

Letter dated 2 March 1853 Kalmut

Dear uncle, cousin, Karl and sweetheart<sup>1</sup>,

I must write to you how things have turned out with us. We come luckily to New York the 17th of July<sup>2</sup>. We stayed there only two days, because there is nothing but thieves there. When one wants, one goes directly to the railroad and arranges it there and not on the steamboat. One travels on the railroad to Albany or Buffalo, without making arrangements any further. Then with further arrangements one becomes much cheated [?], especially with heavy household goods, and then even with a lot of squabbles. One who wishes to visit, comes from there to Detroit, then to Chicago, then to Milwaukee, and then to Sheboygan, then on the plank road to Fond du Lac which is 36 miles long<sup>3</sup>. Then one travels the road to Calumet, by the Nicolas Church<sup>4</sup>, and then travels from there only one mile further to where we are.

Now I will write about my humble self, to let you know how it goes with us. We are now, thank God, still all fresh and healthy, as we hope that it is with you. We no longer feel like cattle, for it is pleasant here. Counting all the settlers, one counts 60,000 souls in our state, Wisconsin, in this year<sup>5</sup>. However, our city is not yet filled with people, but they survey more land each year. The land is much more expensive in Milwaukee where a building spot, which is a quarter acre, costs 5 \_\_\_ 40 dollars, which is bought with 9000 \_\_\_.

Now I must write to you further about our work. I have an American log cabin which is 22 feet long and 18 wide. The roof is covered with shingles as in Germany, which are wooden shingles.

---

<sup>1</sup> Assuming that Karl was Nicolas' son, they were married on February 10, 1852, which the writer may not have known.

<sup>2</sup> Arriving on July 17, 1850 aboard the "Atlantic" was Joseph Hennen, without any other family members. No other Hennens have been found on the arrival records before this letter was written. A biography of their son John states that he immigrated in 1852.

<sup>3</sup> The plank road connecting Fond du Lac and Sheboygan was completed in 1852. There were many plank roads in Wisconsin before 1853, but this one, which allowed one to travel 16 miles in 2 hours, was the only one that made a substantial profit for its owners. When the railroad was built from Fond du Lac westward to Chester, a new steam engine was shipped to the port of Sheboygan and had to be transported over land. The owners of the plank road, sensing the competition, refused to allow it on the road, arguing that the road was only for horse-drawn vehicles carrying passengers. The engine was transformed into a horse-drawn vehicle and passengers were placed in the cab. 14 yokes of oxen and 28 horses pulled it along the plank road.

<sup>4</sup> No St Nicolas Church has been found in the records in Fond du Lac County. There was none in 1874. Considering that they were "one mile beyond it", it would appear that he was referring to the church in Mt. Calvary, which was exactly one mile away. This was, however, not really in Calmetville.

<sup>5</sup> However, the census recorded 305,000 persons in 1850 and 522,000 in 1855 in Wisconsin.

They are 15 inches long, and a 1000 cost one dollar. Now I believe what hard work is, because there are trees here 50 to 60 feet long, without branches, of the same sort as in Germany, but also many other woods: sugar wood, four kinds of nut wood, and many others without sticks. I have others on my land which are 20 feet high. The bush is the best land, it bears still more than once more so much as does prairieland, however on prairieland one can immediately sow, because there is no wood on it. It is mostly wet land.

The fruit smells good here, the wheat costs 4 shilling per bushel, corn three shilling, buckwheat 2 shilling, peas 5 shilling, beans 6 shilling, potatoes 1 □ shilling, a pound of pork meat 5 cents, welsh corn 3 shilling, oats 2 □ shilling. We have for the present earned enough food. When one desires to work here, one has no wants.

I will explain to you what our government is here. When one requires the Constable, which is the police and the judge, one must pay him one shilling per mile; when he has work, the Supervisor receives one dollar per day. When one goes to the court house, it is much like the government in Coblenz. I don't know how much he earns; the president receives 24,000 dollars each year<sup>6</sup>. Here, I can already see that a free America does not cost as much as in Germany, where so many thousand salaried people are. The tax collector here doesn't need so many dogs as in Germany. He takes each year a tax of four cents on the dollar. Then each goes in his house and doesn't need someone in front of him and behind him.

Here in the whole of Calumet there are three Catholic churches, which most in our district have 5 to 6 miles distance to go to a church, which is a bad situation, because the way is not yet built as it is in Germany. Here one has parts 2 to 3 stone throws wide to go over mud, where tree after tree lie, in wet weather. In winter it goes good, because the winter is always as cold as in Germany. When it freezes very much, it doesn't go so easily. Until April they say that one can not plant before May, then it grows fast. That is because of the corresponding time. The days in summer are shorter and longer in winter, the weather changes almost every 2 days, in summer it is warmer here than in Germany, because the sun shines more directly over us, because the firmament is different here.

