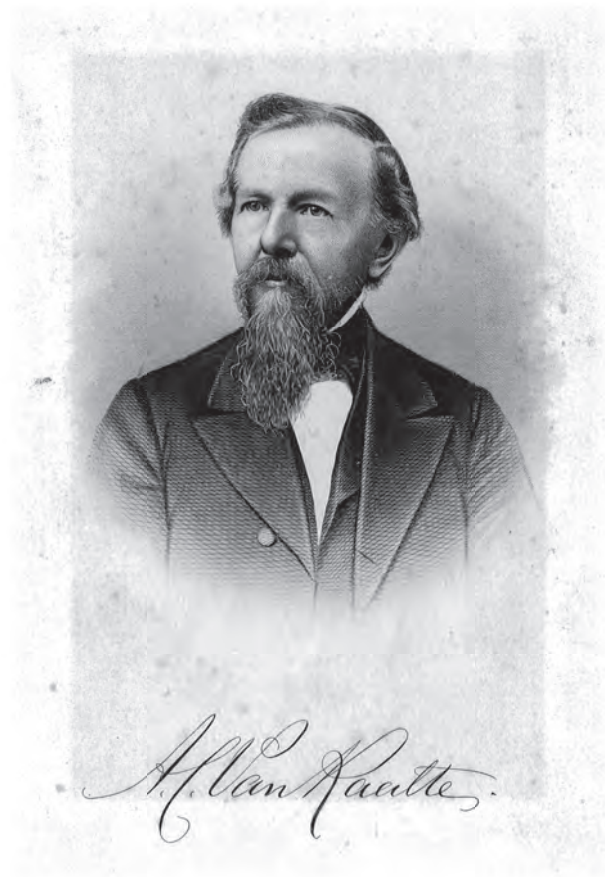


Origins

Historical Magazine of the Heritage Hall Archives

Volume XLI • Number 1 • 2023



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Historical Magazine
of the Heritage Hall Archives

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in the Hekman Library at
Calvin University. It is the archives
of the Christian Reformed Church
in North America, Calvin Theological
Seminary, and Calvin University.

Heritage Hall, Calvin University
1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546
(616) 526-6313

Origins is designed to publicize and
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These include the gathering,
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materials produced by the
day-to-day activities of the church,
seminary, university, and the diverse
communities that support them.

William Katerberg
Editor

Laurie Haan
Circulation Manager

Tracey L. Gebbia
Designer

James C. Schaap
Robert Schoone-Jongen
Robert P. Swierenga
Contributing Editors

InnerWorkings
Printer

Cover photo:

Albertus Van Raalte in mid-life.
Courtesy of Heritage Hall.



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From the Editor

Most of the Spring 2023 issue of *Origins* focuses on the Reverend Albertus C. Van Raalte, the founder of the first Dutch immigrant colony in the United States in 1846-1847 in Holland, Michigan. It also includes two fascinating essays on unrelated topics—a ship that nearly sunk and basketball.

The Van Raalte portion of the issue features an article by Robert Swierenga on Van Raalte and a review of Swierenga's new biography of the *dominee*. It also includes a selection of letters by Van Raalte to his son Dirk. He wrote them in 1874, near the end of his life, while visiting frontier settlements in Kansas. Finally, it offers an article by Douglas Firth Anderson on Henry Hospers, another colony-builder from Van Raalte's time. Hospers had settled in the new Dutch colony in Pella, Iowa, in 1847 as a young man. A generation later, in 1869-1870, he helped found a new Dutch colony in Sioux County, Iowa.

The inspiration for this Van Raalte-focused issue of *Origins* was two events. The first was a partnership between Heritage Hall, the Van Raalte Institute at Hope College (VRI), and the Dutch Consulate in New York City in the past three years. The Consulate helped fund the digitization of

the Van Raalte collections at Heritage Hall and the VRI. The collections now have been digitized and uploaded to digital commons websites at Calvin and Hope. We also are creating a website about Van Raalte, the Holland colony that he led, and their place in American history. The second inspiration was a new biography of Van Raalte by Robert Swierenga. As a matter of happy timing its publication nicely coincides with the completion of Van Raalte digitization project.

My thanks to the Dutch Consulate in New York for its support of the digitization project and to everyone who contributed to the Van Raalte and Dutch colonies portion of this issue.

The essays by Robert Schoone-Jongen and Chad Carlson hint at the longer story of Dutch colonies and subsequent Dutch immigration to the United States into the 1920s. Schoone-Jongen recounts the experiences of a group of Dutch immigrants in 1871 whose ship almost sank on the first part of their journey from the Netherlands to the United States. Carlson, a Hope College professor, explores the origins of the basketball rivalry between Calvin College and Hope College in the 1920s and 1930s. Van Raalte himself had been one of the founders of Hope College in the 1860s. A decade later, in 1876, other Dutch immigrants founded a Theological School in Grand Rapids that evolved into Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University.

It's impossible to know what Van Raalte would have thought about

the place of Dutch Americans in the United States today, particularly those who like him are Reformed Christians. He surely would be pleased that West Michigan is the largest center of Dutch influence in North America.

News from the Archives

The work of Heritage Hall continues, of course. As usual, we have been receiving donations of interesting material from a variety of people and institutions. We are continuing to slowly digitize and put material online. And we respond to dozens of questions and requests for help with research every month.

We received regular "walk in" visitors eager to use Heritage Hall's collections this past year. As in recent years, however, most of our patrons made requests by email or phone, hoping to get access to material digitally or as photocopies. Requests for material in 2022 included ones by local congregations, clerks of classes, and staff from Christian Reformed Church, Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary offices. They also included requests by scholars, enthusiasts of Dutch American and Reformed history, and people doing genealogical, family history, and local history research.

The most requested kinds of material in 2022 were related to immigrant letters and memoirs, genealogy and family history, photo collections, congregational and classical minutes, the history of the CRCNA (various topics), and rare books. Specific topics included researchers working on the Geerardus Vos, immigration, Christian

Reformed missions among the Navajo and Zuni peoples, William Fyfe and the architecture of the seminary and university, William Henry Jellema, Meindert De Jong, Dutch immigrants in Nova Scotia, missionaries in China, and the Calvin-Hope basketball rivalry.

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The price of printing and mailing the magazines has gone up significantly in the past three years. It will not fall any time soon, if ever. At \$15.00 a year, *Origins* is still a bargain, we think, and at that price we will break even on the cost of printing and mailing.

A few years ago we stopped including the little envelopes for sending in checks for renewing your *Origins* subscriptions. I know that this change is an inconvenience for some of you. The simple reason was cost. Only a small number of people were using the envelopes. And printing the enve-

lopes and having them inserted in the magazine cost several hundred dollars a year.

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You’ll see back issues of *Origins* from 1983-2019. You’ll also see a link titled “SUBSCRIBE TO ORIGINS or PAY FOR SCANNING AND RESEARCH.” The link takes you to an online store operated by Financial Services at Calvin. Scroll down and you’ll see an option for Heritage Hall. Click on it, and you’ll see two options. One is “Research & Scanning.” The other is “Origins—Subscription and Contribution Options.” Just as with any other online “store,” you can add items to a basket and then choose to “Continue Shopping” or “Check-out.”

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In between issues of *Origins* in print, remember to check out *Origins Online*, our blog (at <https://origins.calvin.edu/>). If you’re on Facebook, check out our page for bits and pieces of history and news related to Heritage Hall (<https://www.facebook.com/heritagehallarchives>). 

A. C. Van Raalte: Dominee “on the go”

Robert P. Swierenga



Portrait of Albertus Van Raalte (undated).
Courtesy of the Joint Archives of Holland.

Albertus C. Van Raalte was called to preach the gospel and walk in the steps of his father, Albert(us).¹ For forty years he did just that, on two continents—Europe and North America. His life unfolded in tumultuous times, bracketed by Napoleon’s conquest of the Netherlands and the American Civil War. In the 1820s, religious strife upset the *Hervormde Kerk*—the “state church” in the Netherlands—due to the European Réveil (a revival movement) and its unruly offspring, the *Afscheiding* (secession) of 1834, led by Hendrik De Cock, a preacher from Groningen. The authoritarian King Willem I (1815–1840) tolerated reform but not secession. He subjected such pastors to harassment by police and soldiers, crippling fines, and even imprisonment.

As a preacher’s kid, young Albertus was often uprooted, which may have created a certain restlessness in him. But dealing with different dialects and cultures made him adaptable and flexible. His religious conversion as a young adult, after narrowly surviving cholera, led to his call to the ministry. At Leiden University he fell in with a student reform group whose graduates entered state church pulpits, only to be expelled for joining De Cock’s movement.

When Van Raalte, the youngest club member, completed his theological studies, church officials refused to ordain him. The new Christian Seceded Church happily installed him as a circuit-riding “apostle of Overijssel” in his home province. At every “barn church” gathering he was hounded

by police and soldiers for conducting “illegal” (unauthorized) worship services. Nevertheless, he planted new congregations throughout this east-central region of the Netherlands, logging twenty-thousand miles in his first decade (1836–1846).

Van Raalte was always on the go, leaving his wife for weeks at a time, which earned him a reputation as a traveling man. This changed when he settled in a pulpit in Ommen and began training men for the ministry. He then cut back on traveling, except to attend church assemblies and put out “fires” among his separatist colleagues.

In 1846 Van Raalte sought a larger stage by leading a group of Separatists to America. Crossing the Atlantic then, and once again in 1866 to attend a church synod, he added sixteen-thousand nautical miles to his log. In America he traveled another sixteen thousand miles in church work and fundraising. Had his application for a missionary appointment among the Zulus in South Africa borne fruit, he would have added another twenty-thousand miles. In his twenty years as a pastor, he was absent from his pulpit more than ten percent of the time. His extensive travels gave him a vast knowledge of the United States, from the mid-Atlantic coast to frontier Kansas. It also made him a household name in Dutch Reformed circles on two continents and earned him honorary doctorates from New York University and Queens College (later Rutgers University).

Van Raalte was the first Dutch

Robert P. Swierenga taught at Calvin University and Kent State University. Currently he is a research professor in the A.C. Van Raalte Institute at Hope College. His most recent book is *Dominee Van Raalte: Dauntless Dutch Leader in the Netherlands and America* (Van Raalte Press, 2023).

dominee ("lord" in Latin) to establish a colony on the Midwest frontier, and his Michigan settlement in time became the largest Dutch community in North America. His charismatic personality commanded attention and attracted followers. He was a natural leader in church and state—an American Moses in the eyes of his supporters, a pope in the eyes of his critics. He combined the roles of religious and economic leader in a unique and powerful way. As the only university graduate in the colony, and head of the flagship congregation, he was truly the dominant *dominee* in church and community.

To help his colony thrive, Van Raalte pinched pulpit preparations to plant churches and schools, invested in lands and businesses, developed infrastructure, fostered local government, and provided political and civic leadership. His time-consuming land dealings funded a lifestyle above the norm, and he died a millionaire in today's dollars. He put more on his plate than he could handle and burned out before his time. Only a dauntless person could have accomplished what he did in the face of constant criticism and controversies.

Turning points

Van Raalte experienced a number of turning points in his life. Because his father was on the king's payroll, as a pastor in the state church, he could send his promising youngest son to Leiden University, his alma mater. Albertus lacked purpose, however, until the Belgian Revolt of 1830 and the cholera epidemic of 1832 matured him. Students, including seminarians, were inducted into the army and thrown into the so-called Ten Days' Campaign, where they were shocked to see fellow students fall in battle. Albertus trained for war, but the brief campaign ended before he had completed boot camp. He returned to

campus sobered and serious. "Spare my life, so that I can preach," he prayed, as he entered the theological department.²

On campus Albertus fell in with a half dozen reform-minded seminarians, all military veterans, led by the bold and able Hendrik (Henry) Scholte. Upper classmen Simon Van Velzen and Anthony Brummelkamp introduced him to Scholte and his "club." This coterie was tight with *Réveil* men in Leiden and Amsterdam, notably Willem Bilderdijk, who since the 1820s had been calling for reform in the state church. But these reformers never broke with the church, choosing to reform it from within.³ The seminarians preferred to sit under private teachers, notably the Leiden textile merchant Johannes Lé Febure and Lucas Egeling, pastor of Leiden's Pieterskerk. These teachers drew Van Raalte into the reform movement and its critique of theological drift in the state church.

At Leiden his favorite professor, Johannes Clarisse, instructed him in the cultural graces of good posture, clear extemporaneous preaching, and fencing, dance, and musical instruments. He anticipated serving rural congregations in the religiously traditional "Bible belt" of the Netherlands, as his father had done. He was not a seceder at heart. He wanted only to emulate his revered father. Nevertheless, out



Map of the Dutch "Bible Belt." Courtesy of Robert Swierenga.

of naiveté and youthful exuberance, he joined the Scholte "club," which closed the door on his calling to serve in the church of his father and of his own youth.

Van Raalte, the youngest of the Scholte coterie, completed his theological studies in 1835 and stood for examination for ordination before the Zuid Holland provincial church board. The timing could not have been worse. Six months before, in the far north of Groningen, Hendrik de Cock, with Scholte's support, had led his congregation at Ulrum to sign a declaration of secession from the state church. All the other club members—Simon Van Velzen, Hendrik Budding, Anthony Brummelkamp, and George Gezelle Meerburg, had entered state church pulpits and were expelled or resigned to join the nascent Christian Separated Church.

The provincial church board had Van Raalte tagged a separatist before he came before them. It wanted to put him on a tight leash or keep him out of the pulpit. His examiners demanded that he affirm without exception the voluminous General Regulations of the Department of Religion of 1816. This new requirement, never made explicit before, caught the young candidate off guard. He was clearly guilty by association with his older classmates who had entered state church pulpits, only to be rejected for upholding the Dort Canons and Church Order (1618–1619).

After reading the regulations, Van Raalte objected specifically to two—that Remonstrants, who rejected key tenets of Calvinism, be permitted at the Lord's Table; and that pastors over age thirty could not teach catechism. This was enough to bar him from the ministry. He and his Scholte club brothers also objected to the revised form for ordination, which allowed signers to accept the Reformed confessions "insofar as" (in Latin *quatenus*) rather than "because" (in Latin *quia*) they agreed with Scripture. This disingenuous wording enabled objectors to interpret official doctrines as they saw fit, which emasculated confessional standards. In worship, the young pastors refused to sing hymns from the 1807 hymnal, as required by the 1816 regulations, or serve the Lord's Supper to Remonstrants (Arminians).⁴

As a church administrator, Donker Curtius, told Van Raalte: "Preach as you want, but allow us to preach what we want, and obey the regulations." With emotions raw at his seeming unjust rejection, Van Raalte declared, like Martin Luther centuries before, "I cannot and will not utter these vows and do not desire to be a minister in your denomination. . . . The indisputable declarations of the Holy Scriptures have compelled me . . . to break



Portrait of William I, king of Netherlands (1830s). Jan Baptist van der Hulst. National Museum of Warsaw. Wikipedia Commons.

off any ecclesiastical ties from you." When pushed, he dug in his heels but later admitted that "obeying the voice of conscience . . . cost me very much."⁵

Despite rejection by the provincial synod, Van Raalte yet hoped to have the decision overturned by an appeal to higher church officials. When that failed, he finally gave up his call to ministry in the church of his youth. It had spurned him, rather than he the church. His was the historic *Gereformeerde Kerk* of Dort, which the *Hervormde Kerk* synod of 1816 had abandoned. (In English both names translate to "Reformed.") Albertus preferred the Dutch word *gescheiden* (separated), which is a weaker, more neutral form of the oft-pejorative word *afgescheiden* (separatist).

"A partridge hunted in the mountains"

Van Raalte's only avenue for ministry lay with the fledgling Christian Separated Church, led by De Cock, Scholte, Brummelkamp, Van Velzen, and others. The six clerics in the first synod at Amsterdam in 1836 exam-

ined and ordained him. Within days he accepted a call from the combined Genemuiden-Mastenbroek congregation in the province of Overijssel and married Christina Johanna de Moen of Leiden. Christina was a sister of Maria Wilhelmina de Moen. Maria, in a double wedding in 1834, had married Brummelkamp, and the third sister, Johanna Maria de Moen, had married Van Velzen. Hence, Van Raalte, Brummelkamp, and Van Velzen were brothers-in-law.

In his first four years of ministry, Van Raalte established twenty congregations from the Zuider Zee to Graafschap Bentheim, across the German border. He visited each monthly on horseback. His regular circuit covered 180 miles over primitive roads, and he was resisted by rioters, hounded by police, arrested, fined, and several times imprisoned and forced to quarter soldiers in his home, with Christina obliged to feed them. Mayors and their constables took the initiative in disrupting religious exercises, but when overwhelmed, provincial governors sent soldiers to assist.

Van Raalte was a hunted man, compelled to keep one step ahead of the law. Opposition started at the top. King Willem I (1814–1840) denounced Separatists as "schismatics, fomenters of unrest, and secret agitators," and persecuted them under Napoleonic codes meant for political gatherings. If they assembled for worship with twenty or more persons, they were breaking the law, with leaders—pastors, consistory members, and building owners—subject to stiff fines.

