

History in your hand • Calvin College and Seminary by Lester De Koster

Have you held history in your hand?
Has it spoken to you in whispered tones?

This happens when some document, a letter or note or sermon or deed or bill or diary speaks in eloquent silence of times gone by.

And when the document has played a role in the life of your own church or community, it becomes a part of your life in a peculiarly intimate way.

Such documents are the stuff of historical research. The library that holds them is a mine of treasures for the student, the teacher, the writer, the interested reader.

It is because this is so that the new Calvin College and Seminary Knollcrest Library has a specially planned annex wing known as Heritage Hall. This annex is an integral part of the main building and opens into the full library theological collection. Here in Heritage Hall will be stored for safekeeping, displayed for inspiration, and used under supervision the documents out of our own denominational history which have been and will be accumulated in the Colonial Origins Collection.

Single papers can be important. So much the more so are collections of papers like those of the late Dr. Henry Beets, donated to the Calvin Library some years ago, and the collection recently received and described below.

The Christian Reformed Church grew out of an immigration movement, and a giant among the leaders of that movement was Dr. Albertus Van Raalte, founder of the colony that became Holland, Michigan. Dr. Van Raalte had the happy trait of keeping papers, a trait handed on to his family. Letters he kept, sermons, business papers, maps, pamphlets, records of all kinds, and books. These treasures remained in the family until a decade or so ago when they, along with the Van Raalte ancestral residence, became the property of William B. Eerdmans, Sr.

It was around these papers that the conception of Heritage Hall and its Colonial Origins Collection grew. It was to guard safely and properly exploit such treasures as these that the Heritage Hall area was planned, with its fireproofed vault and processing area, its appropriately furnished display space, and its balcony microfilm storage and reading rooms. And now, by gift of Mr. Eerdmans, the Van Raalte documents have been transferred to the present Calvin campus for processing

in readiness for the new quarters rapidly taking shape on the new campus.

When indexed and calendared, the Van Raalte papers will become for scholars the kind of living history that only documents can become. They will be open to scholarly perusal, and in time will furnish sound basis for scholarly publication.

In addition to the Beets papers already mentioned, the Van Raalte collection is being joined by other documents arising also out of the colonial background. Letters and sermons from the hand of Rev. Christiaan Vander Veen have joined with those mentioned in these columns before from that of Rev. Koene Vanden Bosch, along with microfilmed minutes of the Graafschap church.

Readers of these lines, whose heirlooms or attics hide letters, pamphlets, and documents of all kinds are invited to consider making the Heritage Hall a permanent home for the living history such items can become.

It is with deep appreciation that notice is given of the gift of the Van Raalte papers, and of all similar gifts both large and small. For all these are history in the hand.

All those who read these lines are invited to correspond with the Calvin Library regarding any papers, pamphlets, or similar materials that they believe might in any way be of interest to the Colonial Origins Collection. Restricted use of these can be assured, if desirable, and microfilm copies of especially prized items can be arranged.

Professor Lester De Koster (left) gratefully acknowledges gift of Van Raalte papers from William B. Eerdmans, Sr., for Heritage Hall in the new Calvin Knollcrest Library.

