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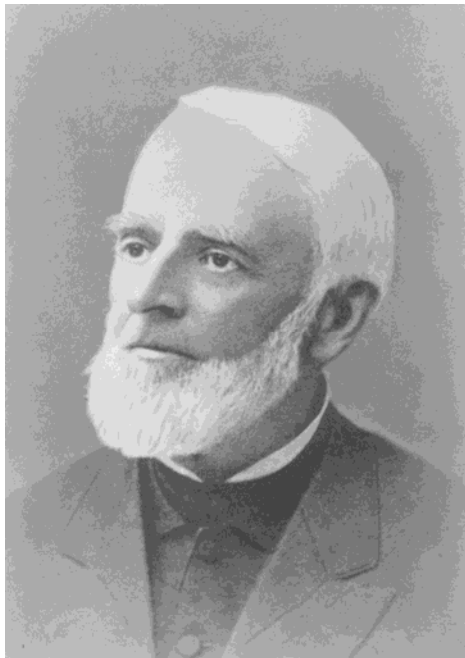
The Legacy of Philip Phelps Jr.

By Alex Markos

Over the past 150 years, Hope College has been under the leadership of only twelve presidents. The first of this great lineage was Rev. Dr. Philip Phelps Jr., who was not only the founder of the college, but also a pivotal leader in the Holland community and a visionary for Christian higher education. As Hope's first president, Phelps stands as a model for Hope's continuing mission of a strong, diverse academic community. Though his story is riddled with both victory and defeat, Phelps left a resounding legacy that is still alive today—a legacy that includes Hope traditions and organizations such as the Phelps Scholars Program, Fraternal Society, and Community Day.

Philip Phelps Jr. was born in Albany, New York, on July 12, 1826. Almost 200 years before, his ancestor, William Phelps of Tewksbury, England, was one of 140 passengers who arrived in Massachusetts aboard the *Mary and John* on May 30, 1630, just ten years after the arrival of the *Mayflower*. He was the sixth child of Hannah (Mascraft) and Philip Phelps Sr., who for 48 years held the respected position of Deputy Comptroller of the State of New York. They spared no expense on the education of their son, who spent nine years at the prestigious Albany Academy and received high marks and honors in classics and mathematics. Phelps then entered Union College in 1842 and graduated two years later at the impressive young age of 18, with honors in Latin and as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He was also a member of the Fraternal Society Omicron Kappa Epsilon, a fraternity which he would later bring to Hope College. After spending a couple of years teaching, he entered the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in New

Brunswick, New Jersey, and graduated in 1849. During his time there, he was assigned to teach Greek and Latin at West Point, New York. Over the next few years, after receiving his license to preach, he was a pastor of the old Greenburgh Church (now known as Elmsford Church) in Westchester County, New York, and then at Hastings-on-Hudson.¹



In 1853, Phelps married Margaret Anna Jordan, an intelligent and caring young woman from Albany. Together they visited the Van Raalte family in the small but growing Dutch community of Holland, Michigan, in 1856, where Phelps began a lifelong friendship with Rev. Albertus Van Raalte.²

It was in 1859 that Phelps had to make probably the toughest decision in his life. He was appointed by the boards of education and domestic missions to take part in the educational work of the Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, by becoming the principal of the Holland Academy and serving as a missionary pastor. Phelps' son Philip Tertius, who compiled a biography of his father, recounts the struggle his parents went through, whether to leave their home, friends, "a paradise of rural charms" for the "western wilderness" of Holland "to make a home among strangers."³ It should be remembered that in 1859, the Holland community was only 12 years old, founded in 1847 by Rev. Van Raalte, so for Phelps and his wife, it would have sounded like they were being asked to move to the middle of nowhere. In a later report to the Board of Education, Phelps wrote of his decision, "I felt in my heart that I was called of God to the work; and under that conviction I went, whether to failure or success I did not know."⁴ I think

(continued on page 2)

From the Director



This issue features the last two articles about important campus personalities and events that have helped to shape Hope College over the last 150 years: Rev. Philip Phelps Jr. and the Class of 1866. The article about Phelps was written by class of 2016 member Alex Markos and is his last for the

Quarterly. His abilities to research and write well will be missed at the Archives. The article about Hope College's first commencement in July 1866 was written by Natalie Fulk, now a junior at Hope. Her research and writing about undergraduate scholarship and orations of these young men, which has been continued with today's students, shows her talents for research and writing in the field of history. I hope you enjoy both articles, too.

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

Philip Phelps (continued from page 1)

we can assure Rev. Phelps today that his courage in answering God's call led to great success.