The persecution riled Van Raalte. He dug in his heels and pushed back, earning a reputation as a scofflaw who disrespected authorities. In a classic example, the mayor of Ommen and his constables interrupted a worship service as the congregation was singing Psalm 33.



Map of Van Raalte's preaching tour. Courtesy of Robert Swierenga.

"What is the purpose of your coming, Sir?" the pastor asked. "I have a mandate from the King, and I order you to disperse this meeting." To this the *dominee* responded: "But I have a mandate from the King of Kings to preach the Gospel to these people. My mandate is higher than yours." At this the mayor declared crudely: "Van Raalte shut your trap." Van Raalte snapped back: "You are the craftiest of mayors I have even met. You are an enemy of God, a profane man for refusing to take off your hat during the singing." At this the mayor threatened: "I will initiate judicial process against you." "Go your way," Van Raalte relied flippantly, as he climbed on a farm wagon and blithely preached his sermon.

Such tactics eventually led to Van

improved markedly under King Willem II (1840–1849), who allowed Separatist congregations to apply for official recognition as "free churches," provided they fund their own operations, care for their poor, and forswear the revered *Gereformeerde* name.

Van Raalte, then serving a settled congregation at Ommen, Overijssel, accepted royal recognition. But he soon had second thoughts, seeing the concession of "*Gereformeerde*" as a price too high to pay. Better for free congregations to remain unauthorized and retain the mark of orthodoxy implied by the historic name. Years later, he lamented his surrender to the king on the precious old name: "If I could relive that struggle, with how much more determination, and with how much more courage, and with

Raalte's arrest and imprisonment. But by late 1835 the Separatist movement counted twenty thousand souls in eighty congregations.⁶

Over the years 1836 to 1840, when official persecution was at its worst, Van Raalte accumulated fines of five thousand guilders, five times his annual salary of one thousand guilders. If wealthy parishioners had not covered his fines, he would have rotted in jail for months.

The situation

a louder voice, . . . would I not bend even a little under the pressure . . . [and] not now allow them to retain the hereditary title of the *Gereformeerde Kerk*, the Church of the Reformation."⁷ Besides, recognition did not end harassment, Separatist laborers continued to be blacklisted for jobs, shopkeepers boycotted, and housewives scorned at the market.

Broederstwisten (brothers' quarrels)

The first generation of Separatists suffered a "crisis of youth."⁸ Leaders fought over confessional and church order issues, with church polity more divisive than doctrine. Was the Church Order of Dort a foundational, authoritative document, like the American Constitution, or was it a living document subject to modification? Van Velzen and De Cock, both "originalists," defended the doctrine, liturgy, and polity of Dort. Van Raalte (and Brummelkamp) accepted revisions in the name of unity, even though unity remained beyond his grasp.⁹

Van Raalte, the ecumenical man

Van Raalte was not a doctrinal ideologue or rigid defender of the Dort church order. He tried to straddle controversial issues, such as wearing clerical garb, ordaining lay preachers (*oefenaars*), seeking royal recognition, and rules for infant baptism and the Lord's Supper. In temperament he was a "man in the middle," according to Dutch historian Hommo Reenders. He sought the "middle road between the liberty of the children of God . . . and unity and order in the church." As the only Separatist preacher to grow up in a state church manse, he was torn by the Secession of 1834. He thought the schism "was not 'a good thing,' or at best a necessary evil." He became a separatist by default, forced on him by the rejection of his professors and church authorities.¹⁰

Nevertheless, Van Raalte remained



The first church in the Holland Colony, later First Reformed Church of Holland. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

loyal to the Separated Church through thick and thin. He loathed schisms but suffered them in his Overijssel congregations, due to ultra-pietistic *Kruisgezinden* (Cross Followers), schooled by the Old Writers of the seventeenth-century Later Reformation.¹¹ Van Raalte confessed to his wife that “the difficulties often make me depressed. I feel that God alone can guard, protect, and build the churches. . . . The Lord’s finger must be revealed in this because, humanly speaking, it is impossible.”¹²

Broederstwisten carried to America

This crisis of youth in the Separated Church was consequential for Albertus on both continents. Persecuted at home by the king and his church officialdom, and stung by the poverty of his parishioners, known as *kleine luyden* (people of the lower class), he saw the light and led his followers to America for religious, educational, and economic freedom.

The long-term repercussion played out in America because the contending factions brought the contentious issues with them in their luggage.

In West Michigan Van Raalte organized the Classis of Holland as a free-church assembly, thus emulating the Christian Separated Church. But in 1850 he orchestrated union of the classis with the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church (RPDC) in the East, which had been affiliated with the Classis of Amsterdam of the state church until 1771. The New York-based denomination was influenced by the First and Second Great Awakenings, which had divided the body into a revivalist, pietist wing and a traditional, doctrinal wing. In 1867 the RPDC deleted the word “Dutch” from its name and became simply the Reformed Church in America (RCA).¹³ These decisions signaled the change from a Dutch-speaking colonial church to an English-speaking American church.

The union of 1850 led immediately to schisms in the Holland colony that hampered the *dominee’s* ministry in America to the end. Congregations with roots that went back to De Cock and Van Velzen in the north defected, beginning with the congregations in the nearby towns of Drenthe, North Holland, South Holland, Noorderloos, and Graafschap. In 1857 the latter two, plus Second Grand Rapids and Polkton (Coopersville) formed the True Holland (later Christian) Reformed Church (CRC). Immigrants influenced by Van Raalte and Brummelkamp in the south remained in the RCA. This historic distinction was the best predictor of affiliation in America in the nineteenth century. As Herbert Brinks explained, “Though the general lines of descent display astounding complexities, it is clear that the Christian Reformed Church . . . originated from De Cock’s adherents, while the Reformed Church in America attracted Van Raalte and his disciples.”¹⁴

In the Michigan schism of 1857, Van Raalte faced a schism in his own congregation. This time he was on the side of church authorities, testifying to the RCA’s orthodoxy and working to uphold its authority. As he was the leader of the Classis of Holland, seceders now directed criticism at him. In a sense, he had become the Dutch American Donker Curtius.

Joining the RCA in 1850 stymied Van Raalte’s passion and plans for Christian day schools, though he could not see this outcome at the time. Apart from classical academies, such as his Holland Academy for pre-seminary study, the RCA endorsed public schools. Van Raalte carried to the grave his disappointment when the parochial day school he established at First Church failed after five years (1857–61). His Holland Academy did continue for fifty years as Hope Preparatory School, the teacher-

training school of Hope College until 1938. By then, immigrants in the Christian Reformed Church had carried out Van Raalte's fervent prayers for primary education by founding Holland Christian Schools in 1901.

World-and-life perspective

Van Raalte absorbed the evangelical and pietist overtones of the Réveil and its tension between belief and practice. His sermons emphasized biblical teachings, and his applications urged pious living. To some strict Calvinists, the gospel he preached set works over grace, piety over promise. Gordon Spykman, a student of his sermons, concluded that Van Raalte preached



Dirk Van Raalte in uniform, 1863, during the Civil War. He later lost an arm during the war. Courtesy of the Joint Archives of Holland.

the gospel in "parts—intellect over against emotions and will—rather than to the 'whole man.'"¹⁵ His expository sermons minimized Reformed doctrine, but he faithfully preached from the Heidelberg Catechism in the afternoon service and diligently taught the shorter compendium to youngsters.

Although Van Raalte aspired to

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer's vision of Christian day schools, he did not adopt his wider Reformed world-and-life view, which came to full expression under Abraham Kuyper later in the century. Van Raalte left the Netherlands long before Kuyper's day. The American *dominee* was a product



Ben Van Raalte in uniform, during the Civil War. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

of the mid-nineteenth century. He preached Christ as a personal Savior and Lord and admonished the faithful to remain unspotted from the world, but he never claimed the culture for Christ. He did not hold a Christian perspective in politics, journalism, business, arts, and sciences. His purview was limited to personal behavior.¹⁶ He did not join the post-millennial crusades so common in Reformed circles of his day—abolition, prohibition, Sabbatarian laws, or prison reform—but he did late in his ministry attend anti-masonic and ecumenical crusades, notably the Evangelical Alliance.

Conclusion

Van Raalte had a domineering personality, with an aristocratic demeanor and authoritarian actions. He did

not take kindly to critics, dissenters, and rivals, and he would not take no for an answer. Yet he accomplished more in his life than most men of his time—as a preacher, immigrant leader, community builder, and social entrepreneur. He was the undisputed leader of all Reformed Hollanders in the Midwest. His sermons and counseling captivated parishioners, his colony became the engine for making West Michigan the Dutch center of North America, and his real estate dealings made him a millionaire in today's dollars.

Most remarkably, Van Raalte would have eschewed accolades. In his mind, he faced more failures than successes. His path to the ministry in his father's church had been blocked unjustly by church authorities when he refused to concede even minor points of church rules and regulations, and he experienced bitter church schisms on both continents. He made the historic church name *Gereformeerde* a hill to die on. Polity, not doctrine, was his red line.

Van Raalte was unfairly castigated for selling the town lots platted in Holland, a responsibility he had accepted only at the urging of the *Volksvergadering* (People's Assembly). He conducted the task openly and honestly. His business ventures in Ommen, clothed as jobs programs for harried Separatists, stumbled, as did his silent partnerships in primary industries in Holland—namely, a potash factory, a tannery, and a lumber and flour mill. The latter in partnership with Paulus Den Bleyker, the Kalamazoo Dutch capitalist, ended in Van Raalte's personal bankruptcy in 1852. At the same time, he lost a press war with the local newspaper editor, Hermanus Doesburg. He learned to his chagrin that editors have a bigger bully pulpit than do preachers. Also at that time, his consistory chastised him for neglecting the pulpit and

spending insufficient time in his study.

These years were a low point in his life, but disappointments continued. In the 1860 and 1864 presidential elections, when survival of the Union was at stake, voters twice spurned his expressed wishes to vote for Abraham Lincoln. In 1866 he was emotionally drained in serving Holland's mother church and returned for six months to the Netherlands. On his return, he refused to attend consistory meetings for a year, until the brethren birthed new congregations and accepted his resignation. Then upstart city leaders, against his strongly stated wishes, had the state legislature incorporate the city of Holland in 1867. As a compromise they left his homestead outside the city limits. He was no longer a voting resident in the city he had birthed and nourished.

In 1869 Van Raalte left Holland to establish the Amelia colony in Virginia, which failed dismally, and he returned with his reputation severely damaged. He should have turned his eyes north or west, rather than south. Tragedies then drained him emotionally and sapped his strength. First was the disappearance of his firstborn son and namesake, Albertus, who at age thirty-two deserted his pregnant wife and four young children, never to be seen or heard from again. The "not knowing" made this a more grievous blow than the expected death from tuberculosis of Peter Oggel, his son-in-law and associate in ministry. Oggel was a kindred spirit who walked in



The home of Albertus Van Raalte in Holland. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

Van Raalte's footsteps, a path his three sons left untrod. Oggel served his first charge in Amelia and his second in Pella's First Reformed Church, the pulpit Van Raalte had declined. Oggel finished as a theology professor at Hope College, another position Van Raalte had turned down.

Albertus's life companion and helpmeet Christina died of tuberculosis in 1871, leaving a hole in his heart he could not fill. And three months later the million-dollar Holland fire destroyed the work of the pioneer generation. Van Raalte's verve in the face of the disaster was said to be his finest hour, but the hard work had to be done by the victims. That same year polemicists refought the 1857

church schism and dragged his name through the mud.

His stupendous funeral and florid memorial resolutions on November 1876 should have cemented his reputation. These events were the talk of the town for a generation. The accolades were genuine, enthusiastic, and uniformly laudatory. But Van Raalte's day had passed. He was an old man resting on his laurels and no longer needed. The indispensable man was dispensable. It would take a century—the 150th anniversary of Holland's founding—before he was made a founding father and an icon—with a nine-foot statue—in his American hometown. ☺

Endnotes

1. Father Van Raalte Latinized his given name, Albert, at the university.
2. Van Raalte, "Naschrift," in *Kompleete uitgave van de officiële stukken betreffende den uitgang uit het Neder. Herv. Kerkgenootschap . . .* (Zalsman, 1884 ed.), 538, trans. Nella Kennedy.
3. The Dutch Réveil was grounded in the Reformed faith, led by Willem Bilderdijk, Isaac Da Costa, and Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, defenders of the faith against the anti-Christian French Revolution.
4. Gerrit ten Zythoff, *Sources of Secession: The Hervormde Kerk on the Eve of the Dutch Immigration to the Midwest* (Eerdmans, 1987), 35-39, 43-45.
5. *Kompleete uitgave* (1884 ed.), 544.
6. Jan Wesseling, *Afscheiding van 1834 in Overijssel: De Classis Zwolle* (Uitgeverij De Vuurbaak, 1984), p. 210. For the statistic, see Hommo Reenders, "Albertus C. Van Raalte: The Homo Oecumenicus among the Secession Leaders," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (Nov. 1998), p. 278.
7. Van Raalte to Simon Van Velzen Jr., April 1862, "Naschrift," in *Kompleete uitgave*, p. 541, trans. Nella Kennedy.
8. Harm Bouwman, *Der Crisis der jeugd: Eenige bladzijden uit de geschiedenis van de kerken der Afscheiding* (J. H. Kok, 1914, reissued, 1976).
9. Herbert J. Brinks, "De Afscheiding: 1834-1984," *Origins* 2, no. 2 (1984): 26; Henry E. Dosker, *Levensschets van Rev. A. C. van Raalte, D.D. Een der vaders der 'Scheiding' in Nederland en stichter der Holland-sche Koloniën in den Staat Michigan, Noord Amerika* (Callenbach, 1893), 51 (quote); 108-10, 121-22; Joshua Engelsma, *Watchman on the Walls of Zion: The Life and Influence of Simon van Velzen* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021), 107-8, 141-48, 177-80; Marvin Kamps, 1834: *Hendrik De Cock's Return to the True Church* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 210-13; Mees te Velde, "The Dutch Background of the American Secession from the RCA in 1857," in George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, eds., *Breaches and Bridges: Reformed Sub-Cultures in the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States* (VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 85-100.
10. Reenders, "Van Raalte," 288-91, 297-98.
11. Kruisgezinden, led by Budding and Lambertus Ledebouer, sought inward peace and experiential (*bevindelijk*) worship. They resented lordship by higher bodies and revered the "pure" doctrines and church order of Dort.
12. "Van Raalte to Dearly Beloved Wife," 2 Oct. 1837, in Leonard Sweetman, ed., *From Heart to Heart: Letters from the Rev. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte to His Wife, Christina Johanna Van Raalte-De Moen, 1836-1847* (Heritage Hall Publications, 1997), 15.
13. *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the RPDC (RCA)*, 1868, 45.
14. Brinks, "Afscheiding," 26.
15. Gordon J. Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher: Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte: A Study of His Sermon Notes*. (Calvin College and Seminary, 1976), 68-70 (quote, 69), Engelsma, *Van Velzen*, 143.
16. Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*, 17.

book review

A. C. Van Raalte: Pastor by Vocation, Entrepreneur by Necessity

Robert P. Swierenga

Holland, MI:
Van Raalte Press, 2023.

Robert Swierenga's latest volume is not just a biography of the man, Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte (1811–1876) but a tribute to the institute named after him. Van Raalte led the first immigrant *kolonie* from the Netherlands to the United States in 1846–1847. It settled in Michigan in a town he named Holland. Another *dominee*, Hendrik Pieter Scholte, was close on his heels. Scholte brought a group to Iowa in 1847. Still more *dominees* and lay leaders followed in the late 1840s and 1850s, establishing colonies in villages around Holland. Van Raalte also opened a Pioneer School in 1851. It evolved into the Holland Academy and became Hope College in the 1860s.

Swierenga notes that A. C. Van Raalte has been “a cooperative endeavor” with his colleagues at the Van Raalte Institute (VRI) at Hope College (xi). The book is dedicated to the late Elton Bruins, the founding director of the VRI, who collected documents related to Van Raalte. Other colleagues at the VRI helped translate documents and track down information, shared their knowledge of Dutch history and Reformed ecclesiology, and reviewed drafts of the book. For decades the VRI has promoted scholarship on

Dutch American history. This book is a fitting monument to its work.

As to the man himself, Swierenga depicts a religious entrepreneur. “Dominee Van Raalte juggled competing roles as pastor, churchman, educational promoter, social entrepreneur, opinion leader, culture manager, and community builder.” He did so “first in founding the Separated church at home, then in building the Midwestern wing of the Reformed Church and—his signature legacy—cofounding Hope College with Philip Phelps Jr.” “Despite the tension between his life on the pulpit and his life off the pulpit,” Van Raalte “made West Michigan the center of Dutch American population and culture in the United States” (xx).

Van Raalte became a classic American figure, but his restless entrepreneurial impulse first revealed itself in the Netherlands. He did not intend to become a pastor, going to the theological school at the university in Leiden to please his *dominee* father. He only gave up medicine and followed the call to serve in the church after a Dutch war with Belgium and a cholera epidemic in the 1830s.

