

COPY OF A LETTER FROM T. VAN VEENSCHOOTEN
TO HIS FAMILY IN LUNTEREN, ARNHEM,
THE NETHERLANDS.

Pella, 26th December 1855

Dear brothers and sisters, brothers-in-law and further relatives,

I wish that you all may receive this in good condition and health as we are in good condition and health. I did send you a few letters from England, but I don't know if you received them. We have had a long but a prosperous sea voyage. Most of the time we had headwinds. On the 2nd of August we took to sea and on the 45th day we saw to our great joy the new part of the world. It was on the morning of September 16 when we sighted with astonishment the high mountains on which grew all kinds of trees; soon we came into a narrow passage so that we had mountains and woods on both sides; soon steamboats came to tow us in, which was soon done, but we had to go on for two hours and then we anchored before New York. The water was at least twice as broad as the river Rhine, and the town was on both sides. New York is situated on an island with broad water flowing through it so that steamers regularly go from one place to the other to bring over people and cargo. As it was Sunday that day we had to remain on the ship in midstream. The sea voyage as we experienced it was fairly pleasant although my wife suffered from seasickness now and then, but not I nor the children so that it was worth mentioning, nor any of the passengers. So nobody has to fear the sea voyage. In New York I wrote a letter, but I had no opportunity to post it. The next day, at 8 o'clock in the morning (Monday), a steamboat came alongside our ship which we boarded with all our belongings, and so - to our greatest joy - we left the ship having been on board 62 days.

The steamboat brought us to the other side to a very big round building in the center of which had been placed a big fountain which cooled the whole building, for it was very hot at that time in New York. That building was specially erected for immigrants, just to avoid mistakes. They ask you to what state you want to go, and you pay the costs of the journey and they give you the right papers as a receipt. I had paid for my trip overland in advance while in Rotterdam, but the papers were accepted there as money, but in Rotterdam I had to pay 15 dollars per person and here I would have had to pay only 13, and we were six and one half persons on this overland trip. We could stay as long as we liked at our own expense in that building but we wanted to go on as soon as possible; however, we could not leave before 4 o'clock in the afternoon when our belongings were brought out in the hall. We then took a walk into town, and when we were there we wandered at the broad streets and big and costly buildings. The streets are at least four times as broad as in Arnhem (capital of prov. Gelderland), and run from north to south and from east to west; and there were thousands of carriages, so that if one wanted to go to the other side of a street you mostly had to wait a few

moments to get through. There were no fine horses, mostly lean ones. Nobody can imagine the ship traffic and trade there who has not seen it for himself. The city is surely twice as large as Amsterdam. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon a steam ferryboat came alongside the immigrants building and we went on board with all our belongings; it brought us for fifteen minutes past the city and then we came to a big steamer with several hundreds of people on board. We were on that till half past ten, and then we boarded a train; at 11 o'clock we started up country. How eager we were to see the country, but alas, we could not as it was pitch dark. The next morning, being Tuesday, we did not see anything else but steep rocky mountains, covered with trees; down in the valleys between the mountains we saw standing block houses every now and then with a little patch of buckwheat, potatoes and maize. Maize is a fruit (product) like that in Gelderland, but it grows as high as seven or eight feet, and the ears are so thick that you can't span (encircle) them with your hand. So we rode on from Monday evening till Wednesday afternoon without delay, then we arrived at Duinkerck, having passed a little village after leaving the rocky mountains; now we came to a better soil and country and had to stay there until the next morning, Friday. In the evening we arrived in Chicago, on Lake Michigan, being a big merchant's town; there were the biggest and most magnificent horses I ever saw. In Chicago we had to stay till Saturday night. On Sunday morning when we awoke we stopped at a station building on a great plain where we remained until Monday morning. Going on we arrived by late evening at the Mississippi; that is a large river going right through America; then we were at the end of the railway. From New York until the Mississippi was 240 hours going, through mountains and woods. Many woods have been cut down and the land cultivated. I saw about 50 woods where they burned up the fallen down trees, not only cut down, but also fallen down from old age, more than I ever saw in Europe. I saw thousands of acres where the tree stumps were still standing, and in between they plowed and grew wheat and maize and potatoes. I did not see very big trees, but still too big for a mill axle, but I saw thousands of oak trees measuring 100 feet without branches or knots; although there are places where trees grow measuring 30 feet round (in diameter?) and more than 300 feet without branches or knots. But there are areas in America, even large pieces of level ground, which are covered with grass more than four feet high, and without trees, but then also without houses, on account of the floods after big showers of rain. But it only rains here for a few days.

