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The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

Volume 21 Number 2

Summer 2011

History of Campus Ministries at Hope College

by Stephen Pedersen

Founded firmly in the tradition of the Reformed Church of America, Hope College has long cherished its Christian heritage. From its origins as an institution

tasked with grooming students for the seminary or missions work, through its transition into a broader institution focused on the promulgation of the liberal arts, the constant that continues to define the institution is its reverence for its Christian heritage and the emphasis placed upon maintaining that reverence at all levels of the college's governing body. The president, faculty and administrative staff have traditionally played a significant and noteworthy role in this process, but the true center of campus religious life has long been the chapel program and the personnel and initiatives associated with it. Mirroring the growth of the institution as a whole, the wide array of

programs that eventually fell under the umbrella of campus ministries evolved over the course of a century as successive presidents and chaplains attempted to better meet the needs of the student body. It is not sufficient to examine only the influence of individual chaplains and their programs, however, as the chapel

program and religious life on campus predates the office of chaplain by several decades. Indeed, an examination of the chapel program and its controversies through the

years provides a useful barometer for religious feeling on campus, although a much more comprehensive approach must be taken in order to come by an accurate account of the campus ministries program throughout its history.



Chapel and religious observance at Hope are as old as the college itself, with religious observance expected of all students and faculty from the institution's earliest years. Attendance at chapel, held weekday mornings at eight o'clock, originated as an expectation rather than an explicit requirement, with the form and function of the service varying significantly from the styles adapted in later years. The school president and members of the faculty

administered the service, as the school did not yet employ a dedicated chaplain. Although the religion department predictably played a significant role in these services, with one member tasked with chapel organization and the recruitment of speakers, faculty from all departments took their turns at the pulpit.

(continued on page 2)

From the Director



We are always excited to bring you articles researched and written by our student assistant staff. In this issue, we bring you the first comprehensive history of campus ministries at Hope College. This article was penned by one of our former student assistants, Stephen Pedersen, who has moved on to Ph.D. work in history at Arizona State University. I hope you find it informative and reflect on the history of this very important part of Hope's history.

Many of you remember articles written in the *Quarterly* by Michael Douma, who worked for the Joint Archives during his student years at Hope. In 2005, Michael saw the fruits of his research published in "Veneklasen Brick: a Family, a Company, and a Unique 19th Century Architectural Movement in Michigan." Michael is profiled in this year's Hope College catalog and, with permission, we have reprinted it in this issue. We love to read about the success of our students!

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

Campus Ministries (continued from page 1)

Chapel also served an administrative purpose by providing the faculty an opportunity to deliver the day's announcements. Students, many of whom would go on to enter the ministry or missions work for the college's first several decades of existence, generally attended both chapel services and Sunday church regularly. The first rumblings of a required chapel attendance policy surfaced in the 1920s, but the strong display of religious feeling put forward by the student community, as well as logistical concerns, led the administration to deem the step unnecessary at that time.

Outside of the structured setting of a formal church service or chapel program, students encountered limited organizational opportunities for engaging with their faith in the first decades of the twentieth century. The YMCA and YWCA existed as the sole student religious groups on campus for several decades, but this did not necessarily represent a lack of religious feeling among the student body. In an era of denominational homogeneity within a student body drawing deeply from the Reformed Church of America, the need for more varied student faith groups did not yet exist. As a whole, campus religious life remained well-served by existing institutions, and few sought to actively change this until the 1930s.

As Hope began to grow outside of its roots in both the number and variety of students it attracted, the college's administration began to rethink the role of religion on campus. Although the number of students directly affiliated with the RCA remained much larger than any other denominational presence on campus, the college's shift from an almost exclusively theologically focused institution to a more broadly minded liberal arts college brought with it a breed of student less directly committed to religious pursuits than their predecessors. Deemed unnecessary little more than a decade earlier, mandatory chapel attendance came into effect in 1934, according to the college catalog. This policy would go on to generate more controversy among the student body than any other, but did not meet significant resistance upon its initial implementation.