As I have learned, sending money except for change is dangerous because the post is not managed here as it is in Germany. When one has good money (paper bills), so can he get his money in practically any store.

I have already long ago written a letter, and still have received no answer. When you now receive this one, write me an answer soon, because I do not know whether or not you have received the letter, because I would like to know whether I can receive why I have written. It is not bad with the money here, because it is still fresh settled \_\_\_\_ (missing part) \_\_\_\_ one pays 20 dollars interest on 100 dollars, therefore you can understand that \_\_\_\_ can borrow no money, when I know that I will receive none, so I must \_\_\_\_ I make, because over two, three years, I have not needed to ask for so much, when it is God's will. We are here aren't we! Here it is much better than in Germany, here the young do not need to become soldiers, which as in Germany has cost so much. Now they are learning English, because without English a young one can not understand at all, which for them is successful.

---

<sup>6</sup> Franklin Pierce was inaugurated on March 4, two days after this letter was written. His pay was \$25,000, as it was for all presidents from 1789 until 1873 when it was doubled.

Nicolas has a desire to become a priest<sup>7</sup>, for which I gladly gave him vacation and he went now to our priest to study. He has promised him all the books for learning. It does not cost as much here as in Germany.<sup>8</sup>

There is also a railroad surveyed from Fond du Lac to Sheboygan which will go through a half mile from us, but it is not yet decided when it will be built<sup>9</sup>. Then it will be much better, because the fruit and everything can be sent better. For the mill we go 8 miles. However, there it runs different than in Germany. Here 30 bushels are ground in an hour, the mill is driven with steam.

I cannot well describe news, because I am not very well familiar with it. Until later, now I will close my letter and leave each many greetings; uncle, cousin, Karl and your sweetheart.

We wish that this letter finds you with good health. My address is at Peter Joseph Hennen in Calmetville, Wisconsin in North America. If you would be so good and send this letter to my father-in-law in Gillenbeuren [town 10 km from Lutzerath], namely Jacob Maas, because I do not know whether or not he received the first letter.<sup>10</sup> For I believe if he had received it, so I would have already received an answer back. Send me one of the 12 free [?] booklets with Lambert Kutscheid when he comes<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> He apparently didn't continue in this, since he is shown in the 1880 census with 8 children.

<sup>8</sup> A Capuchin Monastery and St Lawrence College was located at Mt. Calvary, which in 1895 had 132 residents according to the census.

<sup>9</sup> The 1874 atlas shows the railroad from Fond du Lac to Sheboygan passing through the land of John Hennen, and one half mile from that of Nicolas Hennen, which was apparently the original homestead of Peter Joseph Hennen. This railroad was not built until after 1860.

<sup>10</sup> Since this letter is still in the possession of the Gruesen family, it seems likely that it was not sent to him.

<sup>11</sup> Lambert Kutschied, aged 54, arrived in New York aboard the "Espindola" from Antwerp on June 6, 1853 accompanied by Catharine 54, Barbara 20, Peter 9, Peter Lenart 26, and M. C. Lenart (male). Census records show him and Catharine both living in Forest Township in 1870, both age 74, sharing a residence with Peter aged 27 and his wife Catharine 25. One of the aunts of Carl Gruesen's "sweetheart" was born Lenert.

(On back of paper addressed to Nikolaus Grüsen, marked "Doty Ville"<sup>12</sup> 3 March, and postmarked 23 Mar 1853 at New York.)

Dear parents-in-law, brothers, sisters, brother-in-law, and sisters-in-law!

I would like to know also how things go with you, whether you are still all healthy. I wish that at least some of you were here, because it is better than in Germany. I will write however not that you should come, because here not every one is lucky, many still put themselves down, and become later on sad especially in the old cities where one earns difficult money and wears oneself down. Then one still has no wealth. In the old cities, one seldom acquires more than 20 to 30 acres. That is not enough for a farmer, then one has no woods and no hay, 40 acres is still not enough. Here it is however still better with the land buying. In the beginning, one has really enough with 40 acres, one then risks all and has nothing for the cattle. Here each lives on his land, not so close that we can hear hens in the nest. Here there is no herdsman for the livestock, because the livestock roams around in the summer; mornings they go out, and in the evenings they come back to the house. In winter, most have a shed where they are fed. The livestock is the same type as you have, oxen, cows, sheep, pigs, and horses, and even the wild animals, birds, etc. as in Germany. Here it is similar climate and everything as in Germany.

