

ALBERTUS CHRISTIAAN VAN RAALTE: FUNDING  
HIS VISION OF A CHRISTIAN COLONY<sup>1</sup>

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Albertus C. Van Raalte had a distinct goal in mind when he assumed the leadership of a migration of Netherlanders to America in 1846. When the Society of Christians for Holland Emigration to the United States of North America was formed by Van Raalte and his associate, Anthony Brummelkamp, the purpose of the society "was to found a community in America where Christians possessed of some means would have an unhampered opportunity to regulate their own secular life in accordance with the ordinances of God." Article seven of the regulations stated that "the first calling is to make the colony Christian . . . so that . . . there may be established not only a Christian Church government, but also a Christian government for the protection of God's command. . . ." <sup>2</sup> In a letter Van Raalte wrote on January 30, 1847, just days before settling in what was to become Holland, Michigan, he said, "My greatest hope is that wherever the brothers [and sisters] settle we will all together, as a result of true piety, be a city on a hill and may serve God well during our short lives." <sup>3</sup>

These specified goals for a settlement of Netherlanders in America undoubtedly affected his choice of location for the settlement. He could have stayed in Albany, New York, a settled American city, through which he and his people passed on their way to the Middle West. In fact, some Netherlanders did decide to remain there or he could have chosen to settle in Rochester, New York, where more of the Dutch immigrants chose to settle. Or Detroit, Kalamazoo, or Allegan, Michigan. Each city, town, or village mentioned had certain amenities, infrastructures, and job opportunities for Van Raalte's people. But, in order for Van Raalte to achieve his vision of a Christian community, he considered it necessary to make an "errand into the wilderness" as the Puritans claimed to have done when they settled Boston. Therefore, Van Raalte chose the site near Black [Macatawa] Lake in Western Michigan for his settlement so that he could colonize an area and shape a distinctively Christian community.

It was almost a fatal decision because the Holland *Kolonie* or Colony he established had a very, very difficult first two years. Extreme hardships of every kind such as lack of food and housing, clearing the land of large trees, and battling illness and death all plagued the settlement and severely tested Van Raalte's resolve of establishing a Christian Colony. His people paid a tremendous price for settling in an isolated area away from any kind of basic social structure in order to set up the Colony in a manner agreeable to their original goals. It was true of Holland, Michigan, as of many American settlements, that the Holland settlement was built on the bones of the settlers.

But Van Raalte never lost his determination to found a Christian Colony even though he had to modify his goal for various reasons. The need to modify may have been a problem for him during the passage of time but a major problem which confronted him right from the start was his being thrust into the task of promoting the economic development of the Colony. He learned very quickly that the success of his colonization effort depended to a considerable extent on his ability to build the economic base of the Holland Colony. There simply could not be a Christian Colony if this community were not able to develop economically by providing land for the farm families and business opportunities for the villagers. Immigrants from the Netherlands would not come to the Colony unless there was a hope for jobs as well as for church life and educational opportunities.

Much is known about Van Raalte as pastor and educator. Much less is known about his business activities. <sup>4</sup> The purpose of this paper is to tell the story of Albertus C. Van Raalte as businessman in order to explain why he became so fully involved in business and economic matters during his leadership of the Holland Colony. It is a side of his life which was absolutely crucial to the success of his pioneering endeavors. It may tend to be overlooked because it could have been considered unseemly by those of evangelical piety to acknowledge that Albertus C. Van Raalte, man of God, pastor of First Reformed Church, dedicated Christian and leading churchman, was also an avid businessman, *de facto* banker, major land owner, and real estate salesman. But, even though some colonists misunderstood the reasons for his business involvement, such he was in order to achieve his vision of a Christian community.

Although Van Raalte was a true visionary in the best sense, he was also a very practical man and knew instinctively that to establish a colony and make it successful, it was necessary to have money and use it effectively. Therefore, the society <sup>5</sup> which he and Brummelkamp founded had as one of its purposes to raise funds for those who

planned to emigrate to America. The society had some success in fund-raising and when Van Raalte came to America, he had more than 3,000 florins or guilders in Dutch money from the society as well as more than 2,000 guilders given by Anthony Brummelkamp, a brother-in-law of Van Raalte's wife, Christina De Moen Van Raalte. The wives of these men were members of a well-to-do Leiden family. Both Van Raalte and Brummelkamp had met their wives while attending the University of Leiden.

Van Raalte himself had independent means. He and his sister's husband, Dirk Blikman Kikkert, owned a brick and roof tile factory near the village of Ommen in Overisel Province, a village where Van Raalte served as pastor from 1838 to 1844. When the Van Raalte family decided to come to America in 1846, Van Raalte<sup>6</sup> sold his share in that business for 25,000 florins or guilders. As far as it can be determined, a guilder or florin was worth forty American cents at that time. So if we add the 3,000 guilders of the society funds to the some 2,000 guilders of Brummelkamp to the 25,000 guilders of Van Raalte, they make a total of some 30,000 guilders or 12,000 American dollars.