During his time in Holland, Phelps became a close friend and confidant of Van Raalte. It was these two men who were responsible for the foundation of Hope College and who were both prodigious leaders in the Holland community. In addition to being principal of Holland Academy, Phelps served as a missionary pastor to the small group of English speakers, which later became Hope Church. Although it was not officially organized until 1862, Hope Church began in 1854 as the only group in the new Dutch community of Holland who conducted worship services in English. Most of their members were teachers from the Academy, who felt a little alienated by the all-Dutch services. Therefore, Hope Church and the academy were closely linked, and both owe their development to Phelps. Four years earlier, Rev. John Van Vleck held the taxing double position of principal and missionary preacher, but due to failing health, he had to resign. Thankfully, Phelps was not alone at Hope Church but was assisted by Rev. Giles Van De Wall, a graduate from New Brunswick Seminary, New Jersey (from where Rev. Van Vleck also graduated). These two men helped establish regularly attended English services and an English Sabbath School. Hope Church's services were held at the academy, in the basement of Van Vleck Hall, until the church built its first wooden sanctuary in 1864 on a lot donated by Van Raalte between 10th and 11th Streets, where the church still stands today. With this heavy load of preaching and teaching at the academy, the Board of

Missions decided that this double duty was too much for one man to handle and ended its formal connection to Phelps in 1863. Nevertheless, he doggedly continued to serve as missionary pastor at Hope Church until the summer of 1866.⁵

When Phelps began his work at the academy in the fall of 1859, he was faced with a class of 32 students, some who did not speak English, some who could barely read and write, and some who were ready to enter high school level courses. Despite this stark disparity, Phelps was able to set up a classification system, dividing the students into four levels, A, B, C, and D. After reorganizing the high school, he then focused his efforts on his grand vision of turning the high school into a college. In order to expand the school, he charged the community in the winter of 1862 "to take every man his axe and go into the woods and prepare timber" for the construction of a gymnasium.⁶ After logging over 11,000 feet of lumber, the students under Phelps' supervision erected the gymnasium, which served as the hall for the commencement ceremony of 1862 and the first college commencement of 1866, as well as the college chapel.⁷ What a sight it must have been: strong young men chopping down trees for their own graduation, together hoisting up the logs that would honor their friends and fellow classmates as the emerging leaders of Holland. Following the commencement of 1862, Phelps began giving collegiate-level education to those graduates, which made them the first freshman class of the nascent college.



First chapel/gymnasium, ca. 1862

Over the next few years, Phelps pushed for the academy to become an established Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America college, not merely a feeder school for Rutgers College or New Brunswick Seminary. He wanted his high school students to be able to continue their education in the same place. For his efforts in Christian higher education in Holland, Phelps was elected president of the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America in 1864, and,

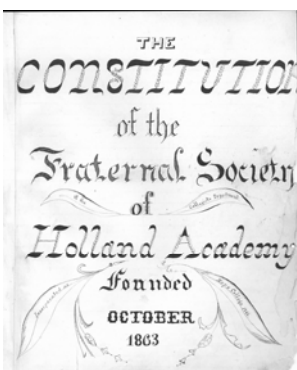
in that same year, he received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of New York.

On May 14, 1866, Phelps obtained the charter that turned the collegiate department of Holland Academy into Hope College, with Phelps as its first president. At his inauguration on July 12, he was presented with a new academic gown by the ladies of Holland, which he would pass down to President Gerrit Kollen (1893-1911), who would pass it on to President Ame Vennema (1911-1918). (To this day, that very robe survives in the Joint Archives of Holland.) Then on July 17, the new college graduated its first class of eight young men, accompanied by a commencement ode specially written by President Phelps and set to music composed by one of the graduating seniors, William Gilmore.



Alex Markos modeling Phelps' robe and cap

However, these graduates were not finished with Hope quite yet. They requested, with some encouragement from Phelps, to pursue theological studies at the college. Originally, it was agreed that the graduates from Hope would go on to continue theological studies at New Brunswick Seminary, but they did not want to leave Holland. Due to students' fervor and Phelps' passionate and convincing speech to the General Synod, the foundation was laid for a theological department, which would become the Western Theological Seminary. It was to be the beginning of Reformed theological and missionary training in the West. From the outset, Phelps made it clear that Hope College had a distinct denominational aspect, that it was connected to the Reformed Church as its "ecclesiastical parent."⁸ In June 1869, the Synod recognized and established the Western Theological Seminary in Hope College.



Another lasting organization introduced by Phelps is the Fraternal Society (Omicron Kappa Epsilon). In 1834, a group of Union students received permission from the college to establish an official organization or brotherhood dedicated to literature, friendship, and morality.⁹ Phelps was initiated into OKE at Union College in 1842, but

the Society was disbanded in 1859, when a larger, national fraternity, Alpha Delta Phi, was established at

Union. This, however, did not stop Phelps from taking the charter and records from Union and re-establishing his old Fraternal Society at the Holland Academy in 1863. He initiated 12 students, who were among the first and second graduating classes at Hope College in 1866 and 1867. The Fraternal Society, which still continues to induct new members, recently celebrated its 180th anniversary in 2014. As a member of this society himself, Phelps started a tradition or at least a trend of Hope presidents who were also OKE brothers, such as Gerrit Kollen, Wynand Wichers, Calvin Vander Werf, and James Bultman. From that initial fraternity at the college's founding, the Greek Life on Hope's campus has increased to eight fraternities and eight sororities.

