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Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte  
(1811-1876)

Courtesy of Holland Museum  
Collection at the Joint Archives  
of Holland

## MARITIME NAMESAKES OF A.C. VAN RAALTE

by GEOFFREY D. REYNOLDS

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*The story of the Reverend Albertus C. Van Raalte, his guidance in creating a Dutch settlement on the Great Lakes in the mid-Nineteenth Century, and his efforts to establish a deep-draft harbor at Holland, Michigan, are fully chronicled in previous issues (Winter 1968: "Pilgrimage to Paradox: The Holland Harbor Questions" and Spring 1971: "Dutch Settlement of Great Lakes Cities"). Here, the author reminds us of the ships that carried Van Raalte's name and their incredible lives through an amazing number of years.*

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Little is known of the influence A.C. Van Raalte exerted on the maritime history of the Great Lakes other than his own frustrating efforts to open a channel and harbor in Black Lake (now Lake Macatawa) in the community he founded in 1847. However, history records at least two vessels that plied the Great Lakes and bore his name for over 80 years.

### Coastal Schooner

The first — a small, two-masted coastal schooner, bearing the founder's name, did take hold and thrive along the eastern Lake Michigan shoreline. Built in 1850 at Michigan City, Indiana, the *A.C. Van Raalte* measured 44' x 12'5" x 4'5", and 50 tons burden.<sup>1</sup>

During that season she shared in the emerging, brisk maritime trade on Grand Traverse Bay boasting 163 steamers and 40 sail vessels.<sup>2</sup>

In June 1859, the schooner was refitted and assigned to the Grand Traverse Bay and Grand Haven route for the season. She was described as a splendid, fast, sailing schooner "expressly for carrying families, with their furniture, provisions, cattle, etc." to run regularly

between Grand Traverse Bay and Grand Haven during the season touching at Traverse City, Elk Rapids, Northport, Manistee and Muskegon.<sup>3</sup>

She continued on this route until the 1859 shipping season closed, when she most likely remained in the area for the winter. While this is hard to verify, news of the schooners *Hamlet* and *Telegraph* arriving first for the season at Northport from Chicago on March 6 and 12 indicates she remained in the bay during the winter.

Later that week a strong Northwester, which prevailed for several days, drove the floating ice from the lower end of the Bay up to the shore, blockaded all vessels, and extended for several miles out into the Bay. Trapped in the 16-inch-thick ice, the schooner was slowly crushed to pieces in East Bay while under the command of Captain O. Evans. Soon after this event she was declared a total loss by Captain Evans and her owners and removed from maritime registers.<sup>4</sup> Despite searches through the years and a 1999 survey, divers have yielded no evidence of her remains.

### Steamer...

The second vessel to carry the Holland founder's name was built as a passenger and freight steamer and finished her maritime service 65 years later as a derelict raft tug. The 94' x 23' x 8'6" steamer *A.C. Van Raalte* was built at the Erie Street shipyard of Hitchcock & Gibson, Buffalo, New York, by John T. Edwards of St. Joseph, Michigan, and P.P. Allen and Martin Green of Berrien County, Michigan, at a cost of \$20,000. She was the third such ship built by the shipyard for this party.<sup>5</sup>

On Tuesday evening, November 12, 1867, 2-1/2 months after her keel had been laid, the hull of this *A.C. Van Raalte* slowly slipped into the water "like a duck" to the delight of more than 200 onlookers. Once there, her smokestack was added. She was equipped with a powerful steeple compound engine (20 x 21, capable of 14 knots), manufactured by Farrar & Trefft & Knight of Buffalo. Described by local papers as a "small but neat and rakish looking" vessel.<sup>6</sup>

Once in the water and running, she made her way to Holland for a short time and then to St. Joseph to join three other steamers, *Burton*, *Skylark*, and *St. Joseph*, owned by the Lake Michigan Transportation Company. There, beginning in March 1868, she made daily runs between St. Joseph and Chicago; interrupted only by Third National Bank creditors in November 1868, seeking back payments from her owner.<sup>7</sup>

