

Letter addressed to Mien van Bijlevelt,
Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Wes. Spr., S.D., 21 April 1910

Dear Mien,

I bet you did not expect to see a letter from me without having to wait so long. You see, I was talking to Annie for such a long time that I felt that I had to engage you in a conversation as well. And now I imagine you to be right here with us. OK, where to begin, or where to leave off. I wrote Annie most of the news already and answered part of her questions, and I don't want to repeat myself if I can help it. I mentioned already that we are all healthy and I wish you all the best in that regard. So now I want to thank you, first of all, for that beautiful picture postcard and good wishes with our little girl. (page 2) She is growing fast and everybody says that she is one of the most beautiful babies in Wessington Springs. Quite a compliment, wouldn't you say? But I will enclose a picture of her. She was exactly 9 weeks old when it was taken. She was sound asleep when we got to the photographer's, and we had quite a time waking her up, and consequently she does not look quite as sharp as she could have, but then I say, better next time.

I think we may get to Platte one of these days for Cornelis wrote us that as soon as the weather and the roads are good he wants to come and get us with his automobile; he bought himself a 5 passenger automobile recently. So then it won't take us that long to get to Platte for a little visit. But right now the weather and the roads are not very good. We had beautiful weather all of March until April 15, with the result that (page 3) everything was green and all fruit trees and plants were in full blossom. But beginning with the 15th until the 18th of April it started to rain and snow and freeze so that we don't see anything of the blossoms or leaves anymore. Such is the case for this entire northwest region. I'm afraid there won't be too much fruit. And now I hear from Annie that in Holland you don't even have enough ice to skate on. Quite a disappointment for people who love to skate. I tell you, if we had it in our power to distribute some of the frosty weather we have had here, we certainly would have send some your way, for we were hit hard. And snow! There was no end to it, from one foot to two feet on level ground! But all of it is gone now, it went gradually. All we have to do is take it as it comes, and not complain. Isn't that right?

(page 4) Now, if you were only as good a skater as cousin Willem, as Annie tells it, it would not take you long to come over. And Annie who prefers summer weather could come across in her row boat and upon arrival on this side of the ocean she could put wheels under her boat, and you put wheels under

your skates when there is no more ice. But all joking aside, I sooner travel by boat and train and let others do the hard work. But maybe you would not enjoy coming here for a visit since we do not have the conveniences of a city where you can travel by rail or streetcar. For here people use horse and buggies or automobiles. But, let me tell you, everything is different here from how you imagine it until you have seen it yourself. However, once you have grown used to how things are done here you would not want to go back to a busy city, (page 5) for here you can move much more freely than in a city. One of these days I will also try to write aunt Cato and Uncle Becht a few lines, maybe you could please give them our best.

So cousin Cor is planning to get married too shortly, is he? We did not know that he was engaged, but I received a letter from Uncle Cornelis who told us.

Well, the way Annie describes the city with all the changes, I am sure I would not be able to find my way anymore. Of course, a lot can happen in 20 years. I suppose Rijswijk and the Hague are probably one city now. Although, I'd love to take a walk once again in that beautiful linden-lined avenue in Cromvliet where our grandparents lived when we left.

It certainly is nice for you that Jo lives so close by. (page 6) That way Aunt and Uncle are able to visit her from time to time, or Jo and her husband them. Please give them our best too, will you? Annie asked if we ever corresponded with aunt Neeltje; well, I can tell you that I never received a letter from her, and she not from me either. And as far as the grain business is concerned, thus far I am still quit happy with it. Of course it requires some expertise on my part which Annie wondered about, but I worked on a farm for 12 years and then you learn the various kinds of grain and whether or not the quality is up to snuff.

Now I have to end. Best wishes to Uncle and Aunt and Willem and you too, of course. Your ever much affectionate cousins and baby,

Gertie, Louiza Juliana & Wilhelm.

Excuse my poor writing and mistakes because I know they are many.

Goodbye.

Letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
Addressed to Any Van Bijlevelt
Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Platte, S.D. 24 March 1908

Dear cousin Any,

I wrote Mien a letter in American and thought I would write you a letter at the same time. I was very pleased to receive a letter from you and to learn that all of you are in the best of health. All of us are doing well also, which means that we are quite fortunate. I am glad, Any, that you liked the postcard I sent you, and I will send you herewith another one with a few comments. Maybe you have never seen anything like it in Holland. We have had beautiful weather here all winter long, but today it is cold and wet so that I cannot work. That is why (page 2) I thought I would write you and Mien. Yes, Annie, I am building a house these days for a certain John De Vries, also a Dutchman, but born in America. He is engaged to my sister Cornelia and they intend to be married as soon as the house is ready. Of course, provided both are spared to see that day. Then they will probably get married in the month of May. Cornelia has grown into a wonderful enterprising girl; she is an excellent housekeeper. But once she is married I am sure that we will miss her from time to time. But then sister Jet is still with mother, God willing, so that mother won't be so alone when we are out working. Mother is still in good health and she is strong, and sometimes she is as fast as a young girl. Quite fortunate for us, wouldn't you say? Andries and Louise told me that you are such a lover of flowers. I am a flower-lover as well, but unfortunately I can not spend much time on it since I am too busy. But mother does quite a bit of gardening. You would make me very happy if you would send me some flower seed of some of those beautiful flowers you have in Holland, and I will enclose some seed of American flowers, the directions how to grow them you will find on the packages. Then you will have to write me if you had any luck with them. You also wrote that that Mr. Lieuwe Van Graft visited grandmother and uncle. He is a really nice person. He was here already before we came to America and always lived in our area, that is to say, some 4 to 5 miles from us. I chose my Father's trade, Annie, and I really like it. Now, you asked me if I could not make a big piggy bank. Well, I can tell you, I can make one as big as I want to make it, but to fatten it up with my savings is quite another matter. What do you think of that? (page 3) And now let

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2011, Grand Rapids, MI

me tell you how it occurred to me to write you. On the first Sunday evening that Andries and Louise were at our place and Piet also, we were talking about all of you, and then the thought occurred to me to write you a few lines to let you know that we were all doing well. I will also send you a postcard of Holst De Jong's house, he is Jansje's husband. A nice house, isn't it? When I write again I'll send you a better one because this one is a bit dark. How is cousin Willem doing? He must be quite a gentleman by now. Please give him and also Uncle and Aunt my best. I will also enclose a postcard for Willem. (page 4) And now I have written just about everything I know and what is happening here. So I had better end this letter. I wish I could make a fun trip like the one you are planning to take this summer. We sure would have a lot of fun. For you see there is little amusement here for young people. And so you can imagine that a person longs on occasion to have a little bit of fun. Well, dear Annie; you had better not look at my many spelling errors. I notice I misspelled your name at the beginning of this letter, but then just think that I wrote in English for that's how your name is spelled in that language. Best wishes then from all of us and especially to you. Your affectionate cousin,

Wilhelm

Goodbye to all.