For most of us today, that is still a considerable sum although we know it would not go far if a family was migrating from one country to another. The thing to remember is that although a guilder was worth only forty cents at that time, it was nearly equivalent to a day's wage for a laboring man. During the early days of the Holland Colony, the average day's wage was between fifty and seventy-five cents.<sup>7</sup> By making these monetary comparisons, one can conclude that Dominie Van Raalte and his family came to America with a considerable amount of money which Van Raalte knew very clearly would be needed for establishing a Christian Colony.

After Van Raalte made the decision to settle in the Black Lake area and came with the first group of colonists on February 9, 1847, he had two immediate objectives. The first was to build temporary shelters for the colonists who would be coming and then to purchase land so that the colonists could settle and develop their farms as soon as possible. He also had to have land on which to build a village with its industries. Since the State of Michigan had opened for development in the early 1830s,<sup>8</sup> much of the land in the area he chose for the Colony had already been purchased by speculators who had bought land at the price \$1.25 per acre. Van Raalte was also able to buy land still owned by the government at that price, but much of the land he wanted had already been purchased by others, some of whom were New Yorkers. He purchased 3,032.47 acres from Courtlandt and Mary Palmer of New York City for the sum of \$7,080.15, or about \$2.32 per acre. The Palmers took a mortgage for much of that sum. Paying such prices for land meant that Van Raalte's money was going rather quickly.<sup>9</sup>

But Van Raalte also learned that he could purchase land very cheaply, land that had been purchased by speculators but on which taxes were not paid and which had become tax delinquent. Van Raalte was able to buy many parcels of such land for very little money. For instance, he purchased one quarter section or 160 acres for a total of \$7.06!<sup>10</sup> Yet with all the land purchases of literally thousands of acres either at a high price or low price, his money almost ran out not long after his arrival. His biographer, Albert Hyma, makes much of the fact that Van Raalte was down to his last \$400 very soon after the Colony was settled.<sup>11</sup> However, as new immigrants came in, Van Raalte would immediately sell them acreage he had purchased. Pastor Cornelius Vander Meulen of Zeeland was doing the very same thing although to a much smaller extent.<sup>12</sup> Jannes Vande Luyster handled the real estate transactions for the Zeeland people as Van Raalte did for the Holland settlers.<sup>13</sup>

As soon as Van Raalte sold land to the new immigrants, he recovered his own investments. Let it be said at this point that there is no indication that the spiritual leader of the Colony who was also making many real estate transactions took any advantage of the people who joined the Colony, which, by the way, included the areas of Graafschaap, Overisel, Drenthe, Zeeland, North Holland, as well as the immediate area around Holland. There is no evidence whatsoever that Van Raalte was engaged in gouging or speculation. He placed his fortune at the service of the people of the Colony. At the same time, it does need to be understood that Van Raalte had to make some profit in his real estate dealings because of the low salary he was receiving from his congregation. In the early years, his promised annual salary of \$600 was rarely met.<sup>14</sup> If Van Raalte had not had private means, he would not have been able to make a living for his family.

Another aspect of Van Raalte's real estate work involved the village of Holland itself. Van Raalte and four other individuals bought the parcels of land on which the village of Holland was located. Some of these individuals purchased the land to speculate on it, according to Engbertus Van der Veen.<sup>15</sup> But Van Raalte did not approve of that. However, Van Raalte's name was on every deed as "proprietor." The purchase of this land by Van Raalte was for the benefit of the people who would settle in the village. It was hoped that as soon as possible the lots of the village would be sold to the hoped for inhabitants. Until that day arrived, the Peoples' Assembly elected five trustees to manage the village property and arrange the sales.<sup>16</sup> These key people were J. Vander Veen, a

tinsmith, J. A. Verhorst, Jakobus Schrader, a carpenter and builder, Oswald Van Der Sluis, Bernardus Grootenhuis, and Van Raalte. The names of these persons also appear on the first plat map of the village of Holland on July 1, 1848.<sup>17</sup>

But the lots in the village did not sell rapidly. By 1850, only about one-fourth of them had been sold. This put the village into a bind because the Peoples' Assembly incurred many debts as the villagers were attempting to clear the streets of stumps, provide a bridge across the Black River on the north, and provide the necessary services for the village, to say nothing about the attempts to clear the channel between Black Lake and Lake Michigan of its sandbars. It was decided, therefore, in a meeting of the Peoples' Assembly to turn the ownership of the entire village over to Dominie Van Raalte. This was a very unusual step but a logical one. The whole process took place openly but this is the kind of situation, occasion, or transaction which is readily open to misunderstanding.

