . . My sister and family and my youngest brother were at my older brother's

home but the fire was everywhere, also on the back end of our farm. The neighbors came to help us put it out. There was still a strong wind and the smoke was so dense we could hardly keep our eyes open but God protected us from the flames. Our boys came home in the forenoon, their eyes practically swollen shut from the dense smoke they had worked in.

In the evening some went to bed but others stayed up to watch. The wind was still strong and there were several fires still burning. Many farm homes were also burned and it seemed



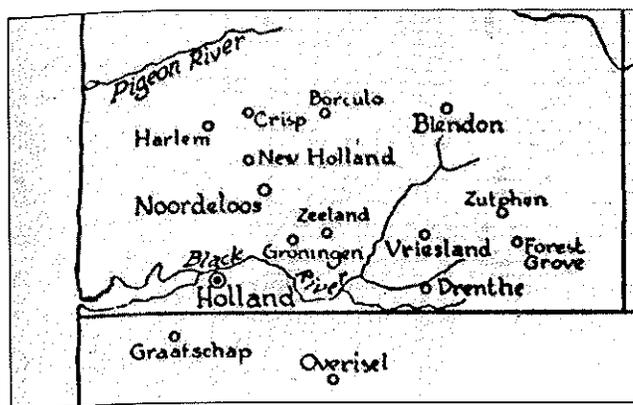
Hendrik P. Scholte, a minister in the secession, took his followers to Iowa when Van Raalte settled in West Michigan. Unlike Van Raalte, Scholte did not associate with any denomination. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

as if God had determined to make the destruction complete. We could see everything from the upstairs of our house. Many prayers were offered for rain; everything was dried up because of the heat and now we had this wind. Oh, how much suffering and anxiety the people endured. Tuesday morning the news came that the big city of Chicago lay in ashes and that thousands had lost everything. And then

there was Manistee where the fire was so intense that the people had to jump in the water to save their lives and many had perished in the flames.

My sister and her family were with us too and on Wednesday moved into our old house. When the people in Grand Rapids and Grand Haven heard of our predicament they rushed food and clothing to us and everyone had plenty to eat. On Tuesday night we had a little rain and never had we felt more grateful for a few rain drops than that night. Oh, how grateful we were to God to get a little relief.

Now the news of the calamitous fires in the cities had spread to the East



Map of the Dutch settlements resulting from Van Raalte's decision to locate in West Michigan. Untitled manuscript map: Archives, Calvin College.

and from all over came supplies of clothing and food for those who had suffered from the fires. We got a letter from our son in Albany—he had heard about it too. He was very sympathetic and wanted to know who of the family and friends had suffered loss. We answered him immediately and oh, how grateful he was that God had spared us. He did his best there to prompt others to send aid going amongst his friends, finally sending two large boxes of blankets and clothes for distribution to those who needed them. There was so much love and sympathy for the Hollanders that so

much arrived by way of money, clothing, food that it was necessary to apportion it to people in proportion to the loss they had suffered.

1876

Nothing of particular interest had occurred during our absence. There had been deaths—

Gertie De Jong, a girl of eleven, and the wife of one of the elders had died besides another man whom we did not know very well. During this time one of the elders had married the widow of Rev. Oggel which caused considerable comment. Van Raalte was ailing and very weak.

We had often talked about making a call on Rev. Van Raalte since he had been ill for a long time. At Gertie's funeral a friend suggested that we go to see him so my husband and I went with her. We were admitted by a daughter and she went to announce to Van Raalte who was calling. We went to his bedroom and he was glad to see us. He lay propped up

in bed having a lot of pain and hardly able to speak. His daughter helped him from the bed to an easy chair. Now he seemed to be able to talk better and was quite cheerful. It was a sad experience for us to see a man who had been so forceful and dynamic and now so weak that he had to be helped like a child. We couldn't understand all he said but he spoke about God's goodness and Jesus's love for sinners. He said he had never experienced so much of God's goodness as now. It was good to hear him say those things and now he asked my husband to offer a prayer. We said goodbye to him but

had the feeling that it was very likely the last time we would see him alive. He was so happy that we had called as witnesses to a common faith, so he said.

On the morning of election day Rev. Van Raalte died and his death made everyone so sad that election day passed quietly. Tension had been rife and many had feared there might be some disturbances. The news of Van Raalte's death was quickly spread and the funeral was set for Friday with expectation that there would be a large crowd of people. The church was hung with mourning crepe and there were also many homes where the doors were bedecked because he was universally regarded as the leader and guide of the colony and people loved him as their former pastor.

On Friday the 10th of November we wended our way to the church. When we got there it was already so full that we couldn't get in without some trouble but finally managed to get to my sister's pew. There were just as many people outside as in the church and they had come from far to pay the last honor and respect to the founder of the Michigan colony. There were also many preachers present. Rev. Pieters led in prayer and Rev. Uiterwijk read several passages from the Bible.

The people were given the opportunity to view the remains of the old highly honored man and it took forty-five minutes before the last one had marched past. He hadn't changed any and lay in his coffin as if alive. Many people wept openly. The huge crowd now marched to the cemetery and there were seventy wagons. . . . There never has been a funeral here which will be remembered so long nor felt as deeply as that of Van Raalte. The church remained covered with crepe for six weeks. §

Marriage Certificate No. 37

In the year 1836 on the 11th of March at 10:30 in the morning appeared before us, Dr. Paulus Godfried van Hoorn, alderman of the City of Leyden, appointed Civil Registrar, Albertus Christiaan van Raalte, unmarried [literally, young man], 24 years old, born at Wanneperveen, Province of Overijssel, October 14, 1811, according to an extract dated January 13, 1836, theological candidate, residing at Hattem, Province of Gelderland, being of age and son of Albertus van Raalte, deceased at Fijnaart the 28th of March 1833 according to an extract from the Death Registration, dated the 1st of December 1835, and of Catharina Christina Harking, no occupation, residing at Amsterdam, consenting according to her statement of March 7, 1836, as drawn up by attorney Pieter Lijndrajer Jr. notary public and witnesses of Amsterdam and properly registered, having satisfied the requirements of the law in regards to the National Militia, according to a certificate of His Honor the Governor of Noord-Holland, dated the 20th of November 1835, and Christina Johanna de Moen, unmarried [literally, young daughter], 21 years of age, born at Leyden, the 30th of January 1815 according to extract of Births Register dated of January, 1836, without occupation, residing at Heerengracht, District 7, No. 119, being of age and the daughter of Benjamin de Moen, deceased at Leyden, on 3rd January 1824, and Johanna Maria Wilhelmina Menzel, deceased at Leyden the 18th of September 1831, according to an extract from the Death Register, dated the 20th of January 1836, and having submitted also extracts indicating the death of her grandparents, while the death of her maternal grandparents is evident from the death extract of her mother, who requested us to solemnize the marriage contemplated by them, of which the announcements have taken place at the main entrance of our City Hall, at noon, to wit the first one on the 28th of February, the second one the 6th of March, both in the year 1836, at Amsterdam and at Hattem on the same days.

No objections against the above mentioned marriage having been made known to us, we have, by granting their request, after having read aloud the above mentioned documents, as well as the chapter from the Civil Code entitled Marriage, asked the future spouses if they desired to take each other as husband and wife: to which each of them responded individually in the affirmative; and hence we declare in name of the Law that Albertus Christiaan van Raalte and Christina Johanna de Moen are united in marriage of which we have drawn up this document in the presence of Johannes Benjamin de Moen, 31 years of age, commission-agent, residing at the Heerengracht, brother of the wife; Carel Godfried Menzel, 47 years of age, bookseller, residing at the Rapenburg, uncle of the wife, Israel Montagne, 50 years of age, solicitor, residing at the Hoogewoerd, a good acquaintance, and Willem Fredrik Menzel, 22 years of age, theological student, residing at the Rapenburg, cousin of the wife, who have signed this document together with us and the contracting parties after it having been read to them.

Signed: A.C. Van Raalte, J.B. De Moen, J. Montagne
C. J. De[sic] Moen, C. G. Menzel, W. F. Menzel, P. G. van Hoorn

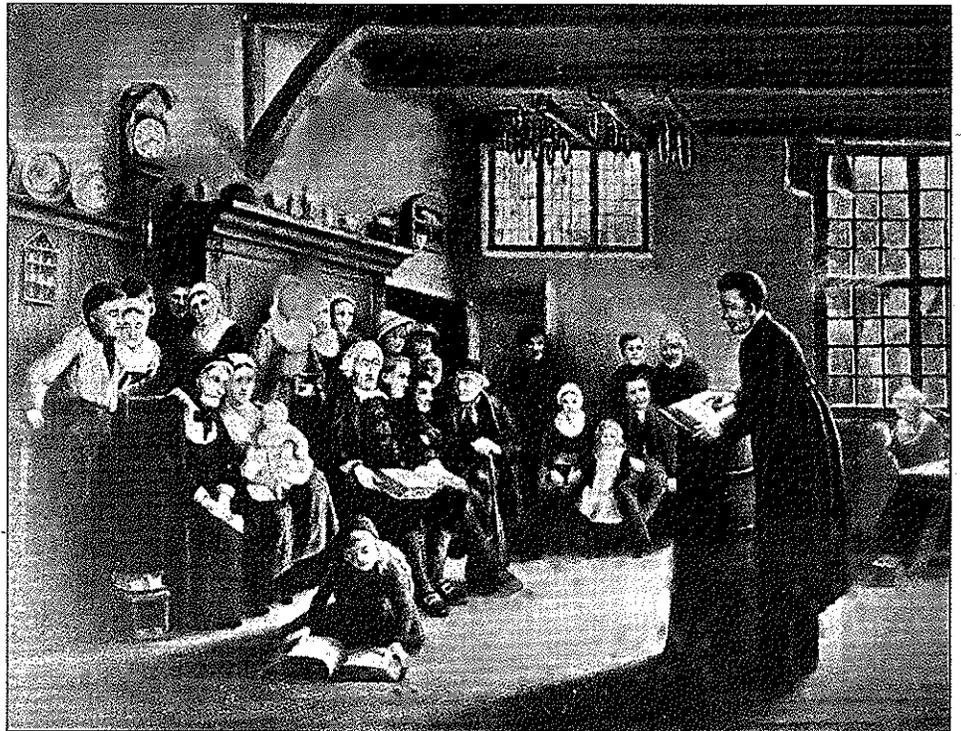
Translated by Gerrit W. Sheeres, 2001

Children of the Day; Not of the Night: The Background of the *Afscheiding*, 1834

Leonard Sweetman

The Dutch immigrants who came to North America during the middle of the nineteenth century under the leadership of Albertus C. Van Raalte and Hendrik P. Scholte came from a small portion of the Dutch population that had separated or seceded from the *Hervormde Kerk* (State Church) in 1834. Seeing errors

settlements in West Michigan it is necessary to understand the confluence of factors in the Dutch State Church that led to this *Afscheiding*, or secession, in 1834. Some of these factors had been developing for centuries, others for just over a decade; some came from the larger European Protestantism, but others



Anthony Brummelkamp and groups of worshipers meeting as had the conventicles for the previous two centuries. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

creeping into the State Church, these fiercely religious people could not accept these errors and therefore felt forced to separate from the church that promoted the errors. To understand this religious basis of Van Raalte and those who established the Dutch

were unique to the Netherlands; some came from the socio-political sphere and others from the philosophical sphere.