In addition to encouraging fellowship among students, Phelps was also committed to building relationships with people outside the Holland community. The mission field was always near to Phelps' heart, and, in 1869, he got the opportunity to share his missionary spirit with a Japanese student. Ryozo Tsugawa journeyed to America in hopes of getting an education, but after spending a few months in New York, was already running low on money and was about to be sent back to Japan. While on one of his usual business trips to the Synod in New York, Phelps was notified about this poor student and immediately responded that he would take care of him. He went to meet him, encouraged him to go to Hope College, and personally travelled with him to Washington D.C. to make the arrangements with the Japanese Embassy. This was the first embassy Japan had sent to the United States since it had adopted a strict isolationism in the early 17th century. Although the embassy was hesitant to give him full responsibility for the student, Phelps was able to convince them to allow Tsugawa to return with him and study at Hope. During his time in Holland, Tsugawa lived with the Phelps family while taking classes at the grammar school, making him Hope's first international student. In 1871, the untimely death of his father summoned Tsugawa back to his homeland before he



Standing-T. Matsda, '83, Nonomiya; Seated-R. Tsugawa, K. Kimura, '79, M. Ohgimi, '79. Picture taken in September 1896 in Japan, when the Japanese who had studied at Hope College got together and held a memorial service upon hearing of the death of Dr. Phelps. His photo is in the frame on the table.

could finish at Hope. However, a few months later he returned to the devastated and fire-stricken town of Holland and graduated from the preparatory school in 1874. Also in 1871, two more students from Japan, Motoichiro Ohgimi and Kumaji Kimura, who, like Tsugawa, came desiring an education, were picked up by Phelps in New York and brought to Holland. They went through four years in the preparatory school and four years at the college and graduated from Hope in 1879—the first international graduates. After Hope, they both went on to New Brunswick Seminary and became ministers in Japan. Phelps took in another Japanese student in 1875 by the name of Tametsne Matsuda, who used to work on a farm near Holland and went to Hope for eight years, graduating from the college in 1883.¹⁰ As a powerful symbol of his legacy, when these four men learned of Phelps' death in 1897, they gathered together in Tokyo to hold a memorial service for their beloved friend and mentor.¹¹

Phelps' vision of an inviting and diverse campus is continued by current Hope president John Knapp who has identified increasing diversity as one of the six major goals of his Hope 2025 vision. Under his administration, the number of minority students has increased from 14% in 2012 to 20% in 2014. According to President Knapp, "[diversity] is a greater emphasis now than it has been, in part because the college needs to serve students from diverse backgrounds well."¹² Now, 147 years since the first international student came to Hope, international students make up 3% of the campus, representing more than 30 countries.¹³

One program that has helped continue this vision is the Phelps Scholars Program, which began in 1999, directed by current Hope professor Charles Green. The program was named by then-Provost Dr. Jacob Nyenhuis in recognition of Hope's first president, who, at the founding of the college, emphasized a diverse student body.¹⁴ The Phelps Scholars are a group of about 90 freshman students from around the country and the world who live in the same dorm (Scott Hall) and all take the same first-year seminar course in learning about multiculturalism and appreciating diversity, as well as volunteer in local organizations. This program serves as an extension of Phelps' invitation to those Japanese students and aids the continuing mission of Hope College to provide a welcoming and hospitable environment to all people seeking a higher education.

Not only was Phelps responsible for admitting the first foreign students, but also for admitting the first female students into Hope College. In his "Special Report to the General Synod" in June 1868, Phelps argued that females deserved an equal education and pushed for a female academy, which he hoped would set an example



First women to graduate from Hope College (top left, Sarah Alcott '82; top right, Frances Phelps Otte '82; bottom left, Lizzie Phelps '85; bottom right, Mary Alcott Diekema '85)

to other colleges and universities around the country. He demonstrated that other schools from different denominations (like the Baptists and Unitarians) had already admitted women into their programs and argued that it was time for the RCA to join this new movement.¹⁵ Although the Synod agreed, Phelps had difficulty securing teachers for this new part of the school. Finally in 1878, as one of Phelps' last achievements as president, the college admitted its first female students. That year,

five women were enrolled in Hope, and by 1883 their number had grown to twenty-five. The number of women on Hope's campus has increased dramatically over the years, and today they make up a little more than 60% of its population. Among these first female students were Phelps' own daughters, Frances, who graduated in 1882, and Elizabeth (Lizzie) who graduated in 1884.