Holland's first historian, Gerrit Van Schelven, reviewed this action on July 4, 1876, in his address on the occasion of the celebration of the centennial of the United States. The address was given just a few months before Van Raalte died and it may be assumed that Van Raalte was in the audience when Van Schelven spoke. Van Schelven said:

In 1849, matters pertaining to these village lands became quite complicated. There was heavy indebtedness incurred, which had to be met, payments on the lands were due, an unpaid balance on that stock of goods of the "colony store" was presented and many other causes of a financial character led the people to resolve that the village lands should revert to Ds. Van Raalte, coupled with the condition that he was to assume all the indebtedness incurred to date.<sup>18</sup>

Bernardus Grootenhuis, in his detailed account and spirited defense of what happened, said that Van Raalte found it difficult to assume so much responsibility for the village's financial base personally and, therefore, wished to withdraw some of his capital. However, if he withdrew some of his funds, some outside speculators would then move in and provide the money. The villagers did not want this to happen, of course. In order to keep the village and its affairs in the hands of the Dutch immigrants and to keep outsiders from cashing in on the current crisis, Van Raalte assumed ownership of all the unsold lots and responsibility for the financial stability of the community personally.<sup>19</sup>

The village at that time consisted of sixty-nine city blocks and 687 lots of varying sizes. Only 141 lots had been sold by the time Van Raalte assumed ownership of the remaining 546 unsold pieces of property. On January 28, 1850, Van Raalte paid taxes of \$146.41 and one-half cents on that property.<sup>20</sup> By the way, he also paid taxes at that time on 1,091 acres of farm land he owned in the Colony. By this time, Van Raalte had a good deal of money tied up in farm land and village properties.

However, Van Raalte's money was basically sustaining the economic life of the community. He had invested in the unprofitable Colony Store to which Van Schelven alluded as well as the Colony ship, the Knickerbocker.<sup>21</sup> That venture also failed. He was a partner in a business referred to as an ashery which was successful.<sup>22</sup> Since so many trees were being cleared and burned, ashes were a commodity which Chicago dealers purchased for their chemical value. In all the buying and selling that was going on in the Colony during the first three years at least, Van Raalte's money provided the economic base. Those early years are replete with the struggles of the early colonists to buy land, clear farms of unwanted trees, and establish village businesses. Van Raalte worked hard to bring in good investors to share the burden such as Paulus den Bleyker from Kalamazoo.<sup>23</sup> These early times were especially difficult, but Van Raalte, the businessman, did his very best to make the Colony an economic success. If the colonists did not become successful farmers and business people, neither would Van Raalte and his people achieve their goal of establishing a Christian community.

With Van Raalte's assumption of ownership of the Village of Holland, or De Stad as it was commonly known then, the cooperative nature of the Colony virtually ceased. The Peoples' Assembly no longer continued to function. All governmental affairs were lodged in Holland Township of which the village was a part until the incorporation of the City of Holland in 1867. But Holland, Michigan, as a Christian community, never ceased to be part of Van Raalte's hope and vision. He now initiated other efforts to make that vision a reality.

His major effort to guide the Colony in becoming a Christian community was, of course, serving the First Reformed Church as pastor and the Classis of Holland, the ecclesiastical organization of the Dutch-immigrant Reformed churches in the Colony, as president. He gave major leadership to the churches of the Colony and in 1850 led them into union with the old Dutch Reformed Church of New York and New Jersey. Eager to expand

the Dutch Reformed influence in the village, he contributed the lots on which the new structure of First Reformed, commonly referred to as the Pillar Church, was constructed in 1856.<sup>24</sup> He contributed the lots for the Second Reformed (Hope) and Third Reformed churches when they were organized in 1862 and 1867 respectively. Van Raalte owned much of the village of Holland but he generously provided for the spiritual, ecclesiastical and educational needs of the community. He also provided the park lands for the village. The market square he owned became Centennial Park in 1876, the year he died.

In addition to his major work as pastor of his congregation and sole pastor of the Reformed community in the village of Holland until the founding of Hope Reformed Church, he was very active in the field of Christian education. It was basic to the hopes of the people of the entire Colony to set up Christian day schools; but because the cost was prohibitive for his congregation Van Raalte led the way in establishing public schools which, however, were entirely under the control of Van Raalte and his people. While establishing the basic educational system for the Colony, he also began the work of setting up the system of Christian higher education. The Pioneer School was organized in 1851 and was only a grammar school at first but it became an academy in 1857 and college classes got underway in 1862. In 1866, the new collegiate institution was incorporated under the name of Hope College.<sup>25</sup>

In the promotion of Christian higher education, Van Raalte made extensive use of his business expertise in getting this major educational effort funded. Again he contributed much of his own funds and property to the institution. He provided five acres of land near First Reformed Church for the school's campus and later enlarged the area to sixteen acres. After Hope College was chartered in 1866, he became president of the Council, its board of trustees. Records of the college are replete with entries of his many gifts. After the railroad came through Holland in 1870 and the company purchased considerable property from Van Raalte, he gave \$4,000 in bonds to the college. But Van Raalte's greatest gift to the academy and particularly to the college was his ability to raise funds for all kinds of worthy causes, the college being the chief one, from the founding of the Pioneer School in 1851, to the end of his life in 1876, by which time he secured many gifts, some of which were of considerable size, such as the gift of \$10,000 from James Suydam of New York City, for the endowment.

