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

A. C. Van Raalte

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July 27, 1870

No. 7D

A letter of A. C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps about Gilmore being appointed rector of the Amelia Institute.

Original in the Archives of Hope College.

Holland Mich, July 27/70
 Rev. Dr. J. Phelps.

Dear Brother,

Being exhausted by
 Rheumatic and bowel troubles, I have to beg pardon.

I do not know anything of Dr. Pieters proposal.

When you asked me about Mr. Gilmore's appointment as Rector then my opinion was that G. at this time might be induced to a change, and that while dealing with Mr. Parson, we could be informed by telegraph about his sentiments.

When with Mr. Parson, expressing that the time was very ripe etc was for both: I had in mind the pressing wants of Grammar School especially its normal department and the female Institute.

I could not accept Parson as Rector, when I saw that he had more in view the higher classes than the normal instruction.

I do not know what to advise about Gilmore.

I did receive yesterday information
of Him: that though they both were placed,
by Dan Bois' own action, and as a matter
of course, on the Bill of Amelia Institute
as conductors of the School; yet He
was willing to undergo the humiliation
and to become his assistant to promote
the enterprise and to appear the Doctor.

I see no cure in it. —

On account of an action on my part to
remove Him, I would be called upon to
give reasons for my breaking down Amelia
Institute: then I would be obliged to travel
and say things which would cause damage.

If you or Executive Committee without
me would move and bring the request
for the Board, then I think the friends
of the D^r and of the enterprise could
take this opportunity to solve the
dilemma in a great benefit for the whole
and in no other way I think could we induce
Him more to leave the field at present nor
could we provide his salary.

Yours truly
H. Woodhull

Holland Mich July 27/ 70

Rev & Dr I: Phelps.

Dear Brother,

Being exhausted by Rheumatic and bowal troubles, I have to use paper. I do not know anything of Dr Pieters proposal. When you asked me about the Mr Gilmore's appointment as Rector then my opinion was that G; at this time might be induced to change: and that while dealing with Mr. Parson. we could be informed by telegraph about his sentiments. -

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I could not accept Parson as rector, when seeing that he has more in view the higher classes than the normal instruction.

I do not know what to advise about Gilmore. I did receive y ster-day information of him: that though they both were placed by Dr du Bois's own action, and as a matter of course, on the Bill of Amelia Institute as Conductors of the School: Yet he was willing to undergo the humiliation to become his assistant to promote the enterprise and to appease the Doctor. I see no cure for it. -

On account of inaction on my part to remove him, I would be called upon to give reasons for my breaking down Amelia Institute: then I would be obliged to reveal and say things wich would cause damage.

If you or executive committed without me would move and bring the request for the boards, then I think the friends of the Dr and of the enterprise could take this opportunity to solve the dilemma in a great benefit for the whole and in no other way I think could e/induce Gilmore to leave the field at present nor could we provide his salary. -

Yours truly

A C Van Raalte

Holland Mich

July 27 / 70

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On account of inaction on my part to remove him, I would be called upon to give reasons for my breaking down Amelia Institute: then I would be obliged to reveal and say things which would cause damage.

If you or executive committee without me would move and bring the request for the Boards, then I think the friends of the Dr and of the enterprise could take this opportunity to solve the dilemma in a great benefit for the whole and in no other way I think could we induce Gilmore to leave the field at present nor could we provide his salary.-

Yours truly

A C Van Raalte

70-07-27

[GS70]

Holland Mich July 27/70

Revd Dr P: Phelps.

Dear Brother,

Being exhausted by Rheumatic and bowel troubles,¹ I have to use paper. I do not know anything of Ds Pieters² proposal. When you asked me about the Mr Gilmore's³ appointment as Rector⁴ then my opinion was that G[ilmore]: at this time might be induced to a change: and that while dealing with Mr. Parson.⁵ we could be informed by telegraph about his Sentiments. –

When with Mr Parson, expressing that the time now very ripe etc was for both: I had in mind the pressing wants of [the] Grammar School especially its normal department and the female Institute.

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On account of an action on my part to remove Him,⁷ I would be called upon to give reasons for my breaking down Amelia Institute: then I would be obliged to reveal and say things w[h]ich would cause damage.

¹ Both Christina and Albertus had their health problems.

² Rev. Roelof Pieters, pastor of First Reformed Church (Pillar Church). Van Raalte retired from the pastorate of this congregation in 1867. Pieters became pastor in 1869, following his pastorate in Alto, Wisconsin. Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., (1902), 656.

³ The son-in-law of the Van Raaltes, William B. Gilmore, began teaching at the Amelia Institute in 1869.

⁴ During 1869-1870, Dr. Anson du Bois was the "rector" or principal of the Amelia Institute. Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed. (1902), 436.

