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June, 1849

The report of the Rev. Isaac Wyckoff, Albany, New York, following his visit to the Holland Colony and other Dutch immigrant settlements in the Middle West.

This copy is a translation of the report which appeared in De Grondwet, November 7, 1911. Lucas also has a translation in his book, Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings, vol. I, pp. 449ff.

This is a very valuable report of the Colony. His visit led the colonists to join the old Dutch Reformed Church in the East in 1850.

another trans. in Lucas,
Dutch Am Mem. & Related
Writing, vol. 2, p. 449 ff.

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1849
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HISTORICAL SKETCHES FROM COLONIAL LIFE

Edited by G. Van Schelven

De Grondwet

November 7, 1911

**XLII-A. REPORT OF A VISIT TO THE HOLLAND COLONIES
IN MICHIGAN AND WISCONSIN,**

by Rev. Isaac N. Wyckoff, D.D., in 1849
Original English text.

The undersigned begs leave respect fully to report the fulfillment of his mission to the Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of North America.

Agreeably to your wishes and instructions, after I had fulfilled the objects of my delegation to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, conveyed at Pittsburg, I went on my way to the Holland Colony. I would, first of all, gratefully acknowledge the goodness of God and the kindness of Christian men in all my journey. Not a day has my health been in any wise impaired - not a day have I been hindered by stress of weather, from prosecuting my mission. Everywhere the kindest personal attentions and the best facilities for traveling have been offered by the Christian brethren.

My journey was made from Pittsburg by public conveyance through Beaver Canal, and by stage to Cleveland, by steamboat to Detroit, by railroad to Kalamazoo, by mail wagon to Allegan, and then by the voluntary and gratuitous favor of Judge Kellogg's team and man, to the Colony. Such interest as Judge Kellogg (a New Englander) and his family have shown to our Holland brethren ought to be recorded here. He hospitably entertained Mrs. Van Raalte and children for three months, while a house was erecting in the wilds of the Colony for her reception. He has several times given up his

kitchen and other parts of his dwelling, and the whole of another house he owns, to accommodate the Hollanders as they were going through. He has preserved and defended the immigrants from imposition and oppression, and stood by them, as they gratefully express it, "mit raad en daat" - counsel and deed - in all their difficulties. He traveled with the Rev. Van Raalte to examine lands, and greatly contributed to the selection of the glorious country which the Colony now occupies. The Dutch Church thanks him, and may God bless him and his for such kindness!

It was a novel ride, and not without peril, from Allegan to the Colony (twenty-five miles). With a noble span of horses and a wagon made for the purpose, we hardly reached the place in eleven hours, "with whole bones." How, then, must the colonists have struggled with ^{or} ~~ex~~-teams, and such wagons as they could get, to reach the place!

My reception, as your messenger, by the Colony, was almost literally with a shout of joy. There had been sorrow in the Colony over many things, and not least over the fact that the Dutch Church (which they had hoped would have received the poor immigrants, flying in poverty from persecutions, with sympathizing hearts and open arms) had seemed to take almost no interest at all in them. With the exception of a few individual brethren, they mourned that the Dutch Church counted them strangers, and had no word of encouragement, no hand of help for them. The reaction, therefore, was electrical. To think that we at last felt for them, cared for them, were willing to help them, though, late, shot through every heart, and there were many thanksgivings to God for this work of love, and many benedictions on the head of your representative.

"Out of their deep poverty" shone "the riches of their liberality" to your commissioner. They feasted us with all they had, but it was mainly a change in pickled pork and fine potatoes. But they begin to have butter and eggs, and when time permits they can get fish out of the lake.

It did not enter into my commission to examine their physical circumstances, and yet I doubt not that both you and many others will be pleased to know some particulars of their locality, progress of settlement, and condition; and I am happy to be able to satisfy so just a curiosity, in a way that will gratify every benevolent heart.

I arrived on Thursday evening, June 1st. My plan was to assemble the ministers on Saturday, make our overtures, and be ready to start for Wisconsin on Monday. But brother Van Raalte could not consent to so early a departure. First, the ministerial brethren could not be assembled till Monday, for expresses had to be sent for all. And second, I must see every settlement, in order to give a fair account. The appeal was so earnest and reasonable, that I consented to remain.

