

Early Hope College History as Reflected in the Correspondence of Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte to Rev. Philip Phelps Jr., 1857-1875¹

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Anyone reasonably acquainted with the history of Hope College when asked who its founder was will answer, without hesitation, Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte. Histories of Hope College² and biographies of Van Raalte³ would confirm this answer. However, through recent research on the correspondence between Van Raalte and Philip Phelps Jr., I have come to believe that there is evidence that should lead us to question this answer—certainly enough evidence to re-evaluate the roles these two men played in the early history of Hope College.

First a word about the correspondence itself. What is available is actually one-sided in that only Van Raalte's letters to Phelps are extant while most of the letters of Phelps to Van Raalte are not. Here is evidence to confirm the theory that Van Raalte destroyed some of his papers before he died. The Phelps family, however, saved the letters of Van Raalte to his friend Phelps. These letters, ninety-five in all, are now in the Hope College Collection at the Joint Archives of Holland. They were numbered and transcribed by Rev. George B. Scholten, the husband of Adriana Otte, a granddaughter of Phelps and the daughter of Dr. John and Mrs. Frances Phelps Otte.⁴ The Otte family treasured the correspondence as well as the papers and scrapbooks of the Phelps family.⁵

Following the death of Rev. Scholten in 1980, the family donated the letters of Van Raalte to Phelps thus making them more accessible for research. Preston Stegenga did not, as far as we can determine, refer to them at all in his history, *Anchor of Hope*, which was published in 1954. Wynand Wichers in his book published in 1968, *A Century of Hope*, mentioned in a bibliographical note that he had copies of more than seventy letters for his use.⁶ It is evident that he only had Scholten's transcriptions. Scholten, in the process of transcribing the letters, also edited the letters to a considerable degree and smoothed out Van Raalte's grammar and corrected misspelled words.⁷ Some transcriptions also have words missing. When Wichers quoted parts of the letters in his history, it is clear that he was using the transcriptions and not the originals.⁸

Studying the whole corpus of letters, most of them in the original, offers us an opportunity to gain some new insights into early Hope College history. Although our reflections on the early history of Hope College based on this correspondence are one-sided

due to the loss of Phelps's letters to Van Raalte, the attitude and thinking of Phelps can be found in other Phelps documents which parallel the Van Raalte/Phelps correspondence for the years of 1857 to 1875. Looking at the correspondence along with other Phelps materials helps to give our study some balance.

The seeds for Hope College were embedded in the hopes and dreams of the Dutch immigrants who formed a Holland Colony⁹ in West Michigan and grew out of their early efforts to organize a system of education for their children.¹⁰ Initially, there was not enough money to support Christian schools, and public education was inaugurated in 1848 for the colonists. In 1851, however, just four years after Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte established the Holland Colony on the shores of Black Lake in West Michigan, he laid the foundation for a Christian high school referred to as the Pioneer School. The founding of a Christian grade school had to wait until 1857, but with the founding of the Pioneer School he began to fulfill a long held dream of the Dutch immigrants.¹¹ Walter T. Taylor of Geneva, New York, was appointed the first principal of the Pioneer School, and classes began in October 1851. To Taylor's report of his first year of work, Van Raalte appended the prophetic words: "This is my anchor of Hope for the future."

Principals came and went fairly rapidly. Taylor served as principal for three years, followed by Frederick P. Beidler who was on hand for one year. With the coming of John Van Vleck in 1855, the school began to stabilize. By 1857 Van Vleck and Van Raalte officially organized the Pioneer School and called it the Holland Academy.¹² That same year Van Raalte went East to raise money for the construction of the academy building, which was later named Van Vleck Hall. The initial cost of this four-story brick building, completed in 1858, was \$7,000. When Van Raalte again went back East in late 1859 to complete the funding for the building and the needed furnishings, the cost had risen to \$12,000.¹³

Van Raalte met Phelps for the first time in 1857.¹⁴ Although the Phelps family had visited the Holland Colony on their western tour in 1856 and Mrs. Van Raalte had entertained them, Van Raalte himself was not in Holland at that time.¹⁵ During Van Raalte's fund-raising trip in 1857, he stayed with the Phelps family in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, a village just north of New York City. Phelps, a graduate of the Albany Academy, Union College, and the Theological Seminary at New Brunswick, was serving as pastor at the First Reformed Church. The congregation was generous in its giving to the cause which Van Raalte represented. Albert and Frances

Few Chrystie, members of that congregation, were especially generous.¹⁶

Van Raalte took a liking to young Phelps, then thirty-one years old. Correspondence between Van Raalte and Phelps and an association between them continued from 1857 until a year before the death of Van Raalte in 1876.¹⁷ As is reflected in this correspondence of eighteen years' duration, 1857-1875, Van Raalte and Phelps became very good friends. Van Raalte's personality did not lend itself to close friendships, and it appears that during his lifetime Phelps and Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp, his brother-in-law in the Netherlands, were his closest friends. The friendship of Van Raalte and Phelps proved to be crucial because working together to advance the cause of education in the Holland Colony depended on their close collaboration.