During his presidency, Phelps worked tirelessly to raise money for his burgeoning college. He even acquired a valuable piece of land on the Black Lake. Part of it was used for the Hope Farm, which he hoped would give profits to the college. It was intended as a gift to the president for all of his work for the college, but Phelps turned it down and gave it over entirely for the college. Unfortunately, not



Hope Haven University logo depicting a fruit tree from the Hope Farm, now Waukazoo Woods

everybody was satisfied with the President's progress. Since 1869, the General Synod had been disappointed with Phelps' investments and fundraising efforts, which, though admirable, could not keep the college from accruing large amounts of debt. Finally in 1878, two years after the death of his beloved friend Dr. Van Raalte, the president had to reluctantly answer the Synod for his unproductive investments. These were indeed dark times for the college: the president and all of the professors were forced to resign. Though most of the faculty were reinstated, the faithful, determined Phelps,

sadly, was not. In order to save the institution which he brought up and reared for a time, the first president had to be sacrificed. A few years later, Phelps stated that he was never able to recover from that blow.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the defeated Phelps was not done with Hope College, and he and his family refused to move out of Van Vleck Hall. At the time of his forced resignation, his son Philip Tertius and daughter Francis were both attending Hope. He continued to stay until the college gave him the back salary that it owed him and until his daughter Lizzie graduated in 1884, after which he was finally forced to leave.

When Hope was facing financial difficulties in 1880, the retired president pleaded for money from surrounding churches in order to help his beloved college, lamenting the thought that “the fruit of so many of my best years of labor and patience, should have no permanency.”¹⁷ As a father struggles with sending his son out into the world, so too did Phelps struggle to see his college stumble along without his leadership.

Still, the college and students never forgot the incredible achievements of their first president. Phelps, who was living in New York at the time, was invited by the alumni to speak at the college’s Quarter Centennial Celebration in 1890. While Phelps was back on campus, the alumni dedicated a large portrait of him to be hung in the library. Then in 1894, he was also warmly invited back for the inauguration of Dr. Gerrit Kollen, one of Phelps’ students who graduated in 1868. Phelps gave the principle address and presented Kollen with his presidential robe, which had been given to him by ladies of Holland at his own inauguration. During the ceremony, the college conferred upon Phelps an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.¹⁸ Two years later, back in his native Albany, New York, Phelps passed away on September 4, 1896.



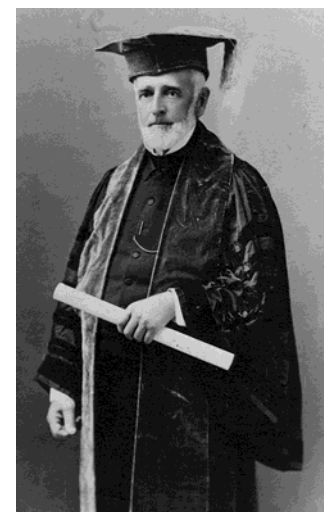
Ox roast on Windmill Island, ca. 1966

Another example of the legacy left behind by Hope’s first president is the strong relationship between the city

of Holland and the college. In his inaugural address, Phelps challenged the Holland community to “cherish the college which has been planted in the midst of yourselves.”¹⁹ Over the past 150 years, the college has enjoyed good, healthy relations with the city (to the envy of many college towns), and perhaps the best manifestation of this is the tradition of the Community Day. As a celebration for Hope’s 100th anniversary, the college and the city co-sponsored the first Community Ox Roast in 1966. (And yes, they roasted an entire ox!) Both students and residents gathered together on the athletic field to celebrate the homecoming weekend and enjoy food and fellowship.²⁰ I believe Dr. Phelps would have been well pleased to see this special bond develop and would agree that the Community Day represents an extension of his initial charge to the city. Though they no longer roast an ox, the annual Community Day continues, a favorite tradition for Hope College and the residents of Holland.

As far as Phelps’ physical legacy on the college, there is Phelps Hall, which doubles as the college’s main dining hall and a co-ed dorm. It was originally intended as an all-girls dorm, but became co-ed in 1973. By having it as an all-girls dorm, the building is not only named after the first president, but after his daughter, Frances, who was one of the first female students at Hope. Coincidentally, the new hall opened in September 1960, exactly 100 years after Frances was born in Van Vleck Hall. President Irwin Lubbers (1945-1963) stated that Phelps Hall would be a “fitting tribute and memorial to the two persons who were so devoted and faithful to Hope College.”²¹

Although Phelps may have left Hope a broken man and in defeat, his legacy as the first president remains to this day. The same values and vision he employed to birth the college in 1866 are still an integral part of its mission in 2016. His ardent, passionate commitment and deep, fatherly love for Hope combined with his humble and faithful demeanor makes him a towering figure in both the history of Hope College and the Holland community.



