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A Letter of A. C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps

A. C. Van Raalte

George Scholten

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March 10, 1870

No. 66

A letter of A. C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps, who apparently is in New York. ACVR reports that he had to sell the female education grounds to the railroad, 12 lots in the "Southern Block" for \$4,000. Wrote about matters in Holland. "If we shall not see enthusiasm for the work, we will sink away in worldly mindedness."

Original in the Archives of Hope College.

(*missing*)

70-03-10 [GS66]

The copy of this letter is in transcription only, one made by Rev. George Scholten.

Holland Mich
March 10, 1870

Revd Dr P: Phelps

Dear Brother,

I am glad that you are upon the right place and in the right work busy.¹ Nothing is more important than perseverance: I pray to God who has the hearts in hand to make you strong: I see not only the importance of the connections with the past: but in the present is the future power and influence. I am glad that you will know by this time that Mrs Phelps has been again out and in Church last Sabbath.

I wish you could by Mrs Phelps in some way, let me have the tax receipts of the female education grounds:² -I have been driven into it to sell to the railroad company the 12 lots of the Southren Block of the same,³ for the price of four thousand Dollars⁴ and an addition to my knowledge of human nature.⁵

Thought the vote for aid in behalf of the Grand Rapids road very dubious is in Town Holland; yet in the City they rejoice in the future, and have promised, irregular by public meeting, the aid of fifteen thousand: and besides this road, they dream of a road to Nunica.⁶ Sa[u]gatuck is up and doing for an airline:⁷ an offers to that effect yet 25m.⁸ more; to be the port.⁹ -

¹ As our readers may have already noted, Van Raalte's sentence structure and word order represent the fact that he did his thinking in Dutch and then wrote out his letters into his second language of English.

² As nearly as it can be determined, the property consisted of twenty-nine full or partial lots in blocks 14, 22 and 25. Wynand Wichers, *Century of Hope 1866-1966*, 88.

³ Site uncertain.

⁴ Van Raalte had donated the properties in blocks 14, 22, and 25 for the Female Seminary in 1867 according to Wichers. Therefore, when the railroad apparently pressured Van Raalte to sell these grounds in 1870, the money he got for these lots belonged to the college. The rail line to Muskegon ran through the southern edge of this property.

⁵ The railroad authorities must have driven a hard deal with Van Raalte if we interpret this comment correctly.

⁶ Local communities were asked to subsidize the cost of the new rail line, something that Holland City did readily. A railroad line would greatly enhance Holland's link with the "outside world."

⁷ Meaning obscure.

⁸ M. stood for thousand.

⁹ Saugatuck, Holland's neighbor to the south, may have wished to develop a harbor that matched Holland's.

1911 Map of City
1876 Plat Map.

Dr Stuart¹⁰ tells me to have paid for the sixty acres¹¹ six procent on 12 m: as United States revenue: and advises me to settle the matter at once for the female education grounds.¹² I begin to believe he is right.

I had a talk in the Dominee meeting¹³ about the Schipbuilding, for planting the missionary element of our common people in South America; but it seems to them yet a story of the moon:¹⁴ this stubbornness I fear is all at the bottom, fear for men and thirst after ease: If we shall not see enthusiasm for the work, we will sink away in worldly mindedness.

The health of my wife is very poor; She has lost a great deal, and can not bear more the cares of the famely. A great deal of the time I am miserable: When steam gets¹⁵ up the machine is out of gear. —Ds Woltman they say is going to die. —Ds Moerdyk¹⁶ is not better. —Revd Dangremond¹⁷ has a subscription list of about one thousand Dollars for the Rabbit River Church: and Elder Van den Berge¹⁸ makes the plan. —

If you see Br: Suydam, my love and best wishes to Him.

May the Lord encourages you

Your friend and Brother

A. C. Van Raalte

¹⁰ As well as Van Raalte knew Rev. Abel T. Stewart, pastor of Hope Reformed Church, he had trouble spelling his name correctly.

¹¹ Van Raalte also contributed a piece of land in the amount of sixty acres he owned. This property was on the south side of Black Lake and must have been west of the City of Holland.

¹² Meaning of this sentence is unclear.

¹³ This reference may be to the Holland Lakeshore Ministerial Association or the *Hollandsche Predikanten Vereeniging*. This association was organized 2 August 1869. Van Raalte's signature headed the list of the members. The organization's record, 1869-1882, is located in the collection of Western Theological Seminary in the Joint Archives of Holland.

¹⁴ Van Raalte was never short of ideas on the evangelization of the world. The missionary ship whose keel was laid in 1864 remained unfinished in the Holland Harbor. The story of that venture was written by Samuel M. Zwemer, in his little pamphlet, *The Ship That Sailed and the Keel That Never Kissed the Sea* (Board of Domestic Mission Reformed Church in America, n.d.). Located in the Samuel M. Zwemer files at the Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

¹⁵ Rev. Harm Woltman, a graduate of the first class of Hope College in 1866, succumbed in 1870. *Historical Directoy of the Reformed Church in America, 1628-2000* (Grand Rapids, 2001), 471.

¹⁶ This is a reference to either Rev. Peter Moerdyk or his brother, William. Both men also graduated in the class of 1866. *The Hope Milestone of 1930, Alumni Number*, Willard C. Wichers, ed., 275.

¹⁷ Rev. Gerrit Dangremond was pastor of the Rabbit River Reformed congregation, 1869-1873. Later the name of the community was changed to Hamilton. This community is located south of Holland, Michigan. Dangremond was also a member of Hope College Class of 1866. Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., 402.