The oldest of these factors was the experiential movements that developed in European Protestantism during the

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Willem Bilderdijk organized a religious fellowship that included cousins Abraham Capadose and Izaak Da Costa. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Adherents to these movements differentiated significantly and essentially from the usual way theologians or literate Christians set forth the content of the Christian faith. This usual practice of articulating faith, a method called Systematic Theology, is to precisely argue that a specific tenet of the faith has been derived from the scriptures and amplified in the life of the Christian community. Proponents of the experiential movements stated that this misses the mark completely. Instead faith must be understood experientially by each person, individually. Three steps are necessary in understanding a point of faith. First is discerning the historical truth—how does the text fit into the narrative of the Bible. Second is discerning the doctrinal truth—how has a point of systematic theology developed during the ages. Lastly is discerning experiential truth—how does God apply the reality of scripture to the specific circumstance. Clearly, this experiential dimension of the scripture is not

something that can be cultivated, since the time and occasion of granting this gift rest in God's hands.¹

Among those who adopted this interpretation were the Puritans in England, who then had an impact, among others, on the Dutch. William Teellinck (1579-1629), who was converted while residing in a model Puritan home in England,² studied at the University of Leiden where he received a doctorate in theology under the tutelage of Arminius. Teellinck was concerned with the assurance of faith and attempted to give structure to the path that results in this assurance in *The Second Reformation*.

Other experiential influences on the Dutch came from Swiss Calvinists, from Lutherans, as well as the mild and gracious Anabaptist movement, later called the Mennonite movement, in the Netherlands. From the latter, members of the Dutch State Church also became influenced by the notion of the importance of the separation between church and state.

Concurrent to the impact of the experiential movement on the Dutch was the emergence of a body of religious literature focused on the assurance of faith by authors referred to as the "old writers." Two of these, Alexander Comrie, (1706-1774) and Wilhelmus a'Brakel, (1635-1711) merit some attention. Comrie, born in Perth, Scotland, was instructed by Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, whose Reformed lineages trace to the Geneva of John Calvin. Comrie matriculated at the University of Groningen and received a doctorate in 1734 from the University of Leiden. He served his entire ministerial career (1734-1773) in the Reformed church in Woubrugge. Comrie's ministry focused on the assurance of faith.

Wilhelmus a'Brakel's book, *Redelijke Godsdienst*, adorned the bookcases of many Dutch homes. He preached and wrote about God's

transformation of the soul and the struggle through which the children of God go as they pass through the desert of doubt and experience the cry of despair. Although focused on rebirth through Christ, Brakel was also concerned with the renewal and healing of the church through the renewal and healing of its members.³ He also describes conventicles, meetings in homes to deal with various concerns within the community of faith. Led by a minister, an elder, a deacon, or a well-informed layperson, a conventicle might study the Heidelberg Catechism, or discuss the sermon



Izaak Da Costa wrote emphatically against the influences of the Enlightenment on the Dutch State Church in the year prior to the 1934 Secession. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

which had been delivered during a previous worship service. The Metrical Psalms were sung before and after their discussions and there was also a social time. And they prayed together, interceding for each other's problems in life and faith.⁴

Although known in the Catholic Church in western Europe before the Reformation, conventicles became more numerous during the eighteenth century in the Netherlands. It was at

these meetings that the sermon and other documents produced by the "old writers" such as Comrie and Brakel, were read and discussed. Attendance became so large that the meetings were forced from homes into barns and even into the fields when the barns could not hold the large numbers. Local authorities or the national army disrupted these meetings as often as possible since they were becoming religious meetings outside the prescribed State Church. Leaders of conventicles were fined and imprisoned and the people were forcibly dispersed. As the opposition of the local and national authorities increased, the determination of the people to meet in conventicles increased in greater measure. These people were convinced that the conventicles alone, not the State Church, had the presence of God for authentic worship, and praise and adoration.

A geographically far more extensive movement, the Enlightenment, also had a profound impact on Dutch Calvinism and the State Church. This philosophical movement originated in France during the first half of the seventeenth century with the work of Rene Descartes, who enthroned reason as the means to examine previously accepted doctrines and traditions. The Enlightenment exerted a profound influence on the Reformed Church by requiring that fundamental commitments, norms, and conduct be rationally defensible. All observations and articulated thoughts must all be subjected to rational verification and validation. Doubt, therefore, is legitimate and necessary in the process of rational activity. To the lay people, reason was becoming more important than faith.

In the Netherlands these various small currents of religious ferment came to a socio-political focus during the French occupation at the



Groen Van Prinsterer saw the need for, and advocated, change in the Dutch State Church during the mid-nineteenth century. He did not advocate leaving the church as the secession did, arguing that it should be changed from within. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

beginning of the nineteenth century. Articles 291 through 294 of the Napoleonic Penal Code prohibited private meetings numbering more than nineteen people for religious purposes, unless the local authorities had previously approved. In effect even small conventicles became illegal. Attempts during French rule to thwart the meetings were as unsuccessful as they had been previously.

With the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 and the abrogation of the Napoleonic Penal Code by the new government, under the leadership of William I,⁵ people assumed conditions would return to what they had been prior to the French occupation. Instead the leaders of the State Church, to more effectively control religious meetings, requested the crown re-institute articles 291-294.

Further, the effects of the Enlightenment on ministers of the State Church came to expression in the official life of the church soon after the defeat of Napoleon. A new church

order was thought necessary and produced in 1816. The new version contained an important change. The change was significant since all officers of the church, ministers, elders, and deacons, were required to append their signature to the form of subscription, thereby indicating consent to the confessional documents and the church order. Under the old church order, produced by the Synod of Dordt in 1618-1619, the Bible was accepted as authoritative, because it is the Word of God. The new church order noted that the Bible was considered authoritative in so far as it contains the Word of God.

The initial, small in number but persistent, critics of the 1816 change found fertile soil in conventicles and in a religious movement that had begun among students in Geneva and spread into the Netherlands. Led by Merle d'Aubigne, a professor of Ecclesiastical History unhappy with apparent liberalism and intellectualism in Calvinism, the students began a movement called the *Reveil* (Awakening) at almost the same time as the church order changed. The Awakening used private Bible study groups to learn of the Christian life. Opposed by established Calvinist church authority, the *Reveil* found particular support among Wesleyans and Moravians. One German Moravian, Johann Lavatar, in addition to corresponding with people in the Netherlands concerning Christian faith and life, widely distributed his *Handbuch für Freunde* (Handbook for Friends) which explicated the ideals of the *Reveil*. By 1820 prayer groups and correspondence groups sprang up in such various places in the Netherlands as Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, Monnikendam, Rotterdam, Harlingen, and Oostfriesland just east of the Netherlands.

One of the fellowships in Amsterdam was led by the poet Willem Bilderdijk, who had been led to

conversion by his landlord's guard. In the fellowship he formed, Bilderdijk argued, as had the experiential movement earlier, that authentic enlightenment resulted from the presence and activity of God, not the free exercise of human reason. Among the group's members were two Jewish cousins, Abraham Capadose and Izaak Da Costa. Both were converted to Christianity by Bilderdijk and remained active members of the State Church for the rest of their lives.

As was the case for the conventicles, Bilderdijk called the members of the fellowship to lives of conversion and repentance, to lives of devotion and obedience to God; lives of worship, work, faith, prayer, and meditation, of scripture reading and Psalm singing, of mutual edification and discipline. Bilderdijk did this by having the members study the Bible, which was greatly facilitated by Capadose and Da Costa, who could read the Old Testament in the original language.

Da Costa organized and served as the leader of a separate fellowship in

Amsterdam and became a sharp critic of the 1816 church order change. In 1823, the 28-year-old Da Costa published *Bezwaren Tegen Den Geest Der Eeuw* (Objections to the Spirit of the Age) a 98-page booklet that aroused and shocked friends and foes alike. One scholar claims it was a declaration of war against all that existed. While others see it as the birth-cry of the *Reveil*.⁶ Within a few days, the first printing was sold out. A second printing quickly followed and also sold out. In it he objects to the principles of unbelief and revolution, and the exaltation of the human being to a position of supremacy. He objects to the facile manner in which the Enlightenment and its advocates eliminated God and the totality of the Christian religion.

