

Albertus C. Van Raalte: Leader of the Emigration, 1844-1867

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The significant years in which Albertus C. Van Raalte was the decisive and key leader of Dutch emigration to America in the nineteenth century extend from the time when he and his family moved to Arnhem, Gelderland, from Ommen, Overijssel, to the period of his retirement from his pastorate and active leadership in the Holland Colony in the State of Michigan and midwestern Reformed Church in America. In those twenty-three years, Van Raalte shaped the vision and achieved many of the goals he so fervently sought for his people. The far-reaching consequences of his thought and action have yet to be fathomed in all of their breadth and depth. In this paper, it is our hope to present a brief summary of his leadership during that crucial span of time.¹

Van Raalte and his family moved from Ommen in 1844 to join his brother-in-law, Antonie Brummelkamp, in the ministry in Arnhem and to move his theological school to a more prominent center. At that time, Van Raalte had already achieved significant results in the early years of his ministry, years which almost coincide with the first years of the Separatist² movement started by Hendrik De Cock, pastor of an Ulrum congregation, in 1834. Van Raalte entered the ranks of the Separatist ministry two years after the inauguration of the movement. He served the small Separatist congregations in Genemuiden and Mastenbroek on the western edge of Overijssel Province from 1836 until 1839 when he and his family moved to Ommen in central Overijssel. There he successfully pastored a growing congregation, built the first Separatist church, began the theological school which soon supplied many candidates for the ministry, and entered into some business affairs in order to provide work for unemployed Separatist people.³ A major part of his work was his itinerant ministry in the entire province as he gathered Separatists into congregations. For his active promotion of the Separatist cause, he suffered considerable persecution. His devoted wife, Christina De Moen Van Raalte, shared fully in all the trials and tribulations associated with the early history of the Separatist or Afscheiding movement in the Province of Overijssel.

When the combined provincial meeting of the Separatists in Overijssel and Gelderland asked him to move the school to Arnhem and he was urged by the Rev. Antonie Brummelkamp, his good friend and brother-in-law, to work for the theological school there, Van Raalte was naturally reluctant.⁴ Although their earlier years in Ommen had been full of tribulation, by 1839 life had become much better for him and his growing family and they were enjoying their life there. They had sufficient funds to have two maids and a hired man. Siblings of Van Raalte had relocated to Ommen during his pastorate there. Consequently, he hesitated to move to Arnhem, but he did so because of the pressure from Brummelkamp, a pressure which he accepted as being the divine call to make the change of residence and work.

The Van Raalte family's brief stay of two years in Arnhem was difficult. The home they rented proved to be located in an area which flooded occasionally.⁵ He had responsibility for relocating the theological school, and this was a substantial administrative burden, although teaching the theological students was a joy for him. The most serious difficulty for Van Raalte was that the dissension and division in the Separatist movement pained him deeply. He could

never understand why earnest and sincere Christians could wrangle over what seemed to him often to be insignificant issues. The clashes of personalities such as the quarrels between Hendrik P. Scholte and Simon Van Velzen deeply grieved him. He considered that many of the issues fought over were of human origin and not crucial for the work of the Kingdom. His own beliefs centered on acceptance of the Dordt Church Order, and he shared in the struggle of the Separatist congregations to be recognized by the Netherlands government.

A major problem arose for Van Raalte because the Separatist congregations could not collect sufficient funds to pay his salary. He had experienced few financial problems when living in Ommen but it was different in Arnhem. Although he had a private income from his wife's inheritance, he nevertheless needed a salary from the congregations. Van Raalte's own economic difficulties stemmed from the worsening economic conditions throughout the Netherlands. The potato blight had struck the country; the poor were in desperate straits and the middle class was also being dragged down. Rather than being able to contribute to the welfare of others, many church members were in dire need themselves.⁶

The tide of emigration from Europe to America which began in the mid-1840s swelled as economic conditions grew worse. The "American fever" touched many Europeans. German emigrants in large numbers were passing through the Netherlands on their way to America. Alexander Hartgerink and Roelof Sleijster, personal acquaintances of Van Raalte, became interested in emigration and left for America in 1845 and early 1846, respectively. Sleijster, a former student of Van Raalte, settled in Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, near the village of Alto. Alexander Hartgerink went first to Ohio and later settled in the Holland Colony.⁷

Out of pastoral concern for the many Separatists and other Christians who were leaving the Netherlands for America both Van Raalte and Brummelkamp became interested in the whole matter of emigration. In 1846, the ministers published a very important pamphlet, entitled, "*Landverhuizing, of waarom bevorderen wij de Volksverhuizing en wel naar Noord-Amerika en niet naar Java.*"⁸ The pamphlet contained fifty-six pages of carefully reasoned and well-presented arguments supporting emigration to America. Early in the pamphlet the writers claimed that emigration had been considered by many Netherlanders for ten or twenty months, which means that soon after the Van Raalte family arrived in Arnhem, discussion of the subject had already begun.⁹

In this pamphlet, Brummelkamp and Van Raalte declared their responsibility to assist those who were emigrating because of financial need. They fulfilled this responsibility by sending letters of recommendation with the emigrants so that Americans would treat them kindly.¹⁰ Although Van Raalte and Brummelkamp loved their native land deeply, they foresaw only a bleak future there for many of their countrymen because of the lack of jobs and the low wages.¹¹ In the winter prior to the publication of this key document, Van Raalte and a number of people he knew well "discussed every aspect of emigration"¹² and formed a society. The members of the society drew up a constitution for the proposed colony they planned to form in America. Article seven of that constitution clearly noted that the colony would be Christian, populated by Christians, and governed as a Christian organization. The document was entitled, "*Grondslagen der vereeniging van Christenen voor de Hollandsche Volksverhuizing naar N. America.*"¹³ At this point, however, there was no indication that Van Raalte himself planned to emigrate and be the leader of the Christian community envisioned in this document.