Postscript:

I will have to put the flower seed in another envelope otherwise the letter might not arrive. Is that OK?

Goodbye.

Text of postcard that seems to have been mailed at the same time. It is addressed to Wilhelmina to whom he had written a letter in English the previous day.

Pella, S.D. , March 23, 1908

Dear cousin Wilhelmina,

This is to let you know that we are all doing well. Cousin Andries and family and cousin Piet are here for supper right now and to spend a pleasant evening talking. I sure would love to speak with all of you, but maybe the time will come someday that we will be able to do so. I hope all of you are doing well also.

On the reverse side you see a picture of Main Street here in Platte. As you can see Platte is beginning to grow. And now best wishes, and write back soon. Also give my best to Uncle and Aunt and the rest of the family. Your affectionate cousin, Wilhelm Van der Boom. Goodbye.

Excuse my poor script.

Postcard showing child

To W.L. v. Bijlevelt
Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Platte, S.D. , 24 Aug 1908

Dear cousin Willem,

Received your nice letter for which my cordial thanks. Say, Wim, you know that Mr. Blanken, the man who ran the dairy shop, who lives on the Lookplein. Would you be so kind to ask him for the address of his son who, I believe, works for the Philadelphia waterworks. I hope you will be able to get the information and if you do please let me know by return mail. He also lives in Philadelphia, U.S.A. Mailed a letter to Annie and hope that it arrived. The boys and mammy are making progress. Goodbye! Best wishes to all. Your affectionate cousin Andries v.d. Boom.

Letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
 Addressed to Mien v. Bijlevelt,
 in which this letter to Annie was enclosed.
 Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Platte, S.D., 14 June 1908

Dear Cousin Annie,

It is Sunday today, and since I responded to Mien's letter already, which I want to mail together with yours, I am going to try to reply to your letter as well and to tell you some news. Mien and you had a few identical questions which I answered already in Mien's letter. But I will try to respond to your other questions in detail. But first I want to thank you for your nice letter and I was happy to learn that all of you are still in good health. All of us are doing well also (page 2) and I hope that when you receive these few lines all of you will still be in good health. How sad that Opoe had to suffer so terribly. I think that she herself must have longed for the end so she would be set free from all that suffering. That is why I think she died so peacefully. I will do my best Annie to express myself in Dutch as well as I can, and you will just have to excuse my mistakes and poor script. Let me begin by telling you about the wedding of Cornelia to Jan de Vries on the 26th of May 1908. About fifty old people had been invited that day (page 3) At 11 o'clock friends and family members gathered here. At 12 noon the minister came and united Cornelia and John in marriage at 20 minutes before 1. After that we toasted the happiness of the young couple with a glass of wine after which everybody was invited to a meal. We had two long tables that seated twelve persons at each table. A few girls from the neighborhood, sister Jet and we ourselves did the serving. Everybody had a really nice time. As evening came everybody left again. It had been a beautiful day; the weather was warm and quiet. Then toward evening the sky changed (page 4) about the time when all the people had left, except for a few like Louise and Andries who were still here. And Piet Rosenthal and a few others. Most people could have been home when suddenly it started to pour, in fact, it poured so heavily that you could barely see a meter ahead of you. Then it cleared up, and over the Missouri River we saw a tornado. It is a funnel-like cloud with a point that moves across the ground while rotating all the time and it sucks up and destroys everything in its path. But it went up the river, and it picked up a big boat and smashed it against the bank. Fortunately none of the people on board

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got killed. Afterwards the cloud broke up and dissipated. (page 5) If I can get some pictures I'll send them to you in the next letter. I do have a few pictures of the damage it caused here in Platte which was caused more by the strong winds that followed after the tornado. But when at 9 o'clock in the evening I went to the barn to milk a cow I was up to my knees in water, and that was on even ground, so you can imagine how much it rained and rained in just one hour. It also hailed terribly, a lot of trees were almost bare with no leaves left and most of the bark gone. When I arrived at the barn (page 6) I had to check first to see if everything was still OK, but everything was still in its place. Then, I had not been back in the house a mere five minutes when it started to blow and hail and rain so terribly, you have no idea; it was like a cloudburst which I am sure it was, for in the eighteen years that we have lived here the Platte River (a small river) had never been so high as it was this time, which also caused a lot of damage with all that water. Sister Jans, her husband and children had gone into their basement for fear that their house might be blown away. But when the water in the creek started rising so high it began to flood the basement and they had to get out as fast as they could so they would not drown (page 7) Well, the next morning when we got up we had to look immediately, of course, what the storm had done. We had a pig sty, 5 x 9 meters, which still stood in its place the previous evening when I came from the barn, and now it was laying scattered over a 40 square rod area, a piece of one side here, and a piece of the roof there, and the rest in smithereens, in other words, totally demolished. The top of our carriage was completely gone; a tree had been driven into the ground two feet and twisted so that we had to dig it out of the ground with a shovel. A lot of windows and chimneys had been broken and blown about. Now about the pictures I am sending you. The first one is of a small house that was under construction and that was tipped over just like that. (page 8) The second (where I put that x) is where a foundation of a house stood of which the framework had been finished already, and you can see how everything was flattened. And where I put that number 1 you can see a small seed shed on its side with the roof against the foundation of the house. And where I put a 2 you can see a small barn for two horses that also was toppled. And all telephone poles along Main Street were leaning and all the lines were broken. No 3 shows a few homes in Platte with their wooden planking that you mentioned in your letter which is two meters wide and run alongside all the homes, though not alongside the stores. (page 9) And where I put that small mark you can see one of those wooden "sidewalks" that floated away.