Philip Phelps, n.d.

Representations of Hope College: An Examination of the Orations of the Class of 1866 By Natalie Fulk

As the first graduating class of Hope College, the class of 1866 set the precedent for what it meant to be a student at Hope College. In the first commencement, which took place on July 17, 1866, each of the eight graduating men gave a speech on a variety of topics ranging from hope to liberty to the progression of the life of man. However, even with such different topics, one can see recurring values and themes throughout all of the pieces. The first and most prevalent theme is that of Christianity and the coming of the kingdom of God on Earth. The next is the importance of education and enlightenment in individual advancement and the advancement of humankind as a whole. Finally, there is an impression of national pride, for both the Netherlands and the United States, seeing as almost all of these men were Dutch immigrants or descended from Dutch immigrants. These themes can be seen as a representation of Hope College itself, as a college in the United States rich with Dutch heritage and focused on education and Christian values.

Hope College started out as a private school known as the Pioneer School that served as a public school, which was formed in 1851 with the intent of education based in Christianity, but it taught mostly elementary education. It was then transformed into the Holland Academy in 1857 with approval by the General Synod and Board of Education of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America, of which the Classis of Holland was affiliated.¹ The Holland Academy was a private primary and secondary school that could focus on integrating education with Christian principles. However, when Rev. Philip Phelps Jr. became principal of the academy in 1859, he had higher goals for the school and wanted to make it into a college. He saw a great need for Christian colleges in what was then considered the “West.” In October 1862, the academy enrolled its first class of college freshmen and on May 14, 1866, Hope College received its college charter from the state of Michigan.² Phelps was officially inaugurated as president of Hope College on July 12, 1866, and on July 17, Hope College graduated its first class of eight college students in its first commencement ceremony.³

These graduates all had successful careers after their undergraduate studies were completed. Seven of the men, Ale Buursma, Gerrit Dangremond, William B. Gilmore, Peter Moerdyk [also seen as Moerdyke], William Moerdyk [also seen as Moerdyke], John W. Te

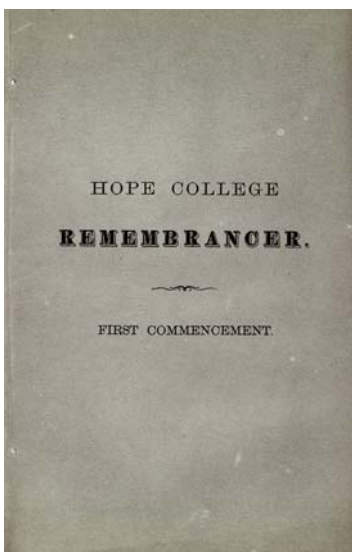
¹“A Brief Biography of Rev. Philip Phelps, D.D., LL.D.” compiled by Philip Tertius Phelps, 1941, Biographical, H88-0122 Phelps, Philip, Jr. Box 1, 3-4.
²Elton J. Bruins and Karen G. Schakel, eds., *Envisioning Hope College: Letters Written by Albertus C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps Jr., 1857 to 1875* (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press) xxii-xxiii.
³“A Brief Biography of Rev. Philip Phelps,” 5.
⁴Ibid. He is quoting from the “Report to the Board of Education, 1865)
⁵Historical Sketch, Box 10 W91-1034 Hope Church
⁶Historical Sketch of Hope College, H88-0122 Phelps, Philip, Jr. Box 1 p. 18
⁷“A Brief Biography of Rev. Philip Phelps,” 6.
⁸Introduction to the Hope College Catalog 1866, in Biographical Folder, H88-0122 Phelps, Philip, Jr. Box 1 .
⁹History (2014), Box 1 H92 1156 Fraternal Society
¹⁰Frances Phelps, “Hope’s Japanese Students,” 1908, “Essays,” Box 1 H88 0116 Otte, Frances Phelps.
¹¹“A Brief Biography of Rev. Philip Phelps,” 10.
¹²“Hope College President Looks to Expand College’s Reach to National Stage” *Holland Sentinel* Nov 2, 2014
¹³Hope College Fried International Center, International Students. <http://www.hope.edu/beyondhope/intlstudents/>
¹⁴Phelps Scholars Program, Hope Topical File
¹⁵Bruins 450-452
¹⁶Hope College Pamphlets, 1884 p. 19
¹⁷Letter to Holland Reformed Churches, November 15, 1880, Biographical, H88-0122 Phelps, Philip, Jr. Box 1
¹⁸“The Story of the Academic Gown of Dr. Philip Phelps,” Biographical, H88-0122 Phelps, Philip, Jr. Box 1
¹⁹Philip Phelps, “Inaugural Address,” *Hope College Remembrancer*, 1867, Biographical, H88-0122 Phelps, Philip, Jr. Box 1, p.18.
²⁰*The Anchor*, Oct 14, 1966
²¹*The Anchor*, Jan 15, 1960



Alex Markos recently graduated from Hope College and double majored in History and Classics and minored in Music. He was a Phelps Scholar his freshman year. Alex spent the Fall 2015 semester in Athens, Greece with the College Year in Athens Program where he studied Ancient Greek history, philosophy and archaeology. This summer,

he will be getting married and will be living and teaching for one year in San Antonio. He then plans to pursue a PhD. in Ancient History.