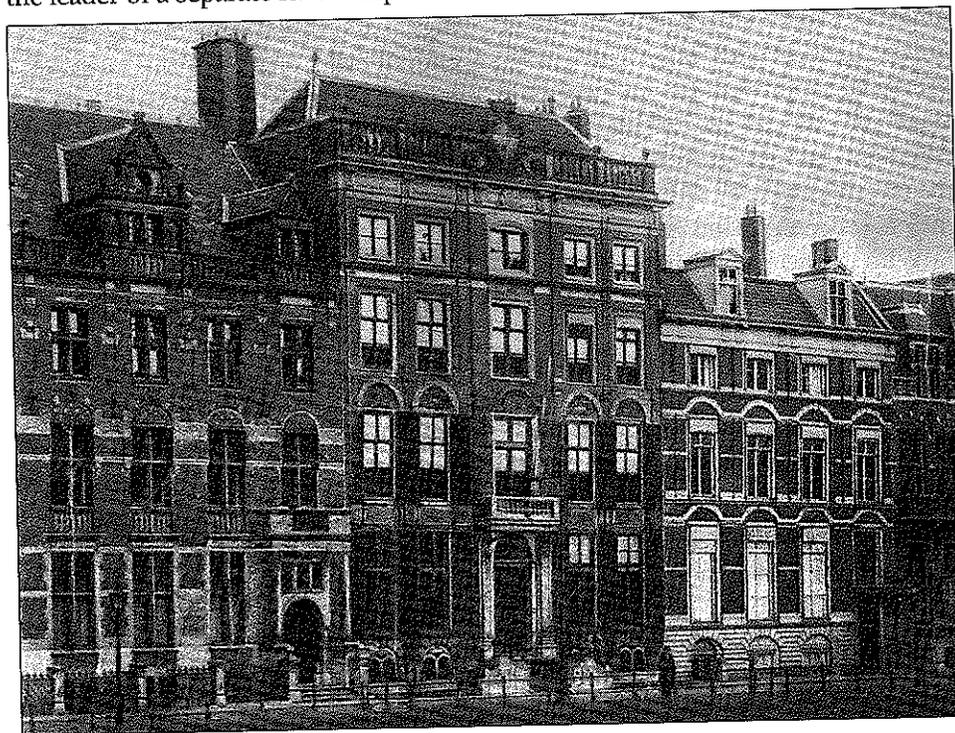
Da Costa militates against those who call for freedom in the various areas of life, which is guaranteed by the Enlightenment. He charges Voltaire, "the incarnation of the Enlightenment," as well as Rousseau, Diderot, and Helvetius, with "Speculations

which corrupt the heart and soul. . . . They have all sorts of theories about unbelief. They eroded respect for the religion of Revelation. In many ways they have prepared the way for the foundation of the enormous French Revolution."⁷ For Da Costa allowing human reason to determine biblical authority gave human reason primacy in the determination of truth, the establishment of appropriate conduct, and the delineation of human and societal goals and objectives.

Among the members of a fellowship established in The Hague were several people who were interested profoundly in the church order and the political order. One of these, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), became the most important voice in the mid-nineteenth century of those who attempted to think, to write, and to speak in a Reformed Christian manner in such areas as politics and education. He did not advocate secession since he believed that to speak with authenticity and integrity concerning the necessity of reforming the church required remaining in the church.⁸

The fellowship Da Costa inaugurated in Amsterdam seemed to stimulate the creation of similar efforts, also called reunions, and house meetings in a variety of places. Always, study of the Bible was the focus of the meeting: "The Bible was no longer the book of the minister and the church, but was pre-eminently the book of the home and of the family."⁹ One of those who participated in the Amsterdam fellowship was Hendrik Pieter Scholte (1805-1868). After his widowed mother died, Scholte left the family business so that he could matriculate at the Amsterdam Athenaeum.

One of his fellow students was Simon Van Velzen (1809-1896), whom he introduced to the Amsterdam fellowship. Another student, Anthony Brummelkamp (1811-1888), discovered



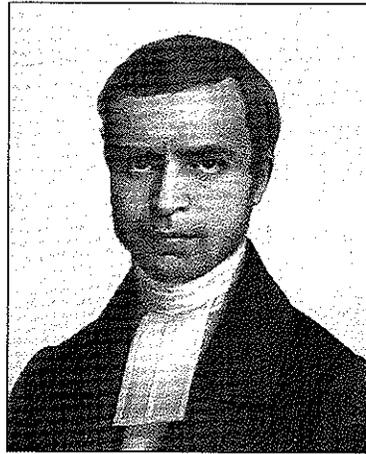
The Van Prinsterer home where some of the sharpest criticism of the State Church was expressed. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

that Scholte was very different from the majority of the students, who were given to godlessness and secularization. Other students and at least one faculty member warned Brummelkamp about Scholte as being too pious and very dangerous since he was a member of Da Costa's fellowship.¹⁰

In 1830, while studying theology at the University of Leiden, Scholte organized and led a group of students who wished to maintain and practice the Reformed faith as it was articulated in the confessions of Dutch Calvinism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most other students and faculty members despised the group and referred to it pejoratively as "Scholte's Club." Members, including Van Velzen, Brummelkamp, and Albertus C. Van Raalte (1811-1876), ignored the condemnation; instead these three and Scholte became key to events that led up to the secession of 1834.¹¹

Van Velzen grew up in Amsterdam and after graduating from Leiden was declared a candidate in the State Church. He was asked to preach in the congregation in Drogeham, Friesland so that the members could gain some idea of his appropriateness for a call to serve them as pastor. Another candidate preached in the afternoon worship service. The second candidate was influenced profoundly by the Enlightenment and Van Velzen refused to shake his hand following the afternoon service. The difference between the two sermons, Van Velzen said, was essential and great. The orthodox congregation recognized and agreed with the difference, and elected him to become their pastor. His discourtesy in refusing to shake hands resulted in a delay of his approval as a candidate for the ministry by Classis of Zuid Holland (in the Reformed tradition, a classis is a regional ruling body). Ultimately he was approved, and ordained to serve in Drogeham.

In 1835, at the first meeting of Classis Dokkum, the classis to which Drogeham belonged, Van Velzen delivered an address in which he presented his defense of the normative character of the confessions above the 1816 church order. The



Hendrik De Cock, the minister in Ulrum, was banned from office by the church for refusing to baptize children of non-confession parents. This step precipitated the Secession of 1834. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

presumptiveness of a new, young minister instructing his elders angered many ministers in the classis. During the ensuing dinner, the president of the classis, after a short address, characterized Van Velzen in moving terms as someone disturbing the status quo. Van Velzen interrupted the president, responded sharply, and concluding by saying he could not remain in the meeting. Afterward, he attempted to organize a meeting with the other ministers of classis who, like him, wished to maintain the orthodox Reformed faith. Only one of the invited ministers came, and no meeting was held.¹²

Next he wrote to the synod of the State Church asking it to enforce the binding character of the confessions, rather than the 1816 church order, on each minister; to prevent ministers who refused to comply from serving

congregations; and to show gratitude toward and protect from all attacks ministers who were proclaiming the faith contained in the confessions. During the next few months communication between Van Velzen and synodical officers became increasingly contentious and concluded with his being deposed from office. The step did not specifically result from his stance on the confession vis-à-vis the church order; rather, it was because of his refusal to permit the singing of evangelical hymns, prescribed for worship by synod.¹³ The deposition put Van Velzen outside the church, where a secessionist movement was underway.

This split from the State Church had begun in Groningen, the province just east of where Van Velzen was serving. This split resulted from a two-fold controversy within the church. First, some objected to the practice of the State Church in allowing the children of non-professing members to be baptized. The argument was that only full members of the covenant could present their children for membership. Secondly, as did Van Velzen, people believed strongly that only Psalms should be sung in public worship. Hendrik De Cock (1801-1842) the minister in Ulrum, Groningen became the focal point for these concerns. For De Cock, the result was increased tension between him and other ministers in the State Church. A further point of contention between De Cock and these ministers was his unapproved tutoring of students for the ministry, by which he spread his viewpoint.

This controversy between De Cock and other ministers, beginning in 1832, was conducted via pamphlets. The ministers who opposed De Cock warned that tolerating him and any other minister who supported his position was a rejection of the developments in modern empirical science

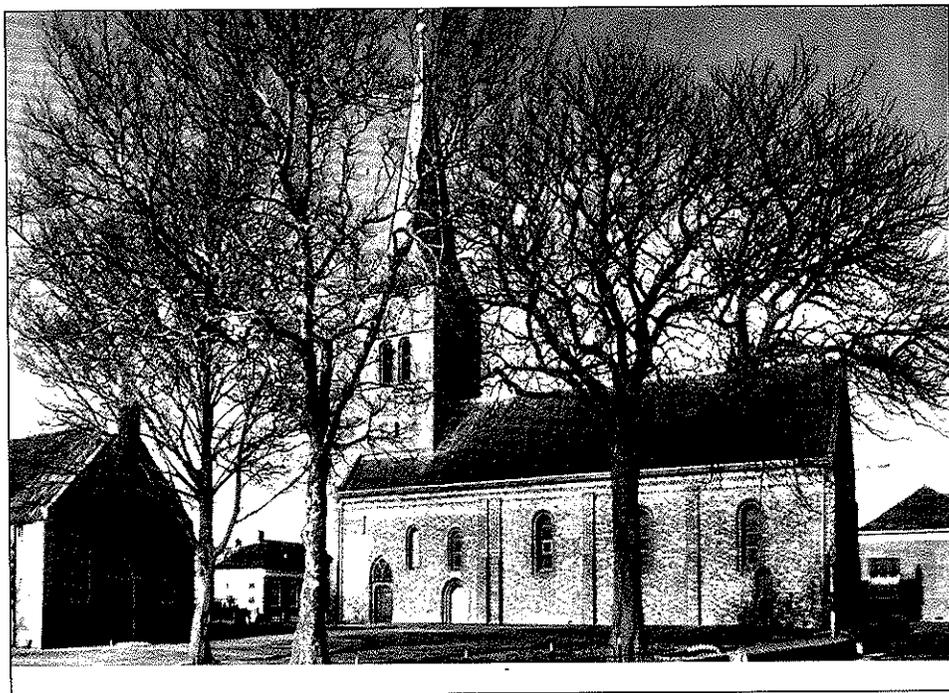
which made impossible the reformation of people, the real objective of ministry. The rejection of modern science, the argument continued, weakened and debilitated the people of God in the struggle for virtue and goodness. Therefore, the people were urged to resist the appeals of those who were trying to sow dissent and chaos by insisting upon unquestioning and uncritical loyalty and obedience to the church's three forms of unity and church order. De Cock's response was a pamphlet whose sub-title provides an apt synopsis, *The Sheep Cote of Christ Attacked by Two Wolves and*

The reason was his refusal to use the prescribed hymns in public worship since this was clearly defiant of what synod had mandated, whereas his position on baptism and refusal to retract the pamphlets did not challenge specific positions taken by the church. De Cock then petitioned the King, who had authority over the State Church, to intervene, and wrote to the national synod's administrative committee requesting intervention in the matter of his threatened deposition.¹⁴ During what followed, when it became clear that not a glimmer of hope existed to indicate that the

became part of this movement for the same reasons as Van Velzen and because he and De Cock had established a personal relationship. Scholte had met De Cock in Ulrum prior to the secession and via correspondence between them came to share his views on the situation in the State Church. He had met De Cock and at the request of the Ulrum consistory preached there just days prior to the signing of the act of secession. When Scholte heard of the secession, he announced to his congregation in Genderen that he saw no course but to follow De Cock. For his support of De Cock, Scholte came under suspicion, and when he conducted an unauthorized worship service late in October 1834 he was suspended from office without being allowed to present a defense. As a result, the Genderen congregation, on 1 November 1834, also seceded from the State Church.

