

### **Series of Events to Celebrate Bicentennial of Van Raalte's Birth**

HOLLAND – Multiple activities are being planned throughout West Michigan in October in celebration of the bicentennial of the birth of the Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte, founder of Holland.

The events, most running between Friday, Oct. 21, and Tuesday, Oct. 25, will include a two-day festival in Holland; exhibitions in Holland, Zeeland and Grand Rapids; and an international scholarly conference at Hope College. All are designed, organizers say, to celebrate a visionary leader who had a major, lasting impact when he brought his fellow settlers to the shores of Black Lake in 1847 in search of economic opportunity and religious and educational freedom.

“The 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of the founder of Holland, Michigan, is a fitting time to honor him for his vision and perseverance, to remember the sacrifices that he and his family made in pursuit of that vision, and to identify and recognize his profound influence upon our community. In short, it is the right time to celebrate his enduring legacy,” said Dr. Jacob Nyenhuis, who is director of the A.C. Van Raalte Institute at Hope and is a member of the Dutch Heritage Coordinating Council, which has been arranging the celebration. “It also provides an occasion to celebrate the key role that Van Raalte played in the transformation of the Holland Academy into Hope College, with the Academy’s second principal, Philip Phelps Jr., as the co-organizer and first president of Hope College.”

Van Raalte was born on Oct. 17, 1811 in the village of Wanneperveen in Overijssel, the Netherlands, the son of a pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church. Following his

own education in theology, at Leiden University, Van Raalte became a leader in the newly formed Separatist Church, holding four pastorates between 1836 and 1846.

In the fall of 1846, he and his small group of followers left the Netherlands and sailed for America. They traveled via New York and Albany, and wintered in Detroit before reaching West Michigan and establishing the “Holland Kolonie” in February 1847. The pioneers were soon joined by many other Dutch immigrants, who not only settled in Holland itself but founded additional communities in the region as well as throughout the Midwest.

Van Raalte continued to work on the colony’s behalf for nearly three decades. He died on Nov. 7, 1876, at age 65.

Activities in conjunction with the celebration are still being scheduled, but will include a two-day “Founder’s Festival” running on Friday-Saturday, Oct. 21-22. Highlights of the festival so far are anticipated to include a reception at the Holland Area Arts Council with birthday cake, a play at Herrick District Library about Van Raalte and family-friendly games at the Holland Armory.

Among other events thus far:

Three concerts have been scheduled in conjunction with the bicentennial. The Holland Symphony Orchestra will perform “Piet Hein Rhapsodie” on Saturday, Oct. 1; the Holland Chorale will feature Dutch composers on Saturday, Oct. 22; and Hope will present an organ recital featuring faculty members Huw Lewis and Linda Strouf on Tuesday, Oct. 25.

Pillar Church will host a community worship service on Sunday, Oct. 23, at 3 p.m.

The international conference “Albertus C. Van Raalte: Leader and Liaison” will take place at Hope College on Monday and Tuesday, Oct. 24-25. Dutch and American scholars will discuss dimensions of Van Raalte including his role as a pastor and ecclesiastical leader and community leader and social reformer, his failed colony in Virginia, his family dynamics and his enduring legacy. The conference is a bilateral event, continuing in Ommen in Overijssel, the Netherlands on Friday-Saturday, Nov. 3-4.

Multiple organizations are planning heritage exhibitions, including Herrick District Library, Third Reformed Church, Hope Reformed Church and Pillar Church, all in

Holland; the Theil Research Center and Van Wylen Library at Hope; Graafschap Christian Reformed Church; the Dekker Huis Museum in Zeeland; and Heritage Hall at Calvin College in Grand Rapids.

The Van Raalte Bicentennial Community Celebration is being organized by the Dutch Heritage Coordinating Council, whose mission is to provide a forum to further the preservation and promotion of Dutch heritage in the Greater Holland/Zeeland Area. Support is being provided by Hope College, the City of Holland, the Herrick District Library, the Holland Area Arts Council and the Holland Historical Trust. Additional information about the celebration, and an updated list of events, is available online at [www.dutchheritagewestmichigan.com](http://www.dutchheritagewestmichigan.com)

The bilateral conference “Albertus C. Van Raalte: Leader and Liaison” is being organized by the A.C. Van Raalte Institute at Hope, which focuses on studying Dutch-American history and the history of the Holland area. Additional information about the conference is available online at [www.hope.edu/vri](http://www.hope.edu/vri)