Winkel, and Harm Woltman, petitioned the General Synod in 1867 to have a theological seminary at Hope College so they could continue their studies. Their request was granted, and these men were then the first seminary class that graduated in 1869.⁴ William Gilmore married Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte's daughter, Christina Van Raalte, and was an instructor of vocal music at Hope College for a while before becoming ordained as a minister.⁵ William A. Shields, the eighth 1866 graduate of Hope College, joined the faculty of Hope College in 1867 as a tutor, and was then an assistant professor of rhetoric and English from 1871-1885.⁶



The activities and addresses of the first commencement were recorded in a special publication titled the Remembrancer.

The first commencement was a very important event for Hope College because it signified its emergence as a college-level institution. The commencement consisted of a prayer at the beginning, music, orations, and the pronouncement of the benediction by the president. On a side note, the music was instrumental and mostly played by the students. One of the seniors, William B. Gilmore, even wrote the music for the commencement ode, with lyrics by President Phelps, which was sung at the end

of the ceremony. However, the majority of the commencement was focused on the orations of original work that were given by each of the graduating seniors. Below is a list of the orations given by the seniors, and a quick synopsis of what each of them is about.

“Salutatory”–Peter Moerdyk

Greets the students, faculty, and guests at the commencement and praises Hope College for its achievements in becoming a college institution.

“Hope”–William B. Gilmore

Explores what hope is and how it is applied in different settings, including war, education, and Scripture.

“Public Opinion”–Harm Woltman

Defines the nature of public opinion and argues that the public needs a strong virtuous leader to lead it.

“Trials and Triumphs of Liberty”–William Moerdyk

Explains liberty and gives examples of fights and fighters for liberty throughout history. It especially focuses on liberty in the Netherlands and United States.

“Man, as he was, is, and is to be”–William A. Shields

Argues that man was created in God's image and was perfect, but is now decaying and always searching for answers that he can never find. However, this searching is worthwhile because it prepares him for the afterlife in heaven when he will have all of the answers from God.

“De Pen is magtiger dan het Zwaard (The Pen is mightier than the Sword)”–John W. Te Winkel

Claims that the pen and the written word enlighten society and make it closer to God, and are more powerful than the sword because they last forever.

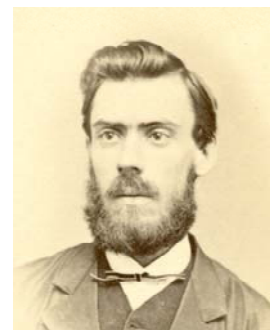
“Skepticism”–Ale Buursma

Argues that skepticism of God is impractical because the teachings of Scripture are logical and can be proven through reason and philosophy.

“Valedictory”–Gerrit Dangremond

Reflects on the graduating seniors' time at Hope and the importance that their education has in their lives. He also thanks different groups from the college.

At first glance, the topics of these orations may seem so different that they could hardly be connected to each other. However, they all have interrelated themes, the first of which is Christianity. They have a similar underlying focus or at least assumption of God's control and the coming of the kingdom of God. Some orations are mainly focused on God and His Providence. One such piece would be Shields' oration entitled “Man, as he was, is, and is to be,” which focuses on God's creation of man and the progression of



William A. Shields



Ale Buursma

man to the ultimate time when he will be with God in heaven. He says that at that time, “man shall be restored to the image of his Maker, be above the angels in rank, be pure and holy, ‘a ransomed soul.’”⁷

Another speech that is centered on God and Christianity is “Skepticism” by Ale Buursma. This speech focuses on proving Christianity and countering arguments from

skeptics. He says that “It matters not to what branch of physical knowledge we apply our thoughts, if we impartially and attentively trace it to its source, we are always led to the conclusion that there is a God who has created and still actively governs all things.”⁸