In the early years, the position of college pastor was filled part-time by faculty members Paul Hinkamp, Albertus Pieters, Harry Hager and Eugene Osterhaven. The college continued to get by without a full-time spiritual leader until the hiring of Reverend Allen B. Cook as college pastor in 1960. Hope expanded significantly in the decades leading up to Cook's hiring, with even greater numbers of non-RCA students enrolling



Allen B. Cook

than ever before. Although they still represented a significant minority among the student population, the presence of these students began to mark a shift in the way that religious life was approached on campus. Church, chapel, and religious life in general had not gone out of fashion among the student body; rather, the approach that the new generation of students adopted towards the expression of their faith began to diverge. Given the broadening nature of student beliefs and the growth experienced directly after the war, a full-time chaplain tasked with the organization and shepherding of religious life on campus became a necessity that the college could no longer ignore.

Despite this need, Cook's original title, resident director of Kollen Hall, bore little resemblance to his eventual role as spiritual leader. Having been hired away from a Protestant missionary fellowship on the Arabian Peninsula and possessing a strong background in ministry, Cook's position as college pastor was all but assured prior to his arrival, and anticipation of the position played a significant role in his return to the United States. This arrangement established several

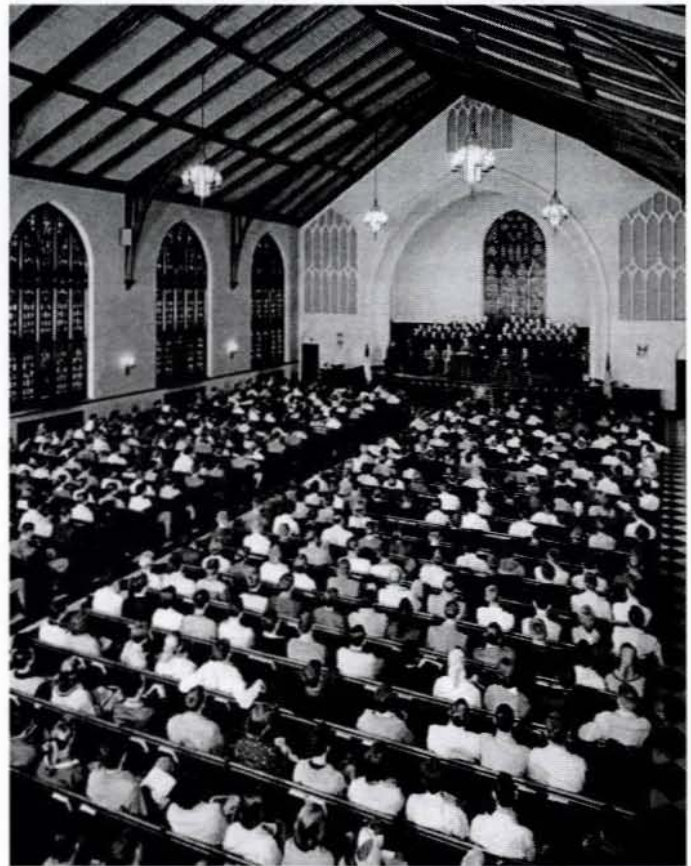
precedents for the office of chaplain, however. As a graduate of Hope College, Cook became the first of several chaplains to return to their alma mater in this capacity. More importantly, the marriage of the college pastorship with the position of resident director was the first of many instances in which the college's spiritual and residential programs would intersect in the form of the chaplain.



William Hillegonds

Cook's term as pastor proved relatively brief, lasting a mere five years. Reverend William Hillegonds, another Hope graduate, succeeded Cook in 1965 and proved to be an able replacement. Deeply concerned with issues of social ministry, Hillegonds was an inspired choice for ministering to a student body questioning its place in the world. Able to illuminate the contradictions inherent to the emerging consciousnesses of his students and aid them in working through them, Hillegonds proved an able mentor and minister to young adult concerns. Although "Wild Bill" did not always work seamlessly with the administrative arms of the college, his impact on his charges in the student body was undeniable. Under Hillegonds, the Student Church, marital counseling services, and a variety of other outreach programs came into being. As a precursor to the mission trips organized by later chaplains, Hillegonds helped to facilitate the hiring and financial maintenance of several volunteers from among the student body who undertook a summer service program in Chicago. Out of these successes emerged the framework of a vital campus ministries program, but emerging controversy regarding the chapel program itself stands out as one of the most impactful events of the era.