At Leiden Van Raalte joined a movement of lay people, clergy, and students who opposed liberal religious trends and state control in the Dutch national church. They promoted orthodox piety and a free church. Some did so from within the state church; others were secessionist minded and left the state church in the *Afscheiding* (secession) of 1834.

Suspicious that Van Raalte was

a seceder, the state church refused to ordain him. The seceder church ordained him instead, and he began organizing and serving congregations. He also invested in businesses to provide work for people struggling to find jobs because they had joined seceder congregations. He endured fines and jail time at the hands of the government.

Religious persecution and economic stagnation led Van Raalte and a group of immigrants to leave for America in 1846. They settled on the Michigan frontier in early 1847, with help from members of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Van Raalte was the Holland *kolonie*'s real estate agent, pastor, political leader, and fundraiser. He continued to drum up



Statue of Albertus Van Raalte in Holland, Michigan. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

support from RCA leaders in New York for many years.

Van Raalte had been a reluctant secessionist in the Netherlands. He might have stayed in the state church if it had ordained him and promoted renewal from within. But he did not always listen well to his followers. His all-pervading influence soon inspired opposition. In the Holland *kolonie* Van Raalte pressed his followers to join the RCA. The RCA was well-established and comfortably American, and he was grateful for its advice and financial support.

Staunch secessionists in Michigan saw the RCA as little better than the state church in the Netherlands, however. A group of them rejected Van Raalte's leadership, left the RCA, and in 1857 founded what became the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The RCA and CRC would compete for Dutch immigrants as they arrived in America. Those who joined the RCA assimilated more quickly and amiably to American life; those who chose the CRC resisted religious and cultural assimilation, reflecting their seceder roots.

The first decade in Michigan required the colonists to endure not just religious conflicts but bitter winters, malarial summers, and unfamiliar environments. By the 1870s, the region had grown from a few dozen colonists to thousands of American citizens and new generations of immigrants. Two of Van Raalte's sons fought in the Civil War.

In 1866 Van Raalte and his wife Christina traveled to the Netherlands.

They visited old friends and family. Van Raalte met with the seceder church's synod and preached in the pulpit of his father's old parish in the state church. It was a triumphant return. But America was home and life there better. "The American citizen no longer had Dutch in the 'very marrow' of his bones," Swierenga observes, "although strings of the fatherland still tugged at his heart" (470).

As the *kolonie* succeeded Van Raalte's influence waned. He came to feel restless, exhausted, and at times bitter about challenges to his authority. His relentless pace of work led to bouts of depression, as with many religious entrepreneurs in his day. He decided to start over again and in 1869 founded a new colony in Amelia, Virginia. It failed, and the settlers blamed him. Christina, who had been sickly for years (tuberculosis), died in 1871. Albertus spent his remaining years promoting Hope College and organizing churches. He died in 1876.

Van Raalte was at once a remarkable figure and a man of his time. Critics and admirers have described him as a "modern Moses, a pope, Napoleon, a dictator, an emperor, a mighty pioneer leader, an American patriot, a statesman . . . a prophet . . . and a Dutch pilgrim father" (573). These are exaggerations in Swierenga's view, but "they do convey truth." Van Raalte had a "domineering personality" and "aristocratic demeanor." "He did not take kindly to critics, dissenters, and rivals, and he would not take no for an answer" (574).

A. C. Van Raalte has the familiar strengths of a Swierenga book. He depicts tensions in Van Raalte's life and work and in rich detail situates the *dominee* in his Dutch and American environments. He pulls these details together in a narrative that is easy to read, occasionally using Americanisms to help readers understand unfamiliar Dutch contexts. He reveals his opinions here and there but frames them with nuance and context.

After his death Van Raalte became an afterthought in his own town. On the 150th anniversary of its founding, in 1997, Holland put him "back on center stage." Princess Margriet of the Netherlands unveiled a nine-foot statue of him. The statue has his "left hand firmly planted on a Bible placed atop a tree trunk, as in the colony's first months," Swierenga writes. His right hand is raised in blessing, and his eyes "gaze on both his church and college. He is now Holland's iconic founder" (558). In *Dominee Van Raalte* Swierenga thus shows the contradictions that inevitably characterized the real person but also why he is appropriately treated as an icon in public memory.

William Katerberg
Calvin University

Letters from the Kansas Frontier by Dominee Van Raalte

Introduction by William Katerberg

In 1874 Albertus Van Raalte was nearing the end of his life. He had been a leader in the *Afscheiding* (secession) movement in the Netherlands that established a Reformed church free of state control. He had led a *kolonie* of Dutch immigrants to the United States in 1846–1847; establishing the town of Holland, Michigan; planting Reformed churches; and founding Hope College. By 1874 there were thousands of Dutch American citizens in dozens of communities in Michigan, with new generations of immigrants following them. And he had helped establish still more *kolonies* and Reformed congregations in the wider Midwest.

Van Raalte had a restless spirit. He enjoyed starting over, organizing, and founding new communities. This work, however endless, seemed to give him new energy. People needed his experience and the resources and connections he had. Communities that had matured also required work. They could stand on their own but often wanted him to use his connections to help them. Yet they sometimes rejected his advice, opposed what he thought right, or resented his authority. That left him exhausted, his energy and spirit sapped.

In the letters, Van Raalte reflects on his life's work. He does not look back with regrets but sounds tired. He misses his beloved wife, Christina, who had died in 1871, and worries about his son Dirk, who was not married and had not yet committed to full membership in the Reformed Church that Albertus served. The letters also reveal that Albertus remained the man he had long been—a religious entrepreneur and *dominee* who founded communities. He spent the first half of 1874 traveling to Kansas—supporting Reformed congregations in frontier settlements and living in a dugout sod home. He delighted in what he saw and still had a keen eye for business opportunities.

"I am well used to my sod home," Van Raalte reports. "One is well able to build something attractive. Recently I saw a schoolhouse built of it. They are plastered, dry, neat, and warm, better than a log house. Freedom in this living is pleasant for me." He asks Dirk to send religious resources from Michigan to help new Reformed congregations. The freedom he enjoyed in Kansas may have reflected a nostalgia for the early days of the Holland *kolonie*. Those times had perhaps seemed simpler, without the conflicts and temptations that came with success. As a father, Albertus presses Dirk to make wise choices in life, focusing on eternal things, not worldly success and affluence. Albertus himself was well off, and he had experienced the temptations that come with success. He appeals to memories of his father to encourage his son to live well as a faithful Christian.

Van Raalte would die two years later, in 1876, thirty years after having left the Netherlands. America had become his new home. Dirk would marry in 1880 and join the Reformed Church, but his father did not live to see it. Dirk never reached the exalted status of his father, but he became influential in his own right, as a banker, businessman, and state house representative in Michigan. In the 1890s he collected magazines, books, and newspaper stories that celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Holland, the town his father had founded.

The letters below are in the Albertus C. Van Raalte Collection in the Heritage Hall archives at Calvin University. Collection 300, box 10, folder 1. They were handwritten, in Dutch, and have been translated. Ellipses that look like leaves between paragraphs indicate where portions of letters were not included. Here and there I have corrected punctuation in the English translation.

*Spring Lake***January 30, 1874****Mr. D.B.R. Van Raalte**

Dear Dirk:

Today is mother's birthday, what a difference for her it must be to have left her life behind her, and to have reached the goal of her life; how vividly I sense that I will soon be there too. What changes are at the door. Sometimes the thought of my approaching departure gives me a quiet, joyous feeling: that complete release from sin and a perfect sphere of activity, what a soul stirring thought.

May the moments of my sojourn here be used worthily and be a blessing, and may the Lord support me and help me through the time remaining. We are having changeable weather and poor roads. I am not yet over my cold. Sometimes I have rheumatism, cough a great deal, etc., but by the grace of God I remain on my feet.

Thank you for your last letter, young Raalte. [I am] surprised that you dared to pull him by his ear, promised to be a good boy, but later said he wanted to whip Uncle Dick. The little one is a dear and is growing well.

The people have prepared an upstairs room for me here. They do all they can to make things pleasant for me and try to cater to my health. If you come here sometime, you will wish to use the room too. It is all according to my taste, elegant, clean, and warm.



Oh, may we see the great design, including everything, so that we include soul and body, time and eternity, and not stare ourselves blind considering only that which we can touch, the temporal, which is not our life's goal.

I have been writing sermons this week, and on a topic which I have never preached before, knowing that some of these matters are of such a nature as to be subjects for study; however, the subjects are not to be presented as sources for quarrelling and fault finding. Namely, some people asked me to preach about the hidden counsel of God regarding election. I have for once agreed and have promised D.V. to preach on it tomorrow. I hope it will result in having them realize that they are creatures of time and dust, and that, besides, blinded by sin they must recognize that there are boundaries, that the revelations of God are to be used for our profit, not to be fathomed, that they must consider their own deeds, just as people expect a child to do, to follow, to obey, instead of being concerned about the actions of the parents which they do not understand, which will become plain to them, not now but when they grow up.

Greet Ben, Julia and Helena heartily for me.

Farewell,
Your loving father
A.C. Van Raalte

P.S. We have just received the vest and medicine. Hearty thanks for your trouble. I hope to use it tomorrow.

*Manito, Ill.***February 27, 1874****Mr. D.B.K. Van Raalte**

Dear Dirk:

The reminder that you have reached the age of thirty and that Albertus is already thirty-eight years old stirs up mixed emotions in me. This fact makes plain to me that my life's evening is at hand. I shall not garner much more wisdom nor exert much long-lasting influence anymore.

The clearest of all to me is that my thoughts and wishes are concentrating on the well-being of my children who are still in the prime of life.

I am far from daring to assert that, if I had to begin my life anew, I would live it more wisely, even if I had the benefit of my experience to guide me. But now, having had the experience, we want to serve those we love with the fruit of our experience. And that is why I gladly tell you what I have discovered—namely that one can never find his blessedness in pleasure, money-making, etc. No matter how good these are within their proper limits. Because a man's blessedness depends entirely on his life—i.e., a religious, God-glorifying life. Pleasing God, seeking His favor and blending oneself with God's great creative and redemptive purposes for our lives—these make the condition of his life and heart radically different. And, therefore, he views all things differently.

In one word, in this world to work only for the visible and tangible things is an activity which drains the soul. It is laying our foundation on the grass which disappears under feet. Nor does it answer the purpose of mankind's greatest needs. Whatever is material is only the shell, the wrappings of man. The spiritual, the moral, the religious part of man needs knowledge and consciousness of God. It needs its Creator as its greatest goal. It needs the favor, the strength, and the fellowship of the Infinite One. If this need does not give direction, color, and tone to our lives we miss a vital support. We achieve no real satisfaction and life becomes a purposeless struggle.

When I heard your mother singing at her work, I was glad, because then I knew that everything went more easily, peacefully, and submissively. Then she was near unto God and there were heavenly things in her heart. At the

end of her life the realization that God had brought her so much sweetness, and her life's troubles had been lessened unspeakably much, stirred her to great gratitude. She was grateful for having received so much benefit from the preaching of the Word and from the other means of grace.

I read that d'Israeli, former premier of England, now Gladstone's opponent and perhaps England's new premier, in describing man's life said, "Youth is a blunder, manhood a wrestling, old age a disappointment."

Why does this statement contain so much truth? Because our spiritual nature was not intended to be a slave of visible and tangible things, but to be a ruler over them as God's viceroy and image-bearer. As long as man did not wrench himself from God, his source, the whole creation lay at his feet to devote it to the glory of his God. Losing sight of his origin and of life's purpose and of his Creator's claims upon him, man acquired a different purpose in life. Man enthroned himself instead of God and thus devoted the realm of this universe to himself.

That is why "youth is a blunder." If man does not know and choose God, he ignorantly loses himself in the glittering glamor of the world. Things change if, in youth, one becomes alerted to the pleasures of God. If one is alert to the truth, he will in his manhood expect to eat his daily bread in the sweat of his brow, and not expect anything else. He will, moreover, justify this condition because of the fact of sin. This acknowledgement is made more easily in the measure that one, like Moses, can esteem the crown of Egypt far inferior to the fellowship with God's people: or, like David, can choose to be a doorkeeper in God's house rather than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Surely "old age is a disappointment" if one has clung to this world as his highest good. Life is short. All



Van Raalte married Christina Johanna de Moen in 1834. This undated image is from her later years. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

flesh is as grass and all the glory of it as the flower of the field. But if one seeks God for the highest good of his heart, he has not lived in vain, but has found the pearl of great price, namely, peace with and capacity for God. Man does not lose this at death. Hence youth, manhood and old age, all our sin, our sinful nature and all the bitter fruits of sin notwithstanding, can be full of joy, salvation, gratitude, and hope if we turn back to God in the way He has opened for us. In that way one becomes a king and is filled with the hope of complete deliverance from sin. One shares in and inherits the glory and joys of heaven.

Do not regard this point of view as strange for a letter conveying a birthday wish. I wanted to say to you, "Dirk, do not halt between two opinions." I trust that you seek the Lord in secret, but also open your heart more tenderly to the tenderizing influences of God's Spirit and truth. I beseech you—set aside time for prayerful study of the Bible. Esteem the preaching of Rev. R. Pieters highly and follow it.

I desire to see that you will support the truth, God's ordinances, God's people, and God's congregation. That alone exalts and saves you. And as for your temporal welfare, my child, serve and please God in your daily work and activities. Do not imagine that you control things. You will have noticed that, although God usually prospers the best means and blesses one's activities, He, nevertheless repeatedly shows the man who trusts in himself or in the means and the talents, that all his success depends on God's blessing in the final analysis. Acknowledge your dependence on Him and on His Sovereignty. Submit yourself and give God the glory. Do not strive with your Creator.



Above all, learn to be grateful. Your grandfather was a great example to me in this respect and I still love him for it. Even if he drank only a glass of cold water, I could notice his gratitude. He gave evidence of acknowledging profoundly that he had forfeited and was unworthy of all blessings. He saw God's merciful love toward him in all things. Hence, he spent his life in glad gratitude—so much so that he regarded the dark clouds as an expression of God's love, care, and action to chastise him in love or to give him better medicine to cure him of the evil of sin. In the measure that you can thank God in that measure you are blessed on earth.

Perhaps you find Holland's lack of money an obstacle. And if I viewed the situation as a worldlyling does, viz., thinking only of making money, I would most likely become impatient and say, "Go where the money is abundant." And being driven by that principle you would see me go where one could make money, e.g., New Orleans, Australia or some other place where money is plentiful.



But I believe that one would not find blessedness but great ruin in such paths or ways. A quiet, pleasant home-life in which one learns to make one's home attractive and the fellowship pleasant for each other; where one does not seek his blessedness outside the home; where each can give the other an intellectual stimulus; where religion is the prop of one's life; where religion and religious truth is the antidote to our passion and faults—in such a home one enjoys life to the full.

And this can be enjoyed without luxury and riches. If in such a home one may observe the Sunday feasting and obtain solid spiritual food in it; if our social and home life may be permeated with this (spiritual food); I know of nothing greater on earth than this. For Jesus declared, "One's life consists not in the abundance of the things one possesses."

To be truly blessed one needs something for his heart and intellect. Furthermore, to have a good life one must be in the right relationship to his life's purpose.

For everything on earth terminates and comes to naught. Rich or poor, prince or beggar, scholar or illiterate—each and every one can be sure that he must die and leave all things behind. Then they have to deal with God, with their conscience and with the unseen world. Now, Holland is a good enough place where one can spend this brief training period for eternity. And if you can spend these years gratefully you will give thanks for them eternally.

It is natural for a young person to desire his own home. Nothing would please me more than to see you obtain a God-fearing wife. If you pray God for such a wife. He will bless you. But let your prayer not be for a home whose purpose is to make a big display in the world, but to bring up a family for God's kingdom. In having

the latter, you will become noble and princely and find blessedness. In the former you will experience rejection, envy, bitterness, and unrest.

I have on occasion to my great sorrow, heard you speak disparagingly of marriage, because you had no home. This grieved me because I would be happy to help you acquire such a home. Or you spoke this way of mar-



Dirk Van Raalte in his later years. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

riage because you had no income—to live in style and luxury, but only enough to make a small beginning. Young people cannot begin where the parents leave off. Soon God's institution of marriage would perish if in the beginning of their married life young people had all they wanted.

I believe that every young couple which marries in the fear of God will experience God's blessing on their labor. I fear that in this way you would lightly sin against God and would ungratefully misjudge what God has already given in His great fatherly care—if you had all you wanted. Consider the birds of the heavens and the

lilies of the field—Jesus wants us to learn and understand from them God's fatherly care, so that we do not permit ourselves to be forced out of his way.

I know that people can misjudge truth. I know that they can argue in a caviling spirit. But without entering on this any further, I counsel you to give consideration to God, to prayer, and to God's Word. For our wisdom, our concern, our strength, and our calculations cannot see us through. I say this in the light of the fact that the acknowledgement of and trusting in God, to which we are called, does not make fools of us. Therefore, instead of taking up and nourishing in ourselves the common worldly expressions by which men caricature and ridicule the life of faith, shake them from you as sparks from hell and the Devil. Whoever makes hobby horses of and wishes to vent his wisdom in these things and does not learn better will discern that mockery has ensnared his soul as he stands dumbfounded in eternity. Evil companionship corrupts good morals.