Brummelkamp, a third member of the Scholte Club, also came under the scrutiny of church officials while serving the congregation in Hattem. He had raised concern because of his refusing the use of hymns in public worship. He had stated that he stood with three church members who could not submit to a church council that was unreformed. Following a classical investigation, Brummelkamp was deposed for challenging the authority of the church. A large number of church members from Hattem and surrounding areas left the State Church following this deposition and joined the *Afscheiding*.

When Van Raalte, a fourth member of the Scholte Club, was examined to become a candidate for the ministry in 1835, classis was cautious even though he was the son of a respected minister, who remained in the State Church until his death. Van Raalte passed the formal exams, but because of his affiliation with Scholte, Van Velzen, and Brummelkamp, the president of



A recent view of the structure that housed the Hervormde Kerk in Ulrum, Groningen whose declaration of secession sparked the larger secession. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

Defended by Hendrik De Cock.

Dealing with what was seen as a clear challenge, classis suspended De Cock from office for two years for refusing to baptize all children presented for the sacrament and for refusing to retract his pamphlets. Still supported by his congregation, De Cock appealed the suspension. During the discussions that followed it became clear that church authorities were planning to depose him from office.

deposition could be avoided, on Monday, 13 October 1834, the consistory and congregation of Ulrum, except for eight members, signed an act of secession or separation from the State Church. This is the event which inaugurated the *Afscheiding*. Once Van Velzen was deposed, he was naturally drawn to De Cock since they shared some theological commonality and certainly a common opposition.

Scholte, a minister since 1833, also

the classical session asked if he could sign the form of subscription and submit to the forms of unity and the church order. Van Raalte acknowledged that he could not. Because this question had never been made a condition of being approved as a candidate, classis was not prepared to deny his candidacy. But because of the implication of defiance in the answer, his membership in the Scholte Club, and that he was soon to become a brother-in-law to Brummelkamp and Van Velzen, classis deferred deciding on his candidacy until the next meeting. At the next meeting he again indicated he could not sign the form of subscription, and classis denied his candidacy status. That December Van Raalte wrote classis that he was severing all religious fellowship with the State Church in favor of affiliating with those who through their words and deeds gave evidence of wishing to live in accordance with "God's ordinances."¹⁵ He joined the *Afscheiding*, exhorting in those congregations, and was declared a candidate for ministry by the seceder's synod held in Amsterdam in 1836.

Using the example of the conventicles, their heritage of lay Bible study, opposition to the new church order, and leadership of like-minded young ministers, the *Afscheiding* moved forward, gaining adherents. Ultimately about 10 percent of the State Church's membership joined the secession. The response from the government was to support the State Church and attempt to stop the spread of secession. Using the restrictions based on the Napoleonic Code, religious meetings were disbanded and ministers arrested and fined. 6

Endnotes

1 For a translation of an autobiographical account of this experiential Christianity see: *The Miracle Of God's Free Grace In Jesus Christ Shown In A Dying Christian, Or The Holy Life And Blessed Death Of Miss Cornelia Constantia Winkelman Who Fell Asleep In The Lord With Joy In Middelburg, Zeeland, On January 22, 1716 At The Age Of 24 Years*. Archives, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

2 Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance Of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, n.d.) p. 118.

3 Beeke has a wonderful footnote, "Brakel issued strong warnings against separatistic pietists and their denigration of the Church. (*Redelijke Godsdienst*, (p. 1099) The Second Reformation divines were church loyalists, not separatists, who sought to bring the apostate church back to God." *Assurance of faith*, p. 410, footnote 61.

4 The study of documents like the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, The Canons of Dordt as well as the study of church-state relations in the last half of the nineteenth century produced a laity well versed in a variety of areas without having the formal academic credentials. Many of these people, whose formal education did not go beyond the elementary school level, were able to discuss intelligently a book such as *Redelijke Godsdienst*, by Brakel, which went through twenty editions in the seventeenth century and was common in the houses of many rural families. The old writers produced a people who were literate, who were self-consciously Reformed, and who were historically sensitive to their context.

5 This monarchy included present

day Belgium, which gained its independence fifteen years later following a violent revolution between the northern provinces and the southern provinces.

6 J. Hovius, *Izaak da Costa's Bezwaren Tegen Den Geest Der Eeaw* ('s Gravenhage: Willem De Zwijgerstichting, 1973), p. 5. Hovius reproduces virtually the entire text of Da Costa's booklet.

7 *Ibid*, p. 4.

8 See for instance, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Unbelief in Religion and Politics*, edited and translated by Harry van Dyke, in collaboration with Donald Morton (Amsterdam: Groen van Prinsterer Fund, 1975).

9 M. Elizabeth Kuit, "Het Reveil," in *De Christelijke Encyclopedie*, 2nd completely rev. ed., F. W. Grosheide and G. P. van Itterzon, eds, vol. 5 (Kampen: J.H. Kok, N.V., 1960), p. 629.

10 J.C. Rullmann, *De Afscheiding In De Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk Der XIXe Eeuw*. 4th rev. ed. (Kampen: J.H. Kok, N.V., 1930) p. 35.

11 Van Velzen, Brummelkamp and Van Raalte later were related when each married one of three sisters.

12 Joh. de Haas, *Gedenkt Uw Voorgangers*, vol. 1 (Haarlem: H.P. Nijlbrief BV, 1984), p. 264.

13 No one from the Scholte Club opposed the singing of hymns. Brummelkamp, Van Velzen and Van Raalte regularly used them in family worship and other private occasions. The objection came from some of the laity who felt that Psalms, with their divine authorship, were solely to be used in public worship.

14 De Haas, *Gedenkt*, pp. 71-73.

15 *Ibid*, p. 214.

Henry Dosker, between Albertus C. Van Raalte and Abraham Kuyper¹

George Harinck

Henry Elias Dosker (1855-1926), the first book-length biographer of Albertus C. Van Raalte, left very little evidence of his own reflections in his papers housed at the Joint Archives² in Holland, Michigan. But in

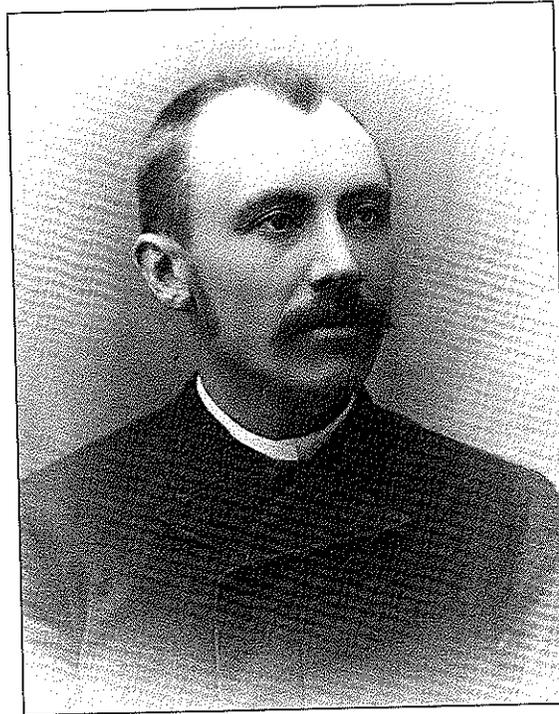
became a pastor in the Seceded Church in the Netherlands and the younger Dosker was born in the parsonage at Bunschoten. He attended high school in Zwolle, where he met his life-long friend Herman Bavinck.

In 1873, when Dosker's father accepted a call from the Second Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, the family emigrated to the United States.

Although the official Netherlands emigration record gives the reason for leaving as a desire for economic improvement, the real reason was that the elder Dosker was not content with the direction taken by his denomination, now called the Christian Reformed Churches. He detected a key ambivalence in his church. One part considered the *Hervormde Kerk* (State Church) to be a false church and they were glad to have left. Another part considered it as a church in decay; they had been forced to leave but still longed to return. Dosker did not want Christians to be on the fringes of society. Like Van Raalte, he wanted Christianity to be widespread

and the church to be in the center of national life. Also like Van Raalte, Dosker felt that he had become a minority in the Seceded Church and chose emigration as a way out of this situation.

The Dosker family intended to Americanize as quickly as possible. In making this same point about Van Raalte in his biography of 1893, Henry Dosker is stressing the convictions of



Henry Elias Dosker, pastor, professor, scholar was born 5 February 1855 in Bunschoten, Utrecht, and died 23 December 1926 in Louisville, Kentucky. Photo: Western Theological Seminary Collection, Joint Archives, Hope College.

dozens of letters to Herman Bavinck now located at the Historical Documentation Center at the Free University, Amsterdam, Dosker proves to be an astute chronicler of Reformed church life in the United States and the Netherlands and highlights the theological developments in both countries late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth centuries.