Since the implementation of mandatory chapel and an associated system of bookkeeping and judicial action regarding attendance, negative reactions amongst segments of the student body began to reach a boiling point by the time Cook arrived on campus. Although many students appreciated the requirement and attended without complaint for the duration of the policy, a combination of differences in religious conviction, the early hour at which chapel occurred, and differing interpretations of what the college could rightfully ask of



its students combined to generate a strong current of anti-chapel feeling among certain students. Students professing other faiths could receive exemptions from attendance, but some Christian students of other denominations felt themselves alienated as well. The college lowered required attendance from 100% to 70% in 1963, with that figure falling to 40% and eventually a tiered plan based upon class standing soon after. After several years of student pressure and incidents of attending students withholding chapel slips in protest, the college abandoned mandatory chapel attendance in 1970. Despite this, chapel attendance remained quite strong for several years.

Hillegonds remained chaplain at Hope until 1977, when he was called to a congregation in Iowa. In his place, the college hired newly appointed trustee Reverend Gerard Van Heest of New York, another Hope graduate with a background in congregational preaching. Less concerned with broader issues of social ministry than Hillegonds in favor of more traditional ministry and student support, Van Heest nonetheless presided over an enormous expansion within the campus ministries program. Under Hillegonds and his successor, a large number of student religious groups came into being, including Campus Life, Fellowship of Christian Students and Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the Catholic Student Union, and several others. On campus, outreach events such as the CROP walk and the Sleepout for the

Homeless involved the chaplain's office in local outreach. As a means of addressing global concerns, the mission trip program came into effect at this time, soon expanding to include several destinations and utilizing dozens of students. Sunday worship in the school chapel, which did not catch on until it was again implemented under the next chaplain, saw its trial period at this time. The rotation of chapel speakers expanded greatly, including Catholic and other speakers not traditional to the school, and the chapel's music program



Gerard Van Heest

began its transition from traditional worship music to more contemporary arrangements.

At the center of it all stood Van Heest, who took on the roles of fraternity advisor, faculty advisor to the lacrosse team, member of several committees regarding student life, and status as one of only two counselors available to

students on campus alongside his duties as chaplain. Supporting Van Heest in this mission after the first year of his employment were a pair of part-time student secretaries and a rotating cast of interns drawn from Western Theological Seminary, many of whom did not remain for more than a single year. Despite the sterling work done in expanding the role of the chaplain's office in student life, chapel attendance steadily dwindled during this era, with consequences for the campus ministries program as a whole. As students began to turn towards churches of their ancestral denomination within the larger city as a means of fulfilling their spiritual needs, the chaplain's office as it was currently structured was exposed as unable to effectively minister to the student body. Although Van Heest himself received favorable reviews from all involved, drastic action needed to be taken in order to fix the system.

That overhaul came in the form of an expanded campus ministries program involving significant increases in funding and personnel. Tasked with overseeing the process was the college's new Hinga-Boersma Dean of the Chapel, Reverend Ben Patterson, the beneficiary of the newly endowed chair and the first non-Hope graduate to oversee the college's spiritual life. Two additional chaplains, Paul Boersma and Dolores Nasrallah, as well

as musical coordinator Dwight Beal, assisted Patterson in this task. Quickly setting about the task of revitalizing flagging chapel attendance, Patterson and his staff soon achieved regular attendance figures of over a thousand students. An emphasis on tailoring music and preaching to the tastes of the student body generated an immediate impact, and a concerted effort by the chaplains themselves to relate to and address the concerns

of the students on campus created massive support. Given the resources to expand, the campus ministries program soon became the largest spiritual draw on campus, with several student faith groups disbanding in favor of chapel-run programs. A series of Bible studies, prayer groups, and mission trips grew up in their place to provide outlets for the exploration of faith outside of structured worship and were generally successful. Within a year, the campus ministries program was the largest and strongest it had ever been on campus.

This new direction did not come without its problems, however. While the new ministry, based more firmly in the evangelical tradition than the programs of previous chaplains, found popularity among a large segment of the student body, a significant segment of students and faculty felt themselves alienated by aspects of the chapel program, particularly those regarding homosexuality and religious pluralism. These issues amounted to Hope's first spiritual crisis since the problem of mandatory chapel, with the campus splintering into segments supporting and decrying the chaplains' new direction, which took many years and Patterson's departure in 2000 to heal. He left behind a revitalized campus ministries program that continued to expand well beyond his departure.

