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Plea from the Hollanders of Michigan to the Senate and the House of Representatives of the US

Van Raalte

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December , 1857

A FEW WORDS FROM THE HOLLANDERS IN MICHIGAN. To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress assembled.

The people of Holland are making a very strong plea for support of the Holland Harbor.

The printed, one page petition reads as if it were written by Van Raalte.

Original in the Holland Historical Trust Collection of the Joint Archives of Holland, 71-16/35.

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A FEW WORDS FROM THE HOLLANDERS IN MICHIGAN.

TO THE HONORABLE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
UNITED STATES, IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

Honorable Gentlemen!—Defenders of justice, life and property in behalf of our adopted land! We pray you give attention and your assistance in behalf of the weak. We, Hollanders adopted citizens of Michigan, come with a plain case, stated in but few words. It is again the Black Lake Harbor, in Michigan.

Ten years ago, we began to knock at your doors; since which time we have been constantly engaged in a life and death struggle in the wilderness and on a desolate shore, tantalized with an inefficient beginning of our harbor work, and cruelly kept in suspense. A flat refusal at the beginning, and a certain knowledge that the United States' Government is neither willing nor able to protect our national Highways on the water, which form our connection with the Atlantic Ocean, would have been a blessing. For the want of harbors, our vessels are wrecked, dear lives are lost, thousands of our countrymen, watching the result of our struggle and anxious to cast in their lot with us, as soon as the question of our success ceases to be doubtful, are kept back, and our temporal welfare is undermined. And it is only the proverbial perseverance of the Dutchman, which keeps us here, else the country would have been abandoned and turned again into a wilderness. Added to all these disadvantages, the financial crisis decides our fate. As a mercantile, seafaring and manufacturing people, we can have no existence, unless our Harbor is opened; our laboring class has to move away, and on account of the ruinous expense and constant danger and losses in shipping, our merchants are disheartened, and our fishermen are seeking better shores, where they can find shelter, Michigan shore being a proverb and a reproach. Moreover, our institutions of education, just developing, and fruitful of promise, will be nipped in the bud, unless we secure the improvement of our Harbor.

Let no one wrong us by misrepresentations of our position and claims. Though weak and feeble, we rejoice that we are citizens of the United States! Our claim is not a small concern, not an unknown affair. Go to the Topographical Bureaux, and Colonel Abert will tell you there, that Nature's God has given for a Harbor a Lake with depth and capacity for more than all the United States' Marine; that the improvement is of urgent necessity for the whole navigation on the Lakes, and that no such Harbor can be found south of us on our shore.

With all the force of the earnest souls of a grieved people, brought to extremities, we pray, let us not longer linger between heaven and earth; let us not longer die such a cruel, slow, but sure death. We pray for a decision. The unfixed wavering policy of the United States' Government upon this question ruins the dearest interests of the people. In behalf then of the honor and your love of our common land, yea, in behalf of your oath to protect the interests and guard the honor of our nation, bring this question to a final decision.

We pray, appropriate a sufficient sum to complete the work at once, and let the work be performed by public contract, else the money will stick to the fingers and tools, and the incompleted work will again become a useless mockery of our hopes, and again will be appropriated to storms and waves. If you will not, or cannot hear our prayer, than we pray for what you can. Deliver us from shame (the mockery of our old country) and from ruinous suspense by your decided "No!" by your decision that the work must be done, not by United States money, but by that of the individual States, by laying tax or duties, so that the Highways of the waters in this blessed country may no longer be spoiled for want of harbors, and we, Americans, may no longer be a proverb, a reproach among the nations, on account of such a self destroying foolishness. With all her faults, her oppressive taxation, her crushing of the poor and the upbuilding of the rich, her attempts to deprive us of our dearest liberties and to foster religious education, our native land, however, and we glory in it, always lent a willing ear to whatever concerned the nation's prosperity. Look at the havens of Holland! Weak and small as she is among the nations of the Earth, her navigation interest never appealed to her in vain. The results have been seen in her having been long the mistress of the Seas, and the greatest commercial power of Christendom.

Our countrymen cannot understand that America cares nothing for the protection of the navigation interest, or the improvement of the harbors of her extensive coast.

Yet one matter. The United States' Government always being an honest debtor, even to their humblest citizens, we take courage to pray for payment of a claim, which we have against the United States' Government. The United States officers have borrowed, for the use of the United States' harbor works at Black Lake, the Holland Colony pile driver, bought by lands, given by the State of Michigan, for improving our navigation, worth \$1,500, according to the testimony of the State Commissioner, which was lost together with the greatest part of the pier, erected in the waters of Lake Michigan. The necessary documents are placed in the hands of the delegates of the State of Michigan.

May the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom, life and power be present with your Honorable Body, and make your labors to thousands and millions, a blessing!

Honorable Gentlemen!

We remain with the most sincere respect

Your obedient servants,

Holland, Ottawa Co., Michigan, December, 1857.