

1847 - 1884

Dr. A.C. Van Raalte established the settlement of Holland on the shores of Black Lake in 1847. In 1848 he was told by the Indians that about 5 or 6 miles north there was some very good land and urged Jan Van Tongeren, Jan Kramer and Otto Van Dyk to settle there. Other families that followed were P.J. Kuiper, H. Brouwer, Jan Spykerman, Jan Veldheer and Jan Vander Kolk.

North Holland Reformed Church was organized by the Holland Classis in Zeeland on April 21, 1852 with 13 members. The Reformed Church was already about 250 years old when North Holland was organized by Dr. A.C. Van Raalte. The first public worship was held in the home of Jan Van Tongeren with Dr. Van Raalte preaching. It was later held at the homes of K. Weener, Otto G. Van Dyk and Jacob Van Dyk with one of the elders leading a very simple service. No one stayed home unless they were sick. Some-times services were held in the evening for those who could make their way through the forest. The first elder was Alexander Hartgerink, a Mexican War Veteran and the first deacon was Jan Van Tongeren.

As more roads were cleared, more families moved into the area. The church began to grow and the church continued from 1852-1866 without a pastor. Minutes of the Holland Classis show that the North Holland and Noordeloos congregations combined in 1856 for a very short time. Part of the church seceded in 1857 and the remaining part disbanded. . A log cabin building served as the first church and was located 1/2 mile west and on the north side of the road at 124th and New Holland.

The official church minutes began in 1860. In 1862 a church building was erected with limited funds just west of the present church building. The first pastor, E.C. Oggel, a Western Seminary student, was called, ordained and installed at a salary of \$600, free house and feed for his horse. Records state that when he came there were 75 children that needed to be baptized. As the church continued growing, the congregation made plans to erect another building which was dedicated on February 1, 1868.

Seating arrangement in the church was very different with two wide aisles on each side, and no center aisle, but one long seat with a partition running down the center. Ladies sat on one side and men on the other. The deacons used long poles to reach the center of the pew when taking the offering. A black velvet bag hung on these poles into which the offering was placed.

Communion service was also very different. The wine was served in two large goblets passed down each row with each person drinking from the cup.

Elders and deacons were seated in side seats along side of the pulpit, The minister's sermons were always divided into two parts – a doctrinal exposition of the Biblical text and an application of the Biblical exposition – in the Dutch language. Most of the people walked to church or came by horse drawn vehicle. A horse barn 100 feet long was built behind the church. .

On February 14, 1868, the decision was made to erect a small parsonage on the site of the former church building. Plans were also made to purchase land for a cemetery. Rev. Oggle left in January, 1870. The following month Seminary student B. Van Ess was called with a salary of \$600, free house, free fuel and feed for a horse. It was also decided to buy furniture for the parsonage.

By constant immigration, the congregation was growing steadily. Rev. Van Ess was not only the preacher and leader of the church but he also had to serve as a Justice of Peace, arbitrator in many disagreements and advisor in many financial matters and business enterprises.

Many things were accomplished during this time. The steeple was added to the church building and a bell was placed in the tower. Rev. Van Ess personally supervised the construction and the toning of the bell. It was the community time piece and was rung every morning, noon and evening. A Sunday School was also organized. Mrs. Van Ess passed away in 1883 and Rev. Van Ess took a call to Illinois in 1884.