¹⁸ (check with Bill Kennedy if he has identified this elder)

Jacobus
48-58 n. 727
to Holland in 1866
1st RCR Elder

Ps Please will you be so kind to send me the sermon of Dr Clark¹⁹ of Albany on the Bible and School question.

¹⁹ Dr. Rufus Clark, pastor of the First Reformed Church of Albany, New York, 1862-1882. He was a widely published author. Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., 371-373.

"The undersigned feels himself, by reason of conscientious scruples, in duty bound and constrained to the necessity of protesting against the ungodly actions, in conflict with God's Word, of a portion of the consistory at this place, in the calling of G. Dalman and F. van Driel to be elders, and of J. van den Berg⁷²⁷ and A. Pleune⁷²⁸ to be deacons, [actions performed in conjunction] with a portion of the congregation, looking upon this call as entirely illegal.

> ⁷²⁷ Jacobus (Jacob, or later James) van den Berge (incorrectly "Van den Berg") (1807-1890), a native of Terneuzen, had emigrated from there as a Reformed Seceder carpenter in 1849, with a wife and nine children; married in 1830 (on the same day as Jacobus' brother, Jan), they had already lost 3 children in infancy but would have at least one more born in the USA. They sailed with the many other Zeelanders, including the Moerdijks, De Prees, and Adriaan Zwemer, who accompanied the Rev. Hendrik George Klijn to the New World (see note 91 above). Jacobus van den Berge and his wife, together with his younger brother Jan van den Berge and his wife (they went to Pella, Iowa, in 1848; see note 731 or higher below) had been involved with the *Afscheiding* in Terneuzen from the start (1837). Jacobus and his large family settled in Albany, New York, for several years, until moving to Grand Rapids in 1855. His younger brother, Nicholas, who, with his family, had emigrated at the same time (as a *Hervormd* carpenter's hired hand), remained in Albany (as a painter, 1870 census). Jacobus worked as a carpenter wherever he lived. Upon his arrival in Grand Rapids, he became a deacon almost immediately at the Second Reformed Church, in the controversial election dealt with here by classis. He eventually "rose" to be an elder in that decimated congregation; see the roll of the Classis of Holland minutes, 20 April 1864. Van den Berge removed to Holland in 1866 and was soon (1868) chosen elder there also, in the First Reformed Church. He was among the majority of those in that congregation who left the RCA in 1882 over the Masonic question and who affiliated (1884) with the CRC. He and Derk te Roller (see 1859-1862 minutes, note 19, below) guarded the entrance to First Church in 1882 when the consistory, led by Teunis Keppel, locked the church doors with a logging chain to prevent classis from meeting there. Van den Berge's youngest child, a "latecomer" born in Albany when his wife was 46, was Ebenezer van den Berge (1855-1939), who attended Hope College, became a Christian Reformed minister and at the end of his career returned to serve in RCA churches. www.zeeuwengezocht.nl; Wesseling, *De Afscheiding van 1834 in Zeeland*, 1:308, 311, 331; Beekhuis, *Al zulke dweepzieke scheurmakers*, 130; *De Wachter*, 14 and 21 May 1890; *De Hope*, 9 December 1868, 21 May 1890; Consistory Minutes, 22 October 1866, 11 December 1868, 11 and 21 March 1882, First Reformed Church, Holland; Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs*, 1:505.

⁷²⁸ Adriaan (Adrian) Pleune (1823-1916), a native of Tholen, Zeeland, where he was a farm laborer, emigrated in the summer of 1848 with his pregnant wife (they had wed that spring in Tholen). He was the son of an unwed mother, Catharina (Kaatje; later Kate) Pleune, a butcher's daughter, whose name he took, and who later successively married two older widowers, who soon died but by whom she had three daughters. She made her living as a laborer and emigrated as *Hervormd* in 1850 with her daughters on the same ship as the parents and brothers of Adriaan Pleune's wife. In the 1850 census she and her youngest daughter were living in Ravenna Township, Ottawa County (now Muskegon County), next to the household of her son, which included his wife, their two infant sons, and his wife's father and brothers. She was still living, aged 73, alone, in 1870, in Grand Rapids. The crossing in 1848 of the poor Adriaan Pleune, his wife, and a few others had been paid for by the gifted but erratic Dominie Budding, who accompanied them. Pleune knew Budding very well and conceivably may have shared his religious views; the Tholen seceders had been divided between the followers of Budding and those who were oriented more toward the mainstream of the *Afscheiding*. Following a difficult trip to Michigan, the small group settled in Ravenna Township, then a wilderness, where they suffered extreme deprivation, especially the first winter, when the first Pleune child was born. After eking out a living farming there for a little over seven years, Adriaan Pleune, his wife, and children moved to Grand Rapids by 1856, where he taught briefly and then farmed the rest of his long life; he and his wife were married for 65 years and had 11 children, fewer than half of whom survived them. On coming to Grand Rapids, Pleune and his wife affiliated with the Second Reformed Church, whose consistory had invited him to teach the children there to read Dutch in a small building behind the church; he was hired for a year on 4 January 1856, for \$28 per month (another source said \$100 a year). Evidently influenced by the arguments of Haan, Pleune declined his call to be deacon here in the spring of 1856 and also again refused to accept his election as

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I wish you could by Mrs Phelps in some way, let me have the tax receipts of the female education grounds:- I have been driven into it to sell to the railroad company the 12 lots of the Southren Block of the same, for the price of four thousand Dollars and an addition to my knowledge of human nature.

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I had a talk in the Dominee meeting about the Schipbuilding, for planting the missionary element of our common people in South America; but it seems to them yet a story of the moon: this stubbornness I fear is all at the bottom, fear for men and thirst after ease: If we shall not see enthusiasm for the work, we will sink away in worldly mindedness.

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