Where I marked No. 1 is our church and next to it the parsonage. No. 4 is a picture of Main Street during the Firemen Picnic. That row of men on Main Street with those small hats and Japanese parasols toward the front in the picture are salesmen who had that picture taken just for the fun of it. They had just played ball with the businessmen of the town. And the person whom I marked No. 1 is Govert who

came for a two-week visit and who now has left again for Wessington Springs. He sends his greetings to all of you; he likes it very much where he is. And right next to his right (page 10) is my youngest brother Louis. I'll send you and Mien also a picture of myself and if you have the opportunity I would appreciate receiving a picture of the two of you, and if possible of all of you. I hope I am not too impolite by asking this. Oh yes, now I have to get back a moment to the wedding. The young people could not come that evening, of course, on account of the weather, and so we postponed it and mailed new invitations to come Friday evening. It sure would have been fun if all of you could have been here too. We had a very nice evening with recitations, singing, and a few speeches, and that's how we spent the evening. Ice-cream, cake, and chocolates, and at midnight a supper, and at 2 o'clock in the morning everybody left again for home. (page 11) I will send you the little piece that appeared in the local newspaper about it. And the headline of the piece is a quote from a brother of Jan De Vries.

Well, Annie, I have to quit. The next time I'll write you something about the Indians. I wrote something about Indians already in Mien's letter.

Andries and Louise are doing well. Andries has regular work and earns 2 to 2 ½ dollars a day; not bad, don't you think? Well, Annie, please say hello to Aunt and Uncle, cousins Willem, Jo and Henri and the rest of the family from Mother's brothers and sisters and mostly from your affectionate cousin,

Wilhelm.

P.S., The flowers had all come up before that hailstorm and not much was left, but maybe a few will survive. Goodbye.

Letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
 Addressed to Miss Annie Van Bijlevelt
 Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Platte, S.D., 22 November 1908

Dear Cousins Mien and Annie,

And other family members. We received your letters of October 9 and 10 in the best of health, and the postcard that had your picture on it, and I hope that when you receive these few lines you may also enjoy the best of health. First of all, I want to thank you for those beautiful portraits and especially for sending so many so that there are enough for each member of the American branch of the family. And I have to thank you especially on behalf of Cornelis, her husband, Holst & Jansje, Cornelis ? , (page 2) Louise and Andries and sister Jet and Mother. It was quite a surprise. And in my mind I give both of you a firm handshake, which I hope may happen someday in real life, which I am certain will be the case, provided we are given time to live. Both of you certainly have turned into real ladies. I recognized both of you immediately from the pictures since we still had a few of your pictures of a few years ago, but your facial features have not changed all that much. I hope you don't mind that I write both of you in one letter; you see, I am quite busy these days (page 2) with my carpentry work which does not give me much time to write. For Sundays is the only day that I am home. I have a few days work ahead of me yet to finish a barn which I started five weeks ago; it is 54 ft wide and 56 ft long which is about 16 x 17 meters. It is located 3 miles south and 1 mile East of Platte on the farm of A. Veneman, the parents of my future wife. Perhaps you wonder why I have not written you earlier that I am engaged to be married; well, I kept forgetting to mention it, and then I thought, Oh well, I'll mention it in the next letter. You should know that it is not customary here (page 2) to mail out cards to announce an engagement like in the Netherlands. But I will make up for it by sending you her picture. However, since I only have one left which was the last one she had, and I have only one of myself left, I will send them this time to Annie, so you can meet my future wife, Gertie Veneman, and as soon as I have some additional pictures made I will send Mien a couple as well. You asked in your last letter if I wear glasses today. I did have some eye trouble and had a specialist look at them; (page 3) he said that I should wear glasses on a regular basis,

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for I wanted one only for reading, but he did not want to give me one for that only. So I wore glasses for a half a year and my eyes have improved substantially, but now I use them only for reading. But when I had my picture taken I still wore them every day.

I hope you will excuse me for not even asking how Uncle and Aunt and cousin Willem are doing. I hope they are doing well. Mother just mentions that Uncle had his birthday last week, the 15th of November. Well, dear Uncle, congratulations and many returns of the day (page 4) for many years, together with all your loved ones, and receive a firm mental handshake from your nephew. And you Aunt, I also congratulate you with Uncle's birthday and may you celebrate that day with him many times in good health and may you together enjoy the pleasures of life and may no thorns be sown among them. And you, Annie, Mien and Willem congratulations with your Pa's birthday and many more after this. I know I am late with these good wishes but I was not aware of it earlier, otherwise I would have sent you a few lines sooner. But, you know the saying, Better late than never. And that's what I thought. Well, Annie & Mien I will answer all the questions you asked in a former letter some other time, because I have to finish now. Cordial greetings to all of you from Mother, brothers and sisters and also from your affectionate cousin Wilhelm and also from Gertie.

P.S. We are enjoying beautiful weather every day, but last week it was quite cold.

Letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
 Addressed to Mien van Bijlevelt,
 Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Platte, S.D., 23 February 1909

