Dedicated in 1903, Van Raalte Hall was the first building at Hope constructed specifically with science education in mind. The tradition of providing facilities that well support learning continues—and was realized most recently with the opening of the Schaap Science Center in 2003. It is from such simple origins that began the trajectory that led to today’s tradition of excellence. The success is a tribute to skilled nurturing and innovation by faculty mentors with a deep commitment to the students in their care.  

The college’s national reputation in the natural and applied sciences is built on the dedication of generations of faculty. Chemist Dr. Gerrit Van Zyl ’18 pioneered the model of involving students in a research, a practice that now reaches institution-wide. He is shown in the 1940s in Lubbers Hall, then the science building, with George Gekker ’49 and Eugene van Tamelen ’47. (All images these pages from the Hope College Collection of the Joint Archives of Holland)  

The buildings help frame the story, but the book is really about the difference made by the dedicated professors whose work Hope’s faculties support. The first science instruction was by a botanist, the Rev. Cornelius Cripstal, who was one of the college’s original five professors and was appointed to teach mathematics, natural philosophy and astronomy, but Hope soon began hiring specialists. The first faculty research space, in Van Raalte Hall (1911), was developed by biologist Samuel Matt—whose lasting impact on the campus also included designing Voorhees Hall. Today’s signature practice of involving students in research as a teaching tool, and obtaining outside funding to support it, was developed by chemist Dr. Gerrit Van Zyl ’18, who taught at Hope from 1933 until retiring in 1966 and had previously written a history of science at the college for the Legacy campaign from which the Schaap Science Center grew. Additional sources include a history of the department of mathematics by Dr. Jay Folkert ’39, who taught at Hope from 1930 until retiring in 1962, and a history of geology by department founder Dr. J. Cotter Tharin, who taught from 1947 until retiring in 1966. An article about the founding and early years of Holland by local historian Paul Treanor, reprinted from Michigan History Magazine, serves as an introduction, putting the college and program into context. Current faculty are also writing about their programs and the future of science at Hope, with a foreword by Dr. Moses Lee, the division’s dean. An appendix will list all who have taught in the sciences.

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