The first group of letters in the Van Raalte/Phelps correspondence relates mainly to the fund-raising efforts of Van Raalte after Phelps accepted the call to be a missionary pastor to the non-Dutch-speaking residents of Holland, Michigan, and principal of the Holland Academy. The Phelps family moved to Holland in the summer of 1859. They lived in Van Vleck Hall where a number of students were living and where the classes were taught. The Pioneer School, now the Holland Academy, gained its fourth principal in nine years with the arrival of Phelps. Although Taylor, Beidler, and Van Vleck left after serving for short periods of time, Phelps came for the long term as his record revealed.

Phelps had just started his work at the academy when Van Raalte left for the East to begin his second fund-raising expedition which would last a full three months, from the beginning of November 1859 to the end of January of 1860. Christina Van Raalte was left to manage a large family, with the youngest child only two years old, and the Van Raalte business affairs.¹⁸ It is no wonder that someone once commented to Van Raalte that the Holland Academy was his first wife, and Christina his second.¹⁹ For this trip, Phelps provided some tips regarding whom Van Raalte should contact.²⁰ Van Raalte met two notable persons on this trip. One was Theodore Frelinghuysen,²¹ scion of a wealthy old Dutch family in New Jersey, former president of New York University and then serving as president of Rutgers College. Frelinghuysen was well-known because he was the vice presidential candidate on the Whig ticket with Henry Clay in 1844. The other was ex-president Martin Van Buren living in Kinderhook, New York, and member of the Dutch Reformed Church there. Prospects of getting something from Van Buren were dim,²² but Frelinghuysen was very generous. Frelinghuysen realized that the enrollment

of students at Rutgers College was enhanced with the graduates of the Holland Academy who were coming East to advance their educational opportunities.

Although there are no letters from Phelps in this collection of ninety-five letters assembled by George Scholten, a knowledge of Phelps comes to the fore very quickly due to an unexpected challenge in the fund-raising campaign. While Van Raalte was making his case for the academy as he visited congregations and individuals, an article appeared in the 1 December 1859 issue of the denominational weekly *The Christian Intelligencer*. The article was signed only with the letter "W," but this anonymous writer apparently had inside information about the academy and seriously questioned the necessity of this Van Raalte fund-raising expedition. Van Raalte happened to be in Manhattan, where the editorial office was located, and the editor of the paper, Dr. Elbert S. Porter, gave him space immediately so that he could respond to this anonymous critic of his campaign to raise funds. He realized that action had to be taken quickly or his efforts to raise money for the academy could be hampered considerably. Frelinghuysen and his faculty published a firm defense of Van Raalte and his cause on 8 December. Phelps sprang into action and published two long articles, one on 29 December and the second on 5 January 1860, refuting the writer "W" point by point. Even Van Raalte was surprised with the forthrightness of Phelps's answer and asked him to tone down the rhetoric somewhat. Although he had been at the academy for only a short time, Phelps was front and center in the promotion of the welfare of the Holland Academy.

Since the Dutch Reformed Church²³ was a small denomination, it did not take Van Raalte and Phelps long to find out the identity of the anonymous writer who had called into question before the whole church the rightness of Van Raalte's fund-raising efforts. The writer was Rev. Charles Scott, pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in Shawangunk, New York, who had never been West to visit the Holland Academy. The source of his information was the former principal, Rev. John Van Vleck, who was a son of the church Scott was pastoring, then serving as principal of an academy in nearby Kingston.²⁴ Scott's sharp questioning did not hamper Van Raalte's efforts but actually strengthened his hand in raising money because the sympathy of many was aroused by the attack on the Holland Academy. People came to Van Raalte's defense and gave generously so that his second fund-raising campaign was a success. The incident left no ill feeling apparently for in 1866 Phelps brought Scott to Hope College at the time theological education was inaugurated at Hope College. Scott taught theology

and later succeeded Phelps as president of Hope College.

After Van Raalte returned from his second fund-raising tour out East, the letters of Van Raalte to Phelps were written mainly during summer vacations.²⁵ Each year the Phelps family went back East to Albany where they spent about two months. During some of that time, however, Phelps raised money for the academy. After the Civil War began in 1861, Van Raalte's interests turned in different directions. Van Raalte became an ardent patriot and encouraged his two sons, Benjamin and Dirk Blikman Kikkert, to join the Northern forces, which they did. The eldest son, who had married in 1859, did not enter the service. The enlistment of Ben and Dirk caused Mrs. Van Raalte a great deal of anxiety, as well it might have. The young men were involved in the siege of Atlanta under General William Tecumseh Sherman in 1864. Dirk was wounded in that battle and lost an arm.²⁶