A July 8, 1868, account in the Holland newspaper *De Hope* describes her special visit to Holland on the occasion of Independence Day:



*A.C. Van Raalte* at Muskegon, 1888

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lake Superior Visitors Center, Duluth, MN

The colors were formally presented on Saturday morning July 4 at the steamboat *A.C. Van Raalte*. Because Dr. V.R. was not present this was done by his [Dirk] B.K. Van Raalte, after which speeches were made by Rev. [Peter] J. Oggel and Dr. [Phillip] Phelps... The *Van Raalte* then departed for Grand Haven and it took a rather large amount of passengers who made a pleasure ride there and who returned that evening.<sup>8</sup>

In April 1869, the builders sold her for \$12,618 to Lucy Green of New York, New York. News of her is scarce until March 1871, when she was listed as running between Holland and Chicago in the peach and passenger trade under the command of local sailor and longtime Ottawa County sheriff, Arie Woltman. Three months later she began her run between Grand Haven and Traverse City, plying the same route the schooner did in 1859.

J.M. Jones of Detroit purchased her in 1872 and retained ownership until Amos Fox and Mr. Ross of Petoskey purchased her in 1874 to run on Little Traverse Bay. In April 1875, her owner and route were changed again to Captain Dodge of Detroit until 1879.<sup>9</sup>

Her 1875 schedule began with a route between Traverse City and Escanaba and was later changed to the Traverse City and Mackinaw route stopping at ports along the way. This route was shortened in spring 1875 to stop at Petoskey in order to connect with other steamers, like the *Music* heading for Mackinaw, and rail passengers traveling via the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad (G.R.I.R.). In 1878, she began taking G.R.I.R. passengers on to Mackinaw for \$75.00 per day.<sup>10</sup> After the railroad reached Mackinaw City in 1882, her services no longer needed for this route, she was used for passenger service to Manistique for the builder of Mackinac Island's Grand Hotel. This event also ushered in the gradual reduction of small passenger trade vessels as the quicker and safer trains began offering twelve months of service.

In 1882, the Smith Brothers of Cheboygan, Michigan, purchased her. They housed-in her lower deck and enlarged the passenger cabins in 1883 and used her on northern Michigan routes. Ownership changed again in 1884 — Smith & A., new owners — but she followed the same route. New owners — Charles H. Caskey and J.M. Burbeck of Harbor Springs — and new routes — Petoskey and Manistee — came again in 1885.<sup>11</sup>

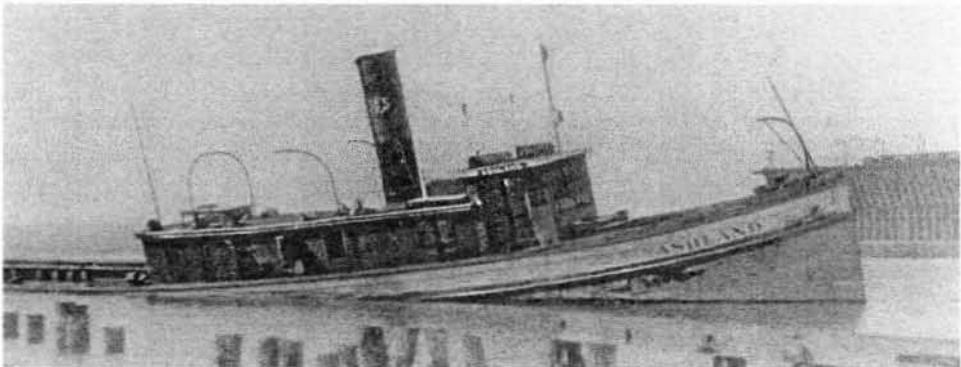
In 1887, she was rebuilt and her owners change frequently and included: W.A. Snyder of Grand Haven (1888, 1891-1892); and Captain A.C. Mayo, Bron, and Hofstra of Muskegon (1888).<sup>12</sup> Captain W.A. Snyder also served as a steamboat captain on the Mississippi River (1861-1864), master for the *Star of Duluth*, and in 1879-1880 built the

tug *Lizzie Frank*.<sup>13,14</sup> He sold the *Van Raalte* to Muskegon parties for \$7,500 where they rebuilt her for use as a daily excursion vessel under Captain Mayo on nearby Lake Michigan and Muskegon Lake.<sup>15</sup>