When Van Raalte was attempting to establish the Holland Colony, he got to know key people in the old Dutch Reformed Church in New York and New Jersey such as Thomas DeWitt, pastor of the Collegiate Church in New York City; businessmen James Suydam who was just referred to and Samuel B. Schieffelin, members of the Collegiate churches; and Isaac Wyckoff, pastor of the Second Reformed Church of Albany, New York. Wyckoff's consistory loaned Van Raalte \$1,000 when he was buying lands for the Holland colonists.<sup>26</sup> Schieffelin and Suydam purchased part of the mortgage of Courtlandt and Mary Palmer, and Van Raalte within ten years had that debt paid.<sup>27</sup> Throughout all of these real estate dealings, Van Raalte, the businessman, became acquainted with people who might also be generous to the colonists' institutions. Some of these donors helped to pay for the building of the stately Pillar Church which was constructed in 1856. Once Van Raalte had the church built, he concentrated on the construction of the major academy building which today is called Van Vleck Hall, the lovely Italianate building at the heart of the Hope College campus.

With the help of Wyckoff and DeWitt and many Dutch Reformed pastors in New York and New Jersey, Van Raalte went on a fund-raising expedition for the Academy building among many Dutch Reformed congregations. He spent months out East, literally going from door to door among the members of many Dutch Reformed congregations in the New York City area, New Jersey, and north up along the Hudson River to the Albany area, where he collected \$6,564.70 from 712 donors!<sup>28</sup> It was nearly enough money to finance the Holland Academy building and pay for many of its furnishings. The average gift was \$9.36, due mainly to the few large gifts of \$100 from a few major donors and the \$480 from Samuel B. Schieffelin. The majority of the gifts were \$5 or less, some only twenty-five cents. Nathan Graves of Syracuse, New York, who later gave funds for Graves Hall on the Hope College campus in 1893, was a major donor as were some of the Van Renselaers, as well as the Hon. Th. Frelinghuysen, who was a Whig vice presidential candidate of the United States on the Clay ticket in 1844. At the time that Frelinghuysen contributed to the Academy building, he was president of Rutgers College in New Brunswick, New Jersey, a Dutch Reformed institution.

Van Raalte was a fundraiser not only for Christian causes in the Colony but also for community business ventures such as the development of the Holland Harbor.<sup>29</sup> As Van Raalte was not reticent about approaching wealthy and distinguished persons in the Dutch Reformed Church for funds, neither was he bashful in approaching the government of the United States. On December 12, 1849, he along with the trustees of the village sent their first petition and plea for funds for the development of the Colony's harbor.

The document is fairly lengthy but it gives an excellent description of the Colony two and one-half years after its founding and it depicts the Colony in the very best light. Allow me to quote from it at length so we may better understand Van Raalte and the village trustees' efforts to raise money from the U. S. Government so that the Colony could survive economically:

We beg to present to the Honorable the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States, in connection with our petition for the improvement of the outlet of North Black Lake, the following sketch of the origin and progress of the settlements on the Black River, usually known as "The Holland Colony."

In 1847, one of our Clergymen [namely, A. C. Van Raalte] visited the United States for the purpose of finding for himself and his friends a new home, where they might enjoy more civil and religious freedom than was allowed them in their father-land, and escape the crushing weight of taxation, by which the bankrupt nations of Europe are now compelled to sustain themselves.

After much consideration, he was induced by the great natural advantages of the Black River Country, to select it as the gathering place and future home of his people. He found it an unbroken wilderness. From its insular position, presenting insurmountable difficulties, in the way of any other than a large company or association of Emigrants, its fertile lands had remained unsold.

Since that time, many Clergymen have removed their Churches almost entire, into the new refuge. Not less than 5,000 souls have landed on the shores of Michigan, and most of them are now comfortably settled in their new homes.

They have suffered many hardships and privations, and prophets of evil have forewarned of the destruction of the settlement; but God, who rules all things, and whose care is over all, has decreed otherwise, and by His blessing, we can now say that there is no longer a doubt of the permanence and prosperity of the Colony. The past season, we have been blessed with abundant harvests, and our people have already begun to develop the rich resources of the land of our adoption.

Although the hazards of navigation to our Lake are so great as to burden us with enormous comparative rates of freight, we are already an exporting people. On the opposite shore of Lake Michigan, we find an unlimited demand for the rich products of our forests, and already the news of our prosperity is stirring up untold thousands of our countrymen to follow us to share in the rich blessings which have rewarded our toils and privations.

Black Lake, or Lake Macatawa, extends from Lake Michigan about six miles inland, with an average depth of at least 20 feet, and its least channel depth is 12 feet. At its head, is the village of Holland, which has grown up to meet the demands of the farming country for a market and outlet.

There are now within our limits, two water Saw Mills, one steam Saw Mill, and one wind Saw Mill; three custom grinding mills, one ashery and soap and candle manufactory, one tannery, one brick yard, and one boat yard. We have eight places of worship, and eight schools, four of them taught by American teachers.

Aside from its vital importance to the future growth and prosperity of our Colony, the construction of a secure harbor, by removing the bar at the outlet of our Lake, will have an important bearing upon the interests of our neighbors upon the opposite shore of Lake Michigan.