Dear Cousin Mien,

Being home now and having some time to myself I thought I'd fulfill my promises of long ago to write you and Annie a letter. All of us are in good health and I hope you are too. I should have written you sooner, but you know how it goes when you are busy, it is always tomorrow is another day. And I hope that you and Annie will forgive me that I waited so long. (page 2) And now I will try and see if I can write a few things that might be of interest to you, the way I see it, for good or evil. I have your letter of the 9th of October in front of me. It is the first one you wrote after your pleasure trip to London; now, let me try to answer the questions you asked in that letter. I am glad that you and Annie had a good trip and enjoyed it. And I am sure it must have been busy in that big city. You ask if we, Americans, like tasty food, and I can assure you yes, we do. Ordinarily we eat potatoes and bread and meat three times a day, and if it is not meat then eggs prepared in a variety of ways. And then the meals are usually accompanied by fruit, cake or pudding. (page 3) And coffee or tea is served with every meal. Coffee in the morning or at noon, and tea in the evening. But Americans do not like black tea and therefore they always use green tea. But I prefer black tea. You would have no problem getting use to the American cuisine. Here everybody has to help himself at the table; you take what you like and leave alone what you do not like. So, a person never has to eat everything that is served. And if anyone of you might ever come to America we would love to serve you all kinds of foods and pastries. You also asked if we have such beautiful fall weather as in the Netherlands. Well, I can tell you, we usually do. Here we always have, at the beginning of (page 4) winter, what is called "Indian summer" which lasts three or four weeks and then the weather is as warm as in summertime. Which we also had again this year. In the beginning of December we had pretty rough weather with a lot of snow, but half December all the snow was gone again and we had beautiful weather until 2 January, and then we had plenty of snow again and it really froze hard for two weeks in a row; this was followed by two weeks of beautiful weather

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and ever since it has been quite stormy. The 9th of February we had a lot of snow accompanied by much wind so that the snow blew into piles from 5 to 8 feet high. Across the entire west of the United States it was very stormy, in fact, it was so bad that for seven days the trains were not moving. (page 5). And all that time we were without mail. The snowplow came first with two locomotives, and the next day they went out again, and after that the passenger train arrived. But yesterday it started snowing and blowing again so that the snow once again formed huge piles which caused the freight train that tried to get here yesterday to get stuck in a snow bank. And consequently no train was able to leave again this morning. Maybe we will have to wait another couple of days before a train can leave. In other words, you can see how stormy the weather has been here this winter. But, it must be said, this winter has been is a bit exceptional, for we have not seen the likes of it for a long time. I am glad that now we are this far along, so the winter cannot last all that long anymore (page 6). I see from your letter that Willem went on a bicycle trip; it sure he must have had a lot of fun. I would not mind taking a trip like that myself, but I always seem to be too busy. And going on vacation during the busy season does not work too well. I see that if both of you plan to make the same trip as Willem you will have a good time. How is Uncle Cornelis doing? Please relay our best wishes to him from all of us when you see him, and when you write back please give me his address. Or does Uncle still live on the Koer...???? It was also a hard blow for Uncle and Aunt Becht to lose their daughter. I sure hope they will be spared other hardships. Now, dear Mien, my paper is getting full and I should finish otherwise I have nothing to tell Annie. So, best wishes to all of you from Mother, brothers and sisters and mostly from your affectionate cousin,

Wilhelm

P.S.: Please don't mind my poor writing and mistakes. And please don't wait writing back as long as I did. Goodbye Mien.

Sidebar on page 1 – Thanks for your congratulations on my engagement and also the best wishes you sent my girlfriend, and she wants to be sure that I send you her cordial greetings. Uncle and Aunt and cousin Willem and Annie thanks so much for that beautiful card of the 25th of December. I am very happy with it. I will send you a portrait of me and Gertie as soon as possible, you can bet on that. Best wishes from your affect. cousin,

Wilhelm.

Letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
Addressed to Annie v. Bijlevelt,
Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Platte, S.D., 23 February 1909

Dear Cousin Annie,

First of all I want to ask you to accept my apologies for not writing sooner. But as you will learn from my letter to Mien I had valid reasons, namely, being terribly busy. Mother just tells me that your mother had a birthday the 15th of March and I want to congratulate her and all of you. Well, Aunt, heartfelt congratulations with your birthday and we hope you may have many returns of the day for many, many years, and that your life may be spared for a long time for all those who are near and dear to you. (page 2). It is possible that you will receive these felicitations a few days ahead of your birthday. We also want to extend our congratulations to you, Uncle, cousin Willem, Annie and Mien. May you celebrate this day together for many years to come.

Now back to you, Annie. I would have loved to have complied with your request for wild flower seeds. But, because of the stormy weather we had last year there were very few flowers. We don't have a great variety of flowers here, and those we do have were damaged in the hailstorm or drowned, so I won't be able to send you any seed this time. On the other hand, I don't think you would like them very much. At any rate, I will send you some seed of some very special, rare flowers and also a flower-seed catalogue. I honestly do not know what kind of flower-seed (page 3) I would want you to send me, since I believe that we can buy all the different kinds of flowers that you have in the Netherlands here. But if you do intend to send some flower-seed, be sure not to buy it. Then I sooner would get some from the flowers that you yourself planted and looked after. I am glad to hear that you succeeded in growing flowers from the seed I sent you. I would love to take a peek around the corner and admire your flower garden because I love flowers, especially when they are in full bloom.

In your letter you also ask me to tell your mother what kind of door that is in front of which the children of Cornelis and Jetje were photographed. Well, aunt, that is a screen door that is to keep the flies out;

(page 4) we have screens around the entire porch; they are sitting by the screen door, that's the only explanation I can give you.

That corncob pipe that Willem received from Andries is used by a lot of farmers here for smoking, but they are pretty well out of fashion in our house. And those buttons with the pictures of various candidates for president are commonly used here. Persons who favor a certain candidate and who want to make it known wear a button like that on their lapel or hat, whichever they prefer, they are called badges here.

You also asked if Cornelis has given up on his plans to visit the Netherlands. I believe so, for, first of all he is married which would make it difficult to take such a pleasure trip and leave his wife and children here. Besides, it is not easy to abandon one's business for the sake of pleasure. I have been wanting to do it myself all along, and when I am rich enough someday, (page 5) and in good health, I am sure that I will visit the Netherlands. Provided I don't change my mind, of course. I would love to see all of you again. How time flies. When we left the Netherlands we were all toddlers and now we are all pretty well adults. I believe that if we would run into each other on the street we would not recognize each other, unless because of the portrait, for people do change quite a bit between 10 and 30 years.

Brother Govert was home on vacation for Old and New Year's and he is doing great. Louis, the youngest, worked for him for two months in the grain business. Then the company relocated Louis to a place called Lake Andes (Dutch pronunciation: "leek endies") where they made him foreman. It is a place some 25 miles from here and thus (page 6) he is able to come home by train every Saturday evening, or every other week.

