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An Article in the Holland City News, Entitled, "The Van Raalte Colony and Its Influence on Holland at the Present Time," by Mrs. H. D. Post, of Holland, (Widow of Henry D. Post)

Mrs. H. D. Post

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1900 +

FILE NAME

January ? 30, 1903

An article in the Holland City News, entitled, "The Van Raalte Colony and Its Influence on Holland at the Present Time," by Mrs. H. D. Post, of Holland, (widow of Henry D. Post).

Contains references to A. C. Van Raalte. Also, "His wife was a noble helpmate worthy of a place in history along with him. The remembrance of home and kindred often intruded itself, and Mrs. Van Raalte often spoke of the trial of leaving early, and still well remembered friends, but she always added, 'It is the Lord.'"

Original in the Archives of Hope College, the Philip Phelps Scrapbook.

THE VAN RAALTE COLONY

Holland City News - Jan. 30, 1963

Its Influence on Holland at the Present Time.

By Mrs. H. D. Post, of Holland.

As I look back to my first meeting with Dr. Van Raalte—he was a young man, with no beard—and recall the striking incidents of that time, and each successive year, the faces that were familiar, and have now passed away, the changes and progress, and improvement down to the present day, it seems to my mind a wonderful panorama.

It was in the winter of '47 that Dr. Van Raalte first visited this tract of land where our City now stands. I have been told by a person who was with him when he first looked at the land, that he fell down in the snow and prayed for guidance and direction from above.

Let us look for a moment at the prospect before him. The ground was covered not only with snow, but with a most magnificence of forest trees of immense size, sugar maple, oak, hemlock, a great variety, many of them 6 feet in diameter.

The people who had come with the dominie, (as we called him then) knew nothing about chopping down these great trees. They were builders of wind mills, store-keepers, carpenters, tailors, goldsmiths, shoe-makers, and when I asked my near neighbor his vocation he replied, "Busselmaker" meaning brush maker. The Dominie knew the character of his people, knew they were active, steady, persevering and could learn. They were also actuated by the same motive which had brought their leader here. So the beautiful forest did not deter him from his purpose. He came not to this wilderness to seek his own, or to secure any possible worldly advantage. The motive that brought him here was a noble one, that he might enjoy more religious freedom.

It was on the occasion of the marriage of his eldest son, at a wedding feast that the dominie related among other reminiscences, that when the bridegroom was an infant, he, the dominie, was thrown into prison for preaching contrary to law. He chose America as the land of his adoption because here he could enjoy perfect religious freedom. There were great trials and privations to be endured but in the darkest hour he seemed to see with prophetic eye the future success of his labors. I have heard him say when we were passing through the the darkest days: "If my head laid low the place would still go on. My work can not be in vain, because I have built in faith."

His wife was a noble helpmate worthy of a place in history along with him. The remembrance of home and kindred often intruded itself, but Mrs. Van Raalte often spoke of the trial of leaving early, and still remembered friends, but she always added, "It is the Lord."

A volume could easily be filled with reminiscences of those early days, but a glance must suffice to show the contrast between our privileges now, and those enjoyed by the early settlers. Our mail in those days came only once a week, on Thursday afternoon. How eagerly we watched for Vrouw Notting to come with the mail bag on her back. Her husband would go to Manlius in Allegan County and bring the bag on his back to his home in Graafschap. He would be tired out. His good wife would then bring it the last three miles to Holland. I frequently assisted my husband in opening and making the mail in those days. There were not as many love letters written then for the postage was higher. As yet we had no roads. Now the mail comes every few hours, but we do not appreciate it, as when it came only once a week.

I cannot refrain from alluding to our system of lighting at that time. We used the tallow candle. My husband thought I must learn to make mold-candles so in one of his journeys to Allegan he purchased some candle molds. I filled in good orthodox order, a wick in the centre and then full of hot tallow. I put them out doors against a large tree close by the door. Very soon I heard the rustling of leaves and I ran to the door just in time to see a hungry looking Indian dog jumping over logs and brush with the candle molds and candles in his mouth. He ran so fast that it was useless to think of persuading him and I was left to meditate on the light that failed. That was the light of other days.

The supply of milk for the family seems a trifling thing but in those days it involved a deal of labor. Our milk man was a milk woman. We did not have the cow brought to the door and milked in her presence as is done in our "New possessions" but good Vrouw Notting brought the milk in pails which hung from a yoke which was across her shoulders. I would say, "Good Morning, Vrouw Arens, are you well?" and she, while she was dipping out my supply of milk would respond to my inquiry thus, "Beter hoeft het niet te wezen," meaning it need not be any better, but it was better after a while for she got a horse and wagon.