In the colony states it is not so healthy, however. For the young, single person it is by far better, as in Germany, especially in the older cities to earn money. For fresh planting it is better for land buying. However, earning hard currency is not as it is in Germany. All the farmers must take goods in exchange for their fruit, instead of currency. However, one can still get hard currency and so it will get better year after year, especially when the railroad is here.

The next city is 7 miles away [probably Dotyville], another is 6 miles [probably St. Cloud], and another is 9 miles [probably [Taycheedah]]. From Sheboygan to Fond du Lac, the plank road, which is made of boards, winds for 40 miles and is 5 miles from us.

Gerhard<sup>13</sup> and Nicolas<sup>14</sup> Mertes are 7 miles from us; Nicolas Kutscheid is four miles, by Lambert; Mathias Joseph Kaspars from Büchel<sup>15</sup> is two miles from us<sup>16</sup> and lives a half mile

---

<sup>12</sup> Dotyville was the unincorporated town and post office which grew up around St Michael's Church in Forest Township, named for James D. Doty, the second territorial governor. It was 5 miles south of the Hennen homestead. Here is buried Albert Hennen, born Apr 23, 1876 and died Mar 25, 1906, son of Mathias Hennen.

<sup>13</sup> Gerhard Mertes, born ca 1805, must have immigrated after 1850 between the birth of two children.

<sup>14</sup> The census records show that Nicolas Mertes was born about 1805 and must have immigrated in about 1842. His third and fourth children were born in New York in 1843 and in Wisconsin in 1845, respectively. The fifth, Philip, was born in Wisconsin on January 29, 1848, exactly 4 months before statehood.

<sup>15</sup> Apparently the one married February 25, 1835 in Alflen to Gertrude Schaden.

<sup>16</sup> In 1874, two properties were owned in Section 18 of Marshfield Township under the name Casper, just two miles from the Hennen homestead. Buried in St Josephs Cemetery in Section 14 of Marshfield Township are Mathias J. Kaspars, born December 19, 1810 and died August 1, 1886, and his wife Gertrude Kaspars, born June 24, 1815 and died February 24, 1883. The records from

from Mathias Konz<sup>17</sup>; Joseph Hohman and Anton Mertes<sup>18</sup> are a half mile from us; our next door neighbor is from the Obermosel, on the other side is one from Holland; on the other side is one from Munich; and on the other side is another from Munich.<sup>19</sup>

You don't have to worry that we are living in the bushes. And our young ones no longer inquire about Germany, except for Mathias, who asks almost every day about his grandfather and grand mother and Pätter. He has named his lamb after him. And your Magdalene Margaret said that I should write how good it is here for her. She earns money in the city by washing for 10 to 12 shillings. It is good here for her, just as it is for all single persons who want to work.

Now I will close my letter and wish all of you a thousand greetings; especially father and mother, brother, sisters, brother-in-law, and sisters-in-law, godparents, Göden, young and old, and uncle with all his family, also all the neighbors, acquaintances and relatives and all that have asked about me, especially give my friendly greetings to the priest and Jacob Lorentz with his whole family and Peter Joseph and his wife Catharine Mertes, Philip Feien, Mathias Joseph Kessler<sup>20</sup> and his family, Nicolas Scäfer and Diederichs family, Joseph Lehren with his family, Lambert Kutschied with his family, teacher John J. Schneider with his family. Tell John Bäcker from Beuren that I ought to write him whether it would be good for him here. If he could be here, he would gain his health in 1 to 2 years and his children would grow strong. Finally, I leave my friendly greetings to all my comrades in Beuren.

-----  
Transcribed and translated by:

Michael Pierce  
7448 Bradshaw Rd  
Kingsville, MD 21087  
410 817-4795

---

Germany reveal that Mathias was actually born November 19, 1810.

<sup>17</sup> In 1874, his sons Fred and John were wagon makers and blacksmiths with a shop about 1 1/2 mile from John and Nicolas Hennen's residence.

<sup>18</sup> Anton Mertes immigrated on 25 Sept 1851, arriving aboard the "London" at New York with his wife Marie and 3 children. He is buried at St Joseph Cemetery in Section 14 of Marshfield Township, born March 12, 1804 and died April 6, 1889.

<sup>19</sup> Other neighbors according to the 1860 census were Hubert Stollenmark (born 1818) and Nicolas Hubert (born 1825) both from Prussia.

<sup>20</sup> This is apparently the one married May 19, 1840 and January 27, 1850 in Gevenich, near Büchel and Lützerath.