The care and burden of the Holland Academy rested more and more upon Phelps's shoulders as Van Raalte's letters in the early 1860s reveal. There were fewer letters during the war years to Phelps as well but what letters there were also revealed something else. Van Raalte, of course, was busy with his growing congregation, the First Reformed Church, situated in its stately Greek Revival style building.²⁷ In addition, his mind was engaged with personal affairs, one being the challenge of going to South Africa as a missionary. This challenge caught Van Raalte's interest when Rev. Giles Vande Wall, a teacher at the academy for two years, left in 1861 to serve in South Africa. Van Raalte was tantalized by the idea of going there especially since he was being severely criticized again by several people in the colony and by his congregation.²⁸ The complaints were that Van Raalte spent too much time with his business affairs, which was true but with good reason. The First Reformed congregation often failed to pay his promised salary of \$600 per year, thus forcing Van Raalte to engage in business ventures. In addition, he was promoting the Holland Harbor project which was crucial to the economic development of the Holland Colony. Van Raalte's letter to Giles Vande Wall in 1862 revealed that Van Raalte was besieged with many concerns,²⁹ leaving Phelps to guide the work of the academy. Indeed, from 1861, with the departure of Vande Wall to South Africa, until 1863, Phelps was the sole teacher in the academy with the assistance of three students who served as tutors.

While Van Raalte was engaged in many pursuits, Phelps, in spite of his heavy teaching and preaching load, was laying the foundation of Hope College. (His congregation was growing and was organized

into Hope Reformed Church in 1862.) During this same period while he was the sole teacher in the academy, he laid out the freshman college course so that the graduates of the academy could begin to do college work right on the premises. No longer would the graduates of the academy have to travel to Rutgers College many miles back East.³⁰ In 1863, the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church gave its approval to the founding of a Christian college in the West to be named Hope.³¹ With the permission of the denomination to found a college came the responsibility for Phelps in 1864 from the General Synod to raise an endowment of \$85,000 to fund the new institution. At this time, Phelps, not Van Raalte, became the primary fund-raiser for the academy and the college. In 1866, Phelps obtained the permission of the State of Michigan to incorporate Hope College. He officiated that same year at the graduation of the first class consisting of eight young men and was inaugurated as the first president. Van Raalte was not at the first commencement or the inauguration of Phelps because he and his wife were vacationing in the Netherlands that summer in the hope that Mrs. Van Raalte's poor health would improve.

Van Raalte was playing a secondary role now, not because he was less interested in the development of the college and the establishment of theological education at the college, but because his professional and personal interests were taking him in other directions. In 1867, at the age of fifty-six, he retired from the pastorate of the First Reformed Church. It had become quite a large congregation so he suggested that the congregation be divided into three congregations. Those people living southeast of Holland formed the Ebenezer congregation. Those congregants living in the village of Holland were divided into two congregations on the basis of geography. Those living on the east side of Central Avenue, would stay at the First Reformed Church and those on the west side would form the new congregation of the Third Reformed Church. Hope Church, first called the Second Reformed Church, was ministering to the English-speaking residents of Holland and was located on Eleventh Street, west of Central Avenue.³² The majority of the Van Raalte letters to Phelps from 1866 to 1875, approximately two-thirds of the collection, dealt with several momentous issues as we shall note shortly.

Having left congregational work, Van Raalte would have had more time to work on behalf of the college and assist Phelps in his multitudinous duties; however, his fertile mind and restless spirit generated the idea of establishing a new Dutch immigrant settlement in Virginia at a place called Amelia Court House near Appomattox. His ostensible reason to

establish a new settlement was for missionary purposes.³³ All that Van Raalte accomplished with this venture was to ruin his reputation. Although he established three congregations and an academy, only one congregation, now called the Mattoax Presbyterian Church, survived. His dear and patient wife, Christina, chronically suffering from ill health, moved down to Virginia with the unmarried children for a brief period of time in 1869 until she insisted they move back to Holland because the Van Raaltes' beloved son-in-law, Rev. Pieter J. Oggel, a professor at Hope, was fatally ill with tuberculosis.³⁴ After the family moved back to Holland, Van Raalte made a third fund-raising foray to build up the endowment of the college. It is not known if he was still away from home when Oggel died on 13 December 1869.³⁵

Meanwhile Phelps's vision for the future of Hope College continued to enlarge. He now made two crucial moves. The first was to inaugurate theological education and the second was to develop Hope into a university. The two moves were closely connected. When the first class graduated in 1866, seven of the eight graduates asked to begin their education in theology and preparation for the ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church at Hope College. There was some opposition out East to this proposal of Phelps because the Theological Seminary at New Brunswick was certainly not overcrowded with students and did not want to lose all of these candidates coming from the West. Moreover, this institution in Holland, Michigan, under the leadership of an unassuming but very dynamic, assertive, and able president, was now a major rival for funds in the denomination. The General Synod, however, approved of beginning theological education at Hope College.³⁶ It must have realized that the establishment of theological education at Hope College would enhance the growth of the western section of the denomination and thus was crucial to the growth of the denomination. Professors Cornelius E. Crispell, T. Romeyn Beck, and Charles Scott, all of whom were Reformed Church ministers, were now not only to provide instruction at the college but theological education as well. Phelps also continued his teaching duties.