Van Raalte and Brummelkamp appended a letter addressed to the Christians in North

America giving more reasons why many wished to emigrate to America. "We will make an effort to acquaint you with ourselves as persons and with our circumstances and aims. This is necessary if you are to trust us and have confidence in us."¹⁴ The writers summarized the persecution they had suffered for their faith.¹⁵ They described the ardent wish of the Separatist people to have independent Christian schools for their children, schools which were forbidden in the Netherlands. They also pointed out a need to settle in a place that was not overpopulated so that hard working people could make a decent living.¹⁶ Autonomy of worship free from government intervention, freedom to establish Christian schools and the opportunity to earn a decent livelihood were the three main reasons for emigration. Probably there were two particular reasons for Albertus C. Van Raalte to make the decision that he and his family would emigrate. The first was that worsening economic conditions affected his own situation. After only two years, the dreams of Brummelkamp and Van Raalte of a thriving combined pastorate were dashed. The Separatist movement in the Arnhem area was too small to support a theological school and two pastors, and the economic downturn forced the consistory of the Arnhem and Velp pastorate to give Van Raalte leave to seek another situation. A second and perhaps more compelling reason was the thought of the needs of the departing emigrants. During his serious illness in the summer of 1846, Van Raalte made his decision, and in August, though he was still very ill, he told Brummelkamp that he, too, would take his family to America. Brummelkamp was stunned by the news.¹⁷

Van Raalte had realized that some person in the Netherlands must go to America, to serve as the leader of the emigration. He had seen, as he read the letters of recent emigrants to America, that they were settling in widely scattered areas of the country: major cities in the east (Boston, New York City, Albany, Buffalo, and Rochester) and in what was then the west (Detroit, Chicago, and Milwaukee) as well as smaller cities and towns. Without the formation of a Christian colony to be a focal point for the new settlers, and an organization such as a classis, the emigrants would be quickly assimilated in the American culture, and they would be inevitably drawn away from the Reformed faith. Reluctantly Dominie Brummelkamp escorted the Van Raalte family to Rotterdam where they set sail for America on the ship, "The Southerner," on September 24, 1846.

Although Albertus Van Raalte was a very practical person, the whole venture was clearly visionary. He could not have understood fully what the move to America would mean for him and his family. He undoubtedly left a difficult and disappointing situation in his homeland, but the problems he would now face, though different, would be daunting. He was going to a large and strange country whose language he could not speak. If he had planned to go to a major city in a settled area such as Milwaukee, Wisconsin, or Chicago, Illinois, places already attracting Dutch immigrants, there would be homes and jobs for his followers. But Van Raalte had determined that he was going to take his followers to an undeveloped, isolated area, where, as we say in America, they would start from scratch. After he and his party arrived in the eastern Michigan city of Detroit in December of 1846, he made his decision to establish the colony in the western part of the state. Van Raalte's bold vision was to meet a tremendous challenge when he encountered the harsh realities of the Michigan frontier.

What may have been significant for Van Raalte's decision as leader of "onze volk" (our people) was the influence of Dr. Thomas De Witt,¹⁸ pastor of the historic Reformed Church in Manhattan, who visited the Netherlands during the early summer of 1846. Though it is not

known whether Van Raalte and De Witt met during that visit, we do know that Hendrik P. Scholte, then still a good friend of Van Raalte, had considerable contact with De Witt. On his return to America, De Witt assumed the responsibility for publicizing, in the Dutch Reformed weekly newspaper *the Christian Intelligencer*, the arrival of many Dutch immigrants, particularly the Separatists. He also published articles such as the "Appeal to the Faithful in the United States in North America" written in May by Brummelkamp and Van Raalte, which appeared on October 15, 1846, in the denominational paper of the American Dutch Reformed Church in New York. Thus many readers were informed of the new tide of emigration¹⁹ and when Van Raalte and his party landed in the New York harbor in November, they were met by people who belonged to the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church who befriended the new arrivals. These Dutch Reformed people were also mainly of Dutch descent; their forebears had come to Manhattan or New Netherland, with the West India Company during the seventeenth century, some two hundred years earlier. The assistance of many friends in the Dutch Reformed Church was indispensable to Van Raalte and his people.²⁰ In addition to friends in the Dutch Reformed Church in Manhattan, and many others who gave assistance of all kinds as Van Raalte and his party traveled west, two people were especially supportive. These were the Rev. Isaac N. Wyckoff, pastor of the Second Reformed Church in Albany, New York, and Theodore Romeyn, an attorney residing in Detroit.²¹