...<sup>30</sup>

The petitioners were not successful. Ten years later they were still attempting to get government money for the harbor project, that time from the state of Michigan. Since it was so difficult to get funds from either the federal or state government, the Harbor Board of which Van Raalte was also a member, sent Mr. John Roost, a Holland businessman, on a fund raising expedition to many of the very same people in the later 1850s to which Van Raalte had gone on behalf of the Academy building a few years before. Eventually, the Harbor Board, after appeals to public and private donors, was successful in getting a channel dug sufficiently deep to allow shipping to move in and out of the Holland port. Van Raalte, the businessman-promoter, along with his cohorts on the Harbor Board were successful in that important venture.<sup>31</sup>

Up to this point in our story of Van Raalte as businessman, I think that it is clear that much of his business acumen was dedicated to the economic development of the Colony and its various enterprises. But you may remember that he needed to develop income for his family and personal needs in order to survive and to maintain a standard of living. Son of a pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, Van Raalte and his wife were of a social class and educational level which today we would probably call upper middle class. Most of the people who joined him in the Colony were of the laboring class. Even most of the other ministers who pastored churches in the Colony were tradesmen who were tutored for the ministry and became pastors without the benefit of university training. During the very early days of the Holland settlement, Van Raalte and his family endured all the privations associated with the very primitive conditions of the times. As time went on, the Van Raalte family resumed the life style they had known in the Netherlands in so far as that was possible in the Holland Colony. One evidence of their life style was the lovely home that Dominie Van Raalte had constructed for his family on the east side of the village. This substantial brick home was undoubtedly the finest home in the village until Dr. Geert Manting built his gracious home on the south side of the village in 1868.

It seems that as Van Raalte was using his business skills in promoting the Colony he was, at the same time, developing into an entrepreneur also. He used his business acumen to make a good living and provide for his family. He also needed funds for his retirement years. Therefore, just as he had been a partner in a business in the Netherlands, so he became a businessman in America out of personal necessity and possibly because he enjoyed business life. Not only did he go into the ashery business, one of the sawmills was built on his property. We know that his major business was in real estate for, as mentioned earlier, he owned considerable farm acreage as well as much of the village of Holland. He was constantly buying and selling property as his business records indicate. His extensive capital investment also had to grow. In connection with his real estate work, he actually was the *de facto* banker of the town. When people bought property from him, they often could not pay the full price and owed Van Raalte money which would be paid off over the years. His personal account book reveals numerous accounts with the local people.<sup>32</sup> After the Civil War when his sons, Dirk and Ben, returned from the war, he staked them in business. His eldest son, Albertus, was also fully involved in family business ventures.<sup>33</sup>

The entrepreneurial activities brought undue stress into his life, however. In his letter of June 29, 1862, to Giles Van de Wall who had taught in the academy and then gone to South Africa as a missionary, Van Raalte mentioned the tax burden he was then carrying. His taxes that year included \$400 for state, county, school and harbor taxes and another amount of almost equal size in federal taxes because of the Civil War. He went on to say that ". . . I am in a position which because of the heavy weight of material responsibilities, requires my full time and energies . . . because I feel obliged to devote my time to being a preacher and pastor, I have no business concerning myself with material matters. But then there are the needs of my family to consider and I feel as if I have been placed between the upper and nether millstones."<sup>34</sup> Van Raalte's entrepreneurial skills got him into some difficulty because he essentially was land poor. He owned much property and he had many taxes to pay, but much of his property was unproductive as he also stated in his letter to Van de Wall. He was fully involved in business affairs but he was not all that successful as an entrepreneur.

But the public perception of him by that time was that he was a wealthy man. In 1862, Holland, Michigan, was still a fairly small town of about 2,000 inhabitants. Five years later, severe criticism of Van Raalte surfaced when at the time of the incorporation of the village in 1867, Van Raalte refused to have his homestead and surrounding acreage placed within the city limits. He still had much property in the village on which he would pay city taxes but he was successful in keeping much of his property on the east side of town outside of the city limits.<sup>35</sup> In very poor English, one Dutch immigrant, George G. Steketee, complained bitterly about Van Raalte's effort to keep his property outside of the city limits: "he has made him Self Rich out of us poor duchman and there for it's no more than Right that he should hlep to bare the espenses of the city and in this way our taxes would be lower. [sic for the whole quote]<sup>36</sup> In spite of Steketee's perception which was open to question, Van Raalte felt his taxes would be too high if his property just east of the village were included in the city limits.

Van Raalte's entrepreneurial endeavors did get him into major trouble, however. After he retired from the pastorate of First Reformed Church in 1867, he decided to found a new colony of Dutch immigrants. It was to be located in Amelia County, Virginia, at a place called Amelia Court House.<sup>37</sup> His ostensible reason for doing this was for missionary purposes. He moved his family there in 1868, assisted in the organization of three churches for newly arrived immigrants from the Netherlands, and established an Academy over which his son-in-law, William Gilmore, presided. To assist one of the churches in becoming established, Philip Phelps, President of Hope College, made a loan of \$2,100 of college endowment to help the church. Van Raalte was undoubtedly behind this

move because he was still president of the Hope College Council. Supposedly the loan was covered by land owned by members of the church.<sup>38</sup>

The whole venture was a disaster. Mrs. Van Raalte who apparently approved of all her husband's business deals up to that time insisted upon moving back to Holland, Michigan, within a year because a daughter's husband, Pieter Jan Oggel, a Bible professor at the college, was fatally ill at the age of forty.<sup>39</sup> From what business papers remain from that era of Van Raalte's life, it is likely that Samuel Schieffelin came to the rescue and took over much of the debt of the Virginia colony.<sup>40</sup> Only one church survived;<sup>41</sup> the school failed as did two of the congregations. Many of the Dutch immigrants who joined that venture lost their property and moved on to other places. All that Van Raalte got out of the whole project was a great deal of criticism.