Dosker's father, Nicholas H. Dosker,

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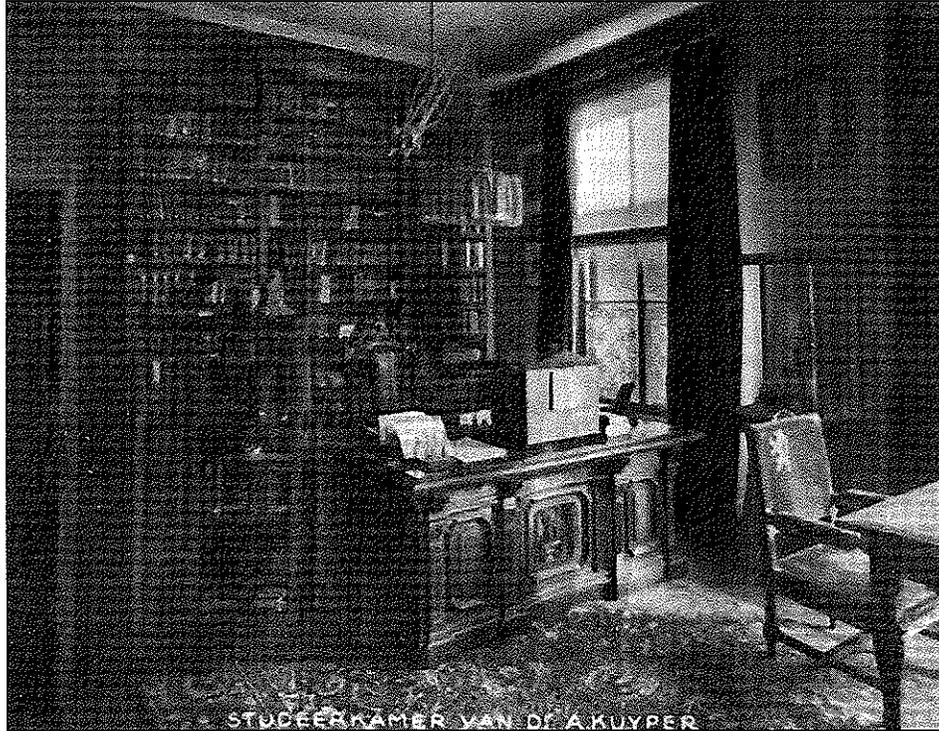
his own family. The life of the Doskers blossomed in America. In 1875 the younger Dosker described a day at Lake Michigan with the Sunday school class of Third Reformed Church to Bavinck. He told how they played under a dry and invigorating American sky, how happy and well-fed the children were, and how rich and poor played together all day long. He compared this Arcadian scene to his memory of poor people in his native country and thanked God he was in the land of milk and honey.

Dosker went to Hope College and graduated in 1876.

He eagerly learned about the progress of science and saw no conflict with religion. When confronted with evolution, he did not want to reject it. Science is God's gift to man, he wrote to Bavinck, and he was certain that these new ideas could be adapted to the Reformed faith.

After graduation, Dosker started to study theology at Hope College. But in 1877 the Reformed Church closed this department because of lack of money. This was a severe blow to the western branch of the Reformed Church.³ A church without an intellectual center of its own will have difficulties in defining its identity. This was certainly the case in the 1870s, when the battle between religion and science was raging. It is noteworthy that while the Reformed Church closed its theological department in Holland, the Christian Re-

formed Church opened its Theological School in Grand Rapids in 1876 and Abraham Kuyper started the Free University in 1880. These years were a



The study of Abraham Kuyper, the moving force behind the development in the churches of the secession in the Netherlands at the turn of the twentieth century. Image: Archives, Calvin College.

watershed in the history of the Reformed people in the Netherlands and the United States, and of all the Reformed denominations, the Reformed Church, west of the Allegheny Mountains, was least prepared for this.

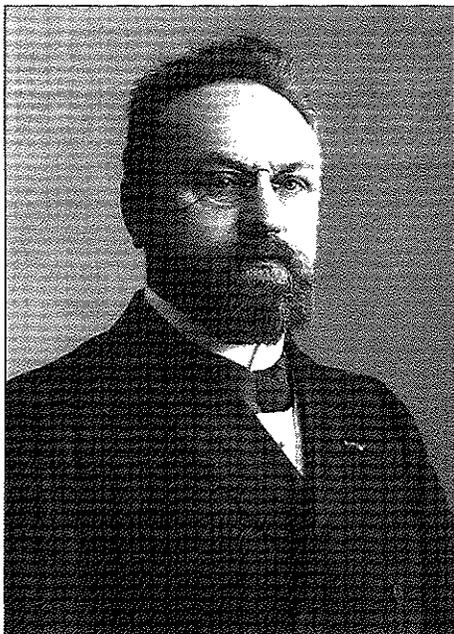
For Dosker it meant he had to prolong his studies at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary. It was the next step on his way to Americanization. Living more than 1,000 miles from home and not in a Dutch neighborhood, Dosker entered a new and different world with interest. But he did not find a theological home there. New Brunswick was also too costly and too far from the Midwest. He took his last year of his theological studies at the Presbyterian McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, his third seminary in three years.

In Chicago Dosker became acquainted with the Presbyterian world. Here he found his American theological mentor in Francis L. Patton, later president of Princeton University. What attracted Dosker to Patton was that he was culturally broad and religiously of, what Dosker called, the "old side."

Although his first impressions of America and of his studies had been very positive, as Dosker grew older and matured, he often felt insecure about his own future and that of Christianity in general. He was not convinced by modern arguments, but neither could he ignore them. In

this situation, Patton offered encouragement. This teacher convinced Dosker that a person could be orthodox and academic at the same time. Dosker wrote Bavinck that the Netherlands seemed to be the prey of modernism, but that men like Patton and Charles Hodge at Princeton would save the American Reformed tradition from modernism. Patton advised Dosker to write a dissertation, but illness upon completing his seminary course prevented him from pursuing the doctorate. Nevertheless McCormick Seminary considered him to be "one of the most celebrated and most scholarly" of its alumni.

In 1879, when Dosker became the pastor of Ebenezer Reformed Church of Holland, the Masonic controversy in the Reformed Church was at its apex. On the matter of church members



Herman Bavinck, prominent theologian in Dutch Reformed circles, and friend of and correspondent with Dosker. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

being part of the Freemasons, Dosker and his father took the same position as Van Raalte (d. 1876). They condemned Freemasonry, but considered it wrong to leave the church for the sake of Freemasonry. They failed to calm the storm in the RCA. An important result of the Masonic controversy in the Midwest was that it worsened the relationship of the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The CRC welcomed the RCA members, who strengthened and broadened the denomination that had separated from the RCA in 1857.

Further, as the tide of emigration from the Netherlands reached its high point, the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands in 1882 advised their members to join the CRC and not the RCA. This was a severe blow for Dosker. For him there was a close connection between the hardliners in the Netherlands Seceded Church who opposed Van Raalte and Dosker's father, and the secession of 1857 in the Colony. The same opinions, sometimes even the same persons, who had

pushed Van Raalte and his followers to leave the Netherlands, lay at the heart of the secession of 1857, as Dosker notes in his biography of Van Raalte.⁴ Some of the hardliners in the Netherlands Seceded Church, who before 1846 had opposed the opinions of A. Brummelkamp, Van Raalte and others, emigrated to the Colony in the 1850s. There they continued their opposition, criticizing Van Raalte's leadership. These seceders considered the old Reformed Church in the Netherlands the same as the RCA: both were false churches. And it was a serious disappointment to Dosker that even his native church in the Netherlands implicitly condemned his church and, in retrospect, that of Van Raalte as well.

Dosker continued to fight for the idea of a broad church that he and his family had embraced when they arrived in America. But it is undeniable that this dream was shattered. Until the 1880s the CRC had been a small minority, a candle that would burn out one day. But now the situation was reversed. The RCA was no longer the leading church in the Colony and Dosker's loyalty to Van Raalte's church isolated him from many Dutch immigrants.

He realized he was in the wrong fight. He sought for a way out. In 1881 he received a call from a Presbyterian church in Chicago. His loyalty to the RCA surfaced and he declined the call, but the Presbyterians stayed in his mind. They seemed to be the denomination best equipped to make a stand against higher criticism that was flooding the country.

But it was not only the Presbyterians he looked at with envy. In the middle of the Masonic controversy, Dosker was intrigued by news from the Netherlands. Kuyper had founded the Free University in 1880. Instead of speaking of the Netherlands in pitiful words, as he had in the 1870s, Dosker

now wrote to Free University professor Philip Hoedemaker: "Every word spoken in your circles is so important for us over here, and is read with the greatest interest. I have subscribed to Kuyper's paper *De Heraut* and follow what happens from week to week."⁵ Dosker shared his knowledge of the Dutch situation and the struggle for reformation in the old Reformed Church with the readers of the *Christian Intelligencer* and other newspapers. He welcomed this new revival,



Abraham Kuyper, author, scholar, theologian and statesman who was successively criticized by Dosker, critical of Dosker, and admired by Dosker. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

which led to the Doleantie of 1886, a second secession from the old Reformed Church.

Until the 1880s, Van Raalte and his vision of a Reformed Church in America had been Dosker's guide, but this had led him into a dead end. Dosker was looking for a new vision, which he could not expect from his own church at that time. The RCA in the West lacked a leader, and though Dosker did his best to restore its intellectual center, it took until 1884 before Western Theological Seminary opened its doors. But the institution

provided no intellectual impulse during its early years. He could not expect it from the CRC school either—that was still far too Dutch. The Presbyterians, going through their own internal struggle, were no real option at this time either, but now there was the world and life view of Abraham Kuyper.