I wrote you a long letter because your welfare concerns me so deeply. Receive this letter in that spirit. I must close.

WM VS 36

Hearty greetings to all and to you
from your loving father.
A.C. Van Raalte

*To: Holland, Michigan
From: Cawker City, Kansas*

JUNE 4, 1874

**Van Raalte, A.C.
Van Raalte, D.B.K.**

Dear Dirk,

Please don't send letters to me addressed to Rotterdam, but to Cawker City Kansas, Box 49, seeing that from my dwelling, there is

more contact with Cawker City than with the Rotterdam post office. I've also reported this by post card to the postmaster.

Houses here are mostly made of sod with earthen roofs and that works quite well, or they are dug out cellars with similar roofs. Hence, one has very little need of fire. Very few small houses are made of wood, and no wonder, for ordinary lumber costs \$42, the best lumber costs \$70.

I now live with a family in a cellar room, but they are now laying a

very quickly dry after a rain, most, sloping nicely, and only along brooks or creeks is some timber. The climate is very dry and healthful, very warm with cooling winds. Cawker City has a population of 600. Six stores and very nice buildings, and all are new. Many are discouraged, unjustly so, I think. In Cawker, people are hoping for a flour mill, for now the mills are spread in various directions. Their expectations for a railroad are well founded.

The huge costs of transportation belong on the disadvantageous side,

Many of the non-discerning people or those who become homesick, and despondent will gladly sell out. Sometimes they offer their claims for 5 to 6 hundred dollars, but those who have put in money and work, don't at all, get their money back. Grown up cattle can be tended by a man for 25 cents a week. Horses, calves, and milk cows are fastened to a pin in the ground in order to graze on the prairie grass.

I have not yet found any indication that Timothy grass and clover can be a success here. An American told me that the grass can't stand the fall and winter. However, they don't really know as yet. I have not yet been to the post office in Rotterdam, and so I have not received any letters.

The last part of the trip I used much Febrifuge, but even so, I was not well. How long I can hold out here, I cannot guess. I miss much, but the people want to do everything for me, but they still don't have rocking chairs and sofas. And I believe that in many places the beds also are not very good, which is not surprising. If I can benefit them somewhat, that would give me pleasure. My money has melted away so that I only have about \$20 and some coins. Without money from you, I would be stuck, and that for me would be undesirable.

Hearty greetings to all,
the Lord bless you.
Your loving father,
A.C. Van Raalte



Cawker City, 1883. From a stereograph. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.

wooden floor in a little sod room, which will be my room. It's all "pioneer living" here, but the settlers have pushed forward some 80 miles further. They are 200 miles from the Colorado line. Many pushed this far and farther away, because the railroads have not acquired the land, and each one can get a homestead of 160 acres.

The hardship of pioneer life, the loneliness of the prairie and the long distances from each other (for each tries to be assured of 160 acres, so that some families often have more than a section), the lack of schools, and church benefits, make many a person sick and faint hearted. The soil is of the best, always dry and good roads,

until one can ship out from the Gulf of Mexico. The springs and falls here are often very windy, summers are longer and winters shorter, however, for a short time, the winter cold can be sharp, as below zero. Because of that, I would fear a winter kill for trees. Most people sow summer wheat because winter wheat becomes worthless. Perhaps one could offset that by drilling wells. It is easy to start farming. Due to various circumstances prices now are good, but as a rule, they are low. However, one can do well when wheat is only 50 cents, for in a few years, he can have 80 acres of wheat. For the present he can find a market among the ongoing new settlers.

Cawker City, Kansas, Box 49

June 11, 1874

Van Raalte, A.C.

Van Raalte, D.B.K.

To: His son Dirk

Dear Dirk,

Since I left Spring Lake, I have not had a letter or a newspaper from

anyone. Therefore, we have nothing to answer. I don't remember if I told you about my moving from the cellar to my sod house. I am happy with that change, for I've gained freedom, quietness, and airiness. It's a land well suited for chickens and fleas. Where I live they will gladly do everything for me, such as Mr. Van Dongen, formerly at Pokton, a farmer there on 80 acres who now has claims of 160 acres for himself and both of his sons, each one.

The settlers are scattered and live on land the smallest of which is a quarter section. Some families have three quarters of a section. Some Hollanders were able to acquire such claims and have left again leaving the land lie idle. Between 40 and 50 lived-in claims, of which six were occupied by unmarried men. It is a weak hotchpotch, in every way a pioneer's bargain where money had to come out of the ground and therefore it has just begun. Soon it will become better. People must go to Cawker City for a market, a town of 500 souls which will grow all-right. It is some 4 or 5 to 12 miles distance. People are expecting a railway along there, from Atchilon and Waterville, or from Eleven Worth, and not without good grounds.

Characteristics of this land area: very high, dry and cool, stiff winds. Yesterday I sat on a wagon, but I needed my heaviest coat. People say that it sometimes blows hard. I notice that the prickly pear grows here, a kind of cactus, an indication of high, dry, land. One has to break ground in May and June to have it productive, when the grass is sap-ripe, otherwise the sod rots, but not the deeper roots under the sod which withers and crumbles the sod, but it doesn't rot, and so it goes with the roots under the sod. The ground consists of fine, crumbly clay with a little sand through it. Because of the dryness,

one can always ride with the wagons, even right after a heavy rain. In that regard, I must add that the people here scarcely know the mildest illness. I believe the climate has been favorable for me: that nervous "high" because of which I often can't sleep, and most get out of bed, especially after speaking or exertion. I'm not free of that, but I found many favorable changes so that I almost never use any medicine except that called febrifuge. It is strange that though I often perspire, those cool winds do not give me cold or cause rheumatism. Along with all the inconveniences, etc., etc. this is a good part on the whole.

If one breaks ground at the good time and not deeper than one and a half or two inches, he can plant corn in that sod and get a moderate crop, but he must not cultivate or use a hoe. The second year a little deeper and thus the land becomes better for wheat. Also, I have seen good but short winter wheat: early planting the last days of April, and sowing of spring wheat in the beginning of March so that everything has good growth. Early, for people fear what they call wind gusts of the last of August or in September, and the late grasshopper. People have not yet given a good try with clover.

There are many rock beds for building houses and the use of mortar. The cost of wood: common, 42, clear \$70. Everywhere one finds bones of the Buffalo. It can rain heavily, but almost at once it is over. In general, the dryness is the detrimental side. Animals do well on that short Buffalo grass, which sometimes withers, but quickly sprouts again when it rains. Corn now stands one to two feet high, depending on early or later planting. So, now you and Benjamin can somewhat understand the farming situation here.

From Schrader you will receive 35 catechism books published by Pieters.

I hope you get them. Look inside for a couple of historical questions books published by De Zwerver and ask Mina to put together ten catechisms and compendiums and please send them to me, and add also some Holland tracts. And be so good and send me after you've read them, the *Intelligencers* also, for I want to anticipate the business of Synod.

How is Dr. Pieters? From Anna you must learn something now and then? How is Ben's little one? Greet Ben and Julia for me. You know nothing about Bert? Can't you send something to New York? We're delinquent for two years. May God graciously help you out on your debts.

What prospects are there for a school district? Again to build? Are the fruit trees promising? My child, ask the Lord for wisdom, leading, and keep your planning for eternity not less than for the temporal. Greet Mina and Helen and the children.

Your heartily loving father,
A.C. Van Raalte

Cawker, Kansas

June 15, 1874

Dear Dirk,

Yours of June 3 I have received, the only one. I thank you for sharing things in which I have much interest. You are correct in saying that being so completely among strangers, one longs the more for tidings from home. By now you surely have my letters from Kansas. I hope I can now receive them quicker out of Cawker.

I am pleased that my room is ready and that all are longing for my coming. Ben's baby is by now surely a pleasant child. I really would like to see her and I hope that may soon take place. I believe that Ben's farm has a healthful location, which at times is good for a baby. Greet Ben and Julia—

I greatly miss the little ones of Spring Lake. There are no babies where I am here. The youngest is already ten years, I think. Don't let Ben risk too much injury to himself in teaching my horse. I'm glad they are going to do well with the town and schoolhouse, even though we will feel it in our taxes.

It is too bad that Jan does not as soon as possible make clear the ground of the blooming peach trees (without that they can't grow), even though he must cut a path through there. Even so, it may well be too late. As to the painting in Helena's house: just so they use Chase recipes for the white washing, the same as that used for white wood. One could use a workman and pay that expensive man with money. Mr. C. Doesburg has Chase, but I turn it over to you. Greet Helena and her dear little children for me. Did you not receive from me the letter of Ravenstein from Rotterdam?

You already know from my other (letter) that I live in a little sod house with a wooden floor; meanwhile we eat with the family who lives in a brick cellar with a clay floor. All good and well, except that the temporary roof (next Spring they will put up a stone building with pieces from the lime stone beds) is too flat and occasionally lets water through. My sod house is plastered inside. If they are plastered on the outside, it is suitable all right. Mine is only plastered in the front. They have thick walls and are therefore much warmer than the defective log cabins. Only they don't have good window work and therefore they are drafty. The roof is made of planks on which hay is laid and then on that is laid dirt from the cellar depths. That makes a perfect roof, even if it is not thickly covered. On mine all kinds of weeds are growing, in spite of the lack of depth and the dryness.

When I came here, there was a good rain. After that, eight or ten days



Dugout sod house of the sort Van Raalte describes on the South Loup River, Custer County, Nebraska. Solomon D. Butcher, 1892. Nebraska Historical Society DIGITAL ID nbhips 10748

of dry, sharp, mostly cold weather. Everything suffered. Yesterday there was a beautiful rain and fine follow-up weather. Maybe there will be more. Well plowed land has good oats, the other is bad. The land is rich, but it requires two to three years before it is a little ready. Due to the dry climate, the buffalo grass is very short. In the valleys, or sheltered areas, it is longer—of a different kind, and there it is mowed. Potato fields are mostly in bloom. Bugs are there but they don't cause much harm. Corn looks good, although on newly opened ground it never amounts to much, at best, a half crop. Pumpkins and watermelons are also planted and do well.

I think that our people, although busy with cattle breeding, have missed the right source of income, that is, sheep breeding. Here there are large pieces of land which they themselves have—hills, often heavily plowed, enclosing many miles in the square, all growing various kinds of grass. Every farmer could easily keep 500 sheep besides his farming. In those sheltered valleys the grass grows

early and long, thus, except for those hard, cold snaps, the sheep could graze in the winters also. If they had done that in the beginning instead of putting their money so much in land or rather farm equipment, they would have a good income. The man who can put a thousand dollars in sheep can live here as a prince. But now people will very slowly come in this. Here and there is an American in the area around here who has grabbed hold of this rope (some do it with cattle) and has become large. It is a land area much like South Africa. Here, too, the prickly pear or cactus grows in the wild, thus very dry. Therefore it is here a land for chickens, much more though, a land for sheep.

This dry climate has a good affect on my health in spite of the lack of many of my favorite things. So far, I have not had to take any medicine except only Febrifuge for strength. Nature is active now. The water that always was in short supply and at times a dark, black-like red, is now colorless and abundant! Although I often am vulnerable to draft, and in

my room in cold weather I do catch a cold, each time so far it goes calmly away without a cough or rheumatism, so much so that it amazes me. I can't give credit to any means except to the high, dry climate. In the meanwhile, it is for me a matter for great thanksgiving; I had not been able to think that what was imperceptible to me would be so much to my benefit. Obviously sickness and death do occur in various forms but I could not imagine that the climate should produce such a powerful influence; it being evident to me that the feverishness of the liver and what is bound to it, giving way to helplessness and inactiveness, is helped the most.

Saturday I began riding a horse and I hope to do that more. It is a small but lazy beast. I have now preached two Sundays, twice each day. At such a time I do need Febrifuge, and sometimes my sleep is hindered but generally it doesn't have any continuing result. The first Sunday I had to inaugurate a new log church—everything built in pioneer style. Yesterday after a rain shower, it was too cold for me there. The wind played around my neck and I got a sore throat. Using a cough drop, I could continue preaching, but I did think that I would have to experience something very bad. However, today I know nothing about it anymore. Yesterday I installed a consistory. This week I must visit the children I am to baptize next Sunday. After that we must prepare things for the observance of the Lord's Supper. By then I think they will be ready to call a certain minister from the Neerland, whom some know, or a student. I have advised them to build immediately a good parsonage of sod, of one level, which they can comfortably do. Otherwise they won't get a minister. If they give him \$300 in money, free food stuff and fuel, and in general help him in his needs, then they will come in a hurry.

These people must go ahead, otherwise they become scornful and despondent, and really, there is here no reason for that. I see a very good future developing for the people but it requires time. Naturally, most of the people are pleased that I am here. There are, however, several who are totally irreligious, infused with strange hobbies, and three or four seceders. Some are hinting whether I can stay here, but they don't dare wait on that, and I myself don't dare make a decision about that. I take note of the hinting of providence. Sometimes I think about coming home the middle of July when I will have things somewhat in

express a package of some of the various kinds of Bibles lying upstairs.

*Cawker City, Kansas –
Holland, Michigan*

June 26, 1874

To: Dirk Van Raalte

Dear Dirk,

If it pleases the Lord, I hope to preach here the second of June, then leave to go through the settlement of Rev. te Winkels to dedicate the church there as I promised, on July 19, if that is convenient with him, and then to start for home. I hope that before that



Sod house of the type Van Raalte describes. J.C. Cram sod house, Loup County, Nebraska. Solomon D. Butcher, 1886. Library of Congress LC-DIG-ppmsca-08379

order here. Be so good to write me which students will take their final exams, and when that is completed, write me then also, that same day, who has passed.

Greet Mina and Chrisje and please me by writing quickly in return.

Your loving father,
A.C. Van Raalte

[P.S.] Be so good and send by

time you at least have sent me money. I would advise you that before that time, letters can no longer reach me, so don't send the postmaster anything anymore for me. A letter from you sent to Holland, Nebraska, at the house of te Winkel would not be unpleasant for me.

Now that I've come in my thinking to somewhat of a schedule, I begin to get a very strong yearning, which at times is difficult. The harvest of wheat



Burial site of Albertus and Christian Van Raalte. Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

has begun, now the winter wheat and after eight days the summer wheat which had been sown early. The winter wheat also which is on well plowed land where wheat was plowed under, is very good. I've seen such that was beautiful. At present it is drying too much and there is a longing for a shower of rain for the corn. The wind usually blows here as a steady cool breeze, but now for a long time it blows from the south doing much harm, being too warm and too dry.

In Michigan people could not stand this dryness and wind, and yet, they've had three showers of rain. At night one can always use a cover. The corn is a dark green and at some places it can completely cover the horses. In most places it is up to a man's shoulders. One must get through the corn early, because in the last of August, it usually ripens too fast due to the south-wind and dryness. I am, however, convinced, even though the land is rich and slowly

on through deeper plowing steadily becomes richer, that our people have not touched upon the special source, i.e., the raising of sheep. They would thrive and multiply like the chickens which they raise by the hundreds. And the wool of this area is of exceptional quality.

Through the Lord's goodness, I am feeling exceptionally well and have accomplished my work so far with pleasure, without hindering my getting stronger. To remain here, I do feel old and if I cannot do any new work, even so, I have many reasons for gratitude for being able to do so much that was useful. Naturally, I expect to write more to you from here, but I mention to you this arrangement, so that in time, you can adjust yourself to it.

I am happy that Anna is cared for. Also for her. I hope to be able to go home and I long very much for Wallen, also especially for the little people, for my still unknown baby,

You must greet everyone heartily for me. I thank you very much that you continually share things with me, for without your letter, I would not learn much. And it seems that Anna has little or no desire to talk with her father. Her letters are simply short, hasty rarities, but perhaps her desire is diminished by the possibility of writing her father being broken.

I am well used to my sod home. One is well able to build something attractive. Recently I saw a school-house built of it. They are plastered, dry, neat, and warm, better than a log house. Freedom in this living is pleasant for me. There are situations that are impossible, but the people do not seem to bother here. It is very healthful here. The people in these years have not yet arranged for a cemetery. An elderly sick woman succumbed when she arrived. Two little children died shortly after their birth and a four-year-old, of the group for whom medication was not provided. That is all from a large group of 40 households in more than three years. The advantages of the country have only been utilized in a very slight way.

They fleece the people; a quarter of them ask about mills, hoping for better; they expect now a larger mill at Cawker. Pioneer living is hard. Regarding the future, with development, planting of trees, and the following of nature's prodding, I see a wonderful result. That is, if the Christian influence is not lacking!

Your loving father,
A.C. Van Raalte

Cawker City, Kansas

July 8, 1874

Mr. D.B.R. Van Raalte

Dear Dirk:

Thank you for your letter of June

30, containing the order for \$40.00 and the letter of July 3. It seems that your letters can arrive in 5 days, at least as far as Cawker.

On the fourth it rained very hard here and the wheat crop was damaged. Cawker made an outcry but it did not help. On the whole wheat does not suffer from the weevil, or flies, or rust, or excessive rain; only from that black gold smut, called burned wheat.