So we were on board the train from Monday night until the next Monday night, being 420 hours going. That night we stayed in the train. The engines are twice as powerful as in Gelderland, and the other carriages about twice as long, and it happens that you see 53 carriages on the same train, and we were with nearly 300 persons in one carriage. The next morning, Tuesday, we went on board a steamer which could carry as many as 20 carriages across the river, and reached Burlington on the other side; there we were still 40 hours away from Pella.

There I hired a carriage for 40 dollars, and we started the next morning, and after a ride of three and one half days we arrived at the town Pella on Saturday afternoon, the 29th of September, all fresh and healthy. We obtained lodging in a carpenter's barn, as houses are very hard to get. On the next day I went to van den Pol, who is married to a daughter of van Beek, in Bennekom (near Ede, Gelderland). I had a letter from the wife's family with me, and when I told them who I was they nearly swooned. The next day they came to fetch my wife and children with the wagon to their house and they stayed there for two days. I and van den Pol went out to buy a farm. A peasant's house they call a farm here, but we could not find one that suited us. That night I went to the carpenter's barn and the following morning I went to van den Pol once more. When I came there he said that last spring his neighbor, ten minutes from there, had sold his farm (had his farm for sale?), as he wanted to go to town, where his son lived and had a shop. Van den Pol said: He won't do business by selling his farm now. But anyhow, van der Pol went over to him. Arriving there, the answer was "no"; but after thinking about it for a few moments, he said he would go to town to talk about it with his son. Van den Pol came home not knowing any further news, but after one hour we received tidings to come over. We bought the farm, being 105 acres, at 20 dollars per acre, including five acres of maize. He instantly left the farm, and on Friday of the same week we were in our own house. The name of the man from whom I bought it is Tomas, a brother of Tomas who owns a corn mill right near the town Arnhem. Now it happened that a man owned 45 acres of land in a corner of my farm and he was able to buy a piece of land that would be much handier for him, also for 20 dollars, and now I bought those 45 acres too for eighteen dollars apiece so that now I own a piece counting 900 reads long and also 900 treads broad, being more than 84 old Dutch acres, so that I could make two large farms on them if only there were another house on it. And I live 35 minutes from town (Pella).

This town is situated on level ground, but out of town it is hilly and difficult to cultivate. But my farm is not very hilly, and it does not cause any difficulty in working it. The water can find its way through quite well. In the valley in the middle grows lots of grass, so that in winter or spring we have to burn it out. The soil here and all over in America is clay. If you would dig a hundred feet deep it is all yellow clay with three or four feet black clay on top, what can be worked easily, and you can work it deep enough with two horses, for the upper soil is loose and also stands the drought well. You don't have to dung the soil over here. You don't grow anything else than wheat, maize and potatoes. The wheat is sown in spring and mowed with a machine with four horses, each day 10 acres, and afterwards it is put up in piles where it has fallen, and in October or November the wheat is threshed by a threshing machine. There are machines run by eight horses, threshing a hundred Dutch "mudden" (hectoliteres), and the wheat drops without chaff into a basin. Then, near the piles they make squares of cleft trees piled up on each other with some straw inside so that they are closed and then the wheat is poured in and covered with straw. As soon as the

wheat is thrashed, the straw is dragged away by the horses and burned. The maize is partly cut in September and put in heaps as fodder for horses and cows; each horse gets 30 ears and the cows 20. The cows are out the whole winter time. They make fences against the northern and northwestern winds which are the coldest; and there the cows are fed, and for the rest they must find their own way. It sometimes is very cold here and always thick snow is falling. But the cattle over here are all good (fat) in flesh, and they are accustomed to it. They don't make much out of dairy farms here. The farmers don't make much butter; the calves are all reared and they have to suck the mother, otherwise the cattle won't produce milk. Cattle raising is a good thing just now. Four or five years ago you had to pay about ten dollars for a cow, and now, when we came here, I bought one with its calf for thirty-five dollars. You never buy a cow without its calf. But it is a nice black cow, about 700 pounds. And I bought another that will be fresh in March for 25 dollars, and also six calves half a year old at ten dollars apiece. I don't need to feed these during winter as they get enough on the farm. I bought a horse, five years old, for \$112.50. I have not too much work for it, but I feed it well. It is the custom here to go to town on horseback during the week for shopping or on Sunday to go to church; you don't walk, but put a saddle on a horse and ride to town. At first, when I had no horse, I was ashamed to go into town.