Some simply quote verses as evidence, such as Gerrit Dangremond does in his valedictory speech when he exclaims “What has God wrought!” from Numbers 23:23

to describe the growth of Hope College.⁹ Others refer to known Bible stories, as Harm Woltman does in his oration on public opinion. He references the story of Noah's Ark from the Old Testament to give an example of when public opinion was misguided. He says the public "gave themselves up to wickedness, till God's wrath overtook them... and while the small band of eight souls...were safely rocked in the ark upon the mighty deluge, the rest who had thoughtlessly yielded to the general opinion that God would not execute his judgments, shared the universal calamity."¹⁰ Peter Moerdyk also thanks God in his salutatory given in Latin to welcome the students, faculty, and guests. He thanks God for bringing Hope College through all of its trials and tribulations in the process of becoming a college and says, "By the grace of God, that dark night has passed, and dawn has brushed the eastern sky with rose and the splendor of the midday sun is approaching."¹¹



Peter Moerdyk



Harm Woltman

Woltman also demonstrates the roots Hope College has in the Reformed Church in America, a Protestant church, as he describes the Reformation and how the public bonded together under strong leaders. He says, "After the public mind had been buried in superstition, and fettered by the chains of popery, how did Luther, Calvin and others lift up the beacon-light of the gospel,

which dispelled the mists! ... Then public opinion broke the bonds which had held it, and shook itself free from the dust of degradation."¹² Even though Hope now has a wide variety of religions represented in its student body, Woltman's statement reflects the Protestant tendencies of the student body at the time. All of these Christian references, from thematic elements to quoted Bible verses to historical allusions, show that Christianity was important to all of these students and was incorporated into whatever topic they were talking about.

The second theme that is apparent throughout their orations is the value that these men placed on education. Dangremond exemplifies this in his valedictory speech. He says, "Take away from a single generation the present facilities of public instruction, and behold what barbarism and ignorance would

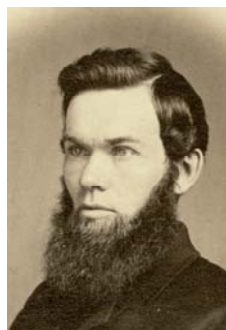


Gerrit Dangremond

ensue!"¹³ To them, the world would be lost without education. Also, education could help people better themselves and the world. Dangremond says, "You see him [the student] struggling hard to fit himself for usefulness, and perchance honor, by applying himself to mental discipline and acquisition. Undaunted by difficulties, with broad views of the future, he stems every current which may oppose."¹⁴ Students have to struggle to better themselves and work towards acquiring skills and knowledge. Sometimes being a student is really hard, but William B. Gilmore in his speech "Hope" says that the solution to the challenges of being a student is hope. He asks, "How could his [the student's] soul be kept from sinking as he surveys the long vista of years stretching before him in the distance, or how could he persevere to reach the goal, were there not some kind monitor to whisper at each depression – *hope?*"¹⁵ Even though the first class of Hope struggled and had to work extremely hard to achieve their academic goals, it was still worth it to them. Their perseverance can be seen as an example for students today and a connection between the past and the present.



William B. Gilmore



John W. Te Winkel

However, besides having a personal purpose, education also had a Christian, higher purpose for these men. For example, John W. Te Winkel in his oration entitled "De Pen is magtiger dan ze Zwaard," or "The Pen is mightier than the Sword," explores how the pen, or education in general, is more powerful than the sword, or war, and how it has prevailed throughout

history. He also makes the point of the pen's superiority by asking, "Is it not by means of the pen that we are familiar with the realm of nature and ourselves share the kingdom of the heavens?"¹⁶ Without education, people would not be able to read the Bible and know God's Word. William A. Shields also argues in his speech that through education, people learn about the world so that they are accustomed to learning and can do it even better once in heaven, when humanity will learn all of life's secrets. He says, "Here is the true incentive to education, that it is not for this fleeting time, but for eternity; and the higher mental and moral culture we can attain in this world, the greater will be our capacity for happiness in another."¹⁷ These students considered education to be a stepping stone to living closer to God.

The final major theme in these speeches is the pride these men had both for the Netherlands and the United States. Holland, Michigan, was a Dutch colony, and most of the students and faculty at the time were either immigrants or children of immigrants from the Netherlands. Therefore, it makes sense that the students celebrated the Netherlands and its leaders. Te Winkel



William Moerdyk

even gave his oration in Dutch, which most of the people at the commencement would have understood. In William Moerdyk's oration entitled "Trials and Triumphs of Liberty," he praises the Netherlands for pursuing liberty and gaining independence from Spain. He says, "Who is not filled with astonishment and rapture, as he reads of the heroic deeds accomplished by the worthy

founders of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, in their arduous struggle for the liberty of religion and of conscience against the propagandists of the Inquisition and Popery?"¹⁸ While praising the Netherlands, he also brings up the issue of Protestant versus Catholic at the time of the revolution, focusing on religious liberty for the Dutch Protestants from the Spanish Catholics. He continues and says, "For eighty years did the brave champions of Holland liberty endure the invasions of their oppressors, until, coming out victorious, they caused the air to re-echo with the sounds, *freemen!*"¹⁹ He celebrates the national successes of the Netherlands.