On Friday, then, I visited the city of Holland. On Saturday I walked from morning to night, along Indian trails, from one clearing and settlement to another in the vicinity. On Monday the Classis met. On Tuesday, mounted on the Doctor's horse (the only horse in the Colony) without a saddle, and domine Van Raalte and others walking and leading the way, we went forth to visit the several "country" churches. Swam the Black River, halted at Groningen, the nearest "province", proceeded on a trail to Zeeland, and spent the night with Rev. Van der Meulen's congregation. Wednesday started early, went by the church of Drenthe, where we dined on butter and bread and

coffee and started for Vriesland, but got lost on our way, and had to employ a good woman as our guide. We at last found Rev. Ypma, and after looking over his province, and being hospitably entertained, and spending the night with him, we returned through the rain next morning to the city. In my route I gathered the following statistics:

The city of Holland, with its environs contains 235 houses; Groningen, 30; Zeeland, 175; Drenthe, 45; Vriesland, 69; Overysel, 35; Graafschap, 50. In all about 630 houses, which, at an average of five souls to a house, will make the population 3,000 souls. Some of the farms have two acres chopped and cleared, others five, and so on up to eighty; so that it may be fairly estimated that there are now three thousand acres cut and in progress of clearing.

The face of the country, which I had supposed was very flat, is pleasantly diversified with hill and valley, lake and stream. The streams are fed by large cranberry marshes, which, being themselves supplied by springs, send forth clear and healthy waters. I saw no lands which cannot be easily drained, so as to make them excellent for hay culture. It is a remarkable provision of nature, that along the several rivers of Michigan there are broad tracts of natural meadow, affording abundance of pasture for summer, and hay for winter. If the character of the forest is a proper index of the quality of the land on which it grows, then the soil is of the most fruitful kind. The trees are wonderful to a dweller on the Hudson. Many and many an oak have I seen from two to three foot in diameter, straight as an arrow, and having from nine to twelve post cuts, of eight feet each, before you reach the limbs. There are thousands of white pines

that will yield from two to three thousand feet of clear inch boarding. I measured the stump of an oak five and a half feet in diameter. Three men (I ^{believe} believe one) could only touch the tips of our fingers around an ancient sycamore. The most beautiful sugar maples grow on the heavy soils. Black walnut and curled and bird's eye maple and wild cherry trees, all of great dimensions, are plenty, and in many parts hemlocks of the most stately proportions. Wherever the land is sufficiently cultivated, the wheat is splendid, rank in growth, and rich in color. Potatoes and turnips of the best quality will be abundant this year, and probably also Indian corn. The prospects of agriculture are full of hope and promise. The heart of the people rejoices, amidst all their privations, in the mercy of God, which has given them such a goodly land, and such great progress.

A most cheering fact further encourage the people. It was anticipated from the dark color of the water in the river, and lake, indicating that drained a soil deeply filled with vegetable matter, or flowing with muck swamps of great depth, that the location would be unhealthy. In the first year that dark anticipation seemed considerably to be realized, for not a few sickened and some died. But just as soon as the people became properly housed, this fear entirely subsided, for directly the colonists enjoyed an unusual average of health. During my whole visit I did not see or hear of a sick person, and this fact is the more conclusive, as this spring has been uncommonly wet, and all the lower grounds have more or less surface water upon them. The early sickness was evidently owing, not to badness of climate and air, but to exposure to the inclemency of the elements, and want of nourishing food.

I ought, perhaps, to mention in this connection that the Colony has uncommon natural advantages. There is a water power on the Black River driving two saw mills, to which a grist mill will soon be added, and at other points, shingle and lath factories, and whatever else requires water power, may be added. And there is scarcely on the face of the whole earth, a more beautiful harbor for all manner of vessels than the Black Lake. It is about five miles long, and varies from a quarter to a mile and a half broad, and has a depth varying from seven feet within twenty feet of the city strand to twenty, thirty, fifty and even eighty feet. Like all rivers on the eastern shore, its outlet is obstructed by the sandbars of Lake Michigan, but let a channel and a haven once be formed, and it is the general opinion of all disinterested persons it will be the most desirable harbor and wintering place on all the western side of the peninsula.

For one thousand dollars, a pier and plank road of five hundred and sixty yards can be constructed, which will immediately increase the ^{trade} tide ten or one hundred fold. A corps of engineers of the General Government is now on the lake making an exact topographical survey of the lake and waters of Lake Michigan at its mouth. Colonel ^hBowes, the experienced and gentlemanly leader of the corps, spoke in the highest terms of the beauty and facilities of the lake and harbor.

An enterprising gentleman has just finished and set in operation a steam sawmill, which operates well, and is capable, with an ordinary wind, of driving six saws. A tannery is in progress of erection, which will find inexhaustible quantities of quercitron and hemlock bark in the neighborhood; and within the limits of the city is a ship-yard, which will be prepared to

*Structure
necessary
See
original*

build all kinds of crafts, and the live oak for hulks and for plan, and the magnificent pines for masts and spars, are in sight on the shore of the lake.

