

D. B. K. Van Raalte, Tells Of Old Days In Legislature

Lansing, Mich., Jan. 22.—There is one member of the present legislature says John Fitzgibbon, veteran political writer of The Detroit News, who was a representative in the house that held the last session in the old state house before the latter was torn down over 30 years ago. He is Representative Dirk B. K. Van Raalte, of Holland, civil war veteran, who lost an arm in battle and is now a bank president. In the '75 and '77 sessions he was the member for the same Holland district.

The old state house was on Washington avenue in the first block north of the Downey house. The '77 legislature was the last that met in the old state house. Mr. Van Raalte recalls that an unusually large number of strong men were members if it. John T. Rich was speaker. Charles M. Crosswell was serving his first term as governor. Fred A. Baker and Edwin F. Conely were two of Detroit's representatives. Capt. Ed. P. Allen later a member of congress and Andrew J. Sawyer, represented the Washtenaw districts. Sim Billings, who became Gov. Rich's railroad commissioner in the '90s, was there from Genesee county. Cricket McElroy represented the St. Clair district. Walter J. Baxter came from Hillsdale. Saginaw had Herbert H. Hoyt in the house; Cheyoygan had William Mc Arthur, and Huron, Thomas B. Woodworth. Senator William Alden Smith was a page.

It was a lively session. Mr. Van Raalte says one day Capt. Allen and Sim Billings were on opposites of a debate. The captain said some things in the course of his remarks that particularly irritated Sim. When Sim got to the floor to reply, the captain slyly removed his chair. Sim didn't look behind when it came time to sid down and ker plunk, he sat on the floor.

Not unreasonably his dignity was ruffled. Seeing Capt. Allen walking towards the door, Sim was on his feet in a jiffy and after him. With all the energy that his long, lank form could command he landed the toe of his right brogan in the seat of the captain's trousers, and was thoroughly angry when he did it. The captain walked into the corridor as if nothing had happened.

Mr. Van Raalte says that one of the squarest men he ever met was Rep. Conely, of Detroit, who in the '80s consented to serve as chief of police of Detroit, for a few years to reorganize the department, later returning to the prictice of law which was far more profitable to him than holding office. He is now dead.

One day, Mr. Van Raalte had a tilt with Rep. Baker of Detroit, which was long remembered by those who

saw it. Rep. Baker had even then a state reputation as an authority on constitutional law. During the earlier weeks of the session he had raised constitutional objections to so many bills that more or less members got out of sympathy with him. On the day of the tilt Mr. Van Raalte fired at him.

"I would ask the learned gentleman to inform the house whether he is here as a representative of the supreme court or as a constitutional lawyer, or as a member for Wayne county. I think it is due the house to be informed in which capacity he speaks."

The speaker had to direct the sergeant-at-arms to get busy and check the hilarity that followed this shot.

As chairman of the ways and means committee, Mr. Van Raalte's program was dashed one day by Capt. Allen and Representative Sawyer, assisted by some upper peninsula members, but he got even before the end of the session. The captain and Rep. Sawyer wanted a \$160,000 appropriation for additional buildings at the Ypsilanti Normal. Mr. Van Raalte was opposed to allowing more than \$60,000. In Mr. Van Raalte's temporary absence they induced his committee to recommend \$90,000. The next day while he was present, they, by a parliamentary trick and with the votes of upper peninsula members, approved the \$90,000.

The state mining school was then a part of the university and located at Ann Arbor. Then, as now, the upper peninsula regarded it as their particular favorite state institution. They were asking \$40,000 for the mining school.

"I'll show you fellows a new trick in return for helping rush that \$90,000 Normal bill through," said Mr. Van Raalte to the upper peninsula members.

He secured the records to show that the year before only two students were enrolled in the mining school. Then he asked if the legislature wanted to go upon record as voting \$40,000 to educate two students. The majority didn't. In fact, the majority was startled to learn that the cost had been so great. The entire estimate was stricken out and not a single dollar was voted this year for the maintenance of the mining school. Then Mr. Van Raalte laughed.

The '77 session authorized the building of the state reformatory at Ionia. Mr. Van Raalte had been a member of the committee also, of the session of '75. He was chairman of the ways and means committee during most of the time the new state house was building. It was completed for \$10,000 less than the appropriation.