Phelps, ever the visionary, had even greater hopes for Hope College though: he wanted to establish a Christian university!³⁷ The school of theology was to be augmented by schools of law and medicine. The Council of Hope College, as the board was then called, approved the concept as did Van Raalte, who was president of the council.³⁸ A new name was adopted for the university: Hope Haven University. The council even voted to re-name Black Lake and call it Hope Haven Lake because the college had purchased 835 acres on the north side of

the lake. The purpose of the property was to raise crops and fruit for the support of Hope Haven University and in Phelps's words to be a setting for a "a future Scientific Department." This purchase of land cost \$10,000, an amount which added a great burden to the finances of the college which was already chronically under funded. New York financiers like Samuel B. Schieffelin³⁹ and James Suydam⁴⁰ often came to the aid of the college with their legendary generosity. Now Suydam gave another munificent gift of \$5,000. In recognition of his large gift, the Council called the property the James Suydam Farm.⁴¹

With all this information, well-known and well-documented, we should pause to ask why Phelps was not generally regarded as the founder of Hope College. Most historical sketches and formal histories do not recognize Phelps as founder of the college. All histories recognize the key role he played at Hope in the 1860s and 1870s, but only one gives him the credit he deserved as founder. Edward Tanjore Corwin wrote a biographical sketch of Phelps, which was published in his monumental *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, ... 1628-1902*, in which he stated Phelps the founder of Hope College.⁴²

Why was what Corwin said passed over by later historians like Stegenga and Wichers? I would suggest that he was an outsider looking objectively at the evidence before him while Stegenga, Wichers, and others were insiders who accepted the mystique and legend that developed around the figure of Van Raalte.⁴³ This may have happened for several reasons. Phelps was a very modest and unassuming person. He was quite the opposite in personality of Van Raalte who was always front and center in church, educational, and civic affairs in the Holland Colony. Van Raalte deserves all the credit he has received as founder of the Holland Colony and the Pioneer School, but Phelps deserves the credit as founder of Hope College. Phelps was determined and single-minded in his conviction that the Western part of the Dutch Reformed Church needed an institution of higher learning and a Christian college. He achieved his goal but with great modesty and self-effacement. His quiet Christian demeanor easily misled others to fail to give him the credit for what he achieved: the founding and organizing of Hope College, beginning with the admittance of the freshman class in the fall of 1862.

With the vision of a Christian institution to be named Hope Haven University, however, the world of the first president now began to collapse. Phelps's reach had clearly exceeded his grasp. The faculty members, Beck, Crispell, and Scott,⁴⁴ were firmly opposed to declaring Hope a university. One reason

for their opposition was that Hope was going more deeply into debt and the faculty members were owed a great deal in back salaries. Much of the endowment which Phelps had laboriously raised was not productive. For instance, Van Raalte convinced Phelps to loan \$2,000 to help fund the Amelia venture—an amount which was later lost.⁴⁵ The major argument of the faculty hung on a preposition: at or in. The question was: did theological education exist at Hope College or in Hope College? The faculty saw the model for theological education in New Brunswick. The Theological Seminary grew out of Rutgers College but had become a separate institution by this time with its own board of superintendents. The faculty claimed that theological education was at Hope College until it was able to be out on its own. Phelps, advocating the university idea, claimed that theological education was in Hope College, namely, that it was the first graduate department of the proposed university. For the sake of expediency, but confusing the issue, the Council of Hope College was assigned by Synod to oversee the work of theological education for the time being.

As things began to go from bad to worse for Phelps in the later 1860s in spite of his success in founding and establishing Hope College, we find other reasons why he was not given the credit due him. The Great Fire of October 1871 destroyed the entire business district of the village of Holland and two-thirds of the homes.⁴⁶ A resulting negative economic impact affected college fund-raising locally. The Panic of 1873 was another blow to Phelps's vision of a Christian university. Money was even harder to come by and the college was falling deeply into debt. Moreover, Van Raalte, who had lost his dear wife on 30 June 1871, a few months before the Holland fire, was in declining health by 1875 and could no longer support Phelps as he had. Van Raalte died the following year on 7 November 1876. Phelps was deprived of the support of his collaborator and sharer of dreams in the educational endeavors in which they had been together since 1859.

Two crucial events quickly followed. Within a year after Van Raalte's death, the General Synod declared that theological education be suspended at Hope College. This was a great blow to the Dutch immigrant churches in the entire Middle West. Indeed, just one year after the Christian Reformed Church inaugurated theological education, the Dutch Reformed Church discontinued it in the Midwest. In 1878 Phelps, along with the entire faculty, was then forced to resign. The committee which recommended the resignations said: "It is sometimes necessary to sacrifice men to save institutions."⁴⁷ The General Synod called for the reorganization of

the college and for an end of the controversy between Phelps and his faculty. Beck and Scott were kept on; Phelps and Crispell were not. A provisional president, Rev. Giles H. Mandeville, pastor of the Harlem Collegiate Church in New York City, was appointed as Phelps's replacement. Mandeville stayed out East to raise money for the school. Scott was given the responsibility of running the college. These two persons pulled the college out of its large debt by 1882.⁴⁸

