

This is a rendition of a letter by Michael Rodenkirch, the founder of St. Michael's Church to his relatives living in Strohn, Prussia, Germany. The letter is a translation from the original German. We have kept some of the strange spelling and some words were not translatable from German to English, but an educated guess is made. The punctuation is strange, but we have kept it as it appears in the letter.

State of West Konsin,  
Dec. 26, 1846

Dear Mother, all Sisters and Brothers and Sister-in-Laws, Relatives and Acquaintances: Sincere Greetings to you All!

Thanks to God we are all well and hope the same of you. I do hope that by now you have received my letter of Oct. 22, telling you where we have finally landed. Should you have received this letter, I hope that news from you is on the way. I will tell you again briefly about our trip.

Emigrants to America generally pay half fare from Cochenn to Coblenz, 10 silver Groschen; from Coblenz to Coeln, 20 silver Groschen; from Coeln to Antwerp by railway, two dollars per adult person, older than 10 or 12 years, children below that age pay half fare, and babies under one year old travel free. From Antwerp to New York adults pay 80 franks while minors pay 70 franks.

From New York you should acquire passage on a steamship to Albany. From Albany to Buffalo you may travel by "Ralter" (perhaps ferry or railway). From Buffalo you travel again by steamship to Milwaukee in West Konsin. Trip from New York to Albany costs 4 shillings, or 20 silver Groschen; from Albany to Buffalo costs 5 or 6 dollars, from Buffalo to West Konsin by steamship cost 6 dollars, at each place "veradkordiert", (possibly register or be recorded) anew and do not trust every German thieving trickster approaching you as exchange agent; these people are usually bad characters.

We had made arrangement for passage to Chicago, however, we went ashore at Milwaukee on Lake Michigan, 80 miles above Chicago. We live now 40 miles northeast of Milwaukee in town 12, range 19, section 13. We are well satisfied here, have good land, and none molest us.

We have a good home, 20x33 feet, built of logs. We also have a wagon, a yoke of oxen which cost \$50.00, a cow, costing \$18.00, chickens and other domestic animal. The cattle graze night and day in the open woods, and whenever they do come home, we give them a handful of salt and a little meal to the cows. Salt is not expensive here, it costs 12 shillings (2 dollars in Prussian money), per tonne, a tonne weighs almost 300 pounds. Eight shilling make a dollar or 100 cents. Ten Gulden are worth \$4.00 here. Prussian money is not good here. Whoever emigrates should exchange his money for gold. Parisian drafts on a good New York bank are good. The drafts I had were good and I deposited them in New York and after traveling 1600 miles to Milwaukee sold them without loss.

I have bought eight times 80 acres, all in one plot, making a whole section, for \$800.00. This would be 1080 Morgen in Prussia. There are no hills here. Whoever buys uncultivated land must be prepared to live for a year on his purse, and that is very expensive living.

The trip across the ocean took 52 days; despite storm and high waves, thanks to God, all went well. The trip through America to Milwaukee took us 18 days. Whoever makes this trip had better take good care of his money. With us there were people from Brohl on the Mainfeld who were robbed of 2200 dollars in Albany. Their plight was great as they could travel only a short distance.

Here in our woods we hear nothing of robberies; hardly any one has a lock on his door. So far I have not seen a snake, but there are foxes, groundhogs, deer, elk, prairie chickens, and other birds. There are also: strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and many varieties of plants, trees, and herbs. We have two kinds of sugar maple, four kinds of oaks, large basswoods, nut trees, redwood, and ironwood which gets so hard that an iron nail cannot be driven into it. For fuel wood, we use the ash. We also have many large trees of enormous size. Many of the fallen trees of dead timber lie crisscross in the forests making it exceedingly difficult for travel.

I find great joy in walking through the forests, admiring the tall trees, 40 to 50 feet high, without a branch, all even thickness; they are beautiful. My children may pick the finest living places, by lot they may choose where they wish to locate. Children and children's children no longer need fear Martini (tax term day, November 11). Meat we have three times daily except Fridays or other days of abstinence. White bread, like Wittlicher Weck, we eat every day. I wish I could wish you here, never yet have I regretted making the trip -- often I have asked the two youngest children whether they would like to return to their old home; they answer, "No, not for a thousand dollars." We wish we could have you here for several days, or as long as you might want to stay. I would like to give you a treat, even if it were to cost me \$50.00.

Tools are very expensive here, but good. Bring an ax for use on the trip, bring no chains, little tinware for of that we have enough here, and for travel across the sea iron pots and pans are best, for your cooking, as tinware does not stand the wear and tear. For your sea voyage make your own "Zweiback" and take along sufficient oatmeal and wheat flour. If you can obtain potatoes, use them for your vegetables. Also carry along ham, butter, brandy, spices, coffee, sugar, and whatever else you might like to eat on your trip across the sea, for on the sea your money will not buy anything; for 4000 miles you shall see nothing but sky and water. If you plan on traveling through the woods here, bring several pairs of boots and shoes and durable clothes; also bring waffle iron and cake pan.

Unmarried and single people will have a good income here in America, in a short time they may earn more than they may ever inherit from their parents.

Our church affairs are still in a bad way. No hope to build a church next year. Now, unless we wish to travel great distances, we must have our prayers and devotions in our own homes. The Gospel we find in our books and meanwhile must be content with that.