When Van Raalte and his party arrived in Detroit, winter had closed in. Pastor George Duffield of the Presbyterian Church in Detroit assisted in finding work for the men. In New York a committee had been formed by De Witt and Wyckoff to help the immigrants; now a committee was formed in Detroit to aid the newly arrived colonists. Van Raalte had originally thought of establishing his colony at Alto, Wisconsin, where his former student, Roelof Sleijster, had settled. But Romeyn, Duffield and several other key citizens of the State of Michigan were very interested in having these Netherlanders, who had the reputation for being hard-working, upstanding and devout people, establish their colony in Michigan. At the close of 1846, leaving Mrs. Van Raalte and the children in Detroit, Van Raalte went on a scouting trip to the western side of the state. He took the train to Kalamazoo where he was put in contact with the Rev. Ova P. Hoyt of the Presbyterian Church there. Hoyt recommended that he visit with Judge John Kellogg in the village of Allegan, the county seat, some thirty miles north of Kalamazoo, and Kellogg advised him to consider the land in northern Allegan County and southern Ottawa County for his settlement.²²

Walking through deep snow with the help of a Native American guide, Van Raalte surveyed the area around Black Lake, where he saw that the Colony could develop a harbor at the mouth of Black Lake. This body of water emptied into Lake Michigan, where ships could sail directly to Chicago and Milwaukee (although at that time, sandbars blocked much of the channel between Black Lake and Lake Michigan). Extensive land in the Black Lake area was for sale at prices which the colonists could afford. Land which had been ceded by Native American tribes was available at \$1.25 an acre from the United States Government, and other property which had already been purchased by speculators was available at \$2.32 per acre.²³ Exercising the role of a leader, Van Raalte decided to settle in Ottawa County on the western side of the state. He brought his family to Allegan, where Mrs. Van Raalte and the children stayed for several months with the very hospitable and kind Judge Kellogg and his family, while he and party of six people²⁴ came, on February 9, 1847, to the area at the foot of Black Lake

which Van Raalte later named Holland. He arranged for the purchase of seven thousand acres for the colony, which would be the home for hundreds of people who shared his vision of a Christian community where the church would be central to its existence.

There was much to do, however, before the planned community could become a reality. At this time most of the inhabitants of the area lived in an Indian village on the southern edge of Black Lake. There were also a few white settlers, including a Congregational missionary couple, the Rev. and Mrs. George N. Smith, and a government agent to the Native Americans, Isaac Fairbanks and his wife Ann. For the Dutch immigrant arrivals, there were no homes, no roads except some trails, no villages with stores from which purchases could be made, no bridges over the creeks and rivers, and, of course, no business and industry. There were no windmills for the grinding of grain or for the production of lumber. Most of the land was heavily forested. The Native Americans had cleared and cultivated a few acres but the land was mainly virgin wilderness filled with great trees. The area was anything but hospitable to the newly arriving Netherlanders who, however, had great hopes for the future.²⁵

Van Raalte and his people were now to be tested as never before. Life had been difficult in their homeland but none of the arriving Dutch immigrants could have imagined what life on the raw Michigan frontier would be like. Van Raalte summoned all of his organizing skills. First he helped people to buy land where they built log huts and started to clear the land for farming. Because the first settlers soon exhausted the funds they brought with them, Van Raalte arranged for loans from sympathetic New Yorkers to fund purchase of acreage.

Of great assistance to Van Raalte were the other Separatist pastors who accompanied the immigrants. Dominie Seine Bolks and his Overijsselaars settled the village of Overisel in northern Allegan County on the southern edge of the Colony. Dominie Maarten A. Ypma and his congregation settled east of the city of Holland in Vriesland. Dominie Cornelius Vander Meulen and his congregation settled Zeeland, just east and north of Holland which was located at the western edge of the Colony. Holland was known as "the city" or "de stad,"²⁶ in contrast with the "villages" or "*dorpjes*," such as Graafschap, Overisel, Drenthe, Zeeland, Groningen, and North Holland. Groningen was between Holland and Zeeland, and Graafschap was south of Holland. Purchasing land and building houses and barns consumed the time and attention of the early settlers. Those who purchased lots in the city of Holland intended to develop businesses.²⁷

It is truly said that settlements are built on the bones of the settlers.²⁸ The first two years of the great colonization effort by Van Raalte and his people were incredibly difficult. Food was usually very scarce; money soon ran out; disease and death were rampant. Many of the first settlers left and headed for the growing cities of Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo where there were increasing numbers of Dutch immigrants who thought that they had no future with the residents of the Colony. Those cities offered the opportunities of employment. Families who stayed in the Colony often sent their young people to work in those places or to be servants for well-to-do Americans.²⁹ These young people earned money which enabled their cash-starved parents to make the necessary purchases for settlement. At this time the proprietors of the Colony, headed by Van Raalte, established a company store to serve the new settlers.³⁰

Only the absolute determination of Van Raalte and his close followers to found a Christian colony, enabled the Colony to survive. The great hardships of those early years took a tremendous toll. In a time when many groups of immigrants or American citizens, sought to

follow Utopian visions, most of these dreams did not survive the harshness of settling in a wilderness. Because of Dominie Van Raalte's leadership skills and vision of a Christian colony, the settlement not only survived but, in time, thrived.

