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2-24-1847

Record of Van Raalte Purchased 4,273 of Various Types of Lumber

A. C. Van Raalte

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February 24?, 1847

A record produced by Isaac Fairbanks stating that Van Raalte purchased 4,273 feet of various types of lumber from Macksanby for the amount of \$29.90. Final payment was recorded on May 24 by George N. Smith.

Calvin College Archives: Van Raalte Collection, Box 12, folder 191.

was written in
ACV R coll.
Box 12, folder 191

Mr Van Ralte Old Wing Feb 24 1847

	Bought of Macksauby	
1,292 feet of lumber	at \$17.00 per 1000	- \$21,964
Also 2,981 do of Louie		\$20.86
total 4,273		\$21,998

there is about 123 feet 1 1/2 inches thick
 " " " " 1150 flooring 1 1/4 " "
 " " " " 900 siding 1/2 " "
 " " " " 1800 inch boards
 " " " " 300 2 by 7 and 8 inches

Old Wing Feb 26 1847
 Received on the above fifteen dollars
 Treasr Genl Bankers
 Received payment for Macksauby
 May 24-1847
 Geo. W. Smith

Feb 24, 1847

crops were raised on muck and clay near his university town. Perhaps he did not understand fully the disadvantages of sandy soil, for his own home still standing on the outskirts of Holland, Mich., forms a part of his estate of twenty-eight acres, most of which is extremely poor soil. At any rate, he bought thousands of acres of good land for his people soon after he had made up his mind to settle near the spot where he spent his first nights. There fine crops have been raised these past hundred years.

The writer was musing about the scenes he had beheld himself in the country around Arnhem, and also in Groningen and Friesland, besides the tulip fields near Leiden and Haarlem. He was now less than one mile removed from the home of old Mr. Fairbanks' grandson, who would be coming over with his sister to explain to him the plan conceived in 1846 by Van Raalte. The grandson had erected a large sign in front of his house, saying, "Old Wing Mission Farm." Back of that sign stood the very same house in which the Rev. George N. Smith had lived when Van Raalte came to visit him. The four bedrooms upstairs and two rooms down stairs were still exactly as they were in January 1847. Here Van Raalte rented some rooms, as he said in his letter to Brummelkamp. A few hundred feet to the east, near the creek, was the log cabin of Isaac Fairbanks, land agent among the Indians, and before long justice of the peace. The grandson still held that office in September 1946. It was not long before Van Raalte obtained from the Indians a piece of land, as attested in one of the many

land deeds which the writer found in the Van Raalte home. On that document appear the names of both Fairbanks and Smith. We also have a document dated February 24, 1847, showing that Mr. Fairbanks was buying lumber for Van Raalte, in order that he could soon have his own home.

What puzzled the author was the mystery which so long had surrounded the labors of Van Raalte. One biographer reported in 1892 that Van Raalte had destroyed nearly all his papers, while another in 1922 could find only a few of the thousands that were still to be seen there. One of Holland's leading citizens, the editor of the local newspaper, told the story that the Rev. Van Raalte in 1846 returned to the East and also went to Wisconsin, while in 1923 a book on Van Raalte's settlement proclaimed the news, so often presented before, that the Rev. Smith lived in a "log cabin." All of that was written at a time when dozens of persons could have shown the experts just where Smith's home had been. It was a sturdy frame house, built in 1845, and very similar to some of the houses erected by the Hollanders at Zeeland during the course of the year 1847, according to one person who saw them at that time, "with fine basements."

It would seem that the citizens of Holland have not fully grasped the significance of Van Raalte's work. The man was so great a figure that all others were dwarfed by his giant personality. That did not please some of the other pastors nor the leading citizens among

Febr. 24, 1847

for renting a building? Their poverty must have been great indeed!

We may be sure that Van Raalte and his friends were severely criticized for their failure to finance proper elementary education for their children. Particularly in recent times we are inclined to forget that in Van Raalte's days universal elementary education was far from a reality. Fortunately we have an admirable discussion of this subject by Van Raalte himself, written in a long letter which was addressed in 1852 to Dr. J. Garretson of the Reformed Church. He said: "Now a word about our dear object, our school affairs. It relieves, dear Brother, my mind verij much that you by the goodness of our Heavenly Father did succeed so very well in finding benefactors whose hearts are moved with compassion for this people, who are willing to sacrifice their means for the education of this people. My heart is filled with joy and thanks, that is my anchor of hope for this people in the future. May God bless those benevolent men with spiritual welfare and the sweetest consolation of the assurance that they are doing a great good. Not at once can be seen the fruit. No, it requires time and patience. It is a great and difficult work to elevate an ignorant mass of people: a people out of the lower class filled with European prejudices. But we have not only to struggle with the extreme ignorance but also with the rudeness and hardships of emigration and new settlement. It cannot be imagined very well what there is lost and spoiled by the last vife ijears. I saw it and weep. Still I rejoice that God is raising up friends to

