

A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF REV. HENRY P. SCHOLTE,  
LEADER OF THE HOLLAND COLONY  
IN MARION COUNTY.

BY WILLIAM M. DONNEL.

The subject of this sketch, the latter part of whose life was so intimately connected with the large and thriving colony planted in Marion county, in 1847, that his biography might fairly constitute a history of the colony itself, was born in Amsterdam, Holland, in 1805.

Early in life he manifested a desire to enter the naval academy, and become an officer in the navy; but his mother, for whose preferences he had a dutiful regard, opposed the scheme, and he abandoned it; but being of an active temperament, and averse to idleness, he apprenticed himself to a carpenter, learned the trade, and also made some advancement in the art of drawing.

When about seventeen years of age his father died, which circumstance called his attention to the subject of religion, and his interest in this subject eventually ripened into a desire to preach the gospel. With a view to prepare himself for this profession, he began the study of the languages, and made so much progress in this department that he was prepared to enter the seminary, at Amsterdam, in 1821. In 1824, he passed successfully through the literary examination, at the University of Leyden, and began the study of theology at that institution. During a powerful religious revival in Holland, in which two converted Israelites took an active part, he became acquainted with numerous leading Christians of various denominations, from England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, who were on a visit to Holland, and became so powerfully convinced of the narrowness of sectarianism, that he abandoned it altogether, regarding even church organizations of secondary importance. He was, therefore — quoting his own words — “prevented from clothing his faith in the straight jacket of ecclesiastical formalism.”

In 1830, a rebellion broke out in Belgium, and Mr. S., with many other students, responded to the call of the king for troops to suppress it. At the close of the rebellion, 1832, he returned to his studies at the university, passed through the theological examination, and was licensed to preach. In the same year he was examined in the synod of Holland, and in 1833, was installed as minister of the gospel in the national reform church establishment. Here, however, he began to experience trouble, resulting from his refusal to submit to the established forms and doctrines that he found had produced a spiritual degeneracy in the church. His decided opposition to a sectarianism that amounted almost to bigotry, brought down upon him the enmity of the national clergy, and this, in 1835, resulted in separation. Mr. Scholte, and a few other ministers, followed by a large number of lay members, withdrew from the national church, and became a separate and independent organization. But they were not permitted to remain so undisturbed. Instigated by the synod of Holland, the government commenced, and for some time carried on, a series of persecutions against the rebels, consisting of fines and imprisonments, basing the legality of their acts upon a law of Napoleon, forbidding the assembling together of more than twenty persons for religious services. For a violation of this law, Mr. Scholte was once imprisoned and fined several hundred guilders. But, during his imprisonment, he made valuable use of his time by acquiring a knowledge of the English language from the study of standard authors, which acquirement became quite useful to him afterwards.

But these persecutions, instead of putting down the rebellion, increased the number of its adherents, till finally the government became weary of so unprofitable an undertaking, and, soon after the accession of William II. to the throne, persecution ceased entirely, and the newly-organized church was permitted to flourish free of the restraints of sectarian rule enforced by secular authority, and independent of governmental patronage; yet in the matter of schools and the education of the young, their independence was not complete.

The relations between church and state extended through the schools, and these were the nurseries of both; and this state of things naturally gave rise to a desire, among the independents, for the privilege of educating their children more in accordance with their own religious views.

In his ministerial labors, Mr Scholte became acquainted with the middle and poorer classes of the country, and had ample opportunities to observe the disparity in their social conditions, the result of pecuniary circumstances; how difficult it was for the poor, and even those of small means, to support themselves and their families, to say nothing of attaining to the social position that merit should entitle them. In the kindness of his heart he began to think about adopting some plan by which relief could be rendered. But he could think of none that could be successfully carried out within the narrow and crowded limits of the Netherlands. So it occurred to him, that emigration to some new country would be the only practicable means of reaching the end desired. In this view of the case he associated with himself another minister of some eminence and ability, and together they made diligent efforts to inform themselves of the natural, social, and political conditions of the various countries that might become an asylum for the poor and oppressed.