You asked if my girlfriend is an American. No, Annie, was born in Zwolle, but at a very young age she came here with her parents, brothers and sisters. They came to America about two years after us, and have lived always around Platte ever since.

How are Uncle and Aunt and Willem doing? I hope they are doing well. I would like for Willem to write me a few lines one of these days. Now, dear cousin, I have to end this letter. Please write back soon.

And now, heartfelt greetings to all of you from Mother, brothers and sisters and also from me, your very affectionate cousin,

Wilhelm.

Goodbye.

Letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
Addressed to Mien v. Bijlevelt,
Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Platte, S.D. 14 June 1908

Dear cousin Mien,

Received your pleasant letter of the 28th of last month in the best of health and was happy to learn that all of you are also in the best of health. We had already received the news of Opoe's passing from cousin Cor, but did not yet have the opportunity to write back. But since I received your and Annie's letter last night I thought I'd answer you now as soon as possible. It sure is hard that Opoe had to suffer so terribly in her old age, (page 2) but for herself it must have been fortunate that death caused an end to her suffering, since now she has been released from all those earthly pains and hardships. Imagine the change this will mean for Uncle Cornelis and cousin Cor. I am sure that they will miss Opoe much more than the other members of the family because they were always with her.

Well, dear Mien, you certainly surprised me with all those beautiful picture postcards for which I thank you very much. I was wondering what might be inside the package when I received it, and then I saw all those beautiful photos. Cousin Henrie takes beautiful pictures; please be so kind to give our best to uncle Henrie and cousin Johanna – from all of us. (page 3) Of the postcards you sent me I still remember three places very well. The house we lived in. Neleman and van Brinkhorst's windmill. Mother says she also remembers the house of the Keizer family and the family itself quite well. But the other pictures in the postcards are of places that were built after we had left. My, that's a long time ago already. Last April 12 it was 17 years ago that we left the Netherlands and we arrived here in America on May 1. Although, looking back it isn't really all that long ago. But a lot has happened since.

But now I have to start answering (page 4) your letter, Mien, because otherwise I won't get around to it. You ask if it is not depressing, fearsome and lonely here on the prairie in the Missouri Valley. The only thing I can say to that, Mien, is that, yes, you do feel lonely and isolated in such an area, but you are not afraid because there is nothing to be fearful about. We don't have wild animals like lions, tigers, bears and the like, although we do have common wolves who shy away from close contact with people since

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2011, Grand Rapids, MI

they are afraid they might get killed. That's why they are well served not to come too close. There are a few Indians or so-called redskins here, but even if there were many they would not harm anyone. (page 5) I will enclose a postcard of an Indian squaw and papoose (pronounced: skwa) so you can see what those people look like. It's been 10 or 12 years ago now (it was a very hot summer afternoon) that we saw a cloud of dust way in the distance that came closer and closer until it was about a half a mile away from our house and we saw that it was a band of Indians, there must have been between 150 to 200 men, women and children. They stopped at a small distance from the house and the chief or headman walked up to us not to fight or to attack us but to ask for a drink of water for the entire group. (page 6) It so happened that we had a cistern, but the water in it was not all that clean. So we gave him some water that we had gotten into the house shortly before, but he did not want to drink it. Then, when we went to the cistern to show him that it was the same water, he was satisfied and convinced that the water was safe to drink. But we had milk in the basement and then mother said that maybe you should give him some milk to drink, so we offered it to him, and we didn't have to ask him twice: he grabbed the pan with milk and drank from it until he was full, and the rest he gave to his wife and children who were still on the wagon. (page 7) And when he was done with that he did not mind having the water which he gave to the other Indians whom he commanded. He did not ask him if they wanted to drink the dirty water, they just had to drink what was available. The Indians are used to bartering, and he wanted to give us a couple of Indian slippers in exchange for the milk and water; but we did not want to accept that, of course, and so they thought they should move on, and they have not bothered us since. So you can see that if you treat them well they will not bother people.

(page 8) You also asked me in your letter whether the center of Main Street was not paved and whether wooden planks run alongside the homes. On the first item: you saw that right, it consists merely of ordinary prairie soil that has turned black in color because of all the traffic, and more dirt is constantly added to it so that the middle stays higher; in that way the rain can run off to the sides. Alongside the houses on Main Street, or rather the stores – because they are all stores – there are no wooden planks, but cement sidewalks. A kind of limestone is mixed with sand which then turns into something that is as hard as stone.

(page 10) You also ask if it is possible to go for nice walks and whether it is nothing but prairie around here. Well, you can't really go for a long walk here because the distances are too far and that is why everybody uses horse and buggies. But when the roads are good people bike quite a bit. Still, to go on a hike like you and Annie did to dig up those daisies is not done much here. Well, dear Mien, I think I had

better finish this letter to you because otherwise I have nothing to tell Annie, and I want to stay on good terms with both of you, of course, and my news or rather my babbling has pretty well reached its end. Now, a few words yet, about the picture postcards that I'll enclose.

One is of a schoolhouse here in town, and the other is of a locomotive or traction engine with cars behind it with grain that is transported from a place some 20 miles from here, called Puckwana, to a place where there is a railroad so it can be shipped east. And then a picture of an Indian couple with their tent or teepee which they put up wherever they decide to stay. Now, dear cousin Mien, cordial greetings from mother, brothers and sisters to all of you, and mostly from me, your affectionate cousin,

Wilhelm Van der Boom

Sidebar: I thought I should reply in Dutch since you write in Dutch, but please overlook all the spelling mistakes and poor script. Goodbye to all.

Letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
 Addressed to Annie v. Bijlevelt
 Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Wessington Springs, S.D., 6 Dec 1909

Dear Cousin Annie,

I am sure you have learned or heard of all the excuses from my letter to Mien and I hope you will also accept them so that I will not have to use this space to say the same thing. Although I do need your forgiveness because I am a poor when it comes to writing letters. First of all I want to thank you kindly for that beautiful postcard, and we were happy that all of you are doing well which I can say of us as well. Which, of course, is the greatest treasure that a person can possess, namely good health. And I hope (page 2) that you may enjoy the same when you receive these few lines. I know it is a little early for best wishes for the upcoming holidays, but better early than late. So, we wish you a pleasant Christmas and much happiness and prosperity in the new year 1910. The same goes for Uncle, Aunt and cousin Willem. And we hope that all of you may be spared for many years to come for each other and for all who are near and dear to you. We would love to be able to convey these good wishes in person, but distance prevents us at least for the time being, and thus we have to be (page 3) satisfied by doing this by way of pen and paper and express our feelings that way.