You still did not seem to know about my travel plans, but you probably know now.

I did not feel very well the last three days, maybe being too tired, because I have labored in the congregation to straighten out the congregational books, which I probably worked at too hard when I feel only partially well, then I miss my easy chair, etc., although the people are good to me.

Now I will possibly, D.V. leave on Tuesday. It will take me three days to reach Rev. Te Winkel because the 80 miles must be covered with oxen.

I was planning to visit Pella and Silver Creek but money and my body oblige me to go home. I hope the amount of money will be sufficient, for you know there are always expenses of one kind or another; so that my income has been cut in half. If I am not delayed by accidents, or illness, I think I will get along.

The corn is beginning to suffer

as a result of the drought. I think Vice-president Colfax is an honest man but he knows absolutely nothing about politics.

I think Holland will succeed in attracting many people on July 4.

I am glad the old Boers is better again. Old people drop off before you know it.

I trust Anna is becoming more human as she grows older. Also, as she gains more education and knowledge of herself, and of her Savior, and will know how in all circumstances to make adjustments and to be of service.

I thank you for the news also in regard to the students. You need not send any more newspapers or letters to this place.

Prepare my buggy for my use. I hope that it can be done without too much expense. Frank will probably still do a good job.

I am longing to see all of you. I hope I will not be delayed, now that the end is approaching I am becoming very eager. I feel I now have some rest. Still this climate is very favorable. After the holidays you in Holland will probably have the quick, warm dull season.

Hearty greetings to all, and kiss the baby. God bless you.

Your loving father,
A.C. Van Raalte

"Kerk en School": Henry Hospers and Iowa's Second Kolonie

Douglas Firth Anderson

To settle where we "might live under the shadow of the Church and School [*kerk en school*]." ¹ That is how Henry Hospers (1830–1901) explained the cultural reasons motivating him and other Dutch and Dutch American colonists in founding the Orange City-centered *kolonie* in Sioux County, Iowa, in 1870.

Not that there wasn't *kerk en school* in Pella in Marion County, Iowa, where almost all the initial colonists had moved from. ² Two decades after its founding in 1847, Pella had churches and a school that would eventually be Central College. Yet arable land in Marion County had become scarce and expensive—at least in the estimation of those who formed a colonization association in Pella in the spring of 1869.

Henry Hospers was Netherlands-born, like most of the colonists. He was his parents' eldest child, born in 1830 in a village in the province of Zuid, Holland. His father was the village schoolteacher. The family joined the 1834 *Afscheiding* (secession) from the Netherlands' *Hervormde Kerk* (established Reformed Church). Attracted to the Rev. Hendrick P. Scholte's immigration society, the family sent teenaged Henry ahead to Iowa in 1847 with Scholte's Pella colony.

Henry purchased Marion County land for his family, and in 1849 they also emigrated. In the correspondence between him and his family, from 1847 to 1849, Henry described the "gently rolling" prairies, settlement life, and American customs. His father

was more practical, worried about taking up farming and how to pronounce "Iowa." ³ Before their arrival,



Henry Hospers, 1872. Courtesy of Northwestern College Archives.

Henry had learned surveying, partnered in a lumber yard, and taught school.

Between 1847 and 1869, Henry Hospers matured into a community leader among the Pella colonists. He built on his experience surveying land for the settlers, opening a land office, and studying law. An acquaintance from the time remembered him as "a young man . . . with steel-grey eyes and a bald crown, whose quiet demeanor and winning speech betrayed the born diplomat." ⁴ As a Democrat in Pella, he was elected alderman and eventually mayor. He ran as well for Marion County surveyor and for the Iowa legislature, but lost. In 1861

Doug Anderson is a professor emeritus of history and reference librarian and archivist at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. He specializes in the history of the American West and American religious history.

he started *Pella's Weekblad* (Pella's Weekly Newspaper) with the Rev. P. J. Oggel.

Also while in Scholte's Pella, Hospers married. His first wife was Cornelia Welle (1826–1863), with whom he had six children (two died in infancy). After Cornelia's death, he married Hendrina Overkamp (1837–1907), with whom he had eight children.

In 1869 Hospers emerged as the lead organizer of the new colonization society. He was still young enough to take on the challenge. He had local prominence (he was mayor at the time) and had his newspaper for publicity. And his expertise as a surveyor, land dealer, and attorney fitted him for meeting many of the needs of a new colony. Not the least, he had been since 1847 in a position to observe H. P. Scholte's leadership of the Pella colony.

Yet why leave Pella, especially if it had *kerk en school*? By 1869, the Civil War was over, and the Homestead Act (1862) was in force. Dutch Americans in Marion County who desired affordable land could now get it more easily by colonizing unsettled land in northwest Iowa. The terms of the Homestead Act were generous. And with the war over, colonists no longer risked perceptions of disloyalty to the Union or threats from the Confederacy.⁵

As for *kerk en school*, Scholte's death in 1868 seemed to provide an opportunity for refreshing Dutch American identity. Once in Pella, Scholte himself rather rapidly acculturated to American culture, including its evangelical Protestantism. He openly welcomed the non-Dutch to the colony, published an English-language newspaper, and joined the nativist (anti-immigrant) and abolitionist-tinged Republican Party. Unlike the Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte, the leader of the 1847 *kolonie* in Holland, Michigan, the Rev. Scholte

did not affiliate with the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church (RPDC) which became the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in 1867. Instead, he not only refused to continue the customary roles performed by a traditional Reformed *dominee* (minister), but went so far as to advocate for congregational independence and for premillennialism. He also welcomed the Iowa Baptists who organized Central University.⁶ By 1869, Pella and its institutions seemed to some of its Dutch settlers as much American as Dutch.

The second Dutch *kolonie* in Iowa amounted to not just a hunt for affordable land but also the chance to deepen the Dutch "shadow" of *kerk en school* over the settlers' new community. Reformed churches, schools, and piety provided the institutional, intellectual, and affective anchors for all the Midwestern Dutch *kolonies*.

for a longer lasting, more encompassing Dutch Reformed shadow than in Pella or Holland.⁷

After an initial scouting party from Pella to northwest Iowa in the spring of 1869 and then the formation of a colony association, close to ninety people signed up to relocate. The association selected Hospers as part of the leadership committee and the second scouting party. For his work on behalf of the association, he was allowed one-third of the yet-to-be-platted town lots.

Hospers then spent time at the U.S. Land Office in Sioux City and steered the scouting party to Sioux County. With a surveyor, the group marked out ranges of land that would become Holland and Nassau Townships. They briefly encountered a solitary but armed Native man (probably Dakota Sioux). There is no indication that Hospers ever questioned why and



Orange City Bank, build in 1884. Courtesy of Northwestern College Archives.

Hospers and his fellow colonists could build on the examples of the *kolonies* to craft a small-town and agrarian settlement that would allow

how Native land had become "open" for settlement. Noting his group's anxiety at meeting the man, Hospers turned to patronizing stereotyping:

the Indian "no doubt" wondered "at our likely 'Dutch' appearance." All the Indian could do by way of communication was shrug and say "Hugh." He left abruptly when he "concluded that we were not the savages he had probably been on the lookout for."⁸

Hospers lauded the new colony site in *Pella's Weekblad*. He did not, however, immediately move to Sioux County along with the first 253 colonists. Instead, he spent the end of 1870 and the beginning of 1871 in the Netherlands as a commissioned agent of the Iowa State Board of Immigration. He was back in Pella in February 1871 to close his affairs there. In June he and his family moved to Orange City. When he appeared in the store that had been constructed for him, an unidentified person reportedly remarked, "There is the father of the colony; from now on, everything will go well."⁹

Once in Orange City, Hospers continued to invest his money and entrepreneurial spirit in the *kolonie*. Initially, he operated a store, as well as a land office. By 1872, he had ensured that the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad established two depots in eastern Sioux County: East Orange (renamed Alton) and North Orange (renamed Hospers). Periodic grasshopper infestations in the region from 1873 to 1879, along with a national economic downturn, slowed the colony's growth and discouraged many settlers, but Hospers found ways to encourage people to stay despite the pressures. In 1880 Hospers and a partner opened a private bank, which did well enough for Hospers to erect a multistoried brick building in 1884, signaling not only his prosperity but also his continuing personal stake in the future of the colony and county.

Hospers launched the Orange City Dutch-language weekly *De Volksvriend* (The Peoples' Friend) in June



De Volksvriend, inaugural issue, first page, 1874. Courtesy of Northwestern College Archives.

1874, drawing on his experience with *Pella's Weekblad*. The new paper would inform "our fellow-Hollanders [about] a magnificent spot of God's earth where there is plenty of opportunity . . . for many a Dutch house-

hold, where the Lord out of His grace . . . has shown He is well pleased, where there is abundant opportunity to bring the rising generation."¹⁰ By the 1880s, *De Volksvriend* printed regular reports from correspondents

who described Dutch *kolonies* expanding into the northern prairies, Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, and Pacific Coast regions.

In his leadership, Hospers generally emulated the patterns of Pella's Scholte and Holland's Van Raalte. However, unlike Scholte and Van Raalte, Hospers was neither a *dominee* nor university educated. Moreover, he ended up spending many years serving as an elected official in one office or another. (By the time he settled in Orange City, he had switched his party affiliation from Democrat to Republican, as had most other Dutch Americans.)

Three of the offices held by Hospers were the most important.

First was that of the Sioux County

supervisor (1872–1887). Shortly after his election, as the new board member he had to work to get the majority of the board to accept the new county auditor and the treasurer, while also backing a battle for the county seat. The battle began in early 1872. A largely Orange City crowd, upset with the majority of the supervisors for stonewalling the new financial officers, broke through a building's wall in the village of Callopie (the county seat at the time) to take the county's safe and other financial records back to Orange City. The battle ended in November that same year with an election giving the county seat to Orange City and enlarging the board. In the aftermath, Hospers spent significant time resolv-

ing fraudulent county finances, including overseeing two successful court cases resisting payment of bogus county warrants and bonds.

The second and third offices were his two terms as an Iowa House member and single term in the state Senate. He was elected to the House in 1887, the year he ended his service as a county supervisor; in 1889 he was narrowly re-elected. He declined running again in 1891. His one term in the Iowa

Senate was 1896–1900. His reported 1895 campaign speech for the Senate reflects the man he was and his approach to leadership:

I am not a speaker, but a plain businessman. I have lived in Sioux County for twenty-five years, helping to build up the country. I deem it a high honor to be nominated a state senator, and I shall deem it a yet greater honor to be elected. I am a republican [sic] who will be proud to vote for the re-election of Iowa's greatest man, Senator Allison [at the time, state legislatures elected U.S. Senators]. But great as these honors are, the greatest yet will be my faithful service. I look to you for counsel. You are welcome to advise me. Your interests are my interests and your welfare is my welfare. It will be my constant aim to give all I have of intellect and power to this constituency. I know your needs; I have been trusted by those who know me best. For eighteen years I have been chairman of the board of supervisors, and Sioux county is out of debt and with a low rate of taxation. I assure you, fellow citizens, I can have no other ambition than to so vote that I can retire with the well wishes of the people.¹¹

He won handily.

Hospers's strength as an elected official and colony leader was not charisma. Rather, he offered integrity, attention to detail, and accessibility for the Dutch and other citizens of Sioux County and northwest Iowa. "He had no pretensions as a speaker, but in the committee room, where the real work of the legislature is done, his worth was acknowledged and his influence felt," the English-language Orange City weekly observed about Hospers's time in Iowa's House.¹²

Hospers's public service was to all the citizenry, not just Dutch Americans. In early 1872 he articulated a threefold identity when responding publicly to characterizations of the



First Reformed Church, Orange City, from *Zes Weken Tusschen de Wielen* (1886)

largely Dutch Orange City group that had “raided” the county seat of Calhoun as a “drunken mob”:

We are of Holland descent; we cannot deny that fact; but we consider ourselves Americans; we are proud to descend from that noble Dutch race (read Motley’s works); but we are far prouder that we are now Americans, that we can raise our children in the free air of this beloved Republic . . .

I am happy . . . to say that I live among that true, Christian people; that I daily receive the good will of them; that I am respected and beloved, and that each of them would spend their last drop of blood in my defense. And although nobody else but myself feels and knows better that I am a very imperfect man, with more short comings than perhaps anybody else [sic]. I know, and God is my witness, that I have done and do all I can, to benefit my dear countrymen.¹³

Dutch, American, and Christian; he offered these three things as the major strands of his identity. Moreover, the Dutch and the Christian elements were tightly intertwined; he lived among “that true, Christian people.”

Kerk en school; church and school. By 1872, Orange City’s church was organized—two, actually, one Reformed, one Christian Reformed. But a school had yet to be started, if school meant a Christian institution beyond the common, often culturally Protestant public schooling of the time. Reformed Christianity had been integral to the inception of the Pella and Holland colonies in 1847, each led by a *dominee*. By 1872 Pella and Holland had churches and schools—Reformed and Christian Reformed churches, as well as Central College (Baptist) in Pella and Hope College (Reformed) in Holland.

In religion, Hoppers followed Holland’s Van Raalte, not Pella’s Scholte. Van Raalte came to Pella in 1856 to



Academy Hall, built 1894, renamed Zwemer Hall, 1924. Courtesy of Northwestern College Archives.

organize a Pella congregation of the RPDC (eventually First Reformed in the RCA). Hoppers, then twenty-six, was a charter member of the new congregation, along with his parents and other family members. Once in Orange City in early 1871, Hoppers set about establishing a Reformed congregation. That May, First Reformed Church of Orange City was organized by Hoppers and others who were mostly from Pella’s First Reformed. While Hoppers was not a founding elder, he was instrumental in getting the church’s building up by 1874. Although never an elder or deacon, he was nonetheless closely involved with the life of the church and particularly of its first pastor, Seine Bolks (1814–1894). Bolks, like Hoppers, had little formal education. He had been mentored in the Netherlands and United States, however, by Van Raalte. Bolks retired from preaching in 1878 due to asthma. He remained in Orange City, though, working in tandem with Hoppers for the stable development of the *kolonie*.¹⁴

Hoppers and the Orange City townsites company had set aside a fifth of the proceeds from lot sales

for an academy.¹⁵ Once the troubled “grasshopper” and depression years were over, financing an Orange City academy seemed achievable. With the sanction of the General Synod of the RCA, on August 1, 1882, the Articles of Incorporation for Northwestern Classical Academy (NWCA) were signed in Orange City. In its constitution, the academy was placed under the supervision of the Classis of Iowa, so that its education would be conducted “in harmony with, and Religion as expressed in, the Doctrinal Standards of the Reformed Church in America.” The Rev. Bolks became president of Northwestern’s Board of Trustees, and Henry Hoppers became the treasurer. Hoppers also sought subscribers in support of the new school and donated not only money but also a town block of 16 lots. Classes began in 1883, and the NWCA dedicated a new permanent building in 1894. By the time of Hoppers’s death, his five youngest children had graduated from Northwestern. Long after his death the Academy expanded, first into Northwestern Junior College and Academy (1928) and then into Northwestern College (1960). School joined church

in casting the broad Reformed shadow over Iowa's second Dutch *kolonie*, as Hospers had envisioned in 1874.

In 1899, Hospers suffered a stroke while visiting family in Cleveland, Ohio. He recovered enough to return home, but he turned over his business interests to associates and slowly weakened. He died in Orange City on October 21, 1901, age seventy-one. He was Sioux County's "most eminent citizen," noted one eulogist, "a friend of the people" and "revered and loved" by them.¹⁶

Public tributes to Hospers's character and contributions were scarcely over, however, before his Orange City Bank failed. What led to the bank failure is unclear. It most likely was tied to investments and/or debts of one or more of his children and/or their spouses, and also perhaps to embezzlement by a clerk. It took until 1905 for his estate to be settled.

The failure of Hospers's bank

raises other issues. Much about his personal and business life remains obscure. To date, no records of his bank or of his estate have come to light, and hardly any of his Orange City correspondence has survived. He was pious, and from a pious family, and he helped found First Reformed Church—yet he was never a church officer. He had confessed in his 1872 letter defending the Calliope raid that "nobody else but myself feels and knows better that I am a very imperfect man, with more short comings [sic] than perhaps anybody else." This may have been more than a public confession of his Reformed belief in human depravity. Perhaps it was a personal acknowledgment of persistent struggles he had in resisting sin and being a faithful Christian. He was ambitious and patriarchal—a man of his time and culture.

Whatever the nature and extent of Hospers's "imperfections" and "short comings," he

was a force among Dutch Americans and a reminder that the leaders in Dutch Reformed communities were not only their clergy. His Dutch *kolonie* and the county as a whole were flourishing as the twentieth century began. In 1870, the year after Hospers helped select and survey Sioux County for the Dutch colony, the county population, according to the

U.S. Census, was 576. In 1900, the year before Hospers's death, it had risen to 23,337.¹⁷ Moreover, in 1904 the county erected a new courthouse. Hospers had been instrumental in contributing money and time to the campaign for it. Its Richardsonian Romanesque architecture immediately made it an imposing symbol of the county's solid prosperity.

