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### "An Episode from the Life of Dr. A. C. Van Raalte" by Henry E. Dosker Was Published in De Hope

Henry E. Dosker

Nella Kennedy

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9 December 1894

Holland, Michigan

“An Episode from the life of Dr. A. C. Van Raalte” by Henry E. Dosker was published in *De Hope*. The story goes back to an event in August, 1847.

In Dutch; translation by Nella Kennedy, September, 2005.

Original in the Joint Archives of Holland at Hope College.

[DE HOPE, Dec. 9, 1894]

### An Episode from the life of Dr. A. C. Van Raalte

By Rev. Henry E. Dosker

I had just arrived home. I ran into an old "settler", one of the first ones. We began talking about the first settlement. The following anecdote was told me by the old doctor; it is too good to be lost forever. I pass it on as it was told me.

It was in the fall of 1847, in August, and stifflingly hot. A group of emigrants from Zeeland, with Rev. C. Van der Meulen, were expected. Rev. Van Raalte had his people working in the construction of wooden sheds for the travelers, at the bank of the lake. Wood, i.e. sawn planks, and nails were worth gold in those days.

Suddenly the nails were gone. People sought high and low, in every box and cabinet, but they were found nowhere. At last something began to dawn on them. And... they found the precious treasure, buried in the earth underneath the chest of some people. These were very godless people; a few were also found among the pilgrim fathers.

That was an Achan situation, a genuine excommunication from the camp. "We cannot use thieves here," said Dr. Van Raalte. Emergency became a virtue [a Dutch saying: receiving profit, even from an unfavorable circumstance]. Two men, armed with rifles, were charged to guard the prisoners during the night. The latter alternately cried, prayed for grace, or called names and cursed.

When dawn came the prisoners were transferred to a "flat-boat", constructed of rough planks. Dr. van Raalte called for volunteers to accompany him on the journey to Grand Haven where the criminals would be placed in the hands of the court. They were soon found and the group sailed out of Black Lake and onto the big Lake, rowing along the coast in order to reach the final destination. The prisoners ranted and cursed in a horrible way.

By afternoon the rowers became tired, the sky in the West began to threaten, the coast was far off and the boat was constructed flimsily and insubstantial. They gave the doctor the choice to land in Port Sheldon or to row on by himself. *They* wanted to go on land. The doctor was not much inclined to do so but was finally persuaded. And that was a good thing. For they were barely near the coast or the storm broke loose, and in a few moments the waves broke the boat into pieces. The boxes floated on the water and the party was soaked. Only the doctor, with incomprehensible quickness, had jumped on land and remained dry. Standing on the coast he laughed heartily at his companions. He did this too early.

They came to the small stream they needed to wade through to reach Port Sheldon. His drenched fellow travelers walked through the shallow water indifferently. The resisting prisoners had to be carried through it. The doctor pleaded for the same privilege.

But, o no! In the middle of the water the friendly carrier stumbled – *on purpose* – and the happiness of the doctor was considerably cooled by the submersion he had received. But fortunately it was August, and hot weather. Clothing dried soon and Port Sheldon was reached where a friendly Dutchmen provided all of them a good lodging for the night and refreshments. Early the next day the trip to Grand Haven had to be continued. Dr. Van Raalte asked for a boat and wanted to try to go by water again. Only one of the group (the one who had discipled [lit.] him by immersion) offered to accompany him. The others, with the prisoners, chose to take the difficult way through the forest, a trip of more than 12 miles. The minister borrowed a bed sheet, found a pole for a mast, a bed rope for tackle and sailed to Grand Haven.

The favorable wind brought them there in an hour and a half, substantially earlier than the arrival of their travel companions. But then, o misery, Van Raalte could not express himself sufficiently in English to communicate his desire concerning the prisoners.

Through the mediation of the captain of the steamer they finally succeeded. In a few moments the prisoners - in whose chests they found many purloined and valuable objects – were sentenced to an imprisonment of ten days and banishment from the colony until the colonists themselves gave permission at a suitable time.

How naive, almost romantic!

It is remarkable [to see] how things transpired in those early days, and yet it went well, often better than now when justice seems to be a lost pearl in many cases, and which needs to be looked for long and warily. It seems to me that such anecdotes need to be preserved for the next generations. Let children know how it was in the old days. The prayer of Dr. Van Raalte, that night in Port Sheldon, must have been an inspiration. He was a man who knew how to act but also how to pray. May we follow him in that.

[Nella Kennedy, Translator:  
September 2005]

[DE HOPE, Dec. 9, 1894]

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