Seventeen months after Van Raalte and the first party arrived and founded the colony, Henry Griffin, county clerk of Ottawa County, was invited by Van Raalte to come to the Holland Colony to register the men who wished to declare their intention to become citizens of the United States. Griffin met with three hundred transplanted Dutchmen in the villages of Holland, Zeeland, and Drenthe. His report, published in *The Detroit Free Press*, July 10, 1848, provided the first description of the Colony.³¹ "I should think there were about 200 houses of all descriptions [in Holland], from the rude hut covered with bark, to the well finished and painted frame house, every lot occupied having a fine garden and yard, in front of the house a gate, and at every window on the street the neat white curtain." These comments indicate that the city of Holland was already of fair size.³² In further comments, he said that there were several stores for goods and groceries. Apparently Dutch housewives could already purchase curtains locally for the windows in their modest homes. At a church service Griffin attended in the log church where Van Raalte was pastor, an American minister preached in the evening service and Dominie Van Raalte, who had studied English during the voyage to America, translated the sermon into the Dutch language. Griffin also reported that farms were being cleared for agriculture and a windmill with four gang saws was producing lumber for the buildings under construction.

With religion central to their lives, the people of the colony, while struggling to build homes and establish businesses or farms, had, as Griffin reported, formed congregations and built log churches. Earlier, Van Raalte had preached in the open or in homes until the log church was built in the city of Holland. Similar work was done in Vriesland by the Rev. Maarten A. Ypma, who came to America with his already organized congregation, and by Seine Bolks in Overisel, and Cornelius Vander Meulen in Zeeland. Although Groningen and Graafschap did not have pastors immediately, the elders conducted services of worship. After the organization of these congregations, Van Raalte, to fulfill his original intention to be the shepherd of the Separatist flocks in America, moved to organize the first classis for the Dutch immigrant congregations.

In the organization of the Classis of Holland on April 23, 1848, Van Raalte laid the foundation for the organization of the Dutch-American immigrant congregations in the Middle West. The importance of this move cannot be emphasized sufficiently. The first classis meeting included the representation of four congregations only: Holland, Graafschap, Vriesland, and Zeeland. Although there were only three ministers and an unknown number of elders, the classis got right down to business. Van Raalte was elected president and Cornelius Vander Meulen, the clerk. There were five major items on the agenda: 1. how often the classis would meet; 2. matters concerning marriage; 3. how long elders and deacons would serve; 4. decisions to be made about the celebration of festival days; and 5. what views were to be held about the catechism, the formulas of concord and the Canons of the Synod of Dordt.³³

In reference to the length of service for elders and deacons, it was decided that "elders and deacons should serve as long as their powers of body and mind are equal to the task; unless some one makes himself unworthy of the office." Van Raalte favored this action, although some Separatist congregations in the Netherlands wanted to follow the church order of Dordt strictly

and allow a two year term only. After a long discussion, the following decision was made in reference to the holy days of "the Birth, the Passion, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the Outpouring of the Holy Ghost": "...the profitable subjects in question, being valuable for spiritual growth, should be treated annually, without any one being confined to regulations as to days and time: so that there shall never be any attempt to force the conscience with regard to it." The peace was kept on this matter.

Discussion was thorough on the place of the confessional standards in the life of the congregations of the Classis. The members of the Classis declared their agreement with the entire "Kerkelijk Handboekje"³⁴ which had been prepared for the 1840 meeting of the Synod of the Afscheiding churches in Amsterdam, stating, "...we accept the entire 'Kerkelijk Handboekje,' with all the Church Orders therein contained, and declare that the church government expressed therein has our perfect assent, and comprehends the government of the Reformed Church."³⁵ Apparently, since Van Raalte had played a key role in the formulation of regulations in this pamphlet in the Netherlands, the classis followed his leadership in accepting it as the church order for the congregations of the classis.

Only one sentence is given in these classis minutes about an issue which was of great concern to Van Raalte. That sentence was, "Rev. Van Raalte wishes the school districts to be discussed."³⁶ This issue would arise repeatedly in future classis meetings. Education was a primary concern for Van Raalte. In the Afscheiding, congregations sought, and were denied, the opportunity to establish free Christian schools in the Netherlands. Despite the many urgent demands the development of a new colony placed on the settlers' time and energy, Van Raalte would not let the issue of Christian schools be forgotten.

Now the question was how this goal could be achieved on the American scene. There were no problems with the local or state governments; in contrast to the Netherlands, here the establishment of such schools was not forbidden. In America, the settlers could establish their schools, but only if they possessed the will and the resources to do so. Thus the problems were not insurmountable but they were very challenging. Education of their children was not a high priority during the early years of the settlement because survival was at stake and children were needed to work in the homes and on the farms. Moreover, public money was available to the Colony for public or district schools, a fact to which Van Raalte referred in that first classis meeting. Although independent Christian schools remained the ideal in the Colony, there were no funds available for them. However, the local district schools were publicly funded, and these schools were controlled by the local community. Therefore a public school met the needs of the colony. Only teachers who were godly persons were hired. The teacher had responsibility for giving instruction in the required subjects of reading and writing, and additionally taught the students the catechism and to sing the Psalms. The ministers or elders came once a week to catechise the children.³⁷ It is apparent that Van Raalte and the colonists settled on the public school because it could be controlled by the Colony and its churches. In effect, the public school was a free Christian school funded at public expense. Van Raalte himself was elected to the public office of school inspector.³⁸ In time, however, Van Raalte did continue to press for the parochial school.