When we left Platte we first lived in a small house where we stayed until the first of December. The weather was fairly decent until the last few days of November. We had just moved and had set up our stoves when it started snowing and at night it froze hard. But now we have a good house and however hard the wind blows we don't feel it and we are able to keep it nice and cozy in here. But it looks like the winter is here to stay. It is stormy every day and (page 3) no one is able to bring in the grain with the roads and the weather being bad. So I get off from work, but that means that I will have to work doubly hard once it turns warmer. This place is 65 miles from Platte, but by train you have to make a detour so that it takes 104 miles, and then you have to wait quite a long time for other trains so it takes a whole day to get there. We had packed our furniture and sent it by train and we ourselves drove to Wessington Springs with our horse and buggy. We left Platte at 2:30 in the afternoon and arrived in White Lake at ?:30 [unfortunately the number is illegible], a distance of 30 miles; we stayed there

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overnight (page 5) and at 9 o'clock the next morning we continued our journey and arrived here at 2:30 in the afternoon. And our horse was in the best of shape just like when we left home.

You wrote me several times about flower-seed, Annie, but there are very few wild flowers here and the ones that we do have are more weed than flower. And once you get them going you will have to get rid of them again, just like a certain flower that grows here – when it blossoms it looks beautiful with purple or violet or lavender, it is like a plume. But the leaves are big thistles and when the flower has died the bud is a [illegible] (page 6) It is a plant that is almost ineradicable. I would love to send you a few different varieties, if only I could find a flower than is not a weed.

This morning we had an accident here. A railroad worker had his leg cut off above the knee when he got under the wheels of the train when it started moving. No one knows how it happened and the man himself says that he does not know either. So here is another person injured for life.

Would you be so kind to give our best to uncle Cornelis and cousin Cor when you see them; and also best wishes to Aunt Cato and Uncle Becht. Please give all of them our best. And you yourself and your house-companions also, from your affectionate cousins Gertie and Wilhelm.

A letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
Addressed to Annie v. Bijleveld
Rijswijk, Netherlands

Wes, Spr., S.D. 20 April 1910

Dear Annie,

We received your much appreciated letter in good health on the 14th of March and we were very happy to learn that all of you were in the best of health. And we hope that when you receive this letter you may still enjoy the same good health. We were very happy with your letter because it is always a pleasure to hear from our Dutch relatives. But I will not try to write such a long letter as you wrote; still, I will try to do my best and to answer as many of your questions as I can. Let me start out with the first one. But, before that, thanks for the good wishes for our little Louiza and we will enclose (page 2) a picture of her taken when she was 9 weeks old. She grows well and is quite chubby which is a sign of good health. And Gertie is in good health too. She suffered quite a bit, but she says that she does not want to think of that anymore since we now have such a great treasure. The doctors said that in seven years they had not seen such a difficult birth. But, thank God, everything went well and she is healthy and strong. And the little one provides a lot of pleasure in our household. Both mothers came here when the baby was a week old. And Mrs. Beltman is a sister of Gertie's, and thus also a Veneman before her marriage. They were all so proud of the little one. Gertie's mother lives near Platte on their own farm, 3 ½ miles east of Platte, and Mrs. Beltman lives a mile farther East, so only a mile from her parents. As far as distances are concerned, we don't pay much attention to that here as long as the weather and the roads are good.

The rest of the letter is missing.

Addressed to Mien v. Bijlevelt
Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Wessington Springs, 27 Jan 1911

Dear Cousin Mien,

pages 1,2,3,4,5 are written in English.

Page 6 was written in Dutch:

We received that beautiful English card signed by all of you and we thank you very much. I would not mind writing Uncle and Aunt, but when I have written you and Annie there is nothing left to write about. And I assume that they hear the news from you, which is just as good. And now I have completed my letter to you and will write Annie next. And I hope to receive a letter back from you soon. So, don't wait as long as I did! And now, Uncle and Aunt, and cousin, best wishes to all of you. And you too receive best wishes from your affectionate cousins,

Gertie, Louiza & Wilhelm.

A letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
Addressed to Annie v. Bijleveld
Rijswijk, Netherlands

Wes, Spr., S.D. 20 April 1910

Dear Annie,

We received your much appreciated letter in good health on the 14th of March and we were very happy to learn that all of you were in the best of health. And we hope that when you receive this letter you may still enjoy the same good health. We were very happy with your letter because it is always a pleasure to hear from our Dutch relatives. But I will not try to write such a long letter as you wrote; still, I will try to do my best and to answer as many of your questions as I can. Let me start out with the first one. But, before that, thanks for the good wishes for our little Louiza and we will enclose (page 2) a picture of her taken when she was 9 weeks old. She grows well and is quite chubby which is a sign of good health. And Gertie is in good health too. She suffered quite a bit, but she says that she does not want to think of that anymore since we now have such a great treasure. The doctors said that in seven years they had not seen such a difficult delivery. But, thank God, everything went well and she is healthy and strong again. And the little one provides a lot of pleasure in our household. Both mothers came here when the baby was a week old. And Mrs. Beltman is a sister of Gertie's, and thus also a Veneman before her marriage. They were all so proud of the little one. Gertie's mother lives near Platte on their own farm, 3 ½ miles east of Platte, and Mrs. Beltman lives a mile farther East, so only a mile from her parents. As far as distances are concerned, we don't pay much attention to that here as long as the weather and the roads are good.

(page 3) Then it is more fun to go by horse and buggy than to have to sit in a train. And it takes only a day. When you go by train you have to make a detour of about 170 miles to get to Platte and change trains 2 or 3 times and wait at the various stations, while if you go by horse and buggy you only have to travel 65 miles. But, of course, if you could go by automobile it would take only about 3 ½ to 4 hours. That's the best of all yet, isn't it?