Potatoes grow excellently here, also with dung. The soil is worked with two horses; the rows are three and one half feet apart. If there are any weeds you work it with a cultivator. When they are ripe, they are taken out, which is done in one day; they are as big as a fist, and no bad ones and of good taste. The farmers all have pigs here, each has 30 or 40, till they are fat, they run in a big closed corral or pen in the open air and they only eat maize ears on which they gnaw, and water to drink. We have an easier and quieter life here than in Gelderland and sleep till the sun rises. No bothering about cutting turf sods, or collecting soil, or digging ditches. I shall have to pay four to five dollars tax, not a cent more, even if you buy a farm - not a cent to pay. We have no spies (informers or betrayers) nor policemen here, nor sheriffs officers, nor any scum or tramps. Nor do they think about military service for our sons. The Lord be praised that we are freed from Egypt and are safely living in a free country where there is an abundance of bread for everyone. Those who have lived here for six or seven years have never seen a poor man at their door. On Sundays they don't collect money for poor people. There are four ministers here, and three churches, but all church seats are alike (free?).

They don't grow rye here. We only eat wheat bread. When the wheat is ground you get the bran and the fine flour separate; we feed the bran to the cattle. We have square stoves here; four pots can be on top of one, and the lower part is an oven where each day or every other day our bread is baked. Such a stove as we have, one of the biggest, with pots, kettles, bread pans and further utensils costs thirty-three dollars. You will probably wonder why I didn't write earlier, but when we were only a fortnight in America my wife, Jan, Wil-

lem, Evertje and Johanna all got colds with fever, and it took four weeks before everybody was recovered again. Then I myself fell ill, and it was five weeks before I had my old health back. I was not very sick, but I could not get around to writing. Most of the people from Holland who came to live here fell ill or feel unwell for some weeks before they become accustomed to the climate as the air here is different from that in Gelderland. Nearly always the air here is clear and thin, the days in winter are one and one half hours longer than in Gelderland; and shorter in summer. Up to now Hendrik and Evert have been in good health, Hendrik grows so fat and thick that possibly you would not recognize him any more.

They have bees too over here, but not many. Tomas has seven hives. These are square, made of wood, three and one half feet high, weighing all together about 500 pounds. I don't know where they get the honey from; honey is expensive here and costs 37 and one half cents Dutch money. Birds are scarce, a few crows, but many big birds of prey, many partridges (but small ones), many prairie chickens of the size of a tame hen; many hares, but very small; many wild geese, many wild turkeys and in the woods also many deer. In America are many large dogs and mostly heavily built cows and very stout oxen. A great deal of work is done here with oxen especially to bring supplies and goods which must be fetched a distance of 40 hours. Then they use ten or twelve yokes of oxen per wagon (one yoke consists of two oxen); and they are very well trained so that a person can easily drive them without bridle or reins, and they pull a load of ten or twelve thousand pounds. There is such strong wood here, called hickory, that the wagon axles are not made any thicker than in Gelderland, and the hoops only one fourth of an inch thick and used only to prevent wear; but an axle seldom breaks. There is also a kind of cartle without horns. Here there are no cattle of any color but red with a little white. Horses are of different colors.

Goods are all quite expensive here, especially clothes. Windmills in America are not only watermills, but especially steam mills. In Pella there are five or six sawmills, but all are run with steam, and they saw only one plank at a time. The saw is a round disk, like a big round table, and it runs so fast that a plank of 20 feet in length is sawed in two minutes, and then the tree runs back as fast as a man can walk. One hundred feet of planks cost 75 American cents to have them sawn and the sawmills are all kept busy. This summer 70 houses were built here in Pella, and if they had more workmen they could have built more. Carpenters earn \$1.25 to \$1.50 a day, and farm hands \$16.00 to \$18.00 a month and are still hard to get. They have to buy their clothes out of it, but there is no opportunity to squander money in any way because gin or strong drink may not be sold here. Fairs and other such entertainments are not held here. Once a year, on the 1st (4th?), everybody goes to an adjacent place (county seat?) and they offer him wheat bread and beer, in commemoration of the liberation of America.