One of the greatest successes of Van Raalte as leader was the achievement of Christian unity with the old Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of New York and New Jersey, founded in 1628 when the first congregation was organized on Manhattan Island by Dominie Jonas

Michelius. More than two hundred years later, the Dutch immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century were loved and assisted generously by this Dutch Reformed Church in the East, which they knew as de Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk.³⁹ Evidence of this love and concern was manifested when the Rev. Isaac N. Wyckoff, pastor of the Second Reformed Church of Albany, New York, a great friend of the Michigan colonists, was sent by the Board of Domestic Missions to visit the Holland Colony.

Wyckoff came to the Colony in the early days of June, 1849, two years after the Holland settlement was made. Van Raalte, who owned the only horse in the Colony at that time, set Wyckoff on it and they traveled around the entire colony, with Van Raalte on foot and Wyckoff on horseback. Van Raalte and the colonists were overjoyed to see this emissary from the eastern Dutch Reformed Church. Several of the colonists must have gotten to know Wyckoff when they passed through Albany on their way west and many of those who did not know him personally had heard of him. His visit showed the colonists that the eastern Dutch Reformed churches were concerned about this settlement in western Michigan. For his part, Wyckoff had already sensed the importance of these colonists to the future of the Dutch Reformed Church and now, through his visit, he came to understand their needs first hand and he assured them of the love the old eastern denomination had for them.

On his return to the east, Wyckoff published an extensive and enthusiastic report on the Holland Colony and the progress it had made in just two years. Wyckoff was so impressed with Van Raalte and his people, their accomplishments and their deep piety, that he may have painted a more romantic picture of the Colony than what actually existed. However, the report was accurate in its details and gave an excellent summary of the role Van Raalte played as leader of the Colony. He reported that the Colony contained about 630 homes in 1849 and with the approximate average of five souls per home, Wyckoff estimated that the Colony consisted of three thousand people. Land was gradually being cleared for farms. There were now two sawmills. Business and industry were beginning to develop. By 1849, there were seven congregations in the Classis of Holland with four ministers, Van Raalte, Vander Meulen, Ypma, and Bolks. Hendrik G. Klyn was on his way from the Netherlands to serve at Graafschap. Five of the congregations had houses of worship. The piety of the colonists was singularly impressive to Wyckoff, and a sentence in his report has been much quoted: "The appearance and tone of piety is purer and higher than any thing I have ever seen and seemed like the primitive Christians and most beautiful."⁴⁰

At the special classis meeting which Wyckoff attended, the visitor from Albany learned that the colonists who believed "in the union of brethren and sigh for Christian sympathy and association,"⁴¹ were nevertheless somewhat reluctant to enter into ecclesiastical connection with the eastern Dutch Reformed Church because of their experiences with the Hervormde Kerk in the Netherlands. Van Raalte had been refused admittance into that body and many of the Separatists suffered persecution from Hervormde members. But Wyckoff assured them "...that it was the farthest from our thoughts to bring them in bondage to men or to exercise an ecclesiastical tyranny over them." The immigrants who were wary of uniting with the old church in the east did not know or understand that the American Dutch Reformed Church was untouched by the liberalism⁴² of the Enlightenment which had influenced the Hervormde Kerk of the Netherlands and that the American church would not dominate them in an ecclesiastical relationship.

Dominie Vander Meulen reported at the classis meeting held early in the fall following Wyckoff's visit that the Classis of Holland was invited to send visitors to the synodical assemblies, but the Classis demurred because "...at this moment it is difficult to do so because of the pressure of local business and the difficulties connected with a new settlement."⁴³ By April of 1850, the classis decided to send Rev. Van Raalte to the meeting of the Albany Synod to be held in May, and at that synod meeting the Classis of Holland was united with the Particular Synod of Albany.⁴⁴ Subsequently Van Raalte reported to the Holland Classis that he had been received with "affection and sympathy."⁴⁵ The union with the Dutch Reformed Church was consummated at the meeting of the General Synod in June. Van Raalte and his people were now united with the daughter church of the old Gereformeerde Kerk of the Netherlands, the church in which Van Raalte's father had served as pastor before and after 1816, when the Gereformeerde Kerk was reorganized and renamed the Hervormde Kerk. Van Raalte and his people regarded the Dutch Reformed Church in America highly because it was committed to the same confessional standards adhered to by the Classis of Holland, and had similar standards of piety.

