

Hope College

## Hope College Digital Commons

---

Van Raalte Papers: 1860-1869

Van Raalte Papers

---

3-13-1867

### The Minutes of the Consistory of Hope Church

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/vrp\\_1860s](https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/vrp_1860s)

The original documents are held in The Joint Archives of Holland. This digitized material is intended for personal research/study only. The original documents may not be reproduced for commercial use in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without permission in writing from [The Joint Archives of Holland](#).

---

#### Recommended Citation

"The Minutes of the Consistory of Hope Church" (1867). *Van Raalte Papers: 1860-1869*. 414.  
[https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/vrp\\_1860s/414](https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/vrp_1860s/414)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Van Raalte Papers at Hope College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Van Raalte Papers: 1860-1869 by an authorized administrator of Hope College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@hope.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@hope.edu).

13 March 1867

Holland, Michigan

In the minutes of the Consistory of Hope Church, there is a full transcription of the letter that Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte, President of the Consistory of the First Reformed Church, wrote to the Consistory of the Hope Church, urging that congregation not accept any new members in the church who were Masons.

In English.

Original in the Joint Archives of Holland, Minutes of the Second Reformed Church (later known as Hope Church), volume I, pp. 42-43.

Minutes, Second Reformed (Wape) Church, vol. I Consistorial Minutes following members: Rev. A. J. Stewart, Dr. Ledeboer and Wm. A. Shields. Adjournment.

Closed with prayer by Rev. A. J. Stewart.

W. B. Gilmore Clk.

Holland, Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>, 1867.

Consistory met at the Parsonage March 13<sup>th</sup>.  
Prayer by the Pastor. Members present— Rev. A. J. Stewart in the chair— Elders Grotenhuis and Gilmore— Deacons J. E. Winkel and Shields.

The report of W. B. Gilmore of money received and paid out while in the office of Deacon was read and accepted:

Money received \$12.<sup>25</sup>; Money paid \$12.<sup>20</sup>

The Article of Incorporation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> R. P. D. Church of Holland was read, approved, and ordered to be recorded. (See paper A.)

On motion, Elders Ledeboer and Grotenhuis were appointed a committee to secure the Deed for the Church lots presented by Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D. D.

According to previous notice an informal meeting of the congregation was held in the 2<sup>nd</sup> R. P. D. C. March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1867, to take into consideration the building of a Parsonage. The necessity of a Parsonage was admitted, and the Consistory authorized to go forward with the work.

A letter was received from the Consistory of the 1<sup>st</sup> R. P. D. Church of Holland. It was read, and the following is a copy:

Holland, Mich., Jan. 1867.

The Rev. Consistory of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ref. Dutch Church of Holland.

Beloved Brethren:— Please bear with us in addressing you on the subject of the Secret Society of the Free Masons, and allow us to bring our objections before you against the connection of Church members with that Society.

We know every one of the Asiatic churches did receive her own epistle of Jesus, and was held respon-

sible for her own peculiar field of action. Yet allow us, on account of our close connection and the mutual influence on one another and duties towards one another. We believe this connection to be unworthy the Church of Christ, especially on account of the abuse of the Oath.

The oath belongs to the public adoration of God to his divine service: Deut. X: 13. - Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

Therefore we believe the oath to be allowed when the magistrates demand it of subjects; or when necessity requires us thereby to conform fidelity and truth, to the glory of God, and the safety of our neighbor.

Then the sacred oath ought not to be used for light-aboring ends. It is said that the Society is harmless and innocent; that the oath is only used to bring about attraction, a certain reverence, and to make the Society more efficient for works of love. This refuge of strength for heathen idolatry is below the light-living and light-spreading character of Christendom.

Then, we deem it unmanly and unchristianlike to swear away to man our sacred privilege to be a witness for truth: our high calling of giving testimony must remain free, and only subject to God and conscience.

This Society requires the oath of secrecy, even before the nature and working of the Society is known.