⁵ "1870. Richard Parsons, A.D., appointed Tutor. Resigned in 1871." *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Hope College, Holland, Michigan, 1885-'86.*" (Holland, Michigan, 1886), 39.

⁶ This matter of humiliation may reflect Van Raalte's ambition for a higher status for Gilmore at the Amelia Institute or it may be due to the fact that Gilmore is already 36 years old. For more information on Gilmore, see *Albertus and Christina: The Van Raalte Family, Home and Roots*, Bruins, Schakel, Simmons, and Zingle, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 147-152.

⁷ This enigmatic statement may well indicate the pulling of strings by Van Raalte to better the position of Gilmore at the Amelia Institute.

If you or [the] executive committee without me would move and bring the request for the Boards, then I think the friends of the Dr⁸ and of the enterprise could take this opportunity to solve the dilemma in a great benefit for the whole and in no other way I think could we induce Gilmore to leave the field at present nor could we provide his Salary. –

Yours truly

A C Van Raalte

⁸ Dr. Anson du Bois.

ARTICLE 9

It was decided that the mission committee of the Classes Holland, Wisconsin, and Grand River²⁵⁷ request the Board of Domestic Missions of our church, that it, by means of the Committee named, appoint a man as pastor and teacher of the Reformed congregations in Virginia.

ARTICLE 10

The request of Drenthe for permission to excommunicate a censured member²⁵⁸ was referred to the committee on order and discipline.

somewhat "tardy" in appointing him to these positions. He became principal of the institute in 1870, succeeding the Rev. Anson Du Bois (1821-1905), a member of the Classis of Schenectady and former corresponding secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions, who had served as principal (teaching at the "classical and English school") and preacher among the Amelia County Dutch from 1869 to 1870. Gilmore remained in this pioneer situation until 1872 (under the Classis of Michigan), when he returned to Michigan, with the prospects for the Virginia colony not very bright. His subsequent career included a brief time as principal/teacher of the virtually stillborn primary and female department at Hope College and three pastorates (1873-1884), one in Michigan and two in Illinois. His widow became the "grande dame" of Holland, Michigan, until her death in 1933. Elton J. Bruins et al., *Albertus and Christina*, 109, 147-152; William Brokaw Gilmore file, Van Raalte Institute, which contains genealogical data from Ancestry.com; *Reformed Church in America. Minutes of the Particular Synod of Chicago. Convened at Constantine, Michigan, May 3rd, 1871* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., Printers, 1871), 110-111; *The Christian Intelligencer*, 22 July 1869; Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar, *Van Raalte*, 164-167; Wichers, *A Century of Hope*, 89; Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 311-312; Corwin, *Manual* (1902), 436; see note 230 above.

²⁵⁷ The newly formed Classis of Grand River, a daughter of the Classis of Holland (21 April 1869 minutes, Article 14; note 216 above), is here evidently automatically added to the already existing joint mission committee of the Classes of Holland and Wisconsin.

²⁵⁸ It could also be "censured members," because the Dutch is ambiguous (*gecensureerd te mogen afsnijden*). The minutes are unfortunately, again, too laconic. The uncertainty is cleared up in the minutes of the 1871 General Synod: there was but one excommunication in Drenthe during the previous year; *The Acts and Proceedings of the Reformed Church in America, ...June, 1871* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church, 1871), 236.

ARTICLE 6

On motion, it was decided that preaching appointments will be granted to the Beaverdam, Drenthe, Fijnaart, Jamestown, Saugatuck, and to our friends who live at the Lake Shore.²⁵⁴

ARTICLE 7

The report of the organization of the three congregations in Virginia, by Rev. Bolks,²⁵⁵ was accepted.

ARTICLE 8

It was proposed and decided to offer to the candidate W. B. Gilmore the mission work of the congregations in Virginia, and that he will approach the Classis of Holland to be examined, and, after favorable conclusion of the examination, to be set apart as missionary of the congregations there, his support being received from the Board of Domestic Missions in New York.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ "Our friends living at the Lake Shore" - who would be granted some supply preaching and for whom the Third Reformed Church's consistory would collect money for a sanctuary - appear to be members of Third Church who worshiped separately near the shore on the south side of the channel leading from Lake Macatawa to Lake Michigan. No separate congregation was then organized here by the RCA, but members of the Lake Shore branch of Third Church seceded during the Masonic controversy in the early 1880s; Bruins, *The Americanization of a Congregation*, 35. About the turn of the century a Lake Shore Reformed Church - also called the Gelderland Reformed Church - was organized but fairly soon disbanded; the Harderwyk CRC (Harderwijk is a city in the province of Gelderland) was established about this same time, not far from the lake but on the north side of Holland. See Articles 14 and 37 below.