As a delegate from the RCA, Dosker attended in 1888 the synods of the Seceded Church and the new Doleantie churches of Kuyper in the Netherlands. The situation for this latter young church was still very precarious. As the first foreign delegate to visit them Dosker spoke words of appreciation and encouragement. He was impressed by the invigorating Reformed life in the Netherlands, especially as compared to the then difficult situation of the RCA churches in Michigan over the Masonic controversy. In the last letter before he departed his native country, he wrote, "I have felt that, were I alone in this world, free as I am at present, I *might* stay and become once more a complete Hollander. And yet the question is whether this would be possible. I doubt it, doubt it very seriously. Ingredients have been mixed in my mental and social make-up, which badly suit the surroundings and claims of Holland."⁶

The ambivalence of his feelings became clear after returning to the United States. When he gave his impressions of the new Dutch church in the *Christian Intelligencer*, his judgment differed from the appreciation he had shown in the Netherlands. Dosker now wrote that the Doleantie was not as attractive when seen from a distance. He judged the movement as spiritually weak. Its main effect was to strengthen the love of the Dutch people for their old Reformed Church. Kuyper's goal had been to free the old church completely of its governmental ties. But this succeeded only partly,

and now Kuyper did not want to secede from the old church. Dosker condemned this position as halfway, and now he expected the Doleantie movement to wane. The result, regrettably, would be that the impressive reformation movement in the Netherlands would die.⁷



Gerhardus Vos, a student from the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church, was courted by the Princeton Seminary faculty. While in the ministry, Dosker hoped to hold a similar academic position. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

The Seceders in the Netherlands applauded Dosker's judgment. But Kuyper reacted furiously and quoted Dosker's article at length in *De Heraut*. Kuyper did not want the RCA to play a trick on the Doleantie. As an official delegate at the Doleantie synod, Dosker had praised them but now in the newspapers he criticized them. In five articles Kuyper stressed that Dosker had been disloyal to the Doleantie, and was not welcome anymore in their circles.⁸

Dosker, badly hurt by this harsh reaction of Kuyper, could never forget this affair. He answered Kuyper, but he could not blunt the charge that he had spoken with a forked tongue. The question of why he changed his stance

is important. According to Kuyper, Dosker had been influenced by anti-Dolentie people in the old Reformed Church. But I think Dosker was disappointed at what had seemed to be a great spiritual movement. In his Van Raalte biography, he would explain that a secession is a true reformation only when it is accompanied by a spiritual renewal. The many conflicts surrounding the Doleantie mitigated any spiritual renewal and made him doubt the true character of this reformation.

His difference with Abraham Kuyper culminated very bitterly for Dosker. In the end the Doleantie proved to be successful and even succeeded in uniting with the 1834 seceders in 1892. Dosker felt himself left in the desert. In 1888 he had published his father's history of the RCA to convince the American and Dutch Reformed community that the CRC was wrong, and that only a reunited RCA could be an important stronghold in the nation. But all his zeal was in vain. In the meantime the Reformed circle in the Netherlands, which had been waning badly when Dosker's family left the Netherlands in 1873, turned out to be one of the most important strongholds of orthodoxy. And, to make things worse, his visits to both synods in 1888 had harmful effects on the relationship between the new Reformed churches in the Netherlands and the RCA. It was a small satisfaction to him that Bavinck took his side, when visiting America in 1892.

But by then Dosker felt that the RCA had lost its way in the 1880s, because of their own disagreements and because of the Dutch intermeddling. This determination had a large impact on Dosker. He gradually withdrew from church debates. Alienated from the RCA churches in the East and disappointed by the differences in the West, he turned his

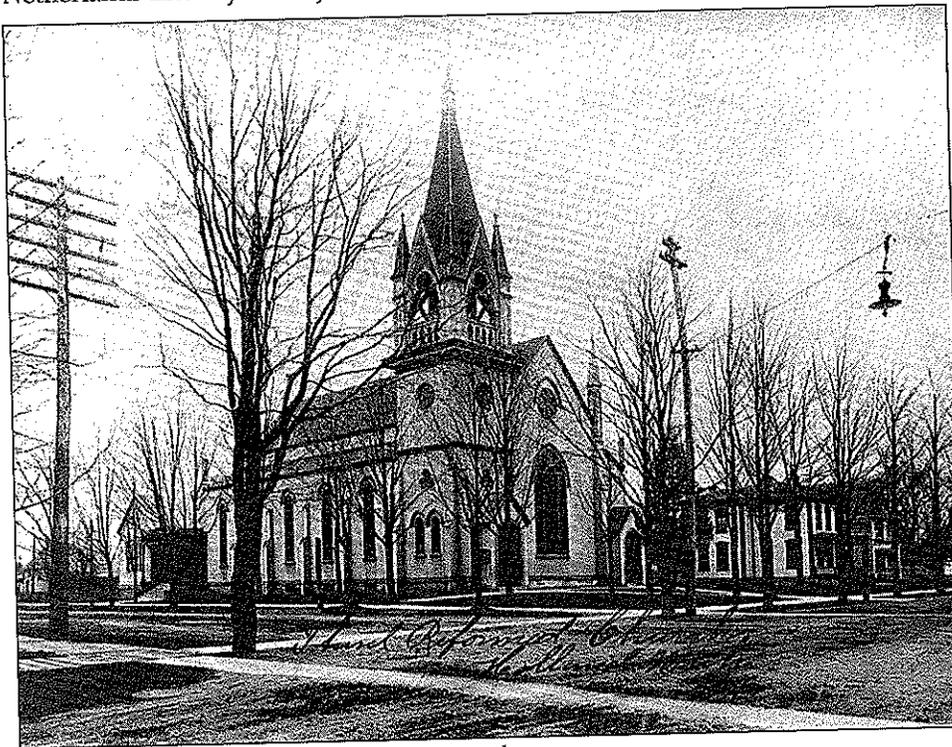
attention to academia. As his field of study broadened his scope and contacts, he overcame his negative feelings and became part of the Presbyterian and Reformed academic world. This brought him the recognition he felt his brethren had withheld from him in church matters. He became the first Dutch member of the American Institute of Christian Philosophy (1889) and in 1898 he was elected a member of the respected Netherlands Literary Society.

to keep the memory of Van Raalte alive in Michigan. If this had been his goal, he would have written the book in English. He had always been a strong defender of the use of the English language. But his book was published in the Netherlands and written in the Dutch language. One reason for a Dutch publication may have been that there was no qualified Reformed publisher in Michigan at that time, but I think there was a positive motive as well. After 1882 the

the close connection between the hardliners within the Netherlands Christian Reformed Church and the American CRC.

It is interesting to note the battlefield on which Dosker chose to make his stand. Because this was a biography of Van Raalte, Dosker could not freely choose the conflict. Since Van Raalte had died in 1876, Dosker focused on the secession of 1857 as the crucial event, rather than on the Masonic controversy of the early 1880s. But it is evident in the book that 1882, not 1857, was the real crisis in the Reformed community in the Midwest. Further, because Van Raalte had taken a mild stance towards disciplinary measures against Freemasonry, Dosker could not use that issue. To avoid the Freemasonry issue, Dosker stressed the secession of 1857. But his lengthy defense of Van Raalte's position in 1857 was rather academic and outdated for American readers. Knowing that the Doleantie never had condemned Freemasonry, Dosker had the idea that his 1857 argument might still appeal to the united Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. This appeal had the highest priority, for it is clear that the CRC and the RCA in the 1880s and 1890s were fully dependent on the supply of fresh immigrants for their growth and well-being.

But the Dutch refused Dosker's argument to acknowledge that they were in line with Van Raalte and should therefore embrace the RCA. Even though Kuyper had the same tolerant opinion on Masonry as Van Raalte and Dosker, it was only in the Dutch context and did not mean he would back the RCA. Having failed to link the RCA to the booming neo-Calvinistic movement in the Netherlands in any way, Dosker developed a distracted attitude to the developments in his church. His judgment became quite negative. He qualified the



Third Reformed Church in Holland, which Dosker served, 1889-1894, between teaching tenures at Western Theological Seminary. Destroyed by the fire of 1871. In recent years parishioners have gone to great lengths to preserve this newer structure. Photo: Archives, Calvin College.

One of the major results of his turn to study was his biography of Van Raalte. The book was published in 1893 in the Netherlands. It is a strong defense of Van Raalte's disputed decision to join the Reformed Church in America. Dosker was impressed by Van Raalte's personality, when he first met him when only a child, during Van Raalte's visit to the Netherlands in 1866.

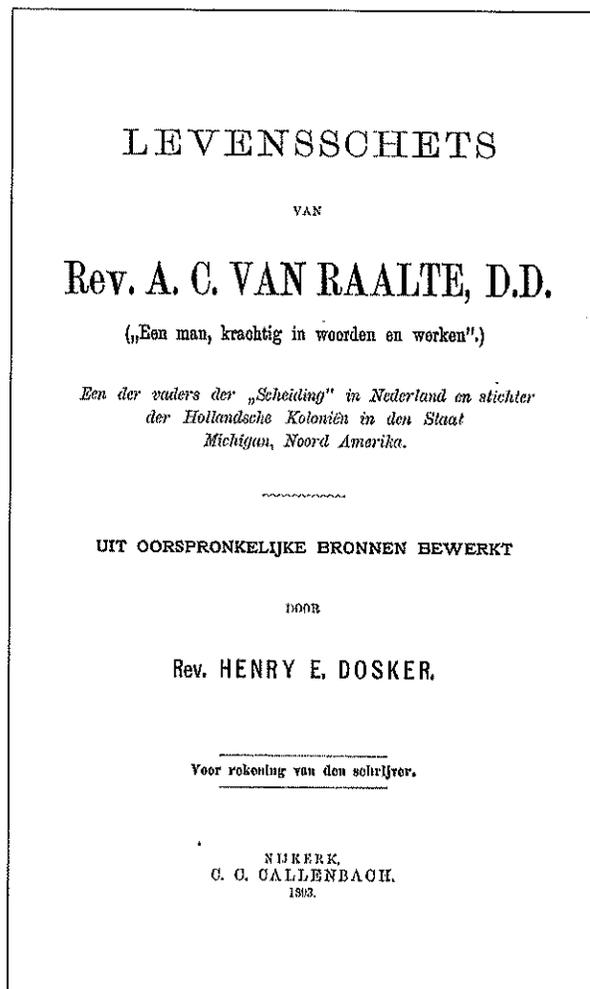
It was not Dosker's main objective

Netherlands Reformed churches, whose immigrants overwhelmingly joined the CRC, increasingly lessened contact with the RCA in favor of the CRC. The biography was Dosker's last and great attempt to convince the Dutch Reformed readers that Van Raalte had made the correct decision in joining the RCA and that the Dutch were mistaken when now preferring contacts with the CRC. It was for these reasons that he wrote extensively on

direction of RCA as unreformed, and saw his church move from orthodoxy to liberalism. He wrote Bavinck, "I fear we are at the edge of great trouble in the church, but I won't secede. If Jerusalem falls, I will pray God for a Pella." Bavinck's visit of 1892 strengthened Dosker in his opinion that the Dutch churches were reluctant to get involved in American affairs. So, his 1893 biography of Van Raalte can be seen, in part, as his resignation from involvement in church affairs.

