

The A. C. Van Raalte Institute is a department of Hope College; hence our mission relates directly to and supports the mission of Hope College. We share a building with and are closely related to another department of Hope College, the Joint Archives of Holland.

The vision of the institute is derived from a letter dated 27 November 1846, by A. C. Van Raalte, written shortly after his party landed in New York. As he was headed westward, he declared, "I hope that a large colony can be established here in America which will focus its work on the Kingdom of God." His vision also extended far beyond the boundaries of Holland, Michigan, to other colonies and immigrants throughout the United States. The bold Christian vision that he had for the church, for education, and for the community continues to have an impact on the "colony" that he founded on 9 February 1847 and on the college which he helped to establish fifteen years later.

The institute carries out its educational mission not only through research and publication but also through the sponsorship of lectures and presentations by our members and invited guests. Through liaison with scholars and educational and cultural institutions in the Netherlands and other countries, we seek to promote the understanding of the history of this community. From time to time, we host visiting scholars from these countries to enable them to engage in research in our local archives and to provide a broader perspective to our own endeavors.

The Van Raalte Institute was established in 1993 through the generosity of Hope College graduate and trustee, Peter H. Huizenga (class of 1960). The initial idea for an institute was provided by James Ver Meulen, a former member of the Hope College Board of Trustees with a strong interest in the history of Hope College and the nineteenth-century Dutch immigration to western Michigan. Before his death in the mid-1980s, Ver Meulen wrote to fellow trustee Huizenga, proposing that they meet to discuss his concept of a research institute on Dutch American studies, which would be located at the college. A few years later, Peter Huizenga provided the means to translate the idea into reality.

On 19 January 1993, the Huizenga family made a major gift to establish and endow the institute. The gift was made in honor of Mrs. Elizabeth Bovenkerk Huizenga, the mother of B. J. Buntrock, Peter H. Huizenga, Suzanne Huizenga Kanis, Virginia Huizenga Jurries, and J. C. Huizenga. The endowment provides support for the institute, housed in the Theil Research Center on the western edge of Hope's campus. Peter Huizenga has remained actively engaged with the institute throughout its history and has often provided additional support for our work.

The institute is named in honor of the founder of Holland, Michigan, the Reverend Dr. Albertus C. Van Raalte (1811-1876), who also played a key role in the founding of Hope College. Van Raalte arrived in western Michigan with a small group of followers on 9 February 1847. His vision for this colony of Seceders from the state church of the Netherlands is incorporated into our mission statement.

Hope College president John H. Jacobson appointed Dr. Elton J. Bruins, the Evert and Hattie Blekkink Professor of Religion Emeritus, as director of the institute in April 1993. Bruins had devoted much of his career to research on Van Raalte, and Ver Meulen had often encouraged him in his work. Ver Meulen had also suggested to Peter Huizenga that Elton would be the ideal person to head up the research institute. Bruins had been retired from teaching less than a year when he was appointed to head up this new research institute.

The institute became a physical presence in January 1994 when Bruins was given the corner of an office in Van Zoeren Hall for his work. He resigned his post as founding director on 1 July 2002 but has remained active as a senior research fellow and consultant in many areas of our work. In January 2004, on the occasion of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the institute,

Bruins was named the Philip Phelps Jr. Research Professor. This newly created research professorship honors the memory of one of the principals of the Holland Academy who became the first president of Hope College. Elton Bruins' research on Phelps has led him to argue that Phelps should be acknowledged as the legitimate founder of Hope College, although Van Raalte did have a major role in its establishment.

In collaboration with the late Karen G. Schakel, Elton Bruins edited the correspondence between Van Raalte and Phelps, resulting in the book, *Envisioning Hope College: Letters Written by Albertus C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps Jr., 1857 to 1875*, published in 2011 by Van Raalte Press and Wm. B. Eerdmans.

In May 1996, the foremost scholar of nineteenth-century Dutch American studies, Dr. Robert P. Swierenga, joined our staff. A Chicago native and friend of Peter Huiuzenga, Swierenga took early retirement from his post as professor of history at Kent State University in Ohio to accept appointment as the A. C. Van Raalte Research Professor and adjunct professor of history.