And, even if it was known, how can a Christian swear secrecy to a body of men, even if that body was as holy as the Church of God, where the constant change of persons and circumstances at any moment may reveal to him facts which he may be obliged for God's glory and men's welfare to uncover?

Dear Brethren, may the Lord give us harmony on this subject for Jesus' sake.

With love and best wishes,

Your Brother in Christ,

A. C. Van Raalte.

Per order of the Consistory of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reformed Dutch Church of Holland.

Rev. A. J. Stewart was authorized to reply.

Adjournment.

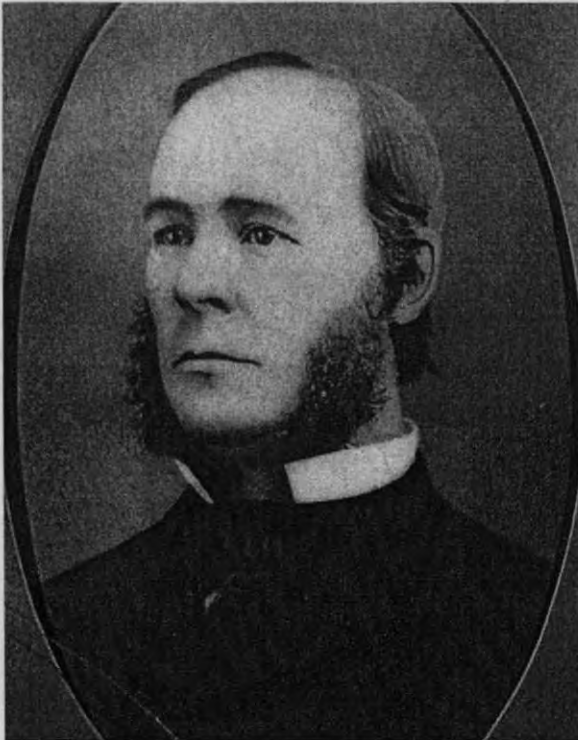
Benediction by the Pastor.

Holland, Mar. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1867.

W. B. Gilmore Clk.

*Consistential Minutes  
Second Reformed (Hope)  
Church, I, 2-15*

He also guided Hope Church through two important challenges: one to their understanding of qualifications for church membership and the other to their perseverance in the face of a fiercely destructive fire.



*Rev. Abel T. Stewart*

*Source: Hope Church, Holland, Michigan materials, Joint Archives of Holland*

**Testing**

Within his first year at Hope Church Rev. Stewart and the consistory of Hope Church received a challenge from the consistory of the First Reformed Church. Their response helped to spare Hope Church from many of the divisive tensions that led years later to the expulsion of First Reformed Church from its beloved Pillar Church building.

Minutes of the consistory meeting of March 13, 1867 record receiving and reading the following letter from the consistory of the First Reformed Church of Holland:

Holland, Mich., Jan 1867.

The Rev'd Consistory of the 2nd Ref. Dutch Church of Holland.

Beloved Brethren: \_\_

Please bear with us in addressing you on the subject of the Secret Society of the Free Masons, and allow us to bring our objections before you against the connection of Church members with that Society.

We know every one of the Asiatic churches did receive her own epistle of Jesus, and was held responsible for her own peculiar field of action. Yet allow us, on account of our close connection and the mutual influence on one another and duties towards one another. We believe this connection to be unworthy the Church of Christ, especially on account of the abuse of the Oath.

The oath belongs to the public adoration of God to his divine service: Deut. VI:13. \_\_Thou shalt fear the the [sic] Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

Therefore we believe the oath to be allowed when the magistrates demand it of subjects; or when necessity requires us thereby to confirm fidelity and truth, to the glory of God, and the safety of our neighbor.

Then the sacred oath ought not to be used for light-abhorring ends. It is said that the Society is harmless and innocent; that the oath is only used to bring about attraction, a certain reverence, and to make the Society more efficient for works of love. This refuge of strength for heathen idolatry is below the light-living and light-spreading character of Christendom.

