

Holland History | A Tulip Time Tradition



In February of 1847, a small group of Dutch men and women led by an Indian guide appeared in the wilderness of Michigan and began clearing a site which would become Holland. By the fall, their numbers had grown to 1700. This settlement of Holland was one of the earliest Dutch towns and considered one of the most successful. Two other significant Dutch compounds were located in New York state and Pella, Iowa.

It was Dr. Albertus Van Raalte who brought the initial group to Holland after having left Rotterdam in September, 1846. In the Netherlands Reverend Van Raalte had been jailed and fined for speaking out against the government's control of worship services. His followers sought freedom to practice their religion as their ancestors had, unrestricted by state rules. And so, after many months of discussion, Van Raalte, his wife and five children aged five months to ten, and a group of followers left for America.

The names of other emigrants in Van Raalte's original founding party were: Oldemeyer, Smit, Laarman, Van Zee, Carman, Klaasen, De Kruif, Grootenhuis, Dunnewind, Motting, Boogaart, Zagers, Fredricks, Kok, Lankheet and Plasman. The settlers were organized and placed in communities according to their homeland. Thus, areas around Holland sprung up with the names of Drenthe, Vriesland, Groningen and others.

At the time the site for "der Kolonie" of Holland was chosen, the country was a wilderness. Missionaries were the only white settlers. But the area afforded much in the way of natural resources along the shores of Black Lake and the Dutch emigrants began chopping trees, building log houses and making roads.



The first winter was severe with much snow and cold weather. This cruel time brought the first deaths, the first marriage and the first children born in the new settlement. By spring of 1847, immigrants began arriving by the hundreds.



The summer of 1847 saw the first log church erected and it sufficed until the Pillar Church was built in 1859. Before the construction of this 35x60 foot shingled building, worship services were held in the open air with the surrounding forest for shade. That winter saw the first regular town planning meetings, called the "Volksvergadering" or "people's assemble". The first school was raised in 1851 and this "Pioneer School" eventually evolved in Hope College.

The town boomed despite mortality rates as high as 50% at times, and by the end of the 1840's, Holland boasted 200 houses and many stores. Van Raalte's original purchase of 1000 leafy acres accommodated the town well and soon saw hotels, a bakery, tinner, tailor and jeweler as well as wagon and blacksmith shops. As the town grew, residents realized that it would be necessary to find a better way to get provisions from outside the area in order to keep up with the steadily growing influx of new emigrants.

To that end, it was decided that a ship should be purchased by the town for the transport of goods and new immigrants, and so the vessel A.E. Knickerbocker was acquired and used successfully for this purpose. After all, the location of Holland was partially due to its proximity to waterways such as the Black River, Lake Macatawa and Lake Michigan.

The city was incorporated in 1867 and saw its first mayor, Isaac Cappon, who went on to serve a total of three terms.

Tragedy struck in 1871 when fires, fed by a strong wind, destroyed most of the city. Sparks from a fire outside of town ignited dried brush then raced through the streets of town. Residents grabbed possessions and ran from the fire, or hastily buried belongings in their



Holland History | A Tulip Time Tradition



yards. Despite the loss of 310 homes and 76 businesses, the town was quickly rebuilt, and the 25th anniversary of the founding of Holland proceeded with much festivity. The industrial growth of Holland was tied to the diverse manufacturing enterprises undertaken. Soon after the fire, the city boasted a leather-making company, production of wooden staves for barrels and basket factory employing nearly 300 people. Flour mills and furniture factories preceded a pickle-making plant and sugar beet factory. In 1906 the Holland furnace company built a plant in town and was employing over 600 locals by the 1930's. In 1929 the Tulip Time Festival was announced to the world and, ever since, visitors have been flocking to Holland to partake of the rich Dutch atmosphere.



Today, the city is home to over 35,000 residents. Approximately a half million visitors come annually to participate in the historic Tulip Festival in May. The city of Holland continues to grow and prosper on the site so well chosen by Albertus Van Raalte in 1847.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Holland's Heritage: a Series of Sketches and Narratives Having to Do With the Founding of Holland, Michigan. n.d.

Keppel, Ruth. *Trees to Tulips; Authentic Tales of the Pioneers of Holland, Michigan* c.1947

Lane, Kit. *Some Stories of Holland Harbor*, c.1975

Massie, Larry. *The Holland Area: Warm Friends and Wooden Shoes: an Illustrated History.* c.1988

Massie, Larry. *Haven, Harbor and Heritage: the Holland, Michigan story.* c. 1996

Michel, Sara. *With This Inheritance: Holland, Michigan: the Early Years.* c.1984

Penrod, John. *Holland: Dutch Heritage in America.* c. 1999

Vande Water, Randall. *Holland, Happenings, Heroes & Hot Shots: Illustrated Narratives of Memorable Moments. Vol. I—IV* c. 1994-7

Vande Water, Randall. *On the Way to Today: a Pictorial History of Holland.* c. 1992

Vande Water, Randall. *Holland: the Tulip Town.* c. 2002

Vande Water, Randall. *Tulip Time Treasures: Diamond Jubilee 75 years of the Festival.* c. 2004

Van Reken, Donald. *A Brief History of Holland, Michigan.* c. 1977

Van Reken, Donald. *The Holland Fire of October 8, 1871.* c. 1982

Van Reken, Donald. *A Picture Album of Holland, Michigan.* c. 1976

Van Reken, Donald. *A Window to the Past.* c. 1988



Information provided by Herrick District Library (04/2010)