

Indian Trail in Black River Valley Led VanRaalte Band To Present Site of Holland

(By D. L. Runnells.)

Holland, June 20.—This city owes a great debt of gratitude to the Ottawa and Pottawattomie Indians that roamed the wilderness of this section of Michigan a century ago and beat a hard trail in the sands of time.

It was this trail that Rev. A. G. Raalte followed in 1846 in search of the promised land for his people. Had there been no path through the forest to lead the Dutch clergyman to this spot, Holland might be located in some other part of Michigan or the na-

tion is a bit of community history was revealed here Friday just before the western Michigan historic and boundary expedition moved north on the second leg of its four-day search in search of additional data to use in advertising this region's tourist and resort business.

Led to Fertile Soils.

The legend hunters visited the historic spot where Mr. VanRaalte's band of Hollanders first made their home on the banks of Black River. The place is designated by a marker on US31 between Holland and Zeeland.

In the city's legend goes the fearful clergyman picked up the Indian trail far in the interior. He followed it a ways and observed it usually grew larger, indicating it was widely used. Past experience had taught him to expect such a place to lead to fertile soils. And the Black River valley lived up to his expectations.

The river flats were used as camping grounds by the Ottawas and Pottawattomies. There were several Indian villages around Black Lake. The largest was at the west city limits overlooking beautiful Macatawa bay. After a brief survey of the valley, its soil and environs the Dutch leader concluded this section was the chosen land for his people and returned to Detroit to assemble the little band of immigrants who had left their fatherland because of religious persecution.

Other Markers Placed.

Here, VanRaalte believed, was a place where they might worship their God with religious freedom, where they might grow the same crops and engage in the same industries in which they had been trained in the fatherland.

The Dutch colonists were so pleased with the valley, the soil and the lake they decided to call their community Holland as their newly chosen land so nearly resembled their fatherland.

Other Dutch colonists followed the VanRaalte party into Michigan, settling in the Black River valley. A marker in memory of Jonnes VanDelyster, one of the early settlers of Zeeland, Vriesland and Drenthe, has been erected to designate the place where the sturdy "God fearing pioneers came from The Netherlands and landed in June, 1849, from a 'plat boot' at the head of navigation on Black River."

A third marker in Pilgrim cemetery marks the spot where the VanRaalte party built its first church.