Then, we deem it unmanly and unchristianlike to swear away to man our sacred privilege to be a witness for truth: our high calling of giving testimony must remain free, and only subject to God and conscience.

This Society requires the oath of secrecy, even before the nature and working of the Society is known. And, even if it was known, how can a Christian swear secrecy to a body of men, even if that body was as holy as the Church of God, where the constant change of persons and circumstances at any moment may reveal to him facts which he may be obliged for God's glory and men's welfare to uncover?

Dear Brethren, may the Lord give us harmony on this subject, for Jesus' sake.

With love and best wishes,

Your Brother in Christ,

A. C. Van Raalte,

Per order of the Consistory of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reformed Dutch Church of Holland.<sup>46</sup>

The consistory of Hope Church authorized Rev. Stewart to draft a reply. At an informal meeting on April 18, the consistory adopted a resolution and read and approved the reply written by Rev. Stewart. The resolution admonished Free Masons who were members of Hope Church to withdraw from the lodge, and the letter provided reasons why Hope Church would accept the membership of Free Masons who met the criteria set for all seeking membership:

Resolved, That the Consistory admonish these brethren belonging to the Order of Free Masons to cease their connection with that body, in order that peace and harmony may prevail among us and others of our brethren who deem such connection contrary to the Word of God.<sup>47</sup>

Holland, Mich. Apr. 9<sup>th</sup> 1867

To the Consistory of the 1st Refd Prot. Dutch Church of Holland.

Dear Brethren:\_\_\_

Your letter, sent to us the last week in February, containing "objections against the connection of our Church members with the Society of Free Masons" has been carefully considered.

---

<sup>46</sup> *Consistorial Minutes*, vol. 1, 42-43. This letter did not arrive out of the blue. As early as 1853, minutes of the Holland Classis indicate a discussion about Freemasonry. In response to a Holland church member's question "whether or not it is lawful for a member of the church to be a Freemason," the response of Holland Classis was "All look upon it as works of darkness, and thus unlawful for a (church) member." *Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858*, trans. by a Joint Committee of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. 2nd edn. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), 144. According to the March 6, 1866, consistory minutes of the First Reformed Church of Holland, there was "general agreement that members of the Masonic Lodge should not be admitted to the Lord's table," and a month later that consistory added theater attendance as an additional prohibition for those partaking of communion. October 22, 1866, of the Consistory of First Reformed Church of Holland stated the plan: "Since the English, or Second Church locally, seems to have no objection to receiving members of the Masonic Lodge into the fellowship of their congregation and admit them to the table of the Lord, it was decided that it is our calling in a Christian protest to witness against this, following the church order." The following month's minutes indicate in response to a question raised by Elder Keppel, "the pastor replied that he has prepared a protest to the local Second church concerning their acceptance of members of their congregation who are Masons." "Minutes of the Ninth Street CRC, of Holland, Michigan November 5, 1850-May 24, 1855," trans. William and Althea Buursma, 2000, 259a-259b, 263a, 271-272.

<sup>47</sup> *Consistorial Minutes*, vol. 1, 44.

The majority of us do not see the subject in the light that you do. To us, Free Masonry seems like some other things, a matter about which Christians do and may conscientiously differ.

The persons of that Order admitted to our Church answered the requirements of the 81. question of the Catechism, and we could not refuse to receive them.

They do not belong to the character described under the 82. question, and we cannot exclude them.

We appreciate your letter, and the kind spirit in which it is written; and, for the sake of harmony, we will endeavor to persuade these brethren to withdraw from their society. And we desire you to ask yourselves whether, on a view of the whole subject, it would not be better for you, as well as for us, to receive these people into the Church on their giving evidence of conversion; and then teach them a better way.