However, the Netherlands was not the only country that these students took pride in. After all, they were now living in the United States and, as such, admired it as well. Like the Dutch Revolution, W. Moerdyk praises the Revolution of the United States from Britain and says, "What true born American citizen does not look back upon the history of his country with pride?" He continues and says, "The sons of Columbia...endured hardships and privations; and at last the standard of liberty permanently waved on these western confines, in defiance of the wealth and power of the invader." He and his fellow classmates were proud of the achievements of their adopted country and the liberty that it symbolized. The United States represented a place of freedom for them and the rest of the Dutch immigrants in Holland, Michigan, because they could worship as they pleased. This pride can be seen again in his commentary on the Civil War, which had ended a year before Hope College's first commencement. He says that the war resulted in "the conferring of an equality of rights on all our citizens and subjects, and our whole land is now the asylum of liberty."²⁰ The Civil War made W. Moerdyk and his classmates proud of their nation and what they had achieved.

The students also make comparisons between the Netherlands and the United States. Woltman praises both William of Orange and George Washington, the revolutionary leaders of the Netherlands and the United States respectively, for being exemplary leaders of their great nations. He says in his speech that "...their consummate skill and extraordinary talents were directed only for the interests of the public," and that "their names shall dwell in the memory of the world till the end of time."²¹ He compares the two leaders and admires both of them equally. Likewise, W. Moerdyk tells his audience of primarily Dutch immigrants and descendants: "Ye whose noble ancestors fought and died for the liberty of the Netherlands join on this occasion in celebrating with stringed instruments and songs of liberties, both of your native and adopted lands."²² This exemplifies the double identity and pride that the students had for both the Netherlands and the United States.

All three of these themes can be representative of Hope College and its history. From Christianity to education to its Dutch roots in America, Hope College embodied the values of the class of 1866, and those students embodied the college. The first members of any organization will instill their values in that organization, and this class of students was no exception. Hope College was shaped by its students, but it also shaped them in turn. These men left Hope College with a valuable education based in Christian values, which was probably hard to come by in the American West at the time. Therefore, the coherence between the themes of these orations and the values of Hope College should come as no surprise. These orations provide a valuable insight into the principles of the first graduating class of Hope College and into the development of Hope College as an institution. They still resonate with Hope College today as it strives to continue offering its students a valuable education and an atmosphere to grow spiritually in the Christian faith.



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¹Wynand Wichers, *A Century of Hope, 1866-1966* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 42.

²Wichers, *A Century of Hope*, 66-68.

³Wichers, *A Century of Hope*, 67-68.

⁴Wichers, *A Century of Hope*, 74.

⁵Laura Shears, *Christina C. Van Raalte Gilmore*, 2008.

⁶Wichers, *A Century of Hope*, 104.

⁷William A. Shields, "Man, as he was, is, and is to be," *Hope College Remembrancer: First Commencement*, July 17, 1866, 31.

⁸Ale Buursma, "Skepticism," *Hope College Remembrancer: First Commencement*, July 17, 1866, 35.

⁹Gerrit Dangremond, "Valedictory," *Hope College Remembrancer: First Commencement*, July 17, 1866, 37.

¹⁰Harm Woltman, "Public Opinion," *Hope College Remembrancer: First Commencement*, July 17, 1866, 27.

¹¹Peter Moerdyk, "Salutatory," *Hope College Remembrancer: First Commencement*, July 17, 1866, 24.

¹²Woltman, "Public Opinion," *Remembrancer*, 27.

¹³Dangremond, "Valedictory," *Remembrancer*, 36.

¹⁴Dangremond, "Valedictory," *Remembrancer*, 36.

¹⁵William B. Gilmore, "Hope," *Hope College Remembrancer: First Commencement*, July 17, 1866, 25.

¹⁶John W. Te Winkel, "De Pen is magtiger dan het Zwaard (The Pen is mightier than the Sword)," *Hope College Remembrancer: First Commencement*, July 17, 1866, 33, trans. John Dykstra, February 4, 2016.

¹⁷Shields, "Man, as he was, is, and is to be," *Remembrancer*, 31.

¹⁸William Moerdyk, "Trials and Triumphs of Liberty," *Hope College Remembrancer: First Commencement*, July 17, 1866, 29.

¹⁹W. Moerdyk, "Trials and Triumphs of Liberty," *Remembrancer*, 29.

²⁰W. Moerdyk, "Trials and Triumphs of Liberty," *Remembrancer*, 30.

²¹Woltman, "Public Opinion," *Remembrancer*, 27.

²²W. Moerdyk, "Trials and Triumphs of Liberty," *Remembrancer*, 30.



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