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Abstract

Founder and leader of the Dutch colony in Holland, Michigan; minister of the Reformed Church in America. Deeds, ministerial papers; correspondence with Lewis Cass, Charles Stitt, Philip Phelps, his son Benjamin Van Raalte and Alexander Hartgerink; clippings, bibliography, photos, obituaries, land purchases from local Ottawa Indians, biographical data including genealogies and a DVD of the 2011 play by Max Bush in honor of the bicentennial of his birth, Vision of a New Life and production photographs.

Accession No: H88-0174
Provenance: Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte
Donor: Van Raalte Family
Processed by: Craig Wright, January 1991
Leon Witteveen, November 1993
Geoffrey D. Reynolds, February 1997

Biography

Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte was born in Wanneperveen, Overisel, the Netherlands, on October 17, 1811. His father was Albertus Van Raalte, a minister in the state church of the Netherlands.

He went to the University of Leyden to study medicine, but in 1833 decided to study for the ministry. In 1836, he became a minister in the Church of the Seceders when he was refused entry into the ministry of the state church. In that same year, he married Christina De Moen, who was born January 30, 1815, in Leiden. He served various churches in the Netherlands, including those in Ommen and Arnhem, until 1846.

Because of the persecution he and his followers were experiencing, Van Raalte decided to emigrate to America. In September 1846, Van Raalte, his wife, and five children set sail on the Southerner for New York with 53 members of his congregation. After much deliberation and prayer, he decided to settle in the area at the head of Black Lake, the present site of Holland, Michigan. He served as the spiritual and political leader of the colony, which grew rapidly. He was also instrumental in the founding of Hope College.

Van Raalte was also concerned with the educational needs of the community. He not only developed the public school system with a strong set of local controls, but also laid the foundations for the Pioneer School, which became the Holland Academy and later developed
into Hope College.

His goal of developing a Christian community governed by Christian principles was visionary but was shattered in 1850. Holland Township became the basic unit of government. Van Raalte’s ideal of Christian control was lost, but his influence was felt because he became active in politics and he continued to own large tracts of land. Although many of the means to achieve a Christian community broke down, Van Raalte was still the pastor of the only church, member of the district school board, guiding light of the Academy, principal landowner, and a businessman with major property holdings.

Dissension, strife, and division among his followers ultimately killed the colony as it was originally envisioned. Some of the stress was undoubtedly caused by Van Raalte’s personality. He knew what he wanted for his colony and he thought he knew what was good for the community and acted accordingly. However, much of the criticism was clearly unfair. The narrow-mindedness and small spirit of some of the Dutch settlers were unbelievable. As early as 1856, Van Raalte entertained the possibility of leaving the colony. He received a call from the church in Pella, Iowa, in that year, but declined as a result of a new show of support by the congregation.

Poor health forced his resignation as minister in 1867, and in 1871, his wife died and the city of Holland was destroyed by fire. He encouraged the settlers to rebuild the city, and lived until 1876, when he died after a lingering illness.

Scope and Content

The collection consists of articles, biographical materials, clippings, correspondence, genealogies, a handwritten sermon, and a Sunday School roll book dated 1851-1855. The correspondence includes 80 letters written to Dr. Philip Phelps between the years 1857 and 1875.

The collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material, except that the correspondence is all in Box 2 because of the large amount it contains. The correspondence with Dr. Phelps is arranged chronologically. Two letters written to Dr. Phelps (51 and 82) are the gift of Gerrit Elzinga.

Container List

Address, A. C. Van Raalte to Dutch Synod, 1842 (copy)
Articles, 1944-1978
  “Centennial Studies,” 1977 (various authors)
De Klerk, Peter. “A Bibliography of A. C. Van Raalte,” 1977
Mulder, Arnold. “Grootmoeder’s Hundred Years,” 1944
Pieters, Albertus. “Remembering the Ways of the Lord,” 1947
Schroeder, Dr. J. A. “Secession and Emigration, 1834-1847,” 1947
Biographical Materials
Albertus C. Van Raalte, n.d., 1852-1997
Christina J. (De Moen) Van Raalte funeral address, 1871
Clippings and Event Programs, 2011
Photographs of Vision of a New Life, 2011 (DVD)
Play, Vision of a New Life, 2011 (DVD)
Clippings, 1876-1976
Death of Van Raalte, 1876, 1976 (D/E)
General, 1876, 1895-1896, 1901, 1963, 1966 (D/E)
Pillar Church, n.d., 1956
Daybook (Dagboek) (photocopy and translation), 1847-1851 (2 folders)
Genealogies, 1949, 1954, 1966 (original 1949 item is located in Hope College Oversized Cabinet)
Historical markers and portrait, 1903, 1926, 1957, 1963
Marriage Manual and Certificate for James F. Van der Sluis and Wilhelmina Van Anrooy
Van der Sluis, 1862 (photocopy)
Memorial Service at Pillar Church, 1976
Purchase Receipts, 1865-1866
Sermons, Genesis III (Handwritten in Dutch)
   January 23, 1856
   February 20, 1856
   February 27, 1856
   March 12, 1856
   August 12, 1863 (English translation of a summary in De Grondwet)
Sunday School Roll Book, 1851-1855 (Copy)
Correspondence, 1846-1875
   Lewis Cass to A. C. Van Raalte, 1850
   Alexander Hartgerink to A. C. Van Raalte and Antonie Brummelkamp, 1846 (copy)
   Rev. Philip Phelps from A. C. Van Raalte, 1857-1875
   Phelps from Van Raalte, 1857-1875 (transcripts)
   Phelps from Van Raalte, 1857-1875 (copies)
   Theodore Romeyn to A. C. Van Raalte, 1847 (copy)
   Charles H. Stitt to A. C. Van Raalte, 1869
   Ben Van Raalte from A. C. Van Raalte, 1866 (copy)
   John Kellogg to Rev. J. C. Brigham (American Bible Society), 1847 (re: Bibles for Van Raalte)
Land Purchases, 1848
   Peter Wakazoo to A. C. Van Raalte, May 13, 1848
   Dominic Wendagawish, Margaret Okitcheguma, Mesquabar Okitcheguma, Peter Wakazoo, Waonoza Mutchespeee, and Mosqua to Albertus C. Van Raalte, June 23, 1848
Land Sales (compiled in 2006), 1847-1876