On the one hand, the colonists in Orange City (and the Midwest more widely) and their descendants more generally kept their Dutch cultural identity distinct—through their Reformed churches and educational institutions, marriage within the group, and new immigrants from the homeland, who kept arriving into the mid-twentieth century.

On the other hand, they also became more American, of necessity and by choice. Hospers and his fellow adult founding colonists had as a group been resident in the United States for over twenty years by 1870. American society and culture were that much more familiar to them than to those founding colonists of Pella and Holland in 1847. The Dutch language remained important for Hospers's generation, but he and his fellow colonists were comfortable working in English as well.

Henry Hospers was not a clone of the Rev. Scholte of Pella, let alone of the Rev. Van Raalte of Holland. He was a self-educated, foreign-born layman young enough to come of age in the United States—and thus more American than either of the *dominees* had been. His roles in elected offices arguably made Hospers a servant to a wider public than were either Scholte or Van Raalte. Despite his having become an adult in Scholte's Pella, the patterns of his leadership resonate at least as much with Van Raalte. Hospers was as entrepreneurial as either *dominee*, but he followed Van Raalte's lead in his diplomatic skills



Sioux County Courthouse, built 1904. Courtesy of Northwestern College Archives

and in his loyalty to the Reformed Church and its theology and piety. Perhaps his dedication to *kerk en school*, then, is his most significant legacy as the leader of Iowa's second Dutch *kolonie*.¹⁸ 🐾



Hoppers with wife and two children. From left: Hendrina Overkamp Hoppers; Hendrina; Arta; Henry Hoppers. Courtesy of Northwest College Archives.

Endnotes

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"Hollanders in Circumstances of Great Destitution": The Survivors of the Ethel Come to Paterson (1871)

Robert Schoone-Jongen

Every immigrant makes a different trip. There may be similarities—routes followed, obstacles encountered—but each person has their particular experience, the moments of their own departure and arrival, or maybe some other event they witnessed that set their journey apart. They may have witnessed a fellow passenger's death and committal to the sea, or an especially fierce storm, or a mid-ocean engine failure. Depending on their personality, some fretted their way across the ocean, while others took the journey's events in stride; some worried about the future, while others felt destined for better things in their new location. And, in truth, most everyone experienced a mixture of emotions as the headed west to America.

This is the story of thirty-six Dutch immigrants to the United States. They all came from one village—Goedereede. They were bound for one destination—Paterson, New Jersey. They traveled together, propelled both by sail and steam: by ferry to Dordrecht; by schooner to Newcastle, England; by steamer to New York; and by rail to Paterson. Along the way they lost all their belongings, and almost lost their lives. Because Dutch Americans generously responded to the newcomers' plight, these immigrants began life in Paterson with a substantial nest egg. But their outcomes were very different, with some rising both socially and economically and others sinking

into disappointment and tragedy.

Unlike so many immigrants, these survivors seemed to accurately remember the exact year they came to the United States, a memory in mind for almost half a century. While dates often fade with time, for the twenty-nine who we can trace in the available records, the year remained firmly fixed. They never forgot the exact year of their Atlantic crossing—1871.

Their story began ordinarily enough on the quay in Dordrecht. It was March 11, 1871. Since the worst of the Atlantic storms would soon be subsiding and crossing by steamship was now commonplace, the travelers could expect to reach New York by early May. They hailed from one of the Netherlands' deepest poverty pockets, the village of Goedereede on the off-the-beaten-path island of Goeree in the province of Zuid Holland. It seems as though these villagers were all related to someone else in the group, as was common among Dutch immigrants. And they were following a well-worn route that connected Goedereede to Paterson, New Jersey. People from that village (and its near neighbors: Ouddorp, Melissant, Sommeldyk, Middelharnis, Oude Tonge, and Nieuwe Tonge) had been heading to the Passaic Valley since 1846, when one of the early boatloads of immigrants heading to the Great Lakes re-

Robert Schoone-Jongen is an emeritus professor of history at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His research is on Dutch immigration to the US since 1850, currently focuses on northern New Jersey.

gion with Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte became marooned for the winter in the New York area.

While the travelers left no inventory of their baggage, we do know two things that determined what they carried on board: the shipping company's rules about size and weight and the immigrants' ability to move their bags, boxes, or bundles. Besides some food there would have been a memento or two, certainly an extra change of clothes, possibly a Bible or a hymnal, and very likely a piece of paper designating their exact destination. Tradesmen likely would have carried a few tools, but Goedereede's village registry indicates that none of these folks on the dock at Dordrecht possessed any special skills. They were all just "laborers." People like them had good reasons, economic and social, for turning their backs on Goedereede and believing Paterson held a better future. What we do know for certain is the care with which the passengers handled their bags. For decades, Dutch travelers had been warned about stevedores who manhandled luggage on the docks—viewing prized possessions as mere cargo.¹

Of the thirty-six people headed for Paterson, we are able to trace accurately the lives of twenty-nine. They consisted of three families, two

sisters, and three individuals. The den Hartogs accounted for one third of the group. Fifty-two year old Flip den Hartog and his wife, Belia Koning, shepherded seven children, ranging in age from seventeen years down to one-and-a-half, along with a married son with his wife and their toddler son. They intended to join Flip's older son, Leentjes, who had settled in Paterson with his wife and son (another Flip) in 1866. In five years Leentjes den Hartog had lost his Dutch name, as Paterson's record keepers had transformed him into Lane Hartley.²

Kors Struijk led the second family. This fifty-five year old laborer traveled with his wife, Lijntje den Ouden, and five of their children, ranging in age from twenty-two down to ten. Like the den Hartogs, the Struijks were following in the wake of an older son, Arij, who had immigrated to Paterson in 1866. He too had immediately lost his Dutch name, appearing in the city records as Aaron Struck. It seems that Kors functioned as the group's spokesman, someone capable of expressing himself both orally and in writing. Two of his sons inherited his facility with language and soon would be awarded jobs with municipal governments. Kors would lose his given name forthwith, spending his Paterson years known variously as Christian, Cornelius, Christopher, and finally Gustav—"Gus" to his friends.³

The Volant, a "brigantine" built on Prince Edward Island in 1867, similar to the Ethel, the ship taken by the emigrants from the Netherlands to England. State Library of South Australia PRG 1373/28/29



Arnoldus van Wijk was a widower. Life in Goedereede had not been happy for him. His wife had died in 1866 and one of their children in 1869. That same year, his sons Krijn and Cornelis moved to Paterson, one finding work in a textile factory and the other in a locomotive shop. In March 1871, Arnoldus traveled with his four remaining children, ranging in age from twenty-five down to eight.⁴

Five other individuals accompanied the Struijks, Van Wijks, and den Hartogs. The van Kerkhoven sisters, Francijntje and Jannetje Cornelia, were related to Kors Struijk by marriage. With both of their parents deceased, the sisters had little reason to remain in Goedereede. Francijntje had already tried her luck working for a year in Rotterdam. Now she would explore Paterson's possibilities. Jannetje Witte was traveling alone, intending to join a number of relatives in the Paterson area. The last two travelers are harder to identify, given the handwriting on the ship's register.

The brigantine *Ethel*, powered by sails, departed from Dordrecht on March 11, passing Hellevoet into the open sea on the next day.⁵ The helmsman set a course for Shields, across the North Sea, at the mouth of the River Tyne in northern Yorkshire. She was a cargo ship, pure and simple—a vessel of 137 tons, one hundred two feet long by twenty-four and a half feet wide. She drew just over twelve feet. She was built of spruce, with her hull plated in zinc. Swansea was her home port. Built in 1867 in the yard of the Owen Company of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, since her maiden voyage the *Ethel* had crossed the Atlantic at least twice, once to the West Indies and then to Newfoundland.⁶ Like most ships in her class, she spent the winter months shuttling between British ports. Her cargos varied, depending on the season and the demands of the market—carrying

everything from people to minerals. During February 1871 she had sailed from Falmouth to Rotterdam to Sicily, then to Dordrecht laden with unrefined sulfur.⁷ In two weeks the crew unloaded the sulfur and refitted the interior to haul passengers to England.

By the late 1860s the arrival of long-distance steamers meant that slower sailing ships, like the *Ethel*, shared the sea lanes with larger and faster ships with metal hulls. All the ships—steam or sail—were controlled by the eyesight of a lookout in the crow's nest and the reflexes of the helmsman. Accidents were frequent and often deadly on the busy approaches to the British ports. The *Times of London* announced the toll daily, and on March 20 it laconically reported that the *Ethel* had been rammed by an unknown steamer within sight of the Yorkshire coast. The wounded brigantine limped into port without any loss of life.⁸ The Dutch press paid more attention to the *Ethel's* accident. One paper reported that the collision occurred due east of Whitby. Another noted that the wounded vessel limped the sixty miles to Shields under its own power, with three feet of water in the hull.⁹ As for the passengers, their story would be told only after they arrived in New York in May. They reported that the steamer carried the French flag. Thankfully, there were no serious injuries from the collision, but their belongings had all disappeared through the hole in the hull into the depths of the North Sea. The immigrants from Goedereede literally had escaped with only the clothes on their backs.¹⁰

Almost a month passed between their landing near Newcastle and their departure from Liverpool, aboard the recently launched steamer *S. S. Wisconsin*. The ship represented the cutting edge of marine passenger liner design. In service less than one year, it featured an advance-designed engine

made to maximize the use of the steam and minimize fuel consumption. She could make the trip to New York in ten days, eleven at most. At 366 feet from bow to stern, and 43 feet abeam, the iron hulled ship could carry about 1100 passengers in steerage and two dozen more in cabins.¹¹ The Guion Lines had designed the ship for

undoubtedly encountered each other down in steerage, the record suggests that the Frisians and Groningers offered little material assistance to the Zuid Hollanders, likely a reflection of the poverty they shared in the homeland. But the thirty-six could at least tell their story to someone else.

Upon arrival in New York, the



The Guion line steamship *Idaho*, sister ship of the *Wisconsin*. Early steamships continue to use sails to supplement steam power or to help ships stay balanced in heavy seas. Wikipedia Commons.

just this kind of work. In a few years' time, the company counted upward of a dozen such vessels in its fleet, ranking third in the trans-Atlantic steerage trade, against competitors like Cunard, White Star, Hamburg America, and soon (and most importantly for Dutch immigrants) the Netherland-America Steamship Company, the predecessor of the Holland America Line.

Hollanders accounted for one hundred two of the passengers on this voyage of the *Wisconsin*. The destitute group from Goedereede were joined by sixty-six Groningers and Frisians headed for the Chicago and West Michigan settlements—with their baggage intact. The ship's scribe listed them all as Germans on the manifest. While the groups of Hollanders

steerage passengers were offloaded onto the boats that shuttled newcomers to the Castle Garden immigrant processing center, located at Manhattan's southernmost tip—the Battery. It was there the Hollanders encountered either Rev. Arend H. Bechtold, pastor of the city's newly organized Holland congregation, or one of his lay helpers. New York's Dutch Reformed churches had been routinely assisting immigrants as they navigated through the harbor on their westward way since 1846. Himself an immigrant born in Amsterdam, Bechtold had been appointed the denomination's man at Castle Garden in 1868. Bechtold by turns served as a greeter, travel agent, consoler, admonisher, lender, and baggage handler to newcomers from the Netherlands. He shepherded his flock

from Castle Garden to the nearby Holland boarding house at 3 Battery Place.

Bechtold was familiar with the trials that beset immigrants—from the deaths of loved ones during the crossing to severe cases of culture shock. But the plight of the thirty-six who arrived on the morning of May 9 stood out. He heard them tell their story of the *Ethel's* fateful collision and their brush with a watery death. Additionally, the *dominee* harbored a special affinity for a Paterson-bound group since he had spent four years in that city, first as the pastor of the First Holland Christian Reformed Church and then of the short-lived Second Holland Reformed Church.¹² There is little doubt that he was acquainted with Struyks, Den Hartogs, and Van Wycks who lived in the Over the River neighborhood, and he might have known that the group from the *Ethel* was coming.

No matter how garbled some of the details may have become, the gist of the problem the immigrants faced was clear. They required both cash and goods—immediately. The call for aid appeared in the very next issue of the *Christian Intelligencer* under the headline “A Very Sad Case.”¹³ The author (presumably Bechtold) solicited aid for “40 Hollanders . . . now in Paterson in circumstances of great destitution,” needing relief that “cannot come to them too promptly.” Cash could be sent to Rev. J. M. Ferris and clothing to John R. Planten at his place of business in Lower Manhattan. As secretary of the Reformed Church’s board of foreign missions, Ferris routinely managed one of the denomination’s larger budget items. Having served congregations in both Chicago and Grand Rapids, and briefly having taught at the academy in Holland, Michigan, he was very familiar with the ins and outs of Dutch immigrant life in America.¹⁴



Castle Garden Landing for Emigrants (1850-1900). Charles Magnus & Company. Wood Engraving. Wikipedia Commons.

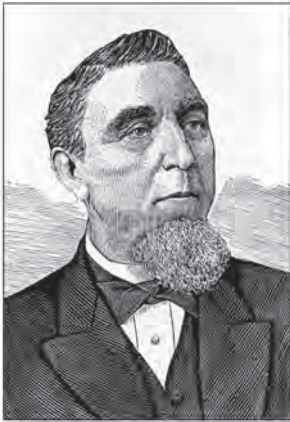
The thirty-six-year-old Planten was a rising presence in New York’s business community. Amsterdam born and New York raised, he and his father headed a pharmaceutical company that specialized in encapsulating foul-tasting medicines in tasteless gelatin pills. John’s brother, Gerrit, lived on a hillside overlooking Paterson. He was a significant figure in that city’s economic development and a loyal member of the Second Reformed Church, the mother church of the area’s new Dutch-speaking congregations.¹⁵ The congregation’s better healed members, including Gerrit, had a history of helping their immigrant neighbors in the Over the River neighborhood.

The *Intelligencer’s* call for help received a prompt, generous response: \$630 in cash and seven bundles of clothes.¹⁶ In mid-June a list of forty-three individual and business donors appeared. The largest amounts—\$25.00—came from five individuals: John R. Planten and his father, Hermanus; Rudolph C. Burlage (Consul General of the Netherlands); Cornelius Van Schaak Roosevelt (grandfather of future president Theodore Roosevelt); and William Guion, one of the partners who owned the *S.S. Wisconsin*. Several donations

came from socially prominent Knickerbocker families, including real estate investor James Beekman. There were ministers: Thomas DeWitt (who had met Rev. Van Raalte at the foot of the gangplank upon his arrival in 1846) and Talbot W. Chambers (a pastor of the city’s prestigious Collegiate Church). And there were prominent politicians: Abram S. Hewitt (soon to be New York’s mayor), his business partner Edward Cooper (son of Peter Cooper, whose lecture series had helped propel Abraham Lincoln onto the national political scene), and Henry C. Murphy (one time mayor of Brooklyn, state legislator and congressman, one time contender for the Democratic vice-presidential nomination, and former U. S. minister to the Netherlands).¹⁷

This outpouring from the rich and famous was both gratifying and humbling for the thirty-six recipients. On May 30, 1871, Kors Struijk penned the group’s public response: “All those Hollanders who were losers of their goods by shipwreck, express their heartfelt thanks for the liberality which they received here, wishing that the Lord, who loveth a cheerful giver, may crown with his blessing and grace these acts of love and mercy bestowed

on us in such a liberal measure! May they also receive mercy from the Lord in the great day of general recom-



Reverend A. H. Bechtold.
Courtesy of Heritage Hall.

pense!
So may it be!"¹⁸
Probably no other group of new Dutch arrivals in Paterson were afforded the boost these folks from Goedereede received that spring.

New clothes, plus \$13,800 in seed money, gave them a start in America few, if any, would ever match. Their need was great, and the Reformed church's response to it more than adequate. These newcomers had the resources to avoid certain destitution.

Exactly how the money was distributed we do not know. But there are indicators that they received help in quickly finding employment in Paterson's factories. John R. Planten reported, "All have now obtained employment, and the material aid bestowed has enabled them to purchase the most needed household effects."¹⁹ From this beginning, we can trace the rest of the life stories for all but four of the travelers.

Coming to America changed them all, and their near brush with death certainly marked their lives. So too did their good fortune, as the clothing and seed money perhaps turned North Sea clouds into silver lining. And living in Paterson, a city with a well-deserved reputation for industrial strife and riots, also changed their outlook on life. Most of them fared well by the standards of the day, though a few did not. How did they experience their journey? Did they remember

more the clouds or the silver lining that followed? Was the memory more of misfortune or of good luck (or of God's benevolent providence)? We don't know. These were ordinary folk, and they left behind no published or unpublished records of what they felt and thought over the years.