²⁵⁵ The congregations were located southwest of Richmond, in Amelia County, at Mattoax, Amelia Courthouse (short-lived), and Chula (stillborn); Lucas, *Netherlanders in America*, 309-312; see notes 230 above and 245 below. Bolks, a faithful Van Raalte lieutenant, had something of a proclivity for pioneer work, e.g., he had been the founding pastor of the Overisel church and would be, late in life, the first pastor of the frontier Orange City, Iowa, congregation (1872).

²⁵⁶ William Brokaw Gilmore (1834-1884) was born in White House, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, but grew up in the English-language RPDC in Fairview, Fulton County, Illinois (organized 1837), where he made his confession of faith in 1857. He was the son of Darius Gilmore, Sr., and his wife Margaret Ann Van Nostrand; the mother's ancestry went back to the seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed immigration; the young couple settled in Fairview in 1836. William B. Gilmore taught school for a few years, after which he entered Holland Academy (1861) to prepare for the ministry. He was a graduate of the academy (1862) and of the first classes of Hope College (1866) and its graduate theological department (1869). While a student, he taught vocal music at the academy and college and also was a member of the English-language Second (Hope) Reformed Church's first consistory (1863). He married Van Raalte's daughter Christina 14 July 1869 in Amelia Courthouse, Virginia; the ceremony was conducted by her father and, incidentally, symbolized Van Raalte's commitment to the union of the two wings (the old eastern and the new western) of the RCA (also, Gilmore's sister would later marry one of Van Raalte's sons). Moreover, the service occurred in the local Presbyterian church, with Van Raalte being assisted by two (evidently) Presbyterian ministers; he was anything but sectarian. In the marriage license as well as in the notice in the *Christian Intelligencer*, Gilmore was called "Reverend" and his occupation was given as "minister," although his ordination would only come after his examination for licensure and ordination by the English-speaking Classis of Michigan in November of the following year (1870). Already in 1869 he began his work teaching at the Amelia Institute and as pastor of the Amelia County Dutch; the classis is thus

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This report was accepted and approved, and in connection with it, the following that was proposed by the Rev. J. van der Meulen:

It is decided that this classis, feeling the need for competent teachers, request the council of Hope College to bring the grammar school of the college into proper order by placing a normal teacher there by the beginning of the coming college year.²⁶⁶

That the classis, in order to support the council in implementing this plan, will attempt to provide the sum of \$500 annually for the council, through the combined influence of ministers and consistories, with cooperation of the other Dutch classes.

It was decided that this matter will be brought to the meeting of the Classis of Grand River and that of Wisconsin, and also.

That our delegates to the Particular Synod of Chicago will use their influence in that body in order to obtain the participation of all of the classes of that synod.²⁶⁷

ARTICLE 31

Mr. G. Wakker, the treasurer of the school board, submitted a very encouraging report, which was accepted.

²⁶⁶ The meaning here seems to be that because the classis recognizes the necessity for qualified teachers of children in the (public) primary schools, it is encouraging Hope College to add to its four-year "Preparatory Department" (i.e., its "Grammar School"; formerly known as "Holland Academy") an instructor who would conduct a program of "normal" education (pedagogy), presumably for women as well as men. This proposal (by the three Dutch classes) is more clearly set forth in May 1870 minutes of the Particular Synod of Chicago: "Whereas, the grammar school instruction is of primary importance, as it is the basis of all higher training, and necessary for the proper preparation of common school teachers; and Whereas, there exists an urgent need of a thorough first-class normal teacher; therefore Resolved, That the different Classes of this Particular Synod unite their strength to raise the sum of five hundred dollars annually for the support of such a normal teacher" ["for the grammar school at Hope College"]. Richard Parsons, the first to occupy this position, served only from 1870 to 1871. *Minutes of the Particular Synod of Chicago, 1870*, 87; *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod, 1871*, 288. At this time Michigan required only one year of normal instruction to prepare for teaching in the common schools; longer study was expected for secondary school teachers. Although Van Raalte had promoted the idea of a Christian primary school in Holland, in connection with the academy and the college, it was only briefly and haltingly realized. The public schools in the area were generally in the hands of Christian educators, so that little need was felt among the laity for the additional financial burden of an officially Christian school. On the other hand, normal (i.e., teacher) education schools and programs were increasingly being promoted in Michigan and throughout the USA. Wichers, *A Century of Hope*, 87-89, 97; Willis F. Dunbar, *The Michigan Record in Higher Education* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 83-86, 158.

²⁶⁷ This proposal to engage the other two Dutch classes as well as the rest of the Particular Synod of Chicago in the support of normal education addition in the Hope College grammar school met with at least initial success; see note 253 above.