In the same year, Dr. Jeanne M. Jacobson resigned from the faculty of Western Michigan University to accept a position as Senior Research Fellow of the Van Raalte Institute and adjunct professor of education. Jacobson's background included an interest in American history and Dutch and Huguenot immigration to America and extensive experience as an editor and author. After she moved to Sarasota, Florida, with her husband, Dr. John H. Jacobson (1933-2005), upon his retirement from the presidency of Hope College in 1999, she continued to be active in the work of the institute, editing the annual report and contributing essays to institute publications, until her death in January 2009.

James C. Kennedy joined the faculty of Hope College in the fall of 1997 as assistant professor of history and research fellow of the Van Raalte Institute. His primary area of expertise in modern European history, with a concentration in Dutch history, made him an excellent addition to the staff. Kennedy had lived in the Netherlands, is fluent in the Dutch language, and already enjoyed considerable prestige and recognition in the Netherlands. In 2003 the Free University of Amsterdam appointed him as professor of contemporary history, so he took a two-year leave of absence from Hope, while maintaining his active connection with the Van Raalte Institute. In June 2005, however, he resigned his post at Hope and committed himself fully to the Free University. In 2007 he accepted a position at the University of Amsterdam as professor of the history of the Netherlands since the Middle Ages.

Karen Schakel joined the staff in September 1997 as office manager and editorial assistant. She served faithfully and with high distinction until her death in December 2009. In April 2010, JoHannah Smith joined the institute as Karen's successor and works now as editorial associate.

Dr. Jacob E. Nyenhuis was appointed Senior Research Fellow at the Van Raalte Institute in September 2001, following his retirement from the Hope College faculty in June 2001, after twenty-six years at the college, the last seventeen as provost and professor of classics. He was named the director of the institute on 1 July 2002.

In September 2004, the Van Raalte Institute and the Joint Archives of Holland moved into the new Theil Research Center at 9 East Tenth Street, on the western edge of the Hope College campus. The Theil Research Center was a gift from Eleonore Goldschmidt Theil in fulfillment of a commitment made by her and her late husband, the eminent economist, Dr. Henri Theil.

In anticipation of this move into larger facilities, the staff was expanded in December 2003 to include two new Senior Research Fellows: Dr. Donald J. Bruggink, the James A. H. Cornell Professor of Historical Theology Emeritus of Western Theological Seminary, and Dr. Earl Wm. Kennedy, professor emeritus of religion, Northwestern College (Iowa). In January 2010, Nella B.

Kennedy, former archivist, art historian, and lecturer in Dutch language at Northwestern College (Iowa), was appointed as Senior Research Fellow and official translator.

In fall 2003, we launched the Visiting Research Fellows Program, with Dr. Hans Krabbendam of the Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg, the Netherlands, and Dr. Lynn Winkels Japinga, associate professor of religion at Hope College, as the first two fellows. Every year since then, we have welcomed fellows from near and far to carry on research on topics consistent with the institute's mission.

The institute also has maintained an active program of translation of critical documents from Dutch into English. Translation services have been provided by many different individuals over the years. They include Dr. Henry ten Hoor, late professor emeritus of English at Hope College; Simone Kennedy, a native of the Netherlands, who resided in Holland from 1997 to 2003; William Buursma, a retired Christian Reformed Church minister, now deceased, and his late wife Althea; and Nella Kennedy, the official translator of the VRI. It is the goal of the institute to have all major Van Raalte documents accurately translated, so that future students and scholars will not be hampered in their research by a lack of knowledge of the Dutch language.

Building upon the solid foundation of our first two decades and with the benefit of our handsome facilities, we have charted a direction for the future that is a logical trajectory from the early vision for this center of research and writing. The vision and dedication of the staff, the support of the Huizenga family, and the gift of Dr. and Mrs. Theil have helped to make the Van Raalte Institute a significant center for scholarly research and publication.