One little-known, well-hidden fact must be mentioned here. Phelps refused to leave the college and the family quarters in Van Vleck Hall. He felt he had been unjustly and illegally dealt with. He pressed his case with the General Synod to be restored as the lawful president of Hope College.⁴⁹ He was also owed several thousand dollars in back salary and pressed for payment. He was not leaving the college for which he had sacrificed so much.⁵⁰ The Phelps family stayed in town for six years more, continuing to live at the college while their two children, Frances and Philip Tertius, received their education at the college. The children graduated in 1882, the first year women graduated from the college. The family moved back East in 1884⁵¹ and two years later he assumed the joint pastorate of two small congregations in upstate New York, Blenheim (South Gilboa) and Breakabeen (North Blenheim), and served them until 1895. Phelps was tagged by his failures and his earlier vital role at Hope College was downplayed: he became an embarrassment by hanging around Holland, which further tarnished his reputation among insiders. The career of Philip Phelps in higher education had come to a very unfortunate end and his dream of making Hope into a Christian university vanished.

In 1890, four years after leaving Holland, Phelps was invited to return to the college for the celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary. He was duly lauded for his accomplishments. His portrait had been painted and given to the college by the alumni association.⁵² In 1894 Hope College bestowed an honorary degree on him. Phelps, this saintly, visionary founder of Hope College, had the satisfaction of being recognized to some degree for what he had accomplished for the academy and the college before he died in 1896 at the age of seventy.

The kind of conclusion that Phelps's career had in Holland, Michigan, must have sullied his reputation in the denomination and the Holland community. The historical documents acknowledge that he was the first president of Hope College; this truth could not be denied him. Since Phelps left the college in disgrace, it could be understood that his being called the founder of Hope College might be disregarded. It is indeed unfortunate that Van Raalte

had not saved the Phelps' letters so we could get a clearer picture of what Phelps did to develop the academy into a college. But this year, as Hope College observes the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Pioneer School in 1851, we can look back on the work of this extraordinary man, Philip Phelps Jr., and acknowledge decisively that he was the founder of Hope College as well as its first president and that without his vision and great effort and labor, there may not have been a Hope College. Hope College clearly owes him a great deal for laying the solid foundation on which future generations could build.⁵³

NOTES

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² The two book-length published histories are *Anchor of Hope: The History of an American Denominational Institution, Hope College* by Preston J. Stegenga (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954) and *A Century of Hope 1866-1966* by Wynand Wichers (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968). Stegenga's history was originally submitted as a dissertation for his Ph.D. degree at the University of Michigan. This work is the more scholarly of the two but both histories are minimally footnoted and Stegenga's volume does not have an index.

³ Five biographies of Van Raalte have been written, the most recent being *Albertus C. Van Raalte: Dutch Leader and American Patriot* by Jeanne M. Jacobson, Elton J. Bruins, and Larry J. Wagenaar (Holland, Mich.: Hope College, 1996).

⁴ Both the original and the transcription of the letter which Scholten numbered as forty is missing. Scholten transcribed most of the letters. However, errors crept in some of the transcriptions and thus are not completely reliable as copies of the originals. Due to a curious habit Scholten had of giving away some of the originals, a number of the letters in the collection exist now in transcription only. His transcriptions also reveal that he did some editing in the process. It can be substantiated that Scholten gave away some of the letters because at least two of the originals have been returned to the collection. Gerrit Elzinga returned the originals of letters 51 and 82. The Van Raalte/Phelps correspondence is located in the Van Raalte Papers, H88-0174, box 2, Hope College Collection, Joint Archives of Holland, Holland, Mich. The author of this paper is currently in the process of editing the letters.

⁵ The Phelps children, Frances and Philip Tertius in particular, were eager and anxious to enhance their father's reputation at Hope College in view of President Phelps's forced resignation in 1878. Apparently in an effort to make sure that at least some of the Phelps papers would survive for posterity, she and her brother placed approximately one-third of the Phelps papers in each of three institutions: Hope College, Western Theological Seminary, and the Holland Museum. Happily, the three parts of the Phelps papers are now all located in the Joint Archives of Holland.

⁶ Wichers, 288.

⁷ Van Raalte had to write Phelps in his second language English, because Phelps did not know the Dutch language.

⁸ For example, see pages 52, 55, and 60. The quote on page 60 from Van Raalte's letter to Phelps, 31 August 1860, is also greatly condensed as well as considerably edited.

⁹ For general histories of the Dutch migration to Western Michigan in the nineteenth century, see Henry S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America: Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada 1789-1950* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1955; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989) 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* (1928), ed. Robert P. Swierenga, trans. Adriaan de Wit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985). The original Dutch edition was published in two volumes by P. Noordhof in Groningen, the Netherlands.

¹⁰ "Elementary Schools" by Gerhard G. De Jonge, n.d. This brief essay is located in the De Jonge Papers, T88-0042, Holland Museum Collection, Joint Archives of Holland.

¹¹ Wichers, 27-28.