As a pastor of Holland's Third Reformed Church since 1889, Dosker managed his time and was able to study five hours a day. His main interest was history, and it was Kuyper who led him to the history of early Dutch Calvinism. Were Dosker's historical studies a preparation for a new start, or was it a move to a safer reality where he himself would not be the subject of debate? In 1893 he reported to Kuyper that Calvinism had never been as important in Dutch history as in the 1890s. Five years later he presented a significant study on the background of the synod of Dordt, meant to defend Calvinism over against the views of the renowned American historian John Lathrop Motley.⁹

Calvinism became the new interest in Dosker's life and it replaced Van Raalte and the RCA. He was strongly attracted by Kuyper's confrontation of Calvinism in the *Zeitgeist* and his reformulation of Reformed theology. In the latter 1890s Dosker confessed that he owed Kuyper more for his spiritual life than his own parents. Although Dosker was devoted to his church for many years, he now focused on Kuyper's neo-Calvinistic system. Kuyper's ideas gave the Reformed people the feeling they were delivered from their dead alleys in church life and were overcoming their intellectual setbacks. Kuyper united and strengthened them by giving them



Title page of Dosker's biography of Van Raalte, the first book-length study of the leader in the nineteenth century Dutch emigration.

a worldview as strong and cohesive as evolutionist or socialist theories. As Dosker wrote to Kuyper, "Our own circumstances in church life are very saddening, but your work is a thunderbolt, that will resound from Maine to California."¹⁰

Kuyper's work was important for America, according to Dosker, because the great battle between modernism and fundamentalism would come to his country during the next decades. While Kuyper was opposing modernism in Europe, Dosker's Presbyterian heroes Patton and Benjamin Warfield opposed their heterodox Presbyterian colleague Charles Briggs, and in 1890 the staunchly Calvinistic *Presbyterian*

and Reformed Review was founded at Princeton to protect Presbyterianism against modern German theology. It was on advice of Dosker and others that Warfield turned to Kuyper for help in this battle.

While the Presbyterians at Princeton were closing ranks, Dosker saw the rising modernism within his own church as the handwriting on the wall. In 1893 his New Brunswick professor Thomas DeWitt published the book *What is Inspiration?* DeWitt seemed to be soaked in the spirit of historical criticism and, according to Dosker, indulged in the illusion of the age that all dogmatics were a remnant of medieval scholasticism. It was disillusioning to Dosker that modernism had entered his own church, but he did not start defending it as Warfield did in the Presbyterian Church. He had already alienated himself from his RCA and was tired

of writing on church matters.

Dosker had to admit that, despite all his former disappointments and losses, he still had to turn his eyes to the Netherlands. If the American Reformed tradition sought strength and renewal it had to go to Kuyper. In 1893 Dosker was involved in inviting Kuyper to visit the World Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. But Kuyper was obliged to decline the invitation. Kuyper did not come to the United States until 1898, when he, with help of Dosker, delivered his famous six Stone lectures and visited the Reformed community in the Midwest.

The interest in Kuyper brought Dosker nearer to the Presbyterians.

Dosker promoted Kuyper in their circles and published articles and reviews in Warfield's *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* from 1893 onward. He considered it the best and most influential Reformed journal and was glad that Kuyper and Bavinck published articles in it. Dosker found much to appreciate in the Presbyterians. Both were looking for this foreign ally in the battle for Calvinism in America and Dosker more and more turned his face to the Presbyterians and their strong presence in American culture. In 1894 he confessed to Bavinck that he considered joining the Presbyterian Church, and he expected to be appointed at one of their seminaries. This was postponed by his appointment as a professor in Church History at Western Theological Seminary in 1894. But he envied Geerhardus Vos who, in the same year, accepted a call from Princeton. In 1903, Dosker finally got what he wanted; a professorship in Church History at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

It may seem a long road from the Dutch seceders to the American Presbyterians, but for Dosker it was the

natural result of his search for a broad national church in America and for a Calvinist theology that participated in the cultural debate. When the father, Nicholas Dosker, could not find this in the Seceded Church in the Netherlands, he had gone to America. And when the son, Henry Dosker, became disappointed in the achievements of the RCA in Michigan in the 1880s, he as well turned his eye to new horizons, to the Netherlands again, especially to Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. From there it was only a matter of time before he joined the American Presbyterians, which he saw as the broad Reformed American church, with its secured place in American culture. It was the goal he had been looking for so long. By 1903 the Americanization of Henry Dosker had been completed successfully. But he had paid his price for it. His fight for the Reformed Church and against modernism had failed. He lost his battles to become an influential leader of his church. The confrontations with Abraham Kuyper taught him that he was not made of the stuff needed for such battles. He fled to history and felt safe in the domain of Clio.¹¹ §

Endnotes

1 Albertus C. Van Raalte Lecture, given at Hope College, March 29, 2001. I am grateful to Dr. E.J. Bruins and Dr. R.P. Swierenga for their comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

2 Henry E. Dosker, *Levensschets van Rev. A. C. van Raalte, D.D.* (Nijkerk: C.C. Callenbach, 1893). The Joint Archives, Hope College, Holland, MI (hereafter cited as Joint Archives).

3 For summaries of the histories of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary see, Elton J. Bruins, "Hope College: Its Origin and Development, 1851-2001," *Origins* 19, no. 1 (2001), 4-13; and Donald J. Bruggink, "Western Theological Seminary," *Origins* 19, no. 1 (2001), 14-21.

4 Dosker, *Levensschets*, vii, viii, 109, 110, 256, 257.

5 H.E. Dosker to Ph. J. Hoedemaker, Grand Haven, Michigan 11 October 1883. A. Kuyper Papers, Historisch Documentatiecentrum, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam (hereafter cited as Documentatiecentrum). A copy of this letter is in the Dosker Papers in the Joint Archives.

6 H.E. Dosker to H. Bavinck, Amsterdam, 16 August 1888. H. Bavinck-papers, Documentatiecentrum.

7 H.E. Dosker, "The Dutch Synods," *The Christian Intelligencer*, 3 October 1888.

8 *De Heraut*, 14 October, 18 and 25 November, 9 and 18 December 1888. Kuyper wrote, "Perhaps it is not superfluous to say a single word concerning this slap in the face given by a friendly hand to the Doleerenden. ... Here there is a question of that tender side of love and and brotherhood called delicacy. Was it delicate in Domine Dosker to blame our Church in such a manner? ... But our complaint against

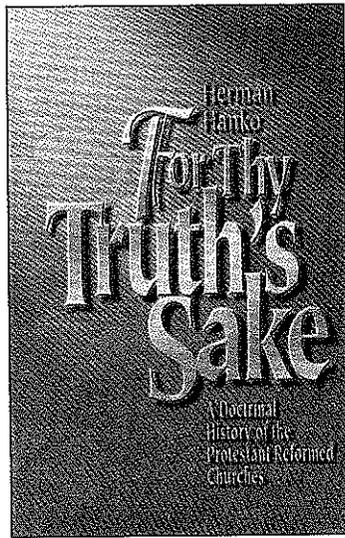
Domine Dosker is more serious. He was the commissioned delegate of the Dutch Reformed Church to our Synod. ... And now we ask, has it ever been heard of that an envoy who was received in the most friendly way in a foreign land and had no dispute there, on his return home publicly censured the land to which he had been commissioned? After leaving us Domine Dosker had no contact with our churches, but moved nearly exclusively among the State churches and the Christian Reformed. The fault he finds with us is merely a repetition of what in both circles has been upheld against us. His judgment rests not upon what he has seen or enquired into himself, but is the result of what others have whispered." *De Heraut*, 14 October 1888.

9 H.E. Dosker, "John of Barneveldt, Martyr or Traitor," in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, IX, 1898, 294. states, "It is a well-nigh hopeless task to give a version of the Arminian drama from that presented by Motley; and yet it may be worth while to reweigh his judgment upon Maurice and his estimate of the trial and fate of Barneveldt in the balances of true history. ... The author's only aim is to present a few considerations to the American reader, in obedience to the ancient maxim, *Audi et alteram partem*." As Dosker wrote to Kuyper,

10 H.E. Dosker to A. Kuyper, Holland, 3 January 1893. Kuyper Papers, Documentatiecentrum.

11 See for instance: *Outline Studies in Church History* (Louisville: Franklin Printing Co., 1913) or *The Dutch Anabaptist; the Stone lectures delivered at the Princeton Theological Seminary, 1918-1919* (Philadelphia, Boston [etc.]: The Judson Press, [1921]).

book notes



For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches

Herman Hanko

Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Free
Publishing Association, 2000
rfpa@iserv.net www.rfpa.org
541 pages plus illustrations,
\$39.95 (hardcover), index

Author and member of the faculty of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), Professor Herman Hanko wrote *For Thy Truth's Sake* as part of the denomination's seventy-fifth anniversary celebration. But the work is far more than a recognition of the PRC's reaching a chronological milestone. Hanko offers unique insight into the

founding of the PRC and presents in English, for the first time, the doctrines, notably of particular grace, expounded by Rev. Herman Hoeksema, the denomination's founder.