But previous to directing public attention to the subject, they wrote a letter to the minister of colonies, asking for vessels and a free passage to the island of Java, and for permission to make free settlement there. On receiving a reply to the effect that the government was not disposed to permit such settlements in her East Indian possessions, they turned their attention to America; and among other portions of this continent, at first favorably thought of, as a location for a colony, was Texas, but after obtaining all the information they could, relating to its geography, climate, &c., it was decided to be too warm; Missouri was also had in view, but the existence of slavery there, at that time, forbade its choice as a location. Finally, Iowa, then the youngest sister in the family of states, was chosen as the land of refuge.

Nothing more now remained but to enlist the interest of a sufficient number of others to form a colony self-sustaining in its corporation. The first meeting for this purpose was held at Leersdam, July, 1846, the next at Ulrich, in December of the same year. At this meeting an organization was effected. Henry P. Scholte being elected president, A. J. Betten, vice president, and Isaac Overcamp, secretary. A board, or committee, was also appointed, whose duty it was to receive members, regulate the supply of provisions, and arrange for means of transportation. This board consisted of four members, G. H. Overcamp, G. F. Lecoque, John Reedfeldt, and A. Wigny. In the reception of members, the board was confined to certain conditions, to-wit: No profane, immoral, or intemperate person could become a member of the colony, nor any avowed atheist, skeptic, or Roman Catholic.\* Another important condition was, that all members who could command the means, should take charge of one or more poor but worthy persons, or families, who desired to go.

Governed by these rules, the organization rapidly increased in numbers, notwithstanding the well known natural tenacity with which the human heart clings to the associations of its native land. In a majority of instances, it requires the strongest will, the most determined resolution, backed by stern necessity and hope for the better, to leave forever the only spot on earth that has ever been dear to him, the home of his birth. Yet, by the spring following (1847), the association numbered about one thousand three hundred persons, and between seven and eight hundred were prepared for the journey. Four sailing vessels were chartered to carry them to Baltimore; and early in April three of the ships sailed from Rotterdam and one from Amsterdam. The voyage occupied about fifty days, more or less, as the vessels did not all reach port at the same time; but in the early part of June they all landed at Baltimore, except nine persons who had died during the pass-

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\* The reason for such exclusion is apparent, when it is known that one among the principle objects of the association was to peaceably preserve religious liberty among themselves.

age. Here they were soon joined by Mr. Scholte, who, with his family, had come by steamer.

Their conveyances from Baltimore to Pittsburg were canal boats and rail cars; and from thence to St. Louis they came by steamer. Here they were received by E. F. Grafe, a German, who had been for some time a resident of St. Louis, and had been apprised of their coming. And here it was necessary that they should sojourn for a few weeks to make certain preparations for the remaining portion of the journey, and for final settlement. A temporary shelter was prepared for their accommodation, a little without the city limits, where they remained till the latter part of August.

Now, like the children of Israel, on their approach to the promised land, they found it advisable to send forward a committee to spy out the country, and select a location. Henry P. Scholte, Isaac Overcamp, and John Reedfeldt, were assigned this duty. But, not like the spies of old, they were kindly received and encouraged in the object of their mission. On reaching Fairfield, they were met by Rev. M. J. Post, a Baptist minister, whose duties as such had given him a knowledge of a large tract of country between that place and Fort Des Moines, and he recommended to the committee the beautiful prairie between the Des Moines and Skunk rivers, in Marion county, as a favorable site for a colony. Mr. Post thereupon volunteered to pilot them to the place, and on reaching it, they were so much pleased with the beauty and natural resources of the country that they at once decided to select two townships (now Lake Prairie), and lay out a town. But as there were already a goodly number of American settlers in the district, Mr. Scholte, who was treasurer as well as president of the colony, set about buying out as many of them as would sell their claims, together with such live stock and farming utensils as he could get, that would be indispensable to his people in agricultural pursuits.

On their return to St. Louis, carpenters and other mechanics were sent in advance with tools and means for procuring lumber, to erect a large temporary shed for the reception of

the colonists. This shed was put up at what is now the western outskirts of Pella, and was for some time occupied by a large number of people, till other temporary shelters could be provided for the accommodation of individual families. A majority of these houses, or more properly hovels, were made of the tough prairie sod, walled up over cellar-like excavations in the earth, to give more perpendicular room, and secure warmth in winter. The long prairie grass, thatched, took the place of shingles for roofing. Many families secured shelter in the cabins lately occupied by those Americans who had sold their possessions and moved away. Mr. Scholte and family lived for some time in a little log cabin that had been erected as a claim pen, by Thomas Tuttle, long before Pella was thought of, and that happened to stand in what is now the public square.