Van Raalte's last years from his return to Holland in 1869 until his death in 1876 were difficult. Although he was not old according to our current standards, he was simply a private citizen living out his last days. He had retired in 1867 at the age of fifty-five and died nine years later on November 7, 1876. The beloved son-in-law of the Van Raaltes, P. J. Oggel, died shortly after their return. Mrs. Van Raalte succumbed to illness and died June 30, 1871. Just months later, on October 8 and 9, the Great Holland Fire swept through the city of Holland, taking with it the entire business district and two-thirds of the homes.<sup>42</sup> Van Raalte was out of town that Sunday because he was preaching in the First Reformed Church of Grand Haven. He returned on Monday to his beloved but devastated city.

Out of this tragedy came a renewed man, however: The Pillar Church survived the fire as did Van Vleck Hall, as well as Van Raalte's own home on the east side of the town. In spite of this disaster which would have put a person of lesser strength into the grave, Van Raalte became the cheerleader of the community and said that Holland must be rebuilt. He was almost unable to pay his taxes the next year but he would not let his dream of a successful Christian Colony disappear with a devastated Holland.<sup>43</sup> Through his inspiration, a relief and aid program was initiated. Most people decided to stay and Holland was rebuilt. By 1875, according to a bird's eye view of the city drawn that year, the city was fully back in business. Van Raalte was also at the center of another fundraising effort called the Ebenezer Fund, a thank offering for the city's survival of the fire. It was designated for the support of students at Hope College. He was a primary donor and an amount of \$36,000 was subscribed for the fund, an incredible amount considering the conditions under which it was raised.<sup>44</sup>

A final question must be raised and that is just how well-to-do did Van Raalte become as preacher-businessman-entrepreneur. The question can be answered. Although it was the common perception that he had become a wealthy man, he actually was not. When the census of 1870 was taken and people had to declare their financial worth, Van Raalte listed an estate of \$10,000 and a personal estate of \$7,000. Considering that he came with an amount of \$10,000 in 1847, twenty-three years earlier, it does not seem that Van Raalte benefitted all that much financially. Several businessmen like Peter Pfanstiehl and John Roost listed assets far greater than Van Raalte.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, Roost and many other businessmen were virtually wiped out a year later in the Great Holland Fire and never recovered financially from that disaster. Van Raalte cannot be accused of becoming rich because he was involved in business matters while serving as a pastor.<sup>46</sup> In comparison with most Holland citizens, however, he was comfortably situated.

Van Raalte was truly a businessman, financier, entrepreneur, and real estate salesman as well as pastor and educator. Holland, Michigan, has become what it is today because of his business leadership as well as his spiritual and educational leadership. He made some mistakes of judgment but the business side of his life was basically devoted to the original goal he had for the Holland Colony. His main concern was to advance all aspects of the Colony's life in pursuit of his goal to have his settlement become a Christian community. His ideal was communicated to his son, Ben, when Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte said, "...every thing which we do for honorable causes enobles our character and gives us more enjoyment for life."<sup>47</sup>