After a transition period under Reverend Timothy Brown of the neighboring seminary, the college hired Reverend Trygve Johnson, a Ph.D. candidate at the time and the first dean of the chapel or chaplain to hold a Ph.D., as its next and current dean of the chapel. A graduate of Western Theological Seminary who had served as an intern at Hope prior to his appointment, Johnson and his team of chaplains have continued to build upon the work of previous chaplains in making the campus ministries



*Left to right: Ben Patterson,
Dolores Nasrallah,
Paul Boersma*



Trygve Johnson

program a strength of the college. The campus ministries staff has expanded to include a Director of Outreach and Social Justice alongside the men's and women's chaplains, the Arts and Worship coordinator, support personnel and the Dean himself. The staff oversees a program that ministers to nearly six hundred students through small group ministries and counts two hundred students annually as participants in its mission trip program.

Although the road has often been difficult, Hope's campus ministries program has grown ever larger through the years of its existence, continuously evolving under the direction of each of its chaplains in an effort to better serve the student body. These efforts have not always gone smoothly, but the college has succeeded in maintaining a strong Christian character to the present day largely through its chaplains' efforts. The process has been a long one, but the resilience and strength exhibited by the program so far give hope for a successful future.

Profile of Former Student Assistant



Michael Douma '04
Grandville, Mich.

All things considered, it should come as no surprise that Dr. Michael Douma graduated Hope with a triple-major: history, philosophy and Dutch studies, thanks in part to two semesters abroad in Leiden, Netherlands.

"At some point when I was a freshman, I had heard of a senior who

had managed a history, economics and accounting triple-major, and it sounded like an extraordinary challenge. I've always been one for challenges and competition."

It was competition and the desire to realize potential that brought Douma to Hope's campus, although his initial interest wasn't completely academic.

"I really wanted to continue my cross-country and track career," he explains. "I had done well in those sports in high school, but I knew I had much more potential than my results had shown."

While he was successful in both the sports arena and the classroom, it quickly became clear to Douma that he had a passion for learning and in particular, for learning about history.

"At some point while at Hope, I realized that every building, that every turn of the corner, has a particular story about it. The campus is full of the figurative ghosts of past dreams and aspirations."

Fueled by his fascination with history, Douma worked throughout his college career at the Joint Archives of Holland, surrounded by collections of Holland's and Hope's history. But true to the liberal arts mission of Hope, he discovered that it wasn't just history that he loved.

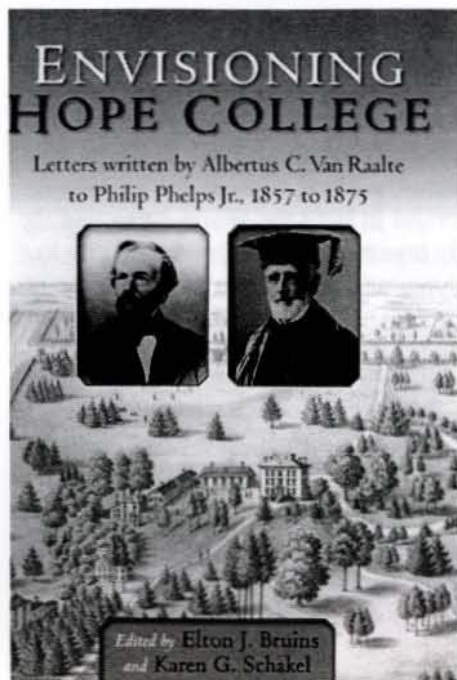
"I was blown away with the thought that in one semester at Hope, I could entertain myself with courses on subjects like ancient philosophy, geology, Reformation history, and that this was considered almost normal."

Since graduating from Hope, Douma has furthered his education at Florida State, where he has earned a Ph.D. in history, focusing mainly on Dutch-American history. He credits his time at Hope and working in the archives with giving him the skills and experience necessary to achieve his doctorate degree.

"Hope taught me how to think critically and encouraged me to discover what my true academic interests were."

And as with many Hope alumni, Douma's experience also taught him valuable life lessons, things he recognizes cannot always be learned in the class.

"Never underestimate the importance of belonging to a community; of having dozens of friends living in the same building; of being able to talk to your professors one-on-one," he says. "I came to Hope, because I wanted to be part of something: a team, a department, a small college where individuals counted, and that's exactly what I found."