Condemned as a passenger steamer in 1890, she was sold to the Garden City Sand Company of Chicago. They removed most of her cabins and converted her to a work tug or lighter for use in dock contracting work around Chicago for several seasons.<sup>16</sup> Her many Chicago area owners included: Andrew Onderdonk (1893-1895); and William J. Ross (1896-1897). She was shortened to 92' in 1895.<sup>17</sup>

In summer 1898, she was purchased by Charles R. Leihy of Bayfield, Wisconsin, and converted to a rafting tug, measuring 87'4" x 19'6" x 6'8" and 97 gross tons. He retained her until 1900.<sup>18</sup>

The steamer ended her long string of owners in 1901, when she was purchased by the Ashland, Wisconsin-based, Shroeder Lumber Company for use in the western Lake Superior lumber-rafting business. Shroeder renamed her the *Ashland* in 1903, after the Wisconsin port city, which would also become her final resting place. As the *Ashland*, she served as a raft tug pulling large log rafts, called booms, around the lakes to port city lumber mills. Once there, the logs were made into building lumber for homes and businesses in the west.<sup>18</sup>



*Ashland* at Ashland, WI, c.1937

Marine Historical Collection,  
Milwaukee Public Library

After more than six decades of service, she was abandoned in 1931 in the channel leading into Ashland and eventually surrendered in 1937, left to scavengers and eventual decay.<sup>20</sup>

There is speculation that there was still another vessel named after *Van Raalte* — a side-wheel steamer built at Traverse City, Michigan, 1871; but no official enrollments or photographs can be found to

verify. Only newspaper accounts, that could have mistakenly identified it, exist and are suspicious to many area maritime historians.

A link between Albertus C. Van Raalte, the boats or their owners, remains a mystery. It would seem that respect for the Reverend extended well beyond the borders of the *kolonie* he founded and prompted his admirers to honor him in this way. ❏

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Customs House inspection, July 17, 1855.
- <sup>2</sup> *Traverse City Grand Traverse Herald*, February 17, 1860.
- <sup>3</sup> *Traverse City Grand Traverse Herald*, June 24, 1859.
- <sup>4</sup> *Traverse City Grand Traverse Herald*, March 23, 1860.
- <sup>5</sup> Unpublished manuscript of William O. Van Eyck, 1930, Joint Archives of Holland, Holland, MI.
- <sup>6</sup> *Detroit Post*, November 19, 1867.
- <sup>7</sup> Dr. A.C Van Raalte was unfortunately absent from this event, only because he was attempting to establish yet another Dutch colony at Amelia Courthouse, Virginia. Unlike his namesake vessel, the colony failed after only a short time.
- <sup>8</sup> Official Enrollments, March 1869-October 1879.
- <sup>9</sup> *Holland City News*, July 13, 1878.
- <sup>10</sup> *Great Lakes Ships We Remember III*, 1994, p. 395.
- <sup>11</sup> Official Enrollments, 1887-1892.
- <sup>12</sup> *Holland Sentinel*, August 15, 1887, and March 14, 1892.
- <sup>13</sup> Biographical Records held at the Tri-Cities Museum, Grand Haven, MI. January 6, 1999.
- <sup>14</sup> *Holland Sentinel*, March 19, 1888.
- <sup>15</sup> *Great Lakes Ships We Remember III*, 1994, p. 395.
- <sup>16</sup> Official Enrollments, 1891-1897.
- <sup>17</sup> *Great Lakes Ships We Remember III*, 1994, p. 395.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Geoffrey D. Reynolds, Collections Archivist at the Joint Archives of Holland (Hope College) since 1997, has an avid interest in the maritime history of the Great Lakes region.