The union of the Holland Classis and the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church would have a profound impact. Thanks to Van Raalte's vision and leadership, the younger and smaller partner in the west would, in only a matter of time, make a great contribution to the life of the Reformed Church in America (the name the church adopted in 1867).⁴⁶ The Dutch Reformed Church in the East provided funds such as salary supplements for the pastors and for the Colony's educational endeavors. The Holland Classis soon brought growth to the denomination because it was not confined to the Holland Colony. In a short time, the immigrant churches in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo became members. Before the Classis of Wisconsin was organized in 1855, the immigrant churches in Wisconsin and Illinois were part of the Holland Classis. Hendrik Scholte's people, who by 1856 had rejected his independent notions, forsook his spiritual leadership in Pella, Iowa, and under Van Raalte's leadership united with the Classis of Holland.⁴⁷ The midwestern Dutch churches soon entered into the vital foreign missions movement of the denomination with Van Raalte leading the way. Among all of the successes of Van Raalte as leader of the emigration, union with the Reformed Church in America was the among the greatest and it is one which continues to have an impact in the present day. The Dutch immigrant congregations of Separatist background enabled the Reformed Church in America to have influence in the Middle West whereas most of the American Dutch Reformed congregations established by the members of the Reformed churches in New York and New Jersey who moved west were unsuccessful.⁴⁸

As the influence of Van Raalte's leadership was profound in the area of the unity of the immigrant Reformed Christians on a regional and national basis, it was equally profound in the Colony. Much of what he had attempted to accomplish in the Netherlands, he could now work toward in the Colony. Here he did establish a Christian community. He organized and was the pastor of First Reformed Church, as Bolks, Ypma, and Vander Meulen organized and served the congregations in their communities. His major ecclesiastical work in the colony was his pastoral leadership of the Holland congregation.

However, his leadership in the Holland community itself was far broader than his church work. All aspects of the life of community were of concern to him because he was the major pastor of the Holland community and in that role he sought to bring Reformed theological

principles to bear on all aspects of community life. His theological beliefs thrust him into community affairs in a role similar to John Calvin's in the city of Geneva in the sixteenth century. There is no evidence that Van Raalte was attempting to duplicate Calvin's model in Holland, but it was firmly implanted in Van Raalte's mind that Holland would be a God-centered community.

At first, Van Raalte as leader of the emigration was working primarily to meet the settlers' present, pressing needs without losing the larger vision of a Christian community. Property had to be obtained so that settlers could buy lots in the city of Holland or farms in the townships and make a living. A school was needed. Local government needed to be established. Holland township was organized in 1848 and members of his congregation ran for public office; Van Raalte himself was a successful candidate for school inspector. In "de stad," Van Raalte organized "The Peoples' Assembly." Five men selected as trustees⁴⁹ had the responsibility to lay out the town and organize the men who would contribute their labor a day or two a month in public works for the good of all citizens. The land within the city's boundary was purchased by Van Raalte in name of the trustees. The Assembly had the responsibility for setting up the company store and a company ship. People of the community had to assume public responsibilities for the community's welfare and they looked to Van Raalte for encouragement.

However, the best efforts of Van Raalte and his people could not overcome many of the practical difficulties they faced. The company store and ship failed as enterprises and were either taken over by private investors or abandoned. Many lots in the city remained unsold, and this caused a financial crisis for the trustees. Outside real estate interests attempted to move in, and the trustees approached Van Raalte with a plea that he assume the city's indebtedness. Van Raalte agreed, and hence became the sole proprietor of the city.⁵⁰ Along with his other land investments, he became the primary real estate owner in the Colony. Providentially the expertise he had gained in the Netherlands from business ventures with his brother-in-law, Dirk Blikman Kikkert, prepared Van Raalte to guide the colony to a better economic footing.⁵¹ The other ministers of the Colony had little involvement in economic concerns, but Van Raalte invested in a variety of businesses which, in time, helped the Colony to grow and thrive. As a major property owner in the colony, he was generous in donating land to the community, providing the market square, land for parks, churches and schools, and donating the sixteen acres which became the original campus of Hope College.

It was Van Raalte who was responsible for establishing an institution of higher learning for the colonists. Elementary education was taken care of by the public schools with their strong Christian emphasis, but Van Raalte saw the need for an academy and college so that young men and women in the Colony would have the opportunity to get more education than the elementary schools offered. He also realized that although he was able to invite many Separatist ministers to join him in the Colony the Afscheiding Church in the Netherlands would not, in the future, provide enough ministerial candidates or pastors for the developing Colony and its churches. Wynand Gardenier had come from the Netherlands to serve the church in Kalamazoo, but although Van Raalte did his best to persuade Helenius De Cock, son of the founder of the Afscheiding movement, to come to serve the church in Graafschap, his efforts were to no avail.⁵² Ultimately, Van Raalte needed to enlist candidates for the ministry from the young men of the colony and therefore he had to provide the institutions to educate them.

The union of the Classis of Holland with the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North

America in 1850 was a blessing to the colonists in many ways. The eastern Reformed Church had founded and supported two key institutions which attracted Van Raalte's attention: Rutgers College and the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey. What Van Raalte first had to do, therefore, was to establish a secondary school or an academy to train the young candidates and prepare them for college at Rutgers. By 1851, Van Raalte presented a plan for such a school to the General Synod, which the members approved and agreed to support financially. Walter B. Taylor, of Geneva, New York, served as the first principal, arriving in October. Eighteen boys were ready for secondary education and were members of the first class. Taylor was followed by other teachers. By 1857, after Van Raalte canvassed many Dutch Reformed congregations in the East personally for funds, construction of the first academy building began and the academy was formally organized. When the Rev. Philip Phelps, Jr. came from New York in 1859 to succeed John Van Vleck, a beloved principal who resigned for reasons of ill health, plans were laid to begin college classes, which commenced in 1862. In 1866, the new college, named Hope College, was incorporated and the first class of eight men graduated. What a joy for Van Raalte and the Holland Classis! All eight graduates asked for training in theology at Hope College in order to enter the ministry of the Reformed Church.⁵³