But, let's talk about the little one. Her name is Louiza Juliana. Louiza is Mother's name and thus she is named after her. Now in Platte was a girl who sang in the Presbyterian church choir, an American girl,

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but she had such a beautiful voice, absolutely without comparison, whose name was Juliet (pronounced Joëlie-et). Now we planned to give her that name, not because we are superstitious enough to think that then our little one might also develop such a beautiful voice, (page 4) but rather because the name sounded so sweet. But then the thought occurred to us that the little princess of Holland – whose picture you sent – was named Juliana and that Juliana was nicer than Juliëtt and sounded better with the name Louiza. And thus she is named after the little princess. Perhaps you could whisper in your little princess' ears that she has a namesake in America.

You asked if my wife was an American. No, she is pure Dutch. And is even able to read and write it. O say! By the way, I see in your letter that you are trying to make some excuse for letting me wait so long for an answer. But I am in the same boat most of the time, and put it off until the next day and so on, until I remind myself of it. So I will not be angry – though that's not my personality. (page 5) I will accept all your excuses in good humor, and try to wait patiently. But you have so many questions that I can easily fill 20 pages, however then I would not have anything left to write to Mien and I do not want to forget or skip her entirely, because I'll bet she would not write me at all then.

As far as we know everybody in Platte is healthy. Except for Cornelia who has been ill for two weeks already, she is as skinny as a pole Mother writes. But it is not a dangerous illness so we hope she'll get better soon. Mother is not homesick for Holland at all. Her children are all here which is the most important thing to her. And the trip would be too far for her anyway. But if I had a chance I certainly would not pass it up, at least if my wife and child could go too. And even if the younger brothers had enough in their piggy bank I don't think they would go. First of all they do not remember anything of the Netherlands, (page 6) and secondly, they have their work which they cannot just leave behind. Bertus is in the grain business. Louis started for himself in a new town; he chose to become a jeweler and is doing well. And Govert is on his claim as I had told you already, and now he started a grocery store. So all of them keep busy. But to meet in New York would not make much sense, because once we were that far I would want to go farther and not let a little thing like that small pond be an obstacle. At any rate, time will tell what will happen. And if we ever get there you had better figure on it that we will ask Mien and you to be our tour guides for the city and the area, because I am sure that a lot of changes have taken place. Now I have to finish and will answer your other questions in my letter to Mien for otherwise I am afraid you are going to be fed up with me with all my babbling. Give our best to everybody,

Your very affectionate cousins, Gertie, Louiza Juliana & Wilhelm.

A letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom
Addressed to Mien v. Bijlevelt,
Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Wessington Springs, S.D., 27 Oct 1910

Dear cousin Mien,

It has been a long time, a very long time in fact, that we received your much appreciated postcards, and I suppose you must have said to yourself Wilhelm does not know how to write anymore. So, first of all I want to beg you to accept my excuse for having waited so long to reply. And now I will try to write a few lines. I could have mailed you a postcard, of course, but OK, what is done is done. We were glad to learn that all of you were still (page 2) in such good health, and I hope that this may not have changed when you received this short letter. I also ask you to excuse me for using a pencil. It is called an indelible pencil. And I hope that you can read my scribbles. I am glad to say that we are all in good health and little Louiza is growing like a weed. She is a little over 8 months old now and walks along the walls and chairs and climbs on everything. One time we left the trapdoor to the attic open, she moved towards it and started to climb up very slowly – I stayed right behind her so she would not fall (page 3) and thus she climbed 8 steps without any help. Which is not bad for such a young baby, would you say? She has six teeth now with another two about to break through. Well, Mien, you probably say to yourself, All he can do is talk about the baby. Alright, you'll just have to forgive me, and I have to admit that I am proud of her. She is quite advanced in comparison to so many other children and I hope she will stay strong and healthy. (page 4)

Gertie and the baby spent about 3 weeks in Platte in September to visit her parents and the relatives and I stayed here in Wessington Springs; I could not leave because the farmers started to bring in their grain. During the time that Gertie and the baby were gone I ate my breakfast at home, my noon meal at the elevator and evenings I went to some of our friends here, the miller, an American. But I was pretty happy when Gertie and the Baby were home again because I would have been pretty lonely if they had stayed away longer.

(page 5) It is quite stormy here today and wet, snow and sunshine alternate and there is a lot of wind. How are Uncle and Aunt doing, and cousin Willem: all healthy I hope. I also want to write Annie a few lines yet and that's why I have to shorten your letter for otherwise I won't have any news for her letter. And I hope you won't wait as long as I did for we love to get news from our Dutch relatives. If I ever get rich I will come and pay all of you a visit someday (page 6) I do think of it on occasion, but money is still the big problem because with the three of us a trip like that will cost nothing less than \$550 of \$600.00. Hoping that you will receive this short letter in good health, we remain after having wished you all the best, your ever affectionate cousins,

Gertie, Louiza Juliana, & Wilhelm.

Goodbye

Letter written by Wilhelm Vander Boom

Addressed to Annie v. Bijlevelt

Rijswijk, the Netherlands.

Wes. Spr., 28 January 1911

Dear Cousin Annie,

I promised Mien that I would respond to your letter immediately. I know, it was high time that I did. If I would have waited any longer you certainly would have had reasons to believe that I had forgotten all of you. First of all, I want to thank you for your kind and very interesting English letter. Truly, Annie, don't ask me to excuse you because I make an awful lot of mistakes myself in my Dutch as well as my American letters. (page 2)

There are so many words that I misspell, and my grammar is nothing to brag about, so, you just write in the language that suits you best. And I'll promise you I will not criticize your writing. We are always happy when we hear something from any of you. I'll write you in Dutch this time, and it is quite well possible that here and there an American word slips in, because all we hear is American since we are the only Dutch people in this town. We ourselves speak almost always Dutch with each other when we are at home. (page 3) So our little girl learns two languages imperceptibly. I wish you could see her; she is growing like a weed and is a real little rascal.