¹² "Circular of the Holland Academy. A brief statement of its object, condition and prospects, course of instruction, etc. etc.," *The Hollander*, 10, 17, 24 June and 1 July 1857. Original in the Holland Museum Collection, Joint Archives of Holland.

¹³ See the Hope College histories by Stegenga and Wichers for details.

¹⁴ In the earliest extant letter of Van Raalte to Phelps, 26 August 1857, Van Raalte thanked Phelps for his hospitality when he canvassed the Dutch Reformed Church members in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. Van Raalte wrote: "Your kindness is often in my remembrance and causes sweet reflection, and a desire to express my thank[s]." This letter, written ten years after Van Raalte's arrival in America, reveals his struggle with mastering the English language.

¹⁵ "Notes on Dr. and Mrs. Phelps trip out West on a vacation, Sept. 1856." This is a handwritten document, undated, in the Phelps Papers, H88-0122, in the Hope College Collection at the Joint Archives of Holland. The Phelps's daughter, Frances Phelps Otte, is the likely author of this brief essay.

¹⁶ The full name of Frances Phelps Otte was Frances Few Christy Phelps Otte. For many details about the Phelps family, see "Phelps, Philip, Jr." in *American Biographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men...*, Michigan volume (Cincinnati, 1878), 97-99. From internal evidence, it appears that Phelps wrote this biographical sketch himself, thus making it all the more valuable for accuracy of details.

¹⁷ The last letter of Van Raalte to Phelps was 3 February 1875.

¹⁸ Of the eleven children born to the Van Raaltes, seven lived to adulthood. At the time Van Raalte was absent from home while on his fund-raising trip, not only did Mrs. Van Raalte have all seven children living in the family home on the east side of the village, but the family also included Helena, the wife of their eldest son. They had been married in February 1859. In December Helena gave birth to a son, Albertus, making a large household—which also included the hired help, of course—even larger.

¹⁹ Van Raalte to Phelps, 10 December 1859. Van Raalte made this statement in a joking manner but most likely the humor would have been lost on Mrs. Van Raalte.

²⁰ Van Raalte's "Begging Guide" is the source of such information. Van Raalte also kept meticulous lists of the names of the donors and how much they gave in this record. Holland Museum Collection, Van Raalte Papers, box 2, T88-0230, Joint Archives of Holland.

²¹ William H. S. Demarest, "The Time of President Frelinghuysen," in *A History of Rutgers College 1766-1924* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers College, 1924), 361-91.

²² In his letter to Phelps, 2 January 1860, Van Raalte wrote, "Ex-president Van Buren lives here but it will be a wonder if he will give \$5.00." Possibly Van Buren's pastor passed on the information to Van Raalte of Van Buren's alleged lack of charity.

Van Raalte's "Begging Guide" does not list the ex-president as a donor. Neither is it known if Van Raalte got to see Van Buren. This letter of Van Raalte also details the hardships he underwent in his fund-raising efforts and especially during these winter months. For information on Van Buren's membership in the Reformed Church of Kinderhook, see Donald B. Cole, *Martin Van Buren and the American Political System* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 11. A picture of President Van Buren's gravestone is in *The Two Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of the Kinderhook Reformed Church, Kinderhook, New York, 1712-1962* (printed privately, 1962), 39. The text beneath the picture reads: "Final resting place of a famous son of the church. Monument marking the grave of Martin Van Buren, Eighth President of the United States, and a lifelong member of the old church, in the Reformed Cemetery at Kinderhook."

²³ This term was generally used for the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church until 1867 when the name of the denomination was changed to the Reformed Church in America. Gerald F. DeJong "The Controversy over Dropping the Word Dutch from the Name of the Reformed Church," *Reformed Review*, 34, no. 3: 158-170.

²⁴ Van Raalte said in his 9 January 1860 letter to Phelps: "I saw the other half of ijour [sic] piece. I thank you for it.- I thank you for your moderation. It does good.- Rev. [Charles] Scott[t] the peculiar friend of Van Vleck owns the writing of W's.- so I heard of Rev. Buckelew." Rev. William Dey Buckelew (1825-1893) was pastor of the Moresville and South Gilboa, New York, Dutch Reformed congregations at that time.

²⁵ There are only three extant letters of Van Raalte to Phelps in 1861, one in 1862, two in 1863, four in 1864, and five in 1865.

²⁶ Ben and Dirk were very faithful letter writers to their parents during their years in the army. Their informative letters were translated by Clarence Jalving and are located in the Holland Museum Collection, Joint Archives of Holland. In a letter dated 29 August 1864 Ben reported that Dirk was shot at by rebels when they attempted to take Dirk captive, which resulted in the amputation of his right arm.

²⁷ This building is now the home of the Pillar Christian Reformed Church.

²⁸ For information on the contentious nature of some of Holland's citizens, see Robert P. Swierenga and Elton J. Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), especially chapters three and four. Van Raalte had already expressed interest in South Africa in a letter to Phelps on 31 August 1860. A controversy was rife in the Holland Colony over the use of hymns in worship services. Van Raalte was possibly more serious about receiving a call to South Africa because the Civil War had not yet begun and his sons were not yet in the army.