Therefore, Van Raalte had one more goal in mind: the establishment of a theological seminary for "the church at the West." The General Synod approved the formation of a department of theology at the college. In time the department was separated from the college and in 1884 became Western Theological Seminary.⁵⁴ Van Raalte had played the primary role in establishing secondary, collegiate, and theological education. The institution of Hope College served more than the Colony, and soon students were coming from all the Dutch immigrant centers in the Middle West to Hope College for an education. Again, Van Raalte's leadership made a great impact in the Dutch-American community. Van Raalte was not always successful as leader of the emigration. Many of the challenges and problems he faced proved to be truly insurmountable. Although he founded a Christian community, united with the Dutch Reformed Church in the East, and established a sound educational system, he was constantly assailed by the same sectarianism and divisiveness which plagued the Afscheiding movement in the Netherlands.⁵⁵ When the settlers had built their homes and farms and established businesses, the peace and unity of the community were immediately threatened by dissension. Some of the Separatists who did not agree with the union with the Dutch Reformed Church in 1850 seceded from the Classis of Holland in 1857, later taking the name of the Christian Reformed Church. Van Raalte was an inspiring leader, yet his manner was, for some people, too forceful. Like Moses, the leader of ancient Israel, he experienced challenges to his leadership. Van Raalte worked his entire life in America for peace and unity among the Dutch immigrants of the Middle West, but he did not achieve this goal. Yet when he departed this life on November 11, 1876, at the age of sixty-five years, many people in the midwestern Dutch-American community realized that a great man was no longer with them. On the 1879 memorial plaque placed in the church which he served as pastor from 1847 to 1867, the year of his retirement, these words are written, "In memory of Albertus C. Van Raalte, first pastor of this congregation and father of our settlement, a servant of the Lord, mighty in words and deeds." That brief tribute truly summarizes the life of the person who was the key leader of the Dutch immigrants to America in the mid-nineteenth century.

Endnotes

1. The major secondary sources used in this paper are: A. Brummelkamp [Jr.], *Levensbeschrijving van wijlen Prof. A. Brummelkamp* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1910); Henry E. Dosker, *Levensschets van Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D.D.* (Nijkerk: C. C. Callenbach, 1893); Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America: Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789-1950*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989); Freek Pereboom, H. Hille, en H. Reenders, editors, *'Van scheurmakers, onruststokers en geheime opruijers...': De Afscheiding in Overijssel* (Kampen: Een Uitgave Van De Ijsselakademie, 1984); P. R. D. Stokvis, *De Nederlandse Trek Naar Amerika, 1846-1847* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1977); M. te Velde, *Anthony Brummelkamp (1811-1888)* (Barneveld: Uitgeverij de Vuurbaak, 1988); and Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America, A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America*, Robert P. Swierenga, General Editor, and Adriaan de Wit, Chief Translator (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985).
2. The Separatist movement is the Afscheiding of 1834. The words are used interchangeably in the paper. The major documentary source of the Afscheiding is *Archiefstukken Betreffende De Afscheiding van 1834*, (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1939-1946) 4 vols., edited by F. L. Bos. The best work on the Afscheiding of 1834 in English is by Gerrit J. tenZythoff, *Sources of Secession: The Netherlands Hervormde Kerk on the Eve of the Dutch Immigration to the Midwest* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987).
3. For a detailed study of the ministry of Albertus C. Van Raalte, see H. Reenders, "Albertus C. van Raalte, als leider van Overijsselse Afscheidenen 1836-1846," in *'Van scheurmakers, onruststokers en geheime opruijers...': De Afscheiding in Overijssel*, 98-197.
4. *Ibid.*, 167.
5. A. Brummelkamp, [Jr.], *Levensbeschrijving*, 194-195.
6. See Bertus Harry Wabeke, *Dutch Emigration to North America 1624-1860, a Short History* (New York: The Netherlands Information Bureau, 1944), 90-93.
7. A letter of Alexander Hartgerink, May 5, 1846, Toledo, Ohio, describing his emigration experience in considerable detail, appeared in *Landverhuizing, of Waarom Bevorderen Wij de Volksverhuizing en Wel Naar Noord-Amrika en Niet Naar Java? door A. Brummelkamp en A. C. Van Raalte* (Amsterdam: Hoogkamer & Compe., 1846), 46-53.
8. An English translation of the title is, "Emigration or why do we promote emigration to North America and not to Java?" The pamphlet which went through several printings is a primary historical document for the emigration to America.
9. *Ibid.*, 2.