From this description of the physical circumstances of the Colony, we will turn to the direct object of your commission, which was to inquire into the religious and ecclesiastical relations of this people, to express to them the sympathy of our Church, to make an overture for church relation, and to offer such aid in there straightness as might be necessary and desirable. To obtain this information, Rev. Van Raalte, deemed it would be expedient to assemble the ministers and the elders of the churches. Accordingly he dispatched letter and messengers to the several ministers and consistories, inviting them to a conference with me on Monday, June 4th. Quite a large company attended, and having opened the conference with prayer and a psalm, we spent nearly the whole day in giving and receiving information and comparing ideas. From the assembled brethren I obtained the following facts and statistics. There are seven congregations and four ministers, tacitly constituting the Classis of Holland:

	Families	Communicants
1. Holland, Van Raalte	225	250
2. Zeeland, V.d. Meulen	175	225
3. Vriesland, Ypma	69	125
4. Overijssel, Bolks	35	80
5. Graafschap,*)	50	100
6. Drenthe,#)	45	79
7. Groningen,	30	63

*) Has called Rev. Mr. Klyn

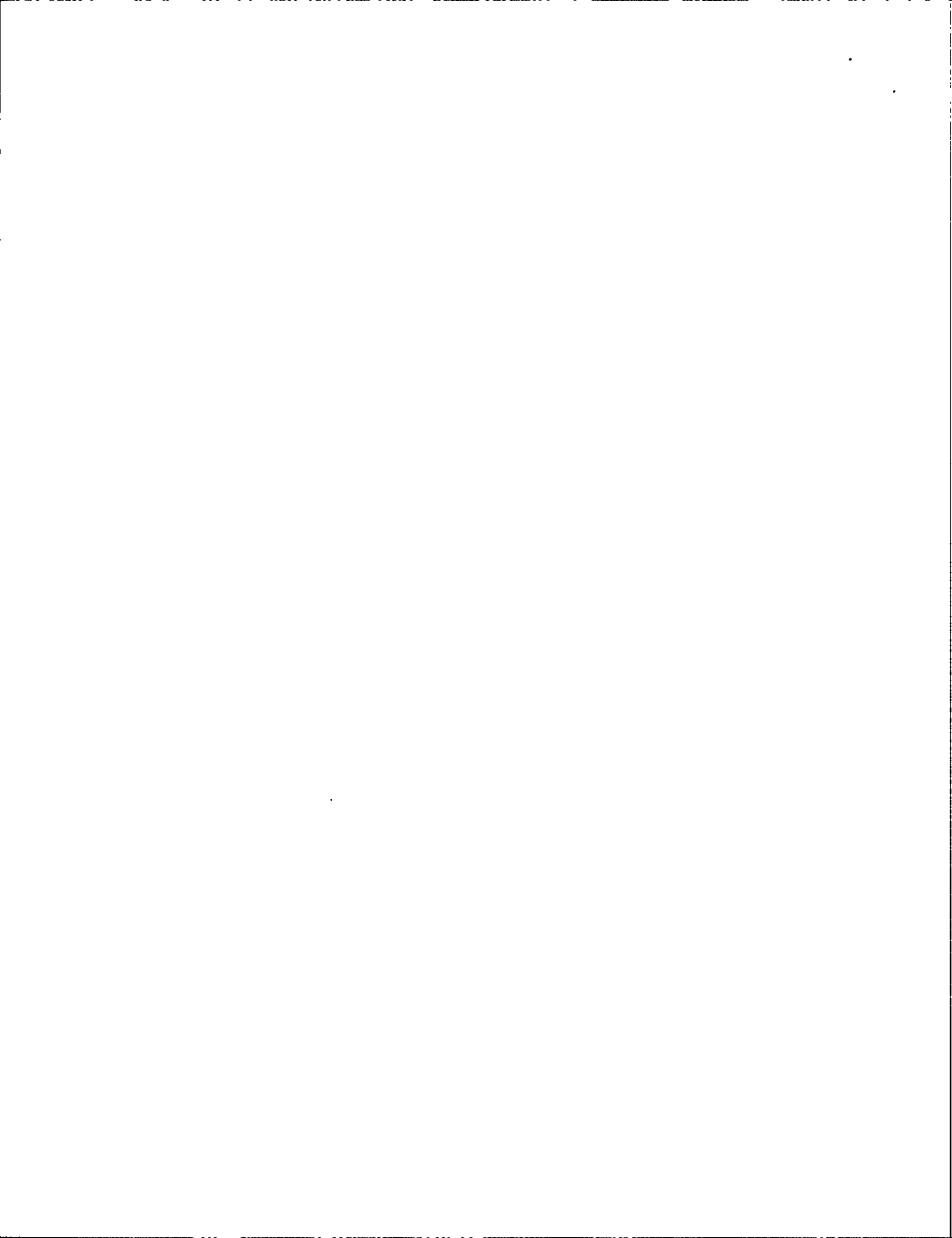
#) Has made a call, but without success.