Hegma

lift us up out of the darkness of ignorance and uselessness; and this labor of love will not be in vain. Their is more estimation of education than there is usual among the European emigrants. The religion among the people is a sure pledge of the success. One of the greatest obstacles, however, is the poverty, which is increased verij much this year on account of a perfect failure of the crops. Many are obliged to send their children out for getting the first necessities of life. I hope that our benefactors will give us for this all the necessary allowance."

How difficult it was for Van Raalte to get adequate funds for his people may be seen in other documents found by the present writer in the Van Raalte home. For example, Judge Kellogg on March 25, 1847, wrote Van Raalte that he was "about out of money." Nevertheless, he was willing to send him some middlings and beans. Mr. Harrington would bring the provisions, including "a little corn for the pigs." Kellogg thought he would come along also. "Mr. Wilson will probably come down and get out the timber for a mill, as soon as the weather will permit."

The first bill for lumber was dated February 24, 1847, at the Old Wing Mission. Here Van Raalte was staying with the Rev. George N. Smith. Isaac Fairbanks was their neighbor, as we saw, and he on February 26, 1847, signed a statement under the account that he had received for the seller the sum of fifteen dollars. The lumber was sold by a person named Macksanby, there

being 1,292 feet for \$9.04, and 2,981 feet for \$20.86, the total \$29.90. On May 24, 1847, the Rev. Smith signed his name to the statement at the bottom of the sheet, saying that Van Raalte had now paid in full. Fairbanks added some interesting details, showing that there were

Mr Van Raalte
 Old Wing Feb. 24 1847
 Brought of Mack-sawby
 1292 feet of lumber at \$7.00 per 100 - \$90.4
 Also 2,981 do of Louie - - - - - 208.6
 total 4,273 - - - - - \$299.8

there is about 123 feet 1 1/2 inches thick
 1150 flooring 1 1/4 "
 900 siding 1/2 "
 1800 inch boards
 300 2 by 7 and 8 inches

Old Wing Feb. 26 1847
 Received on the above fifteen dollars
 Chase Fairbanks
 Received payment for Mack-sawby
 May 24-1847 Geo. W. Smith

LUMBER BILL

123 feet 1 1/2 inches thick, 1,150 feet of flooring 1 1/4 inches thick, 900 feet of siding of 1/2 inch thick, 1,800 feet of inch boards, and 300 feet of lumber of 2 7/8 inches thick. In short, Van Raalte was bound to have good building material for his home. This information also

will convince those who did not believe it possible for Mr. Smith to have had a frame house by 1845 that such a thing was a real fact.

On June 4, 1847, Van Raalte wrote a remarkable letter addressed to "the Merchants in lumber on the Kalamazoo River." He said: "The subscriber want 15 m. feet lumber. He wil paj at last 1 October. Because he cannot look after that matter send he the bearer of this Mr. Hesselink to the dealers in lumber along the Kalamazoo. He must ascertain bij whom he cane get this lumber cheapest. He must look out that the lumber have a good measure and not is spoiled; likewise we very sad have get. The dealer in lumber must him only help to make a raft, but Mr. Hesselink wil self the lumber bring to the Blacklake. Mr. Hesselink know the kind of lumber. The subscriber demand the lumber to get for the cheapest rate; it cane be, that he will paj after some weeks already in cash." He signed himself, "Your neighbour, A. C. Van Raalte. Holland, Ottawa, Michigan, 4 June 1847." On the next page of this document there was written a note to the fact that on this order the following amounts were delivered: 10,711 Field's, 1,852 Carter's, and 5,084 Fisher's, total 17,647 feet for \$9.70. This note was dated Newark, June 7, 1847. In a later hand we read: "Received payment A. Carter Co. by S. P. Wade." It is interesting to note that here we have one of the first letters written by Van Raalte in the English language. He had not studied English in his native land, and not until he was on the steamship the *Southerner* did he begin to become acquainted with that