²⁹ Van Raalte to Giles Vande Wall, 29 June 1862. The location of the original is unknown. Albert Hyma, in his biography of Van Raalte, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1947), refers to this key document on pages 224-26 and 259-61. He must have found the original in the Van Raalte papers at the Van Raalte homestead, papers which were purchased by William B. Eerdmans and later given to Calvin College. The letter was published in *Ik Worstel en Ontkom* by P. J. Risseuw (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, n.d.), 118-21. Clarence Jalving's translation of the letter is located in the Calvin College Archives, but is in a fragmentary state.

³⁰ *First Catalogue and Circular of Hope College, Incorporated A. D. 1866 at Holland, Ottawa Co., Michigan; With a Catalogue and Circular of the Holland Academy. 1865-6.* (Albany, 1866), 41-47. Phelps wrote a historical sketch for this publication. This sketch provided the groundwork for all subsequent histories of Hope College, but it must be understood that it also represented Phelps's point of view.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 46. *The Acts and Proceedings of the Fifty-Seventh General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North*

America, Convened in the Village of Newburgh, N. Y., June, 1863 (New York, 1863), 321. The exact statement of the General Synod for giving permission to establish Hope College was: "The General Synod is conscious in assuming the charge of the Holland Academy. Feeling the importance of education as an efficient instrumentality to secure enlarged and permanent growth in her home missionary field, she would have her membership to adopt, foster, and cherish that Academy, to spare no exertion so that she may not only provide for its present wants, but to cause it to expand until it becomes an institution of a higher grade, and send out, as from a fountain of health, the young men of the West trained into a living ministry, who shall cultivate her waste places, supply the vacancies that arise, and occupy the new fields that continually present themselves." On the basis of this resolution, Phelps received the blessing of the church to continue collegiate education at the Holland Academy. The name "Hope" was not given to the nascent college until its incorporation in 1866.

³² Elton J. Bruins, *The Americanization of a Congregation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 9-11. Central Avenue was known as Market Street at that time because it ran alongside what is now known as Centennial Park and was then the market square.

³³ Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar, 150-67. Van Raalte gave a lengthy explanation for choosing Virginia in his letter to Rev. Pieter J. Oggel on 6 October 1868, which was published in *De Hope*, 21 October 1868, p. 2. This newspaper is located in the Hope College Collection, Joint Archives of Holland. Simone Kennedy's translation of the letter is located in the files of the Van Raalte Institute at Hope College.

³⁴ Van Raalte to Phelps, 3 August 1869.

³⁵ Van Raalte's letters to Phelps while out East date from 18 October to 23 November 1869. On 20 November, Van Raalte wrote Phelps that he hoped to come home soon but had to go to Amelia first. He signed a deed in Amelia on 30 November. It is possible that he made it back to Holland and saw Oggel before his death.

³⁶ *Acts and Proceedings of the Sixtieth General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America Convened in the City of New York, June, 1866* (New York, 1866), 96-97.

³⁷ Although the plan of the university was submitted by the Council of Hope College, Phelps undoubtedly wrote the twenty-page document, "Special Report of the Council of Hope College, to the General Synod, R.C.A., June 1868,..." The report is located in the Philip Phelps scrapbook, Hope College Collection, H88-0122, Joint Archives of Holland. Phelps based his idea of a Christian university on the report "Schools and Education" in the minutes of the General Synod of 1854. Part of that report said: "Schools, academies, colleges, and seats of professional education, all consecrated to Christ, and pervaded by the influence of his religion, will yet, we hope and believe, present the substantial realization of the complete idea of Christian education. An apprehension was felt the last year, that parochial schools might interfere with our public school system, that it might furnish a plea to the Romanists for claiming a share of the public money...The institution of Christian schools under the patronage and influence of the Church can only exert a wholesome influence on our public schools" (454-55). It was at this time that Samuel B. Schieffelin was promoting Christian schools in the denomination. See also *Centennial University Circular of Hope College, at Holland, Ottawa Co., Michigan* (Albany, 1876), 88.

³⁸ "Council of Hope College to the General Synod, R.C.A.," 14 November 1867, Reformed Church Archives, New Brunswick, N. J. (microfilm, Western Seminary Collection, W88-250a, Joint Archives of Holland).

³⁹ Schieffelin was very interested and supportive of the Holland Academy and later Hope College because of his great interest in parochial schools as mentioned above. He not only promoted the concept of parochial schools but also funded the program he

encouraged the Dutch Reformed Church to develop. For an understanding of the parochial school movement in the denomination, see *A Digest of Constitutional and Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America* (New York: Board of Publication, 1906), 477-83. In these pages, Edward Tanjore Corwin chronicled the movement. In the same volume, Corwin summarized the contributions of Schieffelin to the Reformed Church in America and to Hope College. Schieffelin was a partner with his three brothers in a wholesale drug business in New York City. *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography...* (New York, 1897), 521.