Many anecdotes might be related in connection with life in the colony at this early period, but the brevity of this sketch will hardly admit of it; besides, it was intended as a biography rather than a history. We will, however, admit one or two. It can hardly be supposed that the grass roofs of those sod houses would be proof against the heavy rains that sometimes descend in this country; besides, during a rainy season, the earth would be soaked with water. Thus dripping from above and oozing up from below, not unfrequently these semi-subterranean dwellings would half fill with water during a night, compelling the occupants to bail it out or seek higher quarters. On one occasion, during the night, an ox that happened to be grazing near one of these dwellings, finding the grass rather short, evidently mistook the grass roof for a hay-stack, and "went for it." After eating some of it, he got upon it with his fore feet, probably in search of a better quality of provender, as cattle will do, when the structure gave way to his weight, and plunged him head foremost into the apartment below, to the great terror of not only the beast himself, but of the inmates of the room, who must have been sleeping soundly till the crash awakened them. Fortunately, however, none were injured, and the frightened ox made his

way out of the pit by the most practicable route, which must have been the door, and went his way, probably resolving, in his ox mind, never to put his foot in it again. In those days snakes were numerous, and would often intrude themselves into those earthy habitations to the great annoyance of the people, attracted, probably, by the warmth about the roof; when the weather was a little cool, they would crawl through it and fall into the room. Frequently an ugly reptile would drop himself down the sod chimney into the fire, or into the soup, if cooking happened to be going on at the time.

Soon after their settlement here, Mr. Scholte, and other leading Holanders, caused a town to be laid out as a nucleus of the colony, and called it Pella, a Hebrew word signifying a place of refuge. Only a few blocks were platted at this time, and the platting was not completed till 1849, when the colony was increased by the arrival of about seven hundred more members.

In politics, Mr. Scholte was a whig previous to his arrival in this country, having studied and admired the opinions of Henry Clay. In 1855, he commenced the publication of a newspaper called the *Pella Gazette*, the first paper published in the county, and the most western one in the state, east of Council Bluffs. It was whig in principle, but headed "independent." But soon after the principles of the "American party" began to be agitated, Mr. S. became a democrat, and the *Gazette* supported Buchanan for president. At a somewhat later period, he became an ardent republican, and officiated at the Chicago convention in 1860, when Abraham Lincoln was first nominated for president.

Besides his original calling as a preacher of the gospel, Mr. Scholte adopted the profession of law, and was an able advocate. As an orator he was well qualified, both by a superior talent and education, and, but for the natural inability to distinctly sound the English language, he might have been eminently popular as a public speaker. As it was, his Fourth of July addresses, delivered in English, were listened to with interest. As a writer, his style was simple, comprehensive, and

deep. He was the author of a number of pamphlets, principally in his native language.

Generous in his nature, he was ever ready to contribute to any public enterprise calculated to promote the moral or pecuniary welfare of the community. One large church building in Pella will long stand as a monument of his public spiritedness. To the Iowa Central University he donated the five acres of land on which it stands, being in the most beautiful part of the city.

Mr. Scholte, though he had a few enemies, as few good men have not, had many warm friends who still occasionally speak of his good qualities and virtues, having experienced benefits from the same.

Having succeeded in a great enterprise, dear to him from the time he first conceived it, and having witnessed the growth and prosperity of the colony, after a short illness that seemed to be the culmination of a chronic indisposition, he died, August 25, 1868.

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## HISTORY OF MARSHALL COUNTY.

BY NETTIE SANFORD, MARSHALLTOWN, IOWA.

(Concluded from page 548.)

ABOUT seven o'clock on the morning of the 11th of January, 1859, Judge Smith, after a night of intense agony, is found in a chamber of Rev. Mr. Babcock's, surrounded by several prominent citizens of Marshalltown, with a sheet of paper before him, for the purpose of writing an order for the removal of the county records, after a formal re-canvass of the vote. The judge was astonished to find a paper, with the county seal affixed, knowing that he had not given any such paper. Wondering where it came from, he concluded it was a good plan to throw off the responsibility on some unknown rascal, signed the order for the removal, and went through a legal

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