10. *Ibid.*, 3.
11. *Ibid.*, 7.
12. Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 59.
13. Or, "Rules for the Society of Christians for the Netherlander Emigration to North America," Lucas, 59. The full text of the constitution is given by A. Brummelkamp, Jr. in the biography of his father, *Levensbeschrijving*, 205-209.
14. The letter dated May 25, 1846, first published in the *Landverhuizing* pamphlet, dated May 25, 1846, was translated and published in the *Christian Intelligencer*, on October 15, 1846. Subsequently published in Henry S. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 1:14-20.
15. *Landverhuizing*, 32.
16. *Ibid.*, 34.
17. Dosker, *Levensschets*, 65.
18. *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America, from June, 1846, to June, 1849, Inclusive: with a Copious Index* (New York: Printed for the General Synod by J. A. Gray, 1849), 8: 28.
19. See Lucas, *Memoirs*, 1: 14-20, for the full text of the "Appeal" in English translation.
20. This assistance is mentioned in all the major writings about the emigration. For specific references, see Albert Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), 59, 62.
21. See Van Raalte's letters of November 27 and December 16 1846, describing the trip to Detroit, in *Stemmen uit Noord-Amerika, met begeleidend woord van A. Brummelkamp, Bedienaar des Goddelijken Woords*, Tweede Druk (Amsterdam: Hoogkamer & Comp., 1847).
22. Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 72-80.
23. Major information on land purchase by Van Raalte can be found in the Van Raalte papers in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the Calvin College Archives, boxes 11 and 12.
24. The people were Evert Zagers, Egbert Frederiks, William Notting and his wife, Hermanus Lankheet, and Jan Laarman. Zagers and Frederiks came from Emmen in Drenthe, Lankheet from Hellendoorn in Overijssel, and the Nottings from Coevorden in Drenthe. Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 87-88. Lucas does not mention Laarman's place of origin.

25. See Lucas, *Netherlanders*, chapter three, "The Michigan Settlement--Founding and Early History," 87-150, for full details on the Holland settlement.
26. Clear distinction was made between Holland as the city and the surrounding towns as villages.
27. Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 96.
28. Dosker, *Levensschets*, 80.
29. Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 276.
30. A survey of many immigrant memoirs, published in Lucas, *Memoirs*, gives many interesting accounts of the early years in the Colony at Holland.
31. A copy of this letter can be found in the Van Raalte papers, the Joint Archives of Holland at Hope College, Holland, Michigan, in the collection of the Holland Historical Trust, box 1, folder 18.
32. The estimate of the number of houses by Griffin probably is high. Hendrik Van Eyck who described the city in 1848 believed that there were about fifty houses only. See Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 96.
33. The first ten years of the minutes of the Classis of Holland was published in 1950 and entitled, *Classis Holland Minutes 1848-1858* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company). The minutes of the first meeting begin on page 19.
34. The pamphlet is a manual of ecclesiastical regulations.
35. *Classis Holland Minutes*, 23.
36. *Ibid.*, 19.
37. "An Official Report on the Dutch Kolonie in Michigan, 1849," by Isaac Wyckoff, published in Lucas, *Memoirs*, 1: 454.
38. *De Hollander*, April 11, 1855. The Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, in the collection of the Holland Historical Trust.
39. Nicholas H. Dosker used these words for the title of his book which is a history of the Reformed Church in America, published in Nijmegen by P. J. Milborn in 1888.
40. Lucas, *Memoirs*, 1: 454.
41. *Ibid.*

42. See tenZythoff, *Sources*, 99-127, for a full discussion of this matter.
43. *Classis Holland Minutes*, 27.
44. "Minutes of the Particular Synod of Albany," 22, as referred to in the *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church*, 8 (June, 1850): 68.
45. *Classis Holland Minutes*, 39.
46. Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch in America, 1609-1974* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 100-101.
47. See the minutes of the First Reformed Church of Pella which relate how the early members shifted their allegiance from Scholte to Van Raalte. Van Raalte's son-in-law, Pieter J. Oggel, became the pastor of the congregation after it became a Reformed Church in America congregation. Original minutes and translation in possession of the First Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa.
48. The Reformed Church in America, in its effort to establish churches as Reformed Church members from New York and New Jersey, found it very difficult to compete with the larger denominations such as the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists in keeping up with the American frontier. In addition, many of the new congregations founded by the Reformed Church in Michigan and Illinois failed to survive.
49. Lucas, *Netherlanders*, 97-98.
50. Bernardus Grootenhuis presented a spirited defense of this action by the city of Holland. See "Our History," *De Hope*, March 24, 1888; republished in *De Grondwet*, April 16, 1912.
51. For Van Raalte's knowledge of business, see W. De Graaf, "Een afgeschieden dominee als zakeman: Dr. A. C. Van Raalte" in *De Hoeksteen, Tydschrift voor Vaderlandse Kerkgeschiedenis*, 12e Jaargang, no. 1 (Februari, 1983): 3-12.
52. Van Raalte to De Cock, September 26, 1851. Original in the Gereformeerde Archief, Rotterdam.
53. For information on the history of Hope College, see Preston J. Stegenga, *Anchor of Hope: The History of an American Denominational Institution* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954) and Wynand Wichers, *A Century of Hope, 1866-1966* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968).
54. Two dated but useful essays on the early history of Western Theological Seminary are "The Theological Seminary At Hope College" by Cornelius E. Crispell and "The Western Seminary Since 1884" by Henry E. Dosker, published in *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, 1628-1902*, 4th ed., rev. and enl. (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), 199-207. Edward Tanjore Corwin was the editor.

55. Reenders' essay gives the most information on the negative side of the Afscheiding movement.