Five of these congregations have erected houses of worship. That of Zeeland is forty-five by sixty feet, built of handsomely ^B squared cedar logs, with a cupola and bell, and is quite an ornamental building. The Holland house was first built, and was more hastily and less neatly constructed. The others are comfortable log houses.

Of all the communicants in these churches it may be said, they are praying and hopefully converted persons. Their religious habits are very strict and devout. They do all things with prayer and praise. They sing and pray in the morning, after their dinner and after their supper. They pray when they meet for business. At a bee (or meeting for common work) they pray. The Common Council of the city opens its sittings with prayer. The appearance and tone of piety is purer and higher than anything I have ever seen, and seemed like the primitive Christians, and most beautiful.

The Colony is paying as much attention as possible to schools and Christian education. They have a Dutch school and an English one in the city; at Zeeland a Dutch school, and will soon have an English school, and all the rest will follow. The teachers must be godly persons, who, besides teaching reading and writing, must see that the children are prepared on the Catechism, and that they are taught to sing the Psalms. The ministers catechise all the children once a week, and if they are hindered, the elders take their place.

The pecuniary resources of the Church are very low. The funds of the people, which were very limited, have been exhausted in the purchase of land and in making their improvements, private and public, until there is nothing left.



The pastors have but little support, some of them literally none, from their churches. They have been obliged to struggle and work and suffer want, just as their people have done. But they live in faith and hope of better times. They rejoice that the Lord has kept them alive, and given them joy over their flocks in the dark and untrodden wilderness.

HISTORICAL SKETCHES FROM COLONIAL LIFE

Edited by G. Van Schelven

De Grondwet

November 14, 1911

XLII-B. REPORT OF A VISIT TO THE HOLLAND COLONIES
IN MICHIGAN AND WISCONSIN,

by Rev. Isaac N. Wyckoff, D.D., in 1849
Original English text.

At the Classical meeting it was soon made known that the brethren were a little afraid of entering into ecclesiastical connection with us, although they believe in the union of brethren, and sigh for Christian sympathy and association. They have so felt to the quick the falling chain of ecclesiastical domination, and have seen with sorrow how exact organization, according to human rules, leads to formality on the one hand, and to oppression of tender conscience on the other, that they hardly knew what to say. I protested, of course, that it was the farthest from our thought to bring them in bondage to men, or to exercise ecclesiastical tyranny over them. And I stated that they would be most perfectly free, at any time they found an ecclesiastical connection opposed to their religious prosperity and enjoyment, to bid us a fraternal adieu, and be by themselves again.

On comparison of doctrine, a perfect agreement with our standards was found. In the order of their churches, they believe each church and consistory should direct and manage its own concerns; and incline to the idea that an appellate jurisdiction of superior judicatories is not so scriptural as a kind and fraternal conference and advice. Each of their churches appoint as many elders as seem desirable, and they are always in office until they are dismissed as guilty and unworthy, or removed by death.

As the result, they agreed, with those explanations, to join our Synod. It was deemed best, that they should not merge themselves into our existing Classis of Michigan, but unite as a separate Classis with our Northern Synod. They will, however correspond by delegates with our Classes there. To this arrangement I saw no insuperable objection, and I would report the Classis of Holland accordingly.

On the subject of missionary aid the brethren expressed most singular and honorable objections. They thought it seemed best, that the obligation of the churches to support them as pastors should not be impaired by the hope of foreign aid, and that until the churches were able suitably to take care of the pastors, they must suffer with their people. That they were all sadly poor was true, but they saw no example in the Scriptures in which a suffering church or people asked for aid, and therefore, did not feel at liberty in their conscience to do it.

But there was a precedent in the Scriptures, in which, when it was known that the churches in Judea suffered, other churches sent them supplies, not as by solicitation, but out of brotherly love and sympathy, send a free gift to the colony, to be appropriated as the ministers and elders deem the necessities of the saints demanded, they would receive and acknowledge it with all gratitude in the Lord.