Hanko begins with two chapters that introduce the 1924 turmoil in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) that led to Rev. Hoeksema's resignation and the founding of the PRC the next year. For those unfamiliar with the episode, the detailed discussion in the next four chapters might seem long and complex, and for those familiar with the episode it will seem unnecessary. But Hanko raises several interesting points in this early portion of the book that await a response from the CRC. First is his contention that the CRC underwent a fundamental shift in its view of grace after coming into contact with Dutch Neo-Calvinism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Second is his contention that Hoeksema's trial by the CRC Synod of 1924 did not follow prescribed church order.

Not surprisingly, *For Thy Truth's Sake* is written in favor of the PRC, a bias some might find to be too stridently anti-CRC. For those not familiar with the origins of the PRC, the book gives the impression that the debate between the two denominations is ongoing when most members of the CRC these days do not ascribe nearly as much import to the differences between the two as do their counterparts in the PRC. In fact, for someone unfamiliar with the history of Dutch Reformed Calvinism in North America, it might seem from this work that the PRC and CRC are the main trunks in this tradition, rather than two major branches.

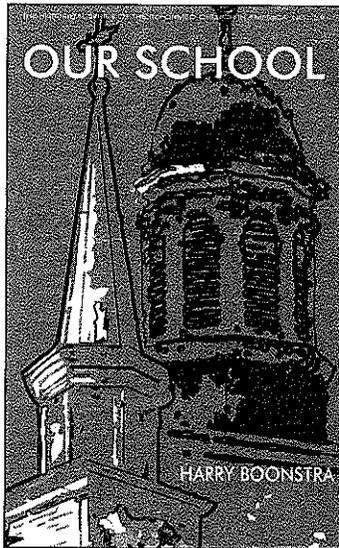
It is a bit unfortunate that Hanko chose to hold back the real strength and value of the work until the third

section, in which he cogently and succinctly presents PRC doctrine. Although it could be argued that this section is simply a distillation of Hoeksema's writings, Hanko's contribution is that he presents many of these doctrines in English for the first time (most of Hoeksema's writings are in Dutch). Hanko's skill as a teacher is evident. He presents such complex doctrines as grace and the antithesis, and issues such as biblical confessionalism and biblical rationalism, in a manner understandable to the general reader.

Hanko does not avoid the difficulties that developed within the PRC, although the account of the differences between Revs. Henry Danhof and Hoeksema, shortly after leaving the CRC, is disappointingly brief. Likewise the commonalities and differences between Revs. Klaas Schilder and Hoeksema merit more attention than they receive. But, the story of the division in the PRC during the 1950s that led to a segment ultimately returning to the CRC is significantly more detailed and complete.

Professor Hanko is to be commended for his effort in presenting a detailed history along with cogent discussion of complex theological matters. Since it is written from the PRC point of view, its members will be the primary audience. But the work is valuable for others interested in the place of the PRC within the Dutch Reformed milieu in North America as well as a general understanding of the PRC. The value of the work is further enhanced with the inclusion of a number of documents, many in English translation, important in the history of the PRC.

Reviewed by Richard H. Harms



Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church

(The Historical Series of the
Reformed Church in America
No. 39)

Harry Boonstra

Grand Rapids, MI:
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001
155 pages (soft cover), \$15

This slender volume is a companion to such other studies of Calvin College as *The Christian Reformed Church and Her Schools* (1955), by George Stob; *Promises to Keep: A Centennial History of Calvin College* (1975), by John J. Timmerman; and Henry J. Ryskamp's *Offering Hearts, Shaping Lives: A History of Calvin College, 1876-1966* (2000). Boonstra forthrightly states that this book cannot be considered a mature, scholarly explanation of all aspects in the historical development of Calvin College. Instead, he examines the reciprocal relationship between the college and its founder and owner, the Christian Reformed Church. He details and makes real how this relationship has flourished and foundered over the years by using controversies between the two as case studies.

Boonstra summarizes the history of the CRC and pays particular attention to those aspects of its past history and present situation which shed light on the major reciprocal tensions in the CRC-Calvin kinship. Among these factors are a continuing penchant for religious secession, the anguish of Americanization, such homegrown theological struggles as the Janssen case (higher criticism) and the Hoeksema case (common grace), and a denominational way of life, which was a blend, not always homogenous, of doctrinal sensitivity, Kuyperian notions and very strongly held traditions concerning every-day religious behavior. As Boonstra states, the CRC took its doctrinal and moral teachings very seriously. On the other hand, cultural mores and biblical principles were often blurred in the eyes of many church members.

Next Boonstra summarizes the history of Calvin College and his subheadings in this chapter are "Beginnings, 1876-1914"; "Why Calvin College?"; "Transitional Years, 1914-1920"; "Years of Struggle, 1920-1945"; "Years of Growth and Growing Pains, 1945-2000." Though the achievements and challenges of Calvin presidents are the central focus here, the author does not in the least neglect students, staff and faculty. For him they all are Calvin College.

Chapter 4, "Onze School: The Ties That Bind," contains a lengthy discussion of the debate over whether the CRC had a right to own a college, which some saw as outside the religious sphere. Integration of faith and learning, changing finances, various synods and the board of trustees, and the effects of a rapid increase in faculty and students not of CRC background are among the subjects briefly covered. Interesting in the above is Boonstra's intriguing comparison of Calvin and Hope College.

Calvin's critics are analyzed in

Boonstra's segment, "What's the Matter with Calvin?" As have other authors, Boonstra argues that much of the criticism of Calvin arose from diverse ideas about how dearly held Reformed ideas can grow and flourish in an American environment. Over the years, pietists, Kuyperians and doctrinal traditionalists have been, and at times still are, critics of the college. Numbered among the critics are members of the Association of Christian Reformed Laymen and the Canadian based Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies.

In Chapter 6, "Keeping an Eye on the Students," and Chapter 7, "Watching the Professors," we see the relationship between the CRC and Calvin College under frequent stress. Theater attendance and Calvin's stance on the film arts loomed large, and greatly strained the CRC-Calvin relationship. Also illustrated here are what *Banner* editor John Vander Ploeg and college president William Spoelhof had to say about *The Bananer*, the student parody of *The Banner*. Boonstra also notes that although Calvin professors are allowed to vote as conscience dictates and join whatever political party they desire, Calvin's mostly Republican constituency did not always agree with idea of open discourse. For instance, *Banner* editor H.J. Kuiper took issue with Calvin professor-librarian Lester De Koster concerning conservative Roman Catholic author J.T. Flynn and political candidate John F. Kennedy.

Of more recent significance is, to use Boonstra's words, "the Creation-Evolution Storm," considered in the author's view the most crucial controversy in the history of the unbelievably complicated relationship. Liberal ideas inherited from the 1960s, the influence of the creation science movement and the strengthening of rigid conservative theological positions among many

Origins

CRC members are a few of the factors which helped fuel a controversy deeply touching the lives of Calvin professors, administrators and also causing anguish among many in the college constituency at large.

In the last chapter Boonstra summarizes the origins of the church-college tensions as a denominational heritage of secession, a proprietary sense

resulting from church ownership and control, and the organizational structure of the college. He notes that the school's religious and confessional moorings are in the CRC. What this nautical metaphor implies for the future of the church and the college is a topic which will have to be pondered by Boonstra and other scholars in the years to come. Though not a

comprehensive history of either the Christian Reformed Church or Calvin College, Boonstra's book, containing both annotated footnotes and a brief bibliography, is an essential source for those interested in the school or the characteristics of the Christian Reformed Church constituency.

Reviewed by Conrad Bult



PUBLICATION NOTE

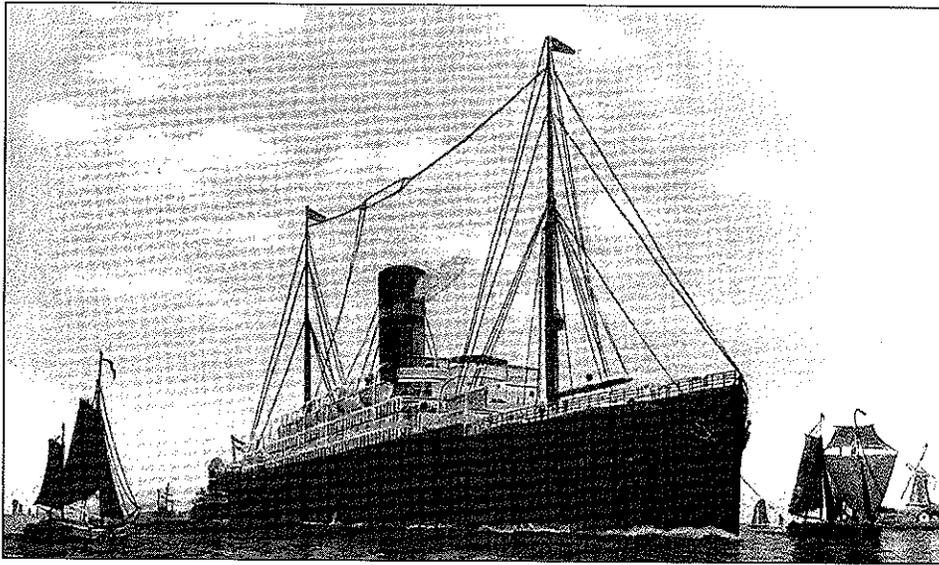
Particular Grace: A Defense of God's Sovereignty in Salvation
Abraham Kuyper; Marvin Kamps, trans.

Compiled from a series of periodical articles, the translation presents Kuyper's defense of particular grace that was opposed in his days by those who espoused a "Christ for all" view of grace.

Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001
(rfpa@iserv.net www.rfpa.org)
376 pages, \$29.95.

for the future

The topics listed below are being researched, and articles about them will appear in future issues of *Origins*.



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