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### Folder 18: Petition to Congress for improvement of water facilities on Black Lake, 1849

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# To the Senate and House of Representatives:

WE beg to present to the Honorable the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States, in connection with our petition for the improvement of the outlet of North Black Lake, the following sketch of the origin and progress of the settlements on the Black River, usually known as "The Holland Colony:"

In 1847, one of our Clergymen visited the United States for the purpose of finding for himself and his friends a new home, where they might enjoy more civil and religious freedom than was allowed them in their father-land, and escape the crushing weight of taxation, by which the bankrupt nations of Europe are now compelled to sustain themselves.

After much consideration, he was induced, by the great natural advantages of the Black River Country, to select it as the gathering place and future home of his people. He found it an unbroken wilderness. From its insular position, presenting insurmountable difficulties in the way of any other than a large company or association of Emigrants, its fertile lands had remained unsold.

Since that time, many Clergymen have removed their Churches almost entire, into the new refuge. Not less than 5,000 souls have landed on the shores of Michigan, and most of them are now comfortably settled in their new homes.

They have suffered many hardships and privations, and prophets of evil have forewarned of the destruction of the settlement; but God, who rules all things, and whose care is over all, has decreed otherwise, and by His blessing, we can now say that there is no longer a doubt of the permanence and prosperity of the Colony. The past season, we have been blessed with abundant harvests, and our people have already begun to develop the rich resources of the land of our adoption.

Although the hazards of navigation to our Lake, are so great as to burden us with enormous comparative rates of freight, we are already an exporting people. On the opposite shore of Lake Michigan, we find an unlimited demand for the rich products of our forests, and already the news of our prosperity is stirring up untold thousands of our countrymen to follow us to share in the rich blessings which have rewarded our toils and privations.

Black Lake, or Lake Macatawa, extends from Lake Michigan about six miles inland, with an average depth of at least 20 feet, and its least channel depth is 12 feet. At its head, is the village of Holland, which has grown up to meet the demands of the farming country for a market and outlet.

There are now within our limits, two water Saw Mills, one steam Saw Mill, and one wind Saw Mill; three custom grinding mills, one ashery and soap and candle manufactory, one tannery, one brick yard, and one boat yard. We have eight places of worship, and eight schools, four of them taught by American teachers.

Aside from its vital importance to the future growth and prosperity of our Colony, the construction of a secure harbor, by removing the bar at the outlet of our Lake, will have an important bearing upon the interests of our neighbors upon the opposite shore of Lake Michigan.

By reference to the map, it will readily be seen, that were a communication opened between Kalamazoo and the head of Black Lake, it would be far the most direct route between the Michigan Central Railroad and Southport, Racine, Milwaukee and Sheboygan. The respective distances on the routes now travelled are as follows:

Via New Buffalo and Chicago, from Detroit to New Buffalo,	218 miles.
New Buffalo to Chicago, by steam,	45 "
Chicago to Milwaukee,	80 "
	<hr/>
	343
<i>By Grand Rapids</i> —Detroit to Battle Creek, Railroad,	122 miles.
Battle Creek to Grand Rapids, Stage,	64 "
Grand Rapids to Grand Haven, River Steamboat,	40 "
Grand Haven to Milwaukee, Steam,	85½ "
	<hr/>
	311½
<i>Distance by way of Kalamazoo and Black Lake.</i> —Detroit to Kalamazoo, Railroad,	148 miles.
Kalamazoo to Black Lake,	48 "
Black Lake to Milwaukee, (including length of Black Lake,)	90 "
	<hr/>
	281

Showing a difference in its favor over the Grand Rapids route of 30½ miles, while it could be travelled much faster, were a plank road constructed from Kalamazoo to Black Lake. On the other route, is sixty-four miles staging, over common roads, then forty miles of river navigation, where great speed cannot safely be attempted.

The difference of distance between this and the New Buffalo route is still greater, 77 miles.

A charter for the proposed plank road has already been secured, and we have assurances that, should the obstruction be removed from the outlet of our Lake, the stock would readily be taken, and the work completed at an early day.

We beg to refer you to the report of the Survey of Black Lake, made during the past summer, by a corps of U. S. engineers, for information with regard to the feasibility of making Black Lake one of the safest, most accessible and capacious harbors on the whole chain of Lakes. As regards its natural advantages, we only desire that they may be seen, feeling confident and willing to abide the judgment of your Honorable bodies.

With much respect, on behalf of your petitioners, we subscribe ourselves,

A. C. VAN RAALTE,  
VANDER SLING.  
A. VER HORST,

T. SCHRADER,  
B. GEOTENHUIS,  
J. BINNEKANT,

} COMMITTEE.