Here's what we do know. As mentioned, Kors Struijk promptly lost his given name, ultimately becoming Gustav (Gus to his friends). His surname stabilized as Struyk (but pronounced like the past tense of strike). Struijk's family settled in the Over the River neighborhood (also known variously as the First Ward, the North Ward, and New Holland), near his brother Arie. Kors found work as a laborer and gardener. He died in 1886. His wife, Lena den Ouden, lived on in the same house on N. 3rd St. until she died in 1904. Their five sons and one daughter all fared well in Paterson. Two sons were self-employed as a grocer and a carpenter. One worked in the mills as a silk finisher, and two others became city workers, one as a policeman in Paterson and the other as a street department laborer in Passaic. Kors and Neeltje's daughter, Klaartje, married another Goeree-Overflakkeer, Jan Cornelis van der Velde van der Bok, a house painter. Five of Kors's children were able to buy their own houses by 1900. And the available evidence indicates they all remained affiliated with a church founded by the Dutch immigrants.²⁰

In Paterson, Flip den Hartog became Philip Hartley. The Hartleys scattered beyond Over the River into the city's more ethnically mixed neighborhoods. Two of the older sons married outside of the Dutch community (one to a Scot, the other to a Swiss). They worked in the locomotive shops and iron foundries. The oldest son, Abraham, remained in Over the River, operating a shoemaker shop until his death in 1896. As far as can be found,

the Hartleys' religious affiliations gravitated to English-speaking groups, like the Presbyterians. Unlike the Struyks, the Hartleys remained renters.

If Arnoldus van Wijk hoped for a better life in Paterson, he likely was disappointed. He remained a widower and found work laboring on a lathe in a woodshop. He never lived in any of the large Hollander areas like Over the River or Riverside/Bunker Hill.²¹ None of his sons became artisans or entrepreneurs, something very unusual among the Silk City's Dutch inhabitants. His youngest son, Simon Johannes, contributed the saddest episodes to the family story.

Born in 1862, Simon was five years old when his mother died back in



Cornelius Van Schaack Roosevelt, 1794-1871.
Wikipedia Commons.

Goedereede. He grew up to work as, variously, a common laborer and a house painter. He did keep contact with other Goedereede emigrants scattered in the Paterson area. He found his wife, Maria Koole, in Over the River and married her on November 22, 1882, apparently in a civil ceremony. She was sixteen and had also grown up in a single-parent home, her father having died when Maria was six

months old. Her mother, Aagje Koek, remarried in 1867 to Maarten de Graaf, a widower with several children of his own. Together they immigrated to Paterson during May 1870.

Gainful employment was a top priority in the de Graaf household. Their children went to work in the mills as soon as they finished the sixth grade.²² Mary (as she was known in Paterson) worked in one of the largest and harshest of them all, the one owned by Catholina Lambert. The sweat of her brow, along with that of thousands of others, financed the medieval, castle-like home Lambert constructed on the side of Garret Mountain and that glowered over the city below.

Simon and Mary set up housekeeping near the base of the mountain. At the age of eighteen, Mary had their first child, with three more following at two-year intervals. One of them died in infancy. And then, in 1891, Simon died, leaving Mary alone with three youngsters. The youngest soon came ill and passed away. Of the surviving two, Mary declared one “unmanageable.”

Attempting to exist as a single parent on a domestic’s pay drove her to such exasperation that she temporarily consigned the children to the Paterson Orphan Asylum. Rumor had it that she became a denizen of the local saloons. The newspapers said, “The ‘gang’ up in the ‘horseshoe’ district all knew her and the saloon side doors often opened at her touch.”²³ There was no question that she found solace with a local blacksmith, by whom she had a son, Herbert, in May 1895.²⁴ Since Mary’s in-laws refused to house either her or her children, the older ones were placed with another family in neighborhood. During the summer Mary and Herbert lived in a house not far from Lambert’s Castle, until the landlord told her to leave for failing to pay the rent.

One sweltering August night, the

penniless Mary, hoping for another job, decided to place Herbert with an uncle, whom she had not seen in years, in Passaic. As she started walking the five miles toward his home, the heat took its toll, and she decided to rest on the riverbank. She fell asleep (she claimed) and awoke to find her baby gone. Witnesses who saw her that night testified she was “hilariously inebriated.” When Herbert was retrieved from the “the polluted current that breeds pestilence,” the coroner discovered a fractured skull. At the trial held in late February 1896, Mary Van Wyck stood convicted of second-degree murder and received a sentence of fifteen years at hard labor in the Trenton State Prison. She was paroled in early 1907.²⁵

The sad tale of Simon and Mary Van Wyck, and the death of infant Herbert, places a crepe-shrouded frame around the picture of the immigrant story. Instead of upward mobility for all, there are stories of both successes and failures. The Struyks and den Hartogs endured and even rose a few notches in the American social scheme. For the Van Wycks, circumstances actually worsened. During the 1880s one of the den Hartog/Hartley relatives would represent Over the River on the Paterson Board of Aldermen and Passaic County Board of Chosen Freeholders. Other Struyks (Strucks) and den Har-

togs (Hartleys) could be found among the leaders of churches and societies; some proudly wore the uniforms of the police and fire departments. But the plight of Simon and Mary Van Wyck was a counterpoint to those successes. As Mary stood publicly convicted and disgraced, a newspaper poetically placed her in the doleful ranks of hard-pressed textile workers, who amid “poverty, hunger, and dirt” and “with a voice of dolorous pitch” sang the “Song of the Shirt.”

As for the *Ethel* survivors’ chief benefactor, John R. Planten, he continued to rise to greater prominence in both the Dutch-American firmament and New York City’s social hierarchy. For decades he served as Consul General of the Netherlands, and at times acting ambassador to the United States. His brother, Gerrit, continued to look after the needy immigrants who lived in the shadow of Paterson’s Second Reformed Church and often sat in its pews. Gerritt began dividing his estate overlooking Paterson into building lots, which he sold to Dutch immigrants, who in turn built two family houses on them. In 1901 the population on those lots petitioned the New Jersey legislature for a charter to incorporate the Borough of Prospect Park. That single square mile would house the heaviest concentration of Dutch immigrants of any square mile

in the Passaic Valley. When the votes were cast to elect the first mayor, the winner was a



The Passaic Rolling Mills, located in the neighborhood where the Van Wycks lived. From a lithograph published in 1880 by Packard & Butler.

member of the Struyk family, Adrian, Kors's nephew.

This is what the available historical records tell us about the lives of the thirty-six immigrants who survived the *Ethel's* collision off the Yorkshire coast. We know where they lived and what they did for a living. We know when they died and, of course, that they vividly remembered the date they had arrived in the United States. All this leaves us with what we can't know about them. How did their near-death experience shape their attitudes? Did they keep the spirit of gratitude they expressed for the gifts New York's well-heeled donors gave? Or did their experiences with life in Paterson (especially for the Van Wycks) embitter them? Did they regret ever having left Goedereede, or, on balance, had the journey to America worth the perils and deprivations they endured?

If nothing else, this story of the Struijks, den Hartogs, and Van Wycks should serve as a reminder of how uncertain the future can be. There was nothing routine about crossing the Atlantic on ships that navigated alone, by dead reckoning, communicating with each other only by shouts through megaphones and semaphore flags. The story of these survivors should be a reminder that no historical account is ever really complete. There is always another layer hidden beneath the ledgers and census schedules, the hidden history of how events were processed, pondered, and stored in the minds of people. For us, and for those who came before us, the present and the past are all we actually can know. The outcome is always shrouded in the mists of the future. 🐾

Endnotes

1. "Adventures of Oepke Bonnema and his travel companion on the trip from Friesland to the United States of America. Described by the bookkeeper B. B. Haagsma (formerly assistant teacher at Arum," in Mary Risseeuw (compiler) *I end with my pen, but not with my heart: Dutch immigrant letters, memoirs and travel journals*. Sheboygan: Sheboygan County Historical Society, 2008, 10.
2. Passenger list for S.S. Wisconsin, 9 May 1871 (ellisland.org). All the Dutch passengers were listed as Germans. *Paterson City Directory* (1867) 79.
3. *Paterson City Directory* (1873 p. 220, 1874 p. 200, 1886 p. 617) 10th Decennial Census, State of New Jersey, County of Passaic, City of Paterson, Ward 1 Enumeration District 146, p. 2. *Paterson Morning Call* 22 October 1886, 1.
4. Goedereede Bevolkingsregister 1860–1891, 351.
5. *De Tijd*, 17 March 1871.
6. *Lloyd's Ship Register for the years 1868–1872*.
7. *Het Vaderland* 11 February 1871, 16 February 1871, 21 February 1871; *Algemeen Handelsblad* 16 February 1871, 21 February 1871, 24 February 1871, *De Tijd* 21 February 1871, 24 February 1871, 27 February 1871.
8. *Times of London* 20 March 1871, 5.
9. *Algemeen Handelsblad* 21 March 1871, *Het Vaderland* 21 March 1871, 23 March 1871.
10. *Christian Intelligencer* 18 May 1871, 2. The *Ethel* was declared unseaworthy in April 1871, repaired, and placed back into service the following spring. *Lloyd's Ship Register*, 1872.
11. The *Wisconsin* had been built in Newcastle upon Tyne. The owners were both American and British. Upon arrival in New York on May 9, 1871, the manifest listed 1118 steerage passengers and 23 in cabins: https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7488/images/NYM237_342-0201?treeid=&personid=&hintid=&queryId=2fc081c797fde0d30c27f61de075e65a&usePUB=true&_phsrc=Lhd10&_phstarl=successSource&usePUBjs=true&a=2.43366565.1438717595.1643634757-28452728.1640694483&_gac=1.250565876.1642381877.Cj0KCQiAoY-PBhCNARisABcz-772PZOJj2CTJnq37KV8sGpxsJq555JKqgx-eMuEb6qB9vtI2_RCgjaI0aAkAXEALw_wcB&pld=15536727.
12. Peter N. Vanden Berge, *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America, 1628–1978*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978, 9. *Christian Intelligencer* 26 August 1880, 1; 24 February 1881, 12. Bechtold also forcefully admonished the newcomers to seek their church home in a Reformed congregation.
13. *Christian Intelligencer* 18 May 1871, 2.
14. *Historical Directory*, 59. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 31 January 1911, 18.
15. Gerrit Planten's estate would form the physical center of the Borough of Prospect Park in 1901.
16. *Christian Intelligencer* 15 June 1871, 3. The donations amounted to approximately \$13,800 in 2022 dollars.
17. *Register of the Department of State*. Washington, D.C., 1880, p. 42; *New York Times* 20 June 1887, p. 8; *New York City Directory*, 1871; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 1 December 1882, p. 4; *New York Times* 2 December 1882, 8. Murphy also served as president of the board of trustees of the Brooklyn Bridge Company, the legal body overseeing construction of the fabled bridge over the East River.
18. "The Thanks of the Shipwrecked Hollanders," *Christian Intelligencer* 15 June 1871, 3. Internal evidence suggests that John R. Planten translated Struijk's words into English. Given his circumstances, it seems doubtful Struijk had acquired this level of facility with English at this time.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
20. 20 Authors compiled database of Dutch immigrants in the federal censuses of 1880, 1900, and 1910 and the New Jersey State Census of 1905.
21. *Paterson City Directory* (1883), p. 578.
22. Maria's older brother and sister were working in the mills at the ages of 11 and 12 in 1870 (authors' census database).
23. *Paterson Evening News* 27 February 1896, p. 1.
24. Herbert was given the surname "Koole," Mary's maiden name.
25. *Paterson Evening News* 14 March 1896, pp. 1, 17 January 1907, p. 1. In a macabre aside, little Herbert's skull remained in the crime property collection of the Passaic County Courthouse for several more years, being produced for the inspection of a local reporter working on a feature story.

The Rivals and the Origins of the Rivalry

Chad Carlson

On March 20, 1920, the *Grand Rapids Press* proclaimed the Calvin Rivals the best junior basketball team in West Michigan. The *Calvin Chimes* described this team as “one of the fastest and pluckiest little teams that we have ever seen. They are small fellows, and only their speed and skill can get them anywhere, but they sure do get there.” The game-by-game accounts of that season in *Chimes* verified the claim. This team of Calvin Preparatory students captivated the student body during its championship season. Although it wasn’t an official Calvin team, this winning squad represented their school unofficially in ways that no team had before.

Calvin students were proud of this

team’s success, using it as evidence that finally convinced school administrators to let them have official interscholastic teams. However, the Rivals’ success did not translate into success at the varsity level for Calvin basketball in the ensuing years. Indeed, as its rivalry with Hope College reveals, the Rivals did not bolster Calvin men’s basketball as students had envisioned after that banner 1920 season. In the first half of the 1920s, the Rivals and the Calvin rivalry with Hope experienced hard times that frustrated a previously optimistic student body.

The Rivals—Calvin Preparatory School students Menzo Bolt, Franklin



The Calvin Rivals, Junior Western Champions. Prism Yearbook, 1920. Heritage Hall Archives.

Chad Carlson is associate professor of kinesiology and director of general education at Hope College in Holland, MI. His research focuses broadly on the socio-cultural aspects of sport, including sports history.

Top, Henry Swets, Christian Telman, Arthur Peters, John Vos, and Theodore Peters—took the floor ever more confident as their 1919–20 season wore on. After a 3–6 start that included two losses to the Hope Preparatory School team, the Rivals ran off six straight wins, prompting the *Grand Rapids Press* to issue its March 20 proclamation: “The Rivals claim championship in Junior Class (18 years and younger) of Western Michigan. They are willing to meet any team who challenges the claim.”¹ This was how basketball worked in its early decades before official post-season tournaments and championships. Any team that had done well by season’s end could lay claim to a title or have a sponsor do so on their behalf, and then that team could challenge or be challenged by any other team with a worthy record.

The Rivals, unsurprisingly, had challengers and would have to earn their title. The *Press* accepted four other Grand Rapids area squads—the East End Independents, Galewoods, the Franklin Reserves, and the Second Congregationals—as viable candidates for the championship title. The five teams engaged in a play-off. The Rivals beat Galewoods in a grueling, three-game series, catapulting them to a one-off finale with the Second Congregationals. This latter squad had already won the city’s Sunday School League crown but was no match for the Rivals. The victory gave the Calvin boys ownership of a brand new, professionally-made championship pennant and a silver cup donated by Siegel’s jewelry store.

The April 1920 issue of the *Chimes* celebrated the championship, recapping every game. It also shared the details of a congratulatory team dinner at the house of local YMCA director Bill Cornelisse, the father figure for Calvin students’ emerging athletic pursuits. Cornelisse and his wife

served the boys a hearty meal, and they all enjoyed celebratory toasts. The *Chimes* article came from sports editor and Calvin Athletic Association Business Manager William Rozeboom. “Rosie,” a student at Calvin College at the time, also served as the Rivals’ coach.

There also was a women’s team at Calvin in 1920—the Calvin Rivalettes. It earned a “champions of West Michigan” title that year and was pictured in the first annual *Prism* yearbook of Calvin College in 1920. But no competitor dared challenge its claim.

Missing from Rozeboom’s story was the way the larger Calvin community reacted to the Rivals’ championship

season. Basketball, along with most other sports, was becoming more popular among prep and college students. Faculty at Calvin and the Christian Reformed Church pastors who ran the college were not happy, however. They still saw sport as antithetical to their doctrinal ideals or, at best, a distraction from students’ learning. Thus, when “Rosie” wrote about his team in the *Chimes*, he did so with two motives: to share his pride in the team and to convince Calvin faculty and the Curatorium—the original name for the Board of Trustees—that having sports teams represent the college would enhance school spirit.

Despite its success, the Rivals could not operate as an official Calvin



The Calvin Rivalettes, “An Undefeated Team.” *Prism* Yearbook, 1920. Heritage Hall.

team. For the 1919–20 season, the faculty and Curatorium had finally allowed for official Calvin basketball teams but did not allow them to play interscholastic or intercollegiate games. Thus, the official “Calvin College” teams for men and women existed during the 1919–20 season, but without the ability to play outside teams. This puzzling setup revealed how oblivious Christian Reformed and college leaders were with regard to sports in general and basketball in particular. This lack of awareness also allowed the Rivals to find a loophole in school policy and operate independently of official Calvin jurisdiction for the season.

They were not the first team to do so, however. The Rivals are often confused with another early, unofficial Calvin team. The school’s athletic history dates back a decade before the Rivals and their championship. Calvin students played in outside games as early as 1910. Through the rest of that decade, “Calvinites” spent increasing amounts of free time at the Grand Rapids YMCA in order to literally exercise their burgeoning love for hoops. By March 1917, the *Chimes* noted that, despite the ongoing rule forbidding Calvin students from playing games against outside teams, Calvin had two men’s basketball teams. A first team and a second team both played against local competition, such as Grand Rapids Junior College and South Christian High School. Clearly, definitions of “official Calvin team” and “outside opponents” remained nebulous and conveniently open to interpretation.

In December of 1917, a team of Calvin students ventured to Holland to play the Hope College varsity basketball team . . . and lost badly. This group of Calvin students had trained together at the YMCA but by policy could not call themselves the Calvin College team. So, according

to Garrett Kempers, a player on that team, they came up with the name “Calvin YMCA” to skirt around the college’s prohibition. This was not the Rivals, but it trained at the same place and found its very existence through the same loophole in college rules as the Rivals. More importantly, this group of men had an influence on the Rivals, who began playing together on the heels of the Calvin YMCA team’s defeat by Hope.