## Endnotes

1. This paper was presented at the 8th Biennial Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies, September 19 and 20, 1991, at Hope College, Holland, Michigan. The paper is based mainly on the Van Raalte papers located in the archives of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan; the Holland Historical Trust; Hope College; and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. The archives of the latter three institutions are administered in the Joint Archives of Holland program whose collections are located in the Van Wylen Library, Hope College. Two key secondary sources used were *Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States* by Albert Hyma, 1947, and *Netherlanders in America, Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789-1950*, a reprint published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1989. The book was originally published in 1955 by the University of Michigan Press. The Hyma volume was also published by Eerdmans. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Herbert Brinks and Mrs. Nettie Janssens at the Calvin College archives for their permission for the full use of the Van Raalte documents and to Mr. Larry Wagenaar, Mr. Craig Wright, and Ms. Reba O'Shesky of the Joint Archives of Holland for their assistance in this study.
2. "The Beginnings of Dutch Immigration to Western Michigan" by Henry S. Lucas, *Michigan History Magazine*, vol. VI (1922) No. 4, p. 670.
3. Published in *Holland in America* by A. Brummelkamp, Arnhem, the Netherlands, 1847. The translation by Dr. Henry ten Hoor is in my personal archives. See my address for a fuller treatment of Van Raalte's vision of a Christian Colony printed in the *Reformed Review*, Winter, 1977, vol. 30/no. 2, pp. 83-94. The original title of Brummelkamp's pamphlet is "Holland in Amerika, of de Hollandsche Kolonisatie in Den Staat Michigan."
4. Albert Hyma, in his biography of Van Raalte, gives considerable space to Van Raalte's financial affairs although in a somewhat apologetic manner. Although this biography of Van Raalte is excellent in many respects because Hyma was the first scholar to use the papers retained by the Van Raalte family until around 1947, he documented his sources rarely, and thus it is very difficult to trace the sources of many of his quotations and facts.
5. The full title of the organization was the "Society of Christians for the Dutch Emigration to the United States of America" or the "Vereeniging van Christenen voor de Hollandsche Volksverhuizing naar de Vereenigde Staten in N. Amerika." A translation of the regulations of the society are located in the Calvin College Archives, the Van Raalte Collection, Box 1, Folder 8.
6. "Een afgeschieden dominee als zakeman: Dr. A. C. Van Raalte [A Separatist Minister as Businessman: Dr. A. C. Van Raalte]" by Ds. W. de Graaf, *De Hoeksteen*, Tydschrift voor Vaderlandse Kerkgeschiedenis, 12e Jaargang, no. 1, Februari, 1983, pp. 3-12. Translation by Dr. Ralph Vunderink and located in my personal archives. The Rev. Mr. de Graaf's essay is valuable because he was able to talk with descendants of people who had been former parishioners of Van Raalte during his Ommen pastorate and who still knew of Van Raalte's business affairs of the 1840s.
7. Aleida Pieters, *A Dutch Settlement in Michigan*, p. 177. She uses the average of 62 cents as her estimate. Hyma says that the 25,000 guilders were worth \$10,000 in American dollars at that time. Hyma, p. 124.
8. See "Michigan For Sale" by John Cumming for the story of Michigan's opening for settlement. The article can be found in *Michigan History*, vol. 70, no. 6, November/December, 1986, pp. 12-16.

9. Most of the records of Van Raalte's land purchases are in the Van Raalte Collection of the Calvin College Archives, Boxes 11 and 12. Complete records of his land purchases and sales, of course, are in the Register of Deeds Office of Ottawa County, Grand Haven, Michigan. The Allegan County Register of Deeds Office contains all Van Raalte's land records for the southern edge of the Colony, for all land south of Thirty-Second street which is in the townships of Allegan County.

10. Calvin College Archives, the Van Raalte Collection, Box 11, Folder 176.

11. P. 97.

12. A plat map of Holland Township, dated October 9, 1849, indicates several parcels of land owned by Vander Meulen who was pastor of the First Reformed Church of Zeeland. Register of Deeds Office, Ottawa County, Grand Haven, Michigan. I have to qualify this judgment somewhat because I have not checked the plat map of Zeeland Township of that period.

13. Lucas, p. 127. Vande Luyster's initial land purchase was for 1,920 acres.

14. Aleida Pieters noted that in 1852, Van Raalte received only \$252 of the promised \$600 from his congregation, pp. 176-7. There is no record in any of the Van Raalte papers at Calvin College or in the collections of the Joint Archives of Holland indicating what his income was from his congregation during the years he served his church from 1847 to 1867. Dr. Pieters examined the minutes of the First Reformed Church and discovered this information.

15. "Life History of Engbertus Van der Veen," p. 10. Joint Archives of Holland. This record of the reminiscences of Vander Veen is one of the most valuable accounts extant of the Holland Colony's pioneer days. Thanks to Gerrit Van Schelven, the reminiscences of many early residents of Holland, Michigan, were recorded and are now in the Van Schelven Collection of the Holland Historical Trust, Joint Archives of Holland. Van der Veen defended Van Raalte against any criticism which arose about the founder's real estate dealings.

16. Vander Veen, p. 10.

17. The Archives of the Holland Historical Trust, Joint Archives of Holland, the Van Wylen Library, Hope College.

18. "Historical Sketch of Holland City and Colony," the Archives of the Holland Historical Trust, the Van Schelven Collection, Box 4, Folder 2, Joint Archives of Holland. It seems likely that Van Schelven was defending Van Raalte regarding that transaction also.

19. "Our History," originally published in *De Hope*, March 24, 1888, and translated by P. T. Moerdyk, a copy of which is in the Van Schelven Collection, Box 9, and labeled, "Pioneer Reminiscences." The Archives of the Holland Historical Trust, the Joint Archives of Holland. Grootenhuis who came with Van Raalte in the first party on February 9, 1847, was a life-long associate of Van Raalte and he, too, defended this action of the Peoples' Assembly.

20. The numerous tax records of Van Raalte are in the Van Raalte Collection at Calvin College, Box 12.

21. "Life History of Engbertus Vander Veen," p. 20.

22. Lucas, p. 98. Van Raalte received the very large sum of \$728.75 for "Pearl Ashes" on July 30, 1851. This was recorded in the Henry D. Post Account Book, the Van Raalte Collection in the Calvin College Archives, Box 12, Folder 193.