Talking about her mamma's flowers you should see how far she can reach to pluck the leaves especially when she knows that there is no one in the room. And if she cannot reach them she takes a foot-warmer and moves it close to the flowers by the window and climbs on it and then she has the greatest fun; and when mamma enter the room she looks the other way quite innocently, and starts babbling to divert attention so as to say that she is not the guilty one who plucked the leaves. (page 4). She was very sick for awhile which I wrote in Mien's letter. But she is all over it now for which we are very thankful. It makes you sad when a little one like that is sick since they cannot tell you where they hurt or what is wrong. But now she plays and romps all over from morning till night.

We learned from mother that Cornelus and his wife and little Marie and brother Bertus and several others have left for Texas on a land-seekers or immigrant expedition. Maybe to sell land to a few people. There people enjoy summer weather all year long. And it is not as cold as here in South Dakota.

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(page 5). When we snuggle closer to the stove, there people walk around in summer clothes and eat all sorts of vegetables and fruit which is something which we enjoy a little in summertime.

Yes, Gertie enjoyed the visit to Platte very much. But she says that next time she is not going alone with the baby but I will also have to come along. Without realizing it, I wrote the last line in English. Please don't mind. We first had in mind to go back to Platte in the spring and to start farming. But the firm for which I work did not like to see me go. Which is a sign that they still like me and that I make money for them. Since the 1st of August 1910 (page 6) I bought nearly 30 to 35,000 bushels of grain for them and sold about 9,000 bushes of corn, so they cannot complain. I am sure that they made good money on it. You said in your letter that aunt Cato had gotten over her grief somewhat (because of the death of her child). And that you did not know the English expression for that which was "forgotten." Although she never will, I am sure. You could say: "She is passed [sic] the severest stage of sorrow, and can bear the shock more easier now." It is lucky indeed that Joop is such a capable young man which will make the blow a little easier to bear. And Joop has given all who were present a good time it seems with his magic lantern. (page 7) And you also wrote that Jo and Henry added a new son to the family. Please be so kind and convey our congratulations on the birth of such a great treasure. May the child give them much joy and may he grow up to be a wise person in society who brings joy to his parents. It is really nice that they live so close by. Sometimes we wished that we lived closer to our parents. But you just have to go where you can earn the most. At times we make plans to make a trip to the Netherlands as you suggest. But first of all there is that big Ocean that lies between us, and then one needs to have enough money (p. 8) to be able to make such a trip. I guess we will first have to see how things go for us financially. And I do not think that it will be quite as easy anymore for Cornelis to make such a long trip. So it does not look like any of us will come over in the foreseeable future. We had better stick to our letter writing. And now I have been babbling without having said anything of substance. The family in Platte is in good health and we can say the same thing about ourselves. And I hope that you will receive this letter in the best of health as well. We remain therefore after sincere good wishes, your very affectionate cousins

Gertie, Louiza Juliana, & Wilhelm

VanderBoom.

(Write back soon).

Letter from Wilhelm Vander Boom

Addressed to Mien v. Bijlevelt

Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Wessington Springs, S.D., 6 Dec 1909

Dear Cousin Mien,

First of all, I ask you a hundred times to forgive me for not having kept my promise to write you a letter. It was not because I did not want to, but you might say it was pure neglect on my part. But since the time that we left Platte we have so much to write that we just did not get around to writing you. But you should know that we often mention you in our conversations. And we would often say, it is high time that we wrote Annie and Mien; they probably think that we have forgotten them. (page 2) But now that I have time because of the bad weather and the bad roads I thought I should write you while I am here in the elevator. We received both of your cards and learned that all of you are good and healthy and we are fortunate that we can say the same thing and we hope that you will receive this letter also in good health. You sent us picture postcards of the Hoornbrug (Hoornbridge) and the windmill, places that I remember well. I believe if someone put me in the middle of the Hague I would still be able to find the various places that I visited long ago. That is, provided the city did not change too much. I do know that today Rijswijk and the Hague are pretty much one city. (page 3) But before we left the Netherlands they were already busy laying streets. If we could afford it we certainly would make a trip to the Netherlands. But if we stay alive it might still happen someday. What a changes we would see. When we left we were only children, some 10 to 12 years old. And now we are all 30 and over. When you look back it seems only a few years. But, 30 years is a long time when you look ahead. You will probably say to yourself, Mien, boy, he's an old jabberer, so please don't mind me. In my thoughts I was conversing with all of you and then sometimes you get off on a tangent.

(page 4) And now I will tell you how I changed from being a carpenter to becoming a grain dealer.

Gertie and I had been married about four months when we left Platte. Well, that's somewhat beside the point, though not entirely. When you are a carpenter here you work most of the time out in the country, and you cannot come home every evening. Sometimes you are away from home for a whole week because the distances are so far that you could not come to work on time in the morning. It is mostly building homes and barns for farmers, sometimes 5 or 10 or at times 14 or 15 miles from home, and

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you are doing well if you get home by Saturday evening. So it is not nice to be married that way, being away from home all the time, and it is not nice for the wife either. (page 5) Brother Govert had the job I have now but he had staked a claim during the month of June. And the law says that you have to live fourteen months on that piece of land before it becomes yours, the same as being indentured. Therefore he could not keep his job and he decided to write me that if I wanted the position I could have it. At first I was not interested for it is never good to switch trades too often. And especially because I had so much carpentry work lined up, enough for the whole winter. But we kept writing back and forth and finally I decided to take it. And that meant, of course, that we had to move which was difficult because we had lived in Platte so long (page 6) and now we would go to a new area where we did not know a soul. In fact, there is not a single Dutchman here, it is all Americans or people of German descent. But all the people here are very friendly and helpful and then you start feeling at home quite soon. So this is a brief account of our move. And here it is December already, St. Nicolas Day, and before you know it is Christmas and New Year. I know it is too early to send you good wishes, but better early than late. So, we wish all of you a happy Christmas and many blessings in the New Year. May all of you together enjoy those days in prosperity, health and vigor with all who are near and dear to you. And now best wishes to all of you from your always very affectionate cousins,
and Wilhelm.

Gertie
Goodbye.