I felt that this was taking high and holy ground, and I hope it may be considered with the powers of the Missionary Board to meet their hallowed scruples in this matter. And whether the Board can do this or not, there is one form in which they can minister to the necessity of the immigrants, and in this form I ventured to take the liberty to pledge their aid.

There are scattering companies of Hollanders at Kalamazoo, Grandville, Grand Haven, Allegan, and a number of surrounding places, which the brethren in the Colony endeavor to supply. But this supply is extremely inconvenient and laborious for them. For example, Allegan is thirty miles from the Colony. The ministers have no horses, and to walk afoot thirty miles out, and preach three times on the Sabbath, is very exhausting work, when they must clamber their way often by blazed trees and along Indian trails. The brethren very much wished they had a missionary or itinerant brother, who should have these small and scattered flocks under his sole care. I promised that as soon as they could call a suitable man, and report to you, you would put him on the footing of your most favored country missionaries. The Rev. Mr. Klyn will come through New York. He has sacrificed much to this service. The Graafschap church to which he is called is struggling under difficulties. Any token of love from you, or the New York churches, to him, will be very opportune.

The length of time necessarily spent in Michigan has already thrown me a week beyond my engagement to return, and it became out of my power to visit the settlements and churches in Wisconsin. I made a visit to Milwaukee, and spent the Sabbath with the church there. There are about sixty Holland families, comprising seventy-five communicants, most located on the south side of Milwaukee run, where they have built a very decent house of worship. They have no minister at present, and they compelled me to attempt to preach to them in the Holland language. Then I ascertained

that there is a church in the neighborhood of Sheboygan, under the care of the Rev. Zonne, embracing about eighty families, and perhaps the same number of communicants.

At Waupun, six miles from Fond du Lac, the head of the Winnebago Lake, there is a settlement of thirty families or more, and a regularly organized church, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Baay, containing more than forty members.

There is also a rising settlement eight or ten miles out of Milwaukee, consisting of sixteen families, who have neither organization nor minister. I am informed by Mr. Baay of the willingness of himself and church to connect themselves with our Church, and their thankfulness for any aid our Missionary Board may please to give. I have written to him, advising him to join the Holland Classis, until a Wisconsin Classis can be formed.

On my return I ascertained that there was a sufficient number of Holland immigrants at Buffalo to form a respectable church; that they had been just ready to organize under the ministry of the Rev. Van Malsen, a most godly and estimable young man, when it pleased God to remove him by death, and that no other movement has since been made among them. There is also an organized church at Pickleville and Pulteneyville, eighteen miles from Rochester, under the care of the Presbytery of Steuben, to which the Rev. John Visscher has been sent as a missionary by the Home Missionary Society of the Old School Presbyterian Church.

There is another organized church of Holland^{ers} at Rochester, under care of Presbytery, to which the Rev. A. B. Veenhuisen ministers. Your commissioner felt a disagreeable emotion brethren, agreeing with our Church

at the thought that these Holland

in every particular of standards, doctrine and government, should have been so long neglected by us that at last they must fall into the hands of strangers to their language and customs. But still, thanks are due to, God, and to our Presbyterian brethren, that the poor people were provided with the bread of life.

On the whole, I consider the Holland Colony in Michigan most wisely located in Divine Providence. There are many excellent men in the State who cordially favor its interests. The State has enacted a law appropriating three thousand acres of land to make roads in the Colony and four thousand for the erection of a pier and other facilities for convenience. The ministers and city council importuned me until I could not refuse to promise them, as soon as possible, to negotiate for them the loan of a thousand dollars on the whole property of the city, consisting of eleven contiguous eighty-acre lots, for the purpose of building this pier. A spirit of brotherly kindness and philanthropy reigns among these colonists, which must be acceptable before God as it is beautiful before men. A case will illustrate this. Two godly parents have six children, both died, leaving no relations or support for their orphans. Immediately six families adopted each one of the orphans, to bring them up in all respects as their own, and one of these families (brother Van Raalte's) has six of its own. It is a most remarkable community, and God will sustain and bless it, and I feel that it will be a blessing and an honor to us to be His instruments in this matter.

In conclusion, if I have been more particular and prolix in this report than is usual, I think you will pardon me. I judge you wish not for

generalities, but for particulars, and have endeavored to furnish them. My journey has been very fatiguing, but if you should have as much pleasure in hearing and ministering as I have had in observing and detailing, we shall all be amply repaid for this effort of Christian benevolence.

Respectfully submitted,

Albany, N.Y. I.N. Wyckoff