With great respect and Christian love, we remain your Brethren in Christ  
Abel. T. Stewart, Pastor<sup>48</sup>

Consistory minutes of the First Reformed church reveal its response to the letter from Hope Church: President Rev. Van Raalte "reports that an answer to the protest sent to the Second church about membership in the Masonic order has been received. In a very irenic manner they have given their reasons why they are of a different opinion than we. It was decided to bring the matter to classis and afterward to synod."<sup>49</sup> Three months later, Rev. Van Raalte told his congregation that he wanted to "step aside," asked consistory "to take steps to call another pastor for 1st Reformed Church," and recommended the splitting of First Reformed Church into "two manageable congregations" (the genesis of a Third Reformed Church).<sup>50</sup>

Influenced by the Christian Reformed Church's decision in 1867 to ban by synodical order membership in lodges such as the Masons and Odd Fellows, Wisconsin Classis and Holland Classis of the Reformed Church in America in the following year asked the General Synod of the RCA to declare membership in the lodge and in the church incompatible and to condemn Masonry.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, the churches of the East, whose

---

<sup>48</sup> *Consistorial Minutes*, vol. 1, 44-45.

<sup>49</sup> "Minutes of the Ninth Street CRC, of Holland, Michigan November 5, 1850-May 24, 1855," trans. William and Althea Buursma, 2000, 288.

<sup>50</sup> "Minutes of the Ninth Street CRC, of Holland, Michigan November 5, 1850-May 24, 1855," trans. William and Althea Buursma, 2000, 292.

<sup>51</sup> Elton J. Bruins and Robert P. Swierenga, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 114.



votes prevailed, viewed lodge membership as compatible with Christianity, and left membership in lodges up to individual consciences.<sup>52</sup>

Unwilling to accept the RCA Synod's vote, the Wisconsin and Holland Classes in 1869 presented overtures to reverse the decision of the previous year, and the Synod referred the matter to a committee. The response of that committee in 1870 was that the 1868 decision would not be overturned for two reasons: to do so would have set up a new (in other words, unbiblical) test of membership, and it would have interfered with the right of the consistory of each congregation to decide who could and could not be church members.<sup>53</sup>

Hope Church, which belonged to the Michigan Classis, was somewhat removed from the controversy. If it had any requests for membership from members of lodges, it was not about to deny membership on that basis alone. In fact, it even allowed the Oddfellows Lodge to conduct in Hope Church the funeral service of John Aling, a member of the Oddfellows Lodge. Adding diversity to the hospitality extended by Hope Church, the funeral sermon at that service was preached in Dutch by Rev. H. Uiterwijk (Henry Utterwick) of Holland's Third Reformed Church.<sup>54</sup>

### A Christmas Interlude

After slogging through pages of consistory minutes, General Synod proceedings and a funeral, it's high time for an interlude, a look back to Christmas-tide 1866. In January 1867, Deacon William A. Shields sent two letters to *The Christian Intelligencer* relating

---

<sup>52</sup> Elton J. Bruins and Robert P. Swierenga, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 113.

<sup>53</sup> Elton J. Bruins and Robert P. Swierenga, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 115.

<sup>54</sup> *Holland City News*, 10 June 1876, 5. "Pillar Church Families by Head of Household" lists Jan Aaling, a likely alternate spelling of John Aling, as a member of what was the First Reformed Dutch Church of Holland. Retrieved from [http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family\\_history\\_resources/Pillar%20Families.pdf](http://www.calvin.edu/hh/family_history_resources/Pillar%20Families.pdf). He was not likely a member of that congregation and of the Oddfellows Lodge at the same time. Members of Hope Church who were active in the local Unity Lodge of Freemasons included Jacob O. Doesburg, Gerrit Van Schelven, E. Herold, E. J. Harrington, and others. Retrieved from <http://ottawa.migenweb.net/holland/history/1882history.html#SOCIETIES>.

**Hope Church,**

**Holland, Michigan:**

**The First  
150 Years**

**By**

**Judy Tanis Parr**