Published in July 2011, this 519-page hardcover features ninety-four letters that A. C. Van Raalte wrote to Philip Phelps Jr., as these two men worked together on behalf of education in the Holland Colony—efforts that led to the founding of both Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in the 1860s. While the volume isn't a biography *per se*, its editor, Dr. Elton Bruins, believes that this rare collection of letters provides a view of Van Raalte not seen in previous works about the respected religious leader.

"This is the first book dealing with Van Raalte in which he himself is doing most of the speaking," Bruins said. "You hear Van Raalte speaking for himself and opening his heart, and that for me makes the book."

Van Raalte led the Dutch colonists who established Holland in 1847, and among his other efforts, he worked tirelessly on behalf of education. Phelps became principal of the Holland Academy, the school which Van Raalte had established in 1859 and became the founding president of Hope when the college grew out of the academy in 1862.

The letters, which Van Raalte wrote in English, are extensively annotated, with explanations about the people and events referenced by Van Raalte and behind-the-scenes insights. The result, Bruins noted, is a broader history of the community and the person of Van Raalte and of the creation of Hope and Western Theological Seminary.

Envisioning Hope College: Letters written by Albertus C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps Jr., 1857 to 1875, Elton J. Bruins and Karen G. Schakel, eds. Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, no 71. Holland/Grand Rapids: Van Raalte Press/Eerdmans, 2011. Available at the Hope-Geneva Bookstore, price \$49: visit www.hopebookstore.com, or call (800) 946-4673.

Albertus C. Van Raalte

Leader & Liaison

An International Conference Celebrating the Bicentennial of
The Reverend Albertus C. Van Raalte, DD (1811-2011),
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24-25 October 2011

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For more information, visit <http://www.hope.edu/vri/>

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A. C. VAN RAALTE INSTITUTE
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HOLLAND AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2011-2012

*All programs will be held in the
Maas Auditorium, Hope College
264 Columbia, Holland*

The American Travels of Jacob Van Hinte

Tuesday, September 13, 2011 - 7:30 p.m.

To kick off the new program year, we will hear about Dutch traveler and writer Jacob Van Hinte and his journey throughout America in 1921. Join editors Nella and William Kennedy as they tell us more about Van Hinte and his diary about the trip.

Port Sheldon History

Tuesday, October 11, 2011 - 7:30 p.m.

Long known as one of the area's oldest settlements, the history of Port Sheldon still remains a mystery to most area residents. Come learn more about this small community on Lake Michigan with local historian Mary Haab.

The Holland Interurban Line

Tuesday, November 8, 2011 - 7:30 p.m.

An interurban rail system served community residents from Saugatuck to Grand Rapids in the early 20th century. Learn more about our first mass transit system from railway historian Norm Krentel and his photographs.

History of St. Nicholas

Tuesday, December 13, 2011 - 7:30 p.m.

The holidays in the Holland area have always been filled with stories of St. Nicholas and his good deeds. Come hear and see more about this historical figure from historian and collector Carol Myers of Holland.

Envisioning Hope College Through the Letters of Van Raalte and Phelps

Tuesday, January 10, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

As Hope College nears 150 years of existence, Elton Bruins will discuss the history of its founding by Albertus C. Van Raalte and Philip Phelps, Jr. and the recently released book on the subject.

Ottawa County Parks

Tuesday, February 14, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Ottawa County parks are some of the best in the state. Learn more about the history of this great system from director John Scholtz.

De Zwaan Windmill: Past and Future

Tuesday, March 13, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

The long history of our local windmill is fascinating and one you will want to hear. Come learn more about its past and future with local historian and professionally trained miller Alisa Crawford through images and comments.

"Cappy" Cappon: Athlete and Coach

Tuesday, April 10, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Franklin C. "Cappy" Cappon is regarded by some historians as Holland's greatest athlete and coach, both here and the college level. Sports historian Randy Vande Water will tell us more about Cappy's storied life in photographs and commentary.

Centennial Park: Cultural Center Point

Tuesday, June 12, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

We bring our program year to a close with the history of Centennial Park and its place in Holland's history as a market place, event area, landmark and home to memorials, a statue and fountains, and cultural center point for our community to relax and remember. Join long-time resident and writer Paul Van Kolken as he illustrates the history of this famous greenspace with images and commentary.

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Hope College's first chapel was built in 1862 and also served as the campus gymnasium.