All of our homes are somewhat different and 400-600-1000 steps apart. My nearest neighbor, Tull, from Gillenfeld, lives about 500 steps away. In adjoining homes live: I. Schneider, Theisch, Keller, Junk, Herriges and Strohn. Tull and Hammes, from Gillenfeld. Tullen from Strotsbuesch, Rodermund from Scheidweiler and a certain Catholic, Buckecker, from Switzerland, a few Englishmen, and also some Lutherans. Each treats the other kindly and all visit back and forth.

On Christmas Day we had fine weather without snow. Many have asked to give you all the news. Later I shall give you more detailed news. Pass this news on to my brother-in-law, Peter Tullen. Gerhardt Schaefer and his wife Susanna, from Schalkenmehren, my "Vaetern" (possible means cousin) Hilarius, John Rodermund from Oberscheidweiler and all other relatives from niederscheidweiler.

How gladly I would like to give you something from my abundance of wood. When I see the great woodpiles burn, it pains my heart and my wife is moved to tears. All wood is burned except for rail fences to keep the cattle out. Our cattle stay out in the open, winter and summer, and graze. Large bells are hung on their necks and one may hear them a mile away. Almost throughout the year our cattle finds its lodging places under the trees. I have erected some shelter for my cattle but it is with difficulty that I keep them there even when the weather is bad. They prefer to lie in the open. Our scythes are narrow but nearly twice as long as yours, the blades are not hammered but sharpened with a stone.

Should you plan to undertake the trip to America, make sure that you are on time at the depot or dock, as neither ships nor train will wait a minute for you, - they are gone like a shot. Whoever makes the trip will be impressed with the omnipotence of God. It is still impossible for me to describe our voyage adequately. We were en route 75 days. Back home we always thought that England was far, far away, but after five days of travel we were nearing the English coast and after 10 days we were alongside Scotland and Ireland; after that we were soon out in the open sea.

This shows the speed of our ship. On the ocean we were for 55 days. High waves often dashed over our ship. The slant of our ship often made it impossible to stand without hanging onto something. At times gusts of wind almost threatened to overturn our ship, but like a floating egg, it would always right itself. The last ten days we sailed along the American shores and then entered the world famous, beautiful New York harbor. We were, of course, exhausted and walked with difficulty on firm soil. We remained in New York for a day. The sumptuous meals served us in America did not agree well with these exhausted pilgrims. The next night we traveled 45 miles by steamboat to Albany and then on as I have already related. We reached Milwaukee in 17 days, and our destination here, afoot, in two days. All of us who came from Gillenfeld and vicinity are happy and well, but I do not know where all of them finally settled. Joseph Streit went to Chicago.

Single men, with a good job, may easily save enough money in one year for an 80 acre farm. The Government permits one to claim two 80 acre farms for one year and at the end of the year another member of the family, 21 years of age, may renew the claim.

Insurance costs 12 shillings or 2 Prussian dollars. Having acquired a claim, one may immediately reside on the land without additional taxes. Anyone may establish a claim without much ado by merely selecting a desired plot on the plat, giving his name, and without dicker-ing about a price. Price of an acre is 20 shillings; in Prussia that would be two and one-half pfennig a rod. There are still vast uninhabited areas available but there are no established roads.

I can hardly grasp the meaning of being separated from you by 7000 miles. Climate here is very much like yours. There are five Indian huts in our vicinity. Indians live on game, are clothed in pelts and wear woolen breach cloths. They sell much deer and elk meat. Each Indian has a saddle horse. They are people like we are, somewhat colored, harm none, visit us freely, sometimes beg, saying, "Give me some." At first we were afraid of these people but we have lost our fear. I have even visited them in their huts, of course well protected with my double barreled rifle and bayonet. They were filled with fear but quite accommodating. They lounge on the bare ground; their shoes were made of pelts and tied to their feet. Honey they find in the woods. I have seen them gather more than an "Ohm" (137.4 liter) from some trees. There is little underbrush in our highland forests. I wish you also could be with us. A few miles from here I could find some very fine farm land for you.

Should you decide to come, remember that I am your friend, do not fail to call on me. Many of our old friends back home tried to frighten us with their fairy tales of wild beasts here. That is why I bought my double barreled gun and pistol and bayonet which could easily spring into action by a touch of the left hand should danger require it. It is quite possible that wild hordes still live beyond the Mississippi, far from here.

I must also tell you something about our language used here. For the numbers we use ciphers. "Holz" is called wood; "fleisch" is "meat", etc.

We pay postage on our letters to the border, the balance of postage you are obliged to pay; deduct that from my account.

Give my regards to the most venerable pastor, the honorable burgermeister, and all those mentioned in my previous letter. I send as many greetings as there are drops of water between us. Give greetings to all relatives and acquaintances. We shall remember you in our prayers daily and hope you are praying for us. Remain true to your faith, hope, and love in God; do your duty. We wish you a Happy New Year.

Give greetings also to all our neighbors, Peter Schladweiler, Peter Sartoris, our teacher and his family, all my sponsors, and all members of the congregation Strohn. I greet you a hundred thousand times and remain

Your sincere brother,

Michael Rodenkirch