It was at the quarter centennial anniversary of this settlement that Dr. Van Raalte paid a tribute to the citizens of the United States who received and aided the colonists, among the names he mentioned were Gen. Lewis Cass, Dr. Wykoff of Albany, Judge Kellogg of Allegan, and many more names I have forgotten. But it was Gen. Robert Hart, of Mich., who first directed his attention to the present location. His object was to secure a site for a society of religious people which should form a centre of education and religion. The first church services were held in the open air. It was at a place near where the Van Raalte home now stands. A place cleared by the falling trees and forming a hollow square. A person who was present said it was a beautiful picture. This was in May of '47. In the Autumn of that year the first church was built of logs. It was not till 1856 that a church was built in the city. The log church was near where the cemetery now is. The aim of the emigrant was education, and step by step from our public school to the Academy, and now Hope College which as a name and a place among the colleges of our land. Dr. Van Raalte and noble helpers, but to him belongs the honor of laying the foundation. As I write the names of Dominie Pieters, Dr. Phelps, Hope's first President, Dr. Stewart, Benk, Scott, all faithful men who have passed away. But our fathers, where are they?

As I recall the incidents of those early days, it seems like the stories of the original settlement at Plymouth, the voyage across the sea, the forest life, the great sickness and privation of those days, the religious zeal and strong faith of those Holland pilgrims. Hope College and the Theological Seminary crown the educational system which is the outgrowth of their religious faith. The first lecture ever delivered here was by Dr. Phelps, and his subject was "Omens, signs, auguries or prognostications." It was interesting and deserves mention as being the first of a series given under the auspices of the Fraternal Society of Hope College.

The wilderness has been made to blossom like the rose, a change has been wrought which at first thought seemed impossible. Let us not forget that these people were christians and they trusted in one who heard and answered their prayers. They brought their religion over the sea with them. I remember the first morning after my arrival, hearing from the little log houses all around us the singing of psalms, and on inquiry was told it was the beautiful custom to sing after each meal or before it.

Now we have taken a hasty glance at Holland as it was in the beginning of our history, when winding paths not deserving the name of roads, through the thick forest, among the trees and over the logs, led among the scattered huts, some built of logs, some of boards and some of boughs and bark. I remember going to see a sick person and noticed that the bedstead upon which he lay was made of twigs of a tree with the bark on them.

We were at that time surrounded on all sides by an unbroken forest isolating us as completely from the world outside as if we were on an island in the ocean. How different is the picture as we now see it. Our city surrounding our fine harbor, and numerous vessels and steamers, engaged in a lucrative trade with the great shipping centres of Illinois and Wisconsin, railroads diverging in many different directions, telegraph lines giving us the means of sending messages, which contrast strongly with good Vrouw Notting's weekly mail, our shops and factories giving employment to a large and increasing population. Our beautiful streets lighted with electricity and lined with well constructed buildings. Our many pleasant homes, our churches, and our school houses—all of these go to make up our Holland of today.

Some one has said and truly, "Holland owes her proud position today, by God's blessing to the careful and successful labors of those to whom the great work of organizing and shaping the growth of the new settlement was committed."

Dr. Van Raalte was spared to see his labors crowned with success. The people who came with him from the fatherland were blessed with high educational advantages, prosperous in their enterprises and comfortable in their homes, and respected as worthy citizens of their adopted country.

The contemplation of this subject for a few moments is well calculated to fill our hearts with gratitude to Him who has so blessed and prospered us in the past that we can safely trust the future in the hands of Him who has brought us thus far, and so signally blessed us, in spiritual as well as temporal things. Many congregations in our western states owe their existence under Providence to this important centre. How many ministers of the gospel and teachers have gone from among us and now laboring in distant lands. In China, Japan, Arabia and India are noble workers among the heathen whose names are familiar to us all. Here in our college a few years ago several native Japanese were educated. They were baptized and became members of Hope Church, and afterwards returned to their native land to spread the knowledge of the Gospel among their own people. These influences have earthly limit but spread wider and wider until the final result can only be known in eternity. The event of Dr. Van Raalte and his people settling in this locality in 1847 has had a great influence upon the History of our country in general, sufficient to warrant my choosing this subject and calling it "A History Making Event."

*17, Phelps scrapbook
Hope & Archives*

*Knickerbocker
Albany, N.Y.
WEDNESDAY*

LATE DR. PHILIP HOPE COLLEGE



HONOR DR. PHILIP AT COLLEGE CELEB

Native of Albany Founded tution at Holland, Mich., Its First President

At the semi-centennial celebration of the founding of Hope College, Reformed church education at Holland, Mich., which commemorated in conjunction with the annual meeting of the general assembly of the Reformed church of America, honor was given to Dr. Philip Phelps, Jr., first president of the college, for many years in Albany a graduate of Union college, 1828.

Dr. Phelps was born in Albany, N.Y., 1826, and got his preliminary education in Albany schools. He graduated from Union college in 1848, and was appointed pastor at Hastings and principal of Holland. When the institution was founded at Hope college in 1866, he became president and served for twelve years. He resumed pastoral work at Blenheim, Schuette county, N.Y., where he died September 4, 1896.

Dr. Phelps' father was Philip Phelps, deputy state comptroller for fifty years. He was appointed Comptroller Marcy in 1826, and advanced to deputy in 1828 and two years, 1842-1844, served as comptroller. He practiced law in the office of Van Rensselaer.

My father (Dr. Phelps above) was born in 1826 - graduated in 1844 when only 18 years old. Linnæus Burr Laude (we still love the) John - Bethe (Kappa) gave it to Hope College a few years ago - from P. Ott