23. See Lucas, pp. 280-284 for the details.
24. The Van Raalte Collection in the Archives of the Holland Historical Trust, Box 2, Folder 13, Joint Archives of Holland.
25. A general history of Hope College was written by Wynand Wichers, entitled, *A Century of Hope 1866-1966*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968.
26. Hyma, p. 147.
27. Part of the Palmer mortgage was paid off by Van Raalte on December 8, 1853. The Van Raalte Collection, Calvin College Archives, Box 11, Folder 168.
28. The complete subscription list of all the donors is in the Van Raalte Collection, Calvin College Archives, Box 1, Folder 26.
29. Many of the records of the Holland Harbor project are in the Archives of the Holland Historical Trust, Joint Archives of Holland.
30. The Van Raalte Collection, the Archives of Calvin College, Box 1, Folder 14. Congress made an \$8,000 appropriation for the project but before the funds were given to the trustees of the village, President Franklin Pierce came into office and vetoed the appropriation. See Engbertus Vanderveen's *Life History and Reminiscences*, p. 27 and Lucas, p. 263, for the details.
31. Lucas gives a good account of the Holland Harbor project, pp. 261-65.
32. In particular, his cash book entries of 1873-76. The Van Raalte Collection, the Archives of Western Theological Seminary, Joint Archives of Holland.
33. On March 16, 1864, Van Raalte, his son, Albertus, and Warren Welder formed a partnership for the manufacturing of lumber and shingles. Van Raalte invested \$1,432.50 in the venture. The Van Raalte Collection, the Archives of Calvin College, Box 1, Folder 4.
34. The Archives of the Holland Historical Trust, the Joint Archives of Holland. Translation by Clarence Jalving.
35. Bernardus Grootenhuis to Moses B. Hopkins, March 1, 1867. Grootenhuis gave as reason for the exclusion of Van Raalte's homestead that much of the area was swampland and "...will never be fit for extension as City..." That property did become city land at a later date. The Van Schelven Collection, Box 1, the Archives of the Holland Historical Trust, Joint Archives of Holland.
36. The Van Schelven Collection, Box 1, the Archives of the Holland Historical Trust, Joint Archives of Holland.
37. The best account of the Amelia Colony is by a former Hope College student, Mr. Karry Ritter, in a paper, entitled, "Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Settlement in Amelia County, Virginia," 1978. The Archives of Hope College, Joint Archives of Holland. Mrs. Nellie Schrijvers-Seegrist wrote extensively about the Amelia Colony in her essay, "The Van Arendonk-Haga Story, a Family History, 1680-1972." Members of her family had participated in that colonization project. Also in the Archives of Hope College. Pieter Zuidema's account of the Amelia settlement was published in *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, edited by Henry S. Lucas, vol. II, pp. 290-294.

38. Financial Report of President Philip Phelps to the Council of Hope College, September 15, 1869. The Van Raalte Collection, Calvin College Archives, Box 1, Folder 25. There was an indirect conflict of interest in this matter for Dr. Van Raalte. The loan did not go to him personally but he was president of the Council which made the loan. This loan came to haunt Dr. Phelps. After Van Raalte's death, at the time when the Amelia Colony was a failure, the General Synod of the Reformed Church demanded a thorough examination of Phelps' handling of the endowment funds of Hope College. Much of Hope's endowment had been placed in investments which yielded little or no interest. In 1878, Phelps was dismissed from the presidency of Hope College. For details of this whole episode, see the annual reports of Hope College in the minutes of the General Synod of that era. It must be said, however, in regard to Dr. Van Raalte, that his numerous gifts to Hope College after his return from Amelia until he died repaid that loan of \$2,100 many times over.

39. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps, August 3, 1869. The family planned to leave Amelia on August 10 according to this letter. The Phelps Collection, Hope College Archives.

40. An indenture of April 3, 1871, stated that Samuel B. Schieffelin purchased 182 acres in Amelia County from Albertus C. Van Raalte for the price of \$5,160. The Archives of Hope College.

41. It is now the Presbyterian Church of Mattoax.

42. For a contemporary account of the Holland Fire, see Gerrit Van Schelven's essay in *Dutch Immigrant and Related Writings*, edited by Henry S. Lucas, vol. II, pp. 1-7. My study of the Holland Fire was published in *Michigan History*, vol. LV (Winter, 1971) no. 4, pp. 289-304, entitled, "The Holocaust in Holland - 1871."

43. Van Raalte's tax bill for 1871 came to \$491.80. The Van Raalte Collection, Calvin College Archives, Box 12, Folder 13.

44. This fund is still in existence and continues to provide financial aid to Hope College students who plan to enter the Christian ministry.

45. A small sampling of Holland residents indicated that they had, on average, \$500 to \$2000 in real estate and \$200 to \$1,000 in personal assets. Pieter Pfanstiehl was then one of the wealthier men in the community, listing \$23,000 in real estate and \$5,000 in personal assets; John Roost, \$21,000 and \$2,500 respectively. Isaac Cappon, the very successful businessman in the local tanning industry, had combined assets worth \$50,000. These census records are in the State of Michigan Archives, Lansing, Michigan.

46. Van Raalte's will is not on file in the records of the Probate Court of Ottawa County and his net worth at the time of his death is unknown.

47. November 13, 1869. The Van Raalte Collection, Archives of Calvin College.