I could write lots and lots more, but I just can't remember everything. We speak about Gelderland every day, not to come back and live there; no, if you would give me two of the best farms in De Valk or in Doesburg where I lived I

would thank you most heartily for it. But I would like to be there for a few days to talk to you, especially not that I am settled in America. And I can't believe otherwise but that, if I may remain strong and healthy, and the children get so far that I have the time to do so, that I may once more make a voyage to Europe, but not with a sailing boat, that takes too long. You in Gelderland and we in America are 2,000 hours from each other, but you can't believe it is so far away since you have not made that journey. When it is six o'clock in the morning here, then it is half past twelve in the afternoon with you. It is generally said that this state is the best state for farming. Several shallow rivers run through this state, and alongside these are the woods and also hills of coal and rocky hills where they burn lime, but on the land made out of that grows only grass, so high that when cattle are lying down you must be quite near to see them. In winter they burn more grass here than grows in all of Holland. The farmhouses here are nearly all made of tree logs cut flat and piled on each other, 20 to 30 feet long, and 16 to 20 feet wide. That is just one room, in which there are as many beds as each family needs. Our house has a large cellar underneath in which we can store quite a lot, but for the rest everything must be placed in the one room or in the attic. But they set a better table here than in Gelderland. Pork and beef are eaten three times a day, but pigs' feet and ears are not used but thrown to the dogs or hogs. When we were first here I went to the butcher to buy a piece of meat. The butcher's wife had just rendered a large quantity of lard and the cracklings were standing in bowls. I asked how much she wanted for those. She answered, "Nothing at all, I'll be glad to have you take them along. Otherwise I'll have to throw them to the dogs." And there was still about four pounds of lard in them.

I can't brag about our house, but it is just like the others, and if you take into consideration the land and its fertility the houses don't matter so much. We wish that more people, yes, thousands more, from Europe were here, who now suffer hardships while here there is an abundance of food. As I said before, I first greatly wondered to see how wheat is threshed on the field and then placed in bins, with the owner of the threshing machine given one tenth of the crop as his hire. They put the grain in sacks and then pile them against the corn crib and they lay there for at least six weeks, far away from the houses, and never one sack of wheat is stolen. In town every house has a pile of wood nearby, with saw and axe which remain there day and night, but nothing is ever stolen, nor do they lock their doors at night. We have had frost all this month, with some snow, and now and then it was terribly cold, especially on Sunday, the 23rd, when it froze so hard as seldom occurs in America, and as long as I can remember it never froze so hard in Gelderland.

I am very sorry that I could not write earlier on account of our sicknesses; otherwise I would have had to write while sick, and when my letter would arrive you might think that some of us might have entered Eternity, and you would have been especially concerned about me, as it is really necessary for me to be spared for some years for my wife and children. Well, I must finish

now, being the second Christmas day that I write this letter. We are all in good health. Do write me a letter in return as soon as possible, and I hope that I may hear the same from my relatives.

I remain in friendship,

Your Brother,

(Signed) T. van Veenschooten

(Translated by T. Van Hoogstraten, former burgomeester of Henselo, Gelderland, August 1959.)

(The following is a copy of a letter from Aalbert van Schothorst (1814-1899), Elderman of Ede, Gelderland, living in Lunteren, to his friend Veenschooten (T. van Veenschoten) Pella, Iowa, A. 1856.)

(1856)

Dear friend Veenschoten,

By the kindness of your family I received into my hands your letter of 26 December (1855), which I and my people have read with the greatest pleasure and interest; yes, with such interest that I chose to make a copy of it to keep in my records. I feel very thankful for it. We were happy to see from it that you are happy and well and arrived there safely, and succeeded so soon in obtaining a house and farm, and that it pleases you to be there and that the soil is satisfactory even without manuring. It all aroused, with some of the people here, the desire formerly still slumbering, also to try their luck in that far away America. The topics of the day were, for some time after the arrival of your letter, about North America. But though you wrote a lot about America, my curiosity was not yet quite satisfied. We wondered how it can be possible that a state can be ruled without police, as always ill weeds grow among the rye. We also wonder if there are any beasts of prey or poisonous animals in that state or in the vicinity. I should like to know what the town Pella looks like. What about elementary instruction and religious teaching? What language do they particularly speak in Iowa? What are the prices of corn and cereals? And where must they be brought to market? And what are the roads like? And do they cultivate the same kind of garden fruits or vegetables as in Gelderland? How does a mowing machine work? We cannot form any idea of it. Does it mow the sides all right? Are there any American tribes and do they mingle among the Europeans or do they withdraw before them or melt away? In case you might write again, and it would not cause too much trouble, I would like to hear some answers to these questions, and whether you live in a sheltered house. I'll count on the further