⁴⁰ A summary of Suydam's gifts to the Reformed Church in America and to Hope College is given in Prof. T. S. Doolittle's biographical sketch of Suydam, published in *Centennial of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in America, 1784-1884* (New York, 1885), 390-99. Suydam made his fortune in New York City real estate.

⁴¹ Van Raalte to Phelps, 5 November 1869. The quote is taken from "The Good Steward: A Memoir of James Suydam" by William J. R. Taylor, D. D., Pastor of the Clinton Avenue Reformed Church, Newark, N. J. (New York, 1873). This handwritten statement, located in the Reformed Church Archives at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, includes a section written by Phelps.

⁴² *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), 654. Corwin said: "The Classes of Grand River and Iowa bear like testimony [in their eulogies of Phelps, 1896] appreciating his consecrated, godly life, his services as a faithful preacher of the Gospel, as the founder [emphasis mine] and able administrator of Hope College and a worthy professor therein."

⁴³ Preston J. Stegenga, in his history of Hope College, came close to stating that Phelps was the founder of the college: "Although Van Vleck had been responsible for the foundation of the Holland Academy, Rev. Phelps enlarged its scope, so that it became a denominational college" (71). According to Stegenga, Van Vleck was key to the establishment of the Holland Academy although it developed out of the Pioneer School which was initiated by Van Raalte.

⁴⁴ A statement of these professors, dated 30 May 1868 and written by Crispell for submission to the General Synod, is located in the papers of the General Synod in the Reformed Church archives at New Brunswick Theological Seminary (microfilm, Western Seminary Collection, Joint Archives of Holland). The professors' point of view can also be found in "The Theological Seminary at Hope College," written by Crispell and published in *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America...1628-1878* by Edward Tanjore Corwin, 3rd ed., rev. and enl. (New York, 1879), 123-26.

⁴⁵ Van Raalte wrote to Phelps on 12 March 1871, "I thank God that you have been the means of helping the Amelia people. The Capital is safe enough." Van Raalte was ever optimistic but completely wrong in this prediction. The committee on the professorate of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America reported that "Loans on Virginia Lands" amounted to \$2,000. *The Acts and Proceedings of the Seventy-Second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, convened in regular session in the City of Utica, N. Y., June, 1878* (New York, 1878), 122.

⁴⁶ For an account of this disaster, see Elton J. Bruins, "Holocaust in Holland: 1871," *Michigan History* 55, no. 4: 289-304.

⁴⁷ *The Acts and Proceedings of the Seventy-Second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Convened in Regular Session in the City of Utica, N. Y., June, 1878* (New York, 1878), 117-25. The quote is found on page 124. One of the committee of five who submitted this report was Samuel B. Schieffelin, who must have been pained to share in making this judgement of Phelps.

Theological education in the West was resumed in 1884 with the establishment of Western Theological Seminary.

⁴⁸ "Historical Sketch" in *1887-'88 Catalogue of Hope College, at Holland, Mich., Twenty-Third Year, 37-48*. This short but detailed chronological sketch of Hope College history was probably written by President Charles Scott.

⁴⁹ A key document written by Phelps during this time, giving his side of the story, was a pamphlet *About Hope College*, April 1884, 22 pages.

⁵⁰ "Historical Sketch" in *1887-'88 Catalogue of Hope College...*, 47.

⁵¹ Phelps was ordered to leave the campus by the General Synod. The exact words of the synod were: *Whereas*, the Rev. Dr. Phelps now occupies a very considerable portion of [Van Vleck Hall], claiming that he does so by express direction of General Synod, and is ready to give it up when the General Synod shall ask him so to do, therefore *Resolves*, That this Synod requests Rev. Dr. Phelps, D.D., to place the rooms now occupied by him in Van Vleck Hall, at the disposal of the Council of Hope College. *The Acts and Proceedings of the Seventy-Eighth Regular Session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, convened at Grand Rapids, Mich., June, 1884* (New York, 1884), 536. At this session of the General Synod, the first time it met in the West due to the Masonic Controversy which convulsed the midwestern churches, the synod made a special trip by train to visit the campus. The members of the synod felt that the college needed a home for the president so it passed the hat and raised over \$3,000 for that cause. With the synod finally bringing the Phelps issue to a close, the council, with the approval of synod, made Charles Scott the president officially. Scott was inaugurated as president in 1885, an action delayed perhaps until General Synod resolved the issue with Phelps.

⁵² *The Anchor* 3 (July 1890): 10, 150. *The Anchor* was and still is the Hope College student newspaper. A synopsis of the address which Phelps gave at the alumni gathering to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the college also appeared in this issue. The address was titled "Unity in American Education." It was reported that Phelps received a very cordial reception at the celebration.

⁵³ In recognition of President Phelps, Philip Tertius Phelps privately published in 1941 a biography of his father, *A Brief Biography of Rev. Philip Phelps, D.D., LL.D.* The pamphlet included addresses and tributes made at his funeral and his memorial service at Hope College. Phelps died 4 September 1896.