The Rivals received mention in the *Chimes* as early as 1918—within a year of the Calvin YMCA’s lone intercollegiate game—for playing games against outside teams. And it appears that the Rivals’ coach, Rozeboom, played guard for the Calvin YMCA team. “Rosie” also played for other YMCA-based aggregations of unofficial teams, and he featured prominently in early official athletics at Calvin. As a June 1919 picture in the *Chimes* titled “Rosie and his team ‘The

represent Calvin in beating its rival teams, including—and especially—Hope College.

The emergence of these unofficial teams and this expansion of basketball interest from the student body forced the Curatorium to discuss allowing athletics. The issue had become an annual agenda item by the late 1910s. In 1917, the college Supervisory Committee reported to the Curatorium that “athletic games must be viewed as physical exercise and therefore it has no objection to them.” It also suggested that all interscholastic games should continue to be “strictly forbidden.” In 1918, the Supervisory Committee suggested that the Curatorium clarify what was meant by “interscholastic games.” The Curatorium responded that “no students as a group or any student personally may in the name of Calvin College take part in any game of any other school, or at any other place



Men's Varsity Basketball Team. Prism Yearbook, 1923. Heritage Hall.

Rivals,” suggests, Rozeboom played a strong role in organizing the team.² The origin of the name “Rivals” is not known. But this background suggests that Rozeboom and the Calvin YMCA created the new team to eventually

than the campus of the School itself.”

This definition left gaping holes for misinterpretation. The Curatorium emphasized it “in order to maintain the Reformed nature of the School, in view of the fact that it is a school of

the churches, so that the atmosphere in the school not become worldly."³ Worldliness would become seemingly the greatest of all sins on campus in the following decade. But basketball, with the help of the Rivals, would escape judgment as a worldly (and therefore forbidden) activity.

In 1919, the Curatorium began to cede ground. It authorized a special committee to "explore this entire matter of Athletics and its relationship to the school." By June 1920, the Athletics committee submitted its report, and the Curatorium officially sanctioned interscholastic games and contests—subject to a series of "regulations and restrictions," of course.⁴ Six months later, a Calvin basketball team took the floor for the first official time ever.

The first ever official Calvin men's basketball team opened its inaugural season in December 1920 with a game against Hope College at Hope's on-campus Carnegie Gymnasium. Students had been waiting for years to be able to support their school's official team, and excitement ran high. The game ended ingloriously, however, with Calvin losing 30–13. Seymour Swets, the student journalist reporting on the game, realized how badly defeated Calvin had been. "Hope failed to start off with her usual rush because of the close work of Calvin's guards," he wrote in the January 1921 issue of the *Chimes*, "but [they] warmed up after Kok had started the scoring for Calvin with a free throw. If the game would have ended then, we would have beaten Hope 1 to 0."⁵ Swets may have been trying to put a positive spin on the defeat. Or, perhaps, it was brave humor meant to redeem a painful loss.

The *Chimes* also reported on other matches from the same day. The opening act to the first-ever Calvin-Hope men's game was a match between the Hope Reserves and the Rivals. The

young Calvin boys lost 19–18 in a "hair-raising" affair. Calvin students thought the Rivals outplayed Hope's reserves, despite the final score. The future of Calvin basketball, in the form of the Rivals, was bright.

Further, the Calvin varsity squad had donned "brand new suits" for the inaugural game. They took "the floor of Carnegie Gym like a million dollar aggregation," the *Chimes* reported, "and they looked right capable of taking the hop out of Hope." Calvin students admitted that their team had been outmatched. But with their players being "as new as the suits" and Hope as an "old-timer at basketball," they set their sights on the future. "Just wait, Hope, old girl, we're not thru with you yet. If not this year then in the coming years we are going to put a team on the floor that will make you wish you were on the bottom of Black Lake."

This bravado indicated a pride in the mere presence of an official school team. If the current team couldn't win, maybe the Rivals would when the players came of college age. Finally, according to the *Chimes*, Calvin students could take solace in the fact

that "The girls said our men were a lot better-looking than Hope's squad anyhow."⁶

The Calvin varsity team's inaugural season was full of ups and downs. It lost its first three games, won four out of the next five, and then ended with two losses, finishing with an encouraging 4–6 record. The Rivals, on the other hand, continued to impress mightily, coming only a "slight margin" away from repeating as Western Michigan Junior champions.

On March 4, the Rivals traveled to Holland again, this time to play the Hope Preps, and won in dominant fashion, 33–9. Swets noted without modesty the importance of the victory: "This is the first time in the history of the world that a Calvin team defeated a Hope team, but it is not the last time. It surely did our old hearts good to put one over on Hope." Clearly, the December losses meant more than normal games. And later in March, the Calvin "Freshies," evidently a different team from the Rivals, defeated the Hope Freshmen 22–19 with "excellent passwork," "crack shots," and a "stone wall defense."⁷

The following season, Calvin added



Women's Basketball Team, Calvin College. Prism Yearbook, 1921. Heritage Hall

a few more games to its schedule . . . and finished worse for the wear. The schedule included two games against Hope in the 1921–22 season. The first encounter was a loss at Carnegie Gym in December, 52–20. While Calvin got off to a 5–0 lead, its inexperience and the absence of two team members hindered its ability to keep the lead, and in the preliminary game the Hope Reserves beat the Rivals 35–27. In early March, the Rivals took the Hope Reserves to the limit a second time before falling by one point. And the varsity teams squared off again later that month with Hope winning 26–14. The *Chimes'* reporter J. Meeter used a boxing analogy to describe the game. Noting Calvin's improvement, he proclaimed that "Hope didn't put over a K. O.," but Calvin fell short in the draw.⁸ The Calvin Varsity ended their season 3–11, while the Rivals stayed in form, ending at 10–3.

"Tomorrow would be bright if it were not for yesterday" noted the *Chimes* in February 1923; "we are in bondage to the past." This editorial lamented the lack of success throughout the short history of Calvin's intercollegiate athletics, calling the varsity basketball team "weak," "peculiarly inefficient," and "accustomed to losing."⁹ John Swets, the *Chimes* sports editor, was not calling out the players or the coach. Nor was he ignoring the success of the Rivals. Instead, he was chiding the Calvin administration for not supporting the varsity team with the resources it needed to win.

Indeed, during the 1922–23 school year, the Calvin varsity basketball team went 0–6, including yet another lopsided loss to Hope. The *Chimes* reported, perhaps wearily, that Calvin "performed splendidly" in "holding down the 'Hollanders' to a 32–15 score."¹⁰ Sentiment of moral victory still filled the *Chimes'* stories, but how much longer would that ap-



The Rival Club. Prism Yearbook, 1923. Heritage Hall.

pease the students? The program was not getting better. It was getting worse. The future—in the form of the Rivals—had looked so bright two seasons prior. But things had not turned out the way that Calvin students had envisioned.

Heading into that 1922–23 school year, only one Rivals player joined the Calvin varsity basketball team—Menzo Bolt. The Rivals had been successful on the basketball court in part because of their unity, but their unity remained largely isolated from the spirit on Calvin's campus. The student body seemed to support the Rivals before athletics became official in 1920, but once Calvin had an official team, the Rivals—despite their success—became relegated, no longer the school's sole or even primary hoops focus.

The *Prism* yearbook of 1923 indicated that the Rivals had turned into a student club. Its goal was "to foster a keener brotherly love among its members, to secure one another's welfare, and to promote the best interests of Calvin College." This mission statement about love, welfare, and collegiality perhaps comes across as tongue-in-cheek, considering that the definition of the club's name indicates

challenge, competition, and scarcity. Moreover, the group's original basketball players hadn't matriculated onto the Calvin team and, therefore, into the Calvin community. The Rivals seem to have become some sort of fraternity, professing unity with the college but separate from the broader Calvin community. Contemporary Garritt Roelofs, in an early unpublished draft of his memoirs, says of this group: "'Rebels' would not have been a misnomer!" Seymour Swets went so far as to remind the Rivals in October 1921 "that college loyalty comes before club loyalty."¹¹

This dubious reputation led to a rocky existence for the Rivals. The club sought status as a college-approved extracurricular entity. The college recognized it in 1922. However, its status as an official college club never was secure. Between 1922 and 1924, the Rivals were under constant scrutiny. The faculty insisted on probationary status, in which the group needed to prove its authenticity before being reinstated. It petitioned the faculty for reinstatement, but the minutes of the 11 March 1924 Calvin faculty meeting indicate the "existence of irregularities" between the Rivals'

constitution, as shared with the faculty, and what the professors seemed to think was the reality of the club.

In November 1924, the faculty gave four reasons for denying the Rivals' petition for reinstatement. First, it "would be contrary to school policy." No policy is listed, and the claim was taken to be fact and not explained. Second, "the Rival club should have no privilege over other clubs." It is not clear that the Rivals were asking for special privileges, but this statement implies that it was. Third, "approval of a club is no guarantee that the club will always live up to its constitution." This speaks to the wariness the faculty had toward the Rivals. And fourth, "the club is still under probation."¹² Alongside the final denial of club status came a severe reprimand. Some of the Rivals were not allowed to take final exams in the spring of 1925. Only those who were graduating could take exams, but they weren't allowed to participate in commencement activities.

The punishment ended the probationary period and marred the Rivals' legacy. Students then viewed the Rivals as Calvin's first championship team. Student energy and the team's success had forced the faculty to approve intercollegiate sports on campus in 1920. And the Rivals continued to have success beyond that championship season. Yet its members had done little to improve the official basketball program at Calvin. The team did not in the long run get their well-earned recognition as the catalyst for Calvin's proud basketball tradition but were treated as a group of reprobates whose existence as a quasi-fraternity was antithetical to the spirit of the campus community.

The difference in tone between William Rozeboom's wholesale praise of the Rivals in 1920 and Seymour Swets's circumspect admonition of the club already in 1921 (even as the



Hope College Men's Basketball Team. Milestone Yearbook, 1924. Courtesy of the Joint Archives of Holland.

team was winning) reveals the team's ambiguous place on campus. The Rivals captured the hearts of Calvin students in 1920, when they needed to demonstrate that basketball could enhance the school's spirit. But once Calvin had a varsity team with a schedule of outside games a year later, the Rivals lost status. As the official Calvin team struggled to find success, the Rivals became seen as part of the problem. Few of the Rivals joined the varsity squad, and the club was scapegoated as the type of fraternity that flourished at many other colleges across the country—an Americanizing influence—but that Calvin wanted to avoid.

Calvin basketball continued to flounder as the administration chastised the Rivals. The 1923–24 varsity team had poor prospects to begin with and finished the season meeting the low expectations. "The inevitable has happened," the *Chimes* noted in January 1924. "Calvin received its annual drubbing . . . at the hands of the Hope Five, 38–15." The team stumbled to a 2–11 record and saw itself as far below the standards of Hope's team as it had been in 1920. The following season, Hope started its substitutes in a February 1925 defeat of Calvin, 26–12.

The lone consolation for the

Calvinites that season was the plan for a new gymnasium to be built on campus. "We are looking forward to meeting Hope on our own floor and trust this will be some time within the very near future—then we will give them some good run all of the way," the *Chimes* noted later that month.¹³ Enthusiasm for the new gym helped propel this team to a 5–10 record, its best since year one.

Neither the Rivals nor Calvin's rivalry with Hope fared well in the first few years after 1925, as both teams suffered threats to their existence. The June 1926 issue of the *Chimes* reported that the student body had accused the Rivals of trying to unduly influence a student government election to further its own candidates. This crime appeared unforgivable, further reducing any chance the group had of leaving any positive legacy.

The Calvin men's varsity basketball team had yet to defeat its rival, Hope College. The two teams couldn't schedule a game for the 1925–26 season despite Hope originally agreeing to do so. The *Chimes* suggested that Hope had displayed a "spirit of haughtiness" in the unsuccessful scheduling negotiations. Longtime Calvin professor and administrator Henry Ryskamp described the feelings between these two schools at the time as escalating

"to such a pitch and to an aftermath of attitudes so bitter" that a "discontinuation" was needed.¹⁴

The Rivals had died out, and the Calvin-Hope rivalry seemed over, too. The rivalry would be resurrected a few years later, however.

In early 1929, Calvin and Hope got past previous squabbles and squared off twice. Calvin won both times, the first ever wins over its rival by the men's varsity team. The teams remained virtually even between 1929 and 1936—with Calvin winning seven and Hope winning nine—when the next competitive hiatus began. The new rivalry, with Calvin beginning to match Hope, had sowed the

seeds for the rivalry to proliferate after World War II.

Calvin College and Hope College had secured their rivalry even as the existence of the original team with that name fell away. The Rivals had encouraged Calvin to officially sanction intercollegiate athletics but quickly became a distraction from Calvin's emerging community spirit. It was the existence of a rival school that encouraged the Calvin men's basketball team to higher standards, a mark that remains even today, each team having won just over one hundred games. The rivalry is celebrated enough that *Sports Illustrated* featured it in 1992 and ESPN in 2007. 🐾

Endnotes

1. See Rozeboom, "Championship of Western Michigan," *Chimes*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (April 1920), p. 172.

2. "Rosie and his team 'The Rivals,'" *Chimes*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (June 1919).

3. Article 22, M. b. Board of Trustees Minutes 1917 (translation), Calvin University Archives Box 3, folder 12, no date listed. Article 10. Board of Trustees Minutes 1918 (translation), Box 3, folder 15, p. 27. May 28, 1918.

4. Article 15.3.3. Intercollegiate Games. Board of Trustees Minutes 1918 (translation). Calvin University Archives, Box 3, folder 17, p. 25, May 28, 1919; Article 29.4.1. Athletics. Board of Trustees Minutes 1920. Box 4, folder 2, p. 32. June 8, 1920.

5. Seymour Swets, "Hope 30—Calvin 13," *Chimes*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 1921), p. 34.

6. *Ibid.*, 34-35.

7. Seymour Swets, "Calvin Rivals," *Chimes*, Vol. 15, No. 9 (December 1921), p. 375; Swets, "Rivals Have 100% Week," *Chimes*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (March 1921), p. 129; Swets, "Hope 'Freshies' Need Fresh Hope," *Chimes*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (April 1921), p. 172.

8. J. Meeter, "Hope Tossers Subdue Calvin," *Chimes*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (April 1922), p. 154.

9. John Swets, "Our Athletic Activities," *Chimes*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (February 1923), p. 60.

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for the future

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

The Fall 2023 issue will have essays on a variety of topics. It will feature a story about Wilma and Walter Lagerwey during World War II, based on letters between. Part I in the fall, will focus on the time before Walter shipped overseas. Part II, in the Spring 2024 issue, will focus on the years when he was in Europe, where he served as a Dutch language specialist in the Army Signal Corps. He went on to become a professor of Dutch at Calvin College. The image is a "V-mail" letter, short for "Victory Mail." V-mail was designed by the military to reduce the space

required for mail. You can see an bomber pictured on the postage stamp and an indication that the mail was passed by the

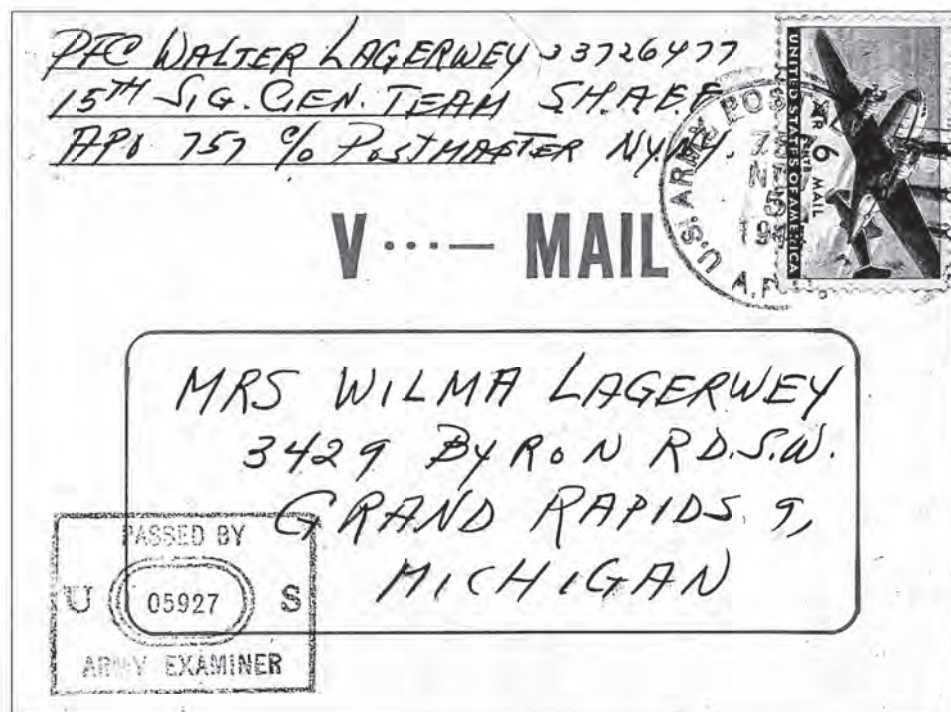
Army Examiner. Image from the Walter and Wilma Lagerwey collection, courtesy of Heritage Hall.

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