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Letter from Roelof Sleijster to Rev. Antonie Brummelkamp

Roelof Sleijster

Henry ten Hoor

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August 25, 1846

Waupun, Wisconsin

A letter to the Rev. Antonie Brummelkamp from Roelof Sleijster which was published with other letters to Brummelkamp including two from Albertus C. Van Raalte and published in *Stemmen uit Noord-Amerika, met begeleidend woord van A. Brummelkamp, Bedenaar des Goddelijken [sic] Woords. Tweede Druk, te Amsterdam, bij Hoogkamer & Compa. 1847.*

Sleijster was a former student of Van Raalte who migrated to Wisconsin and settled in Alto, Wisconsin. He was a member of the Wisconsin legislature in 1870.

In Dutch; translation by Dr. Henry ten Hoor.

Original in the collection of the Holland Museum at the Joint Archives of Holland at Hope College.

Waupoint, also Waupun,
in Wisconsin,
written on August 25, 1846

Dear Brother in our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ:
That you and yours may be blessed is the prayer of my soul!

Dear Sir!

You will have noticed from my letter of August 13 which I wrote to my parents that I arrived in Wisconsin safely and in good health (through the Lord's goodness) and have chosen Waupun as my station and home. Waupun lies 86 miles above (to the northwest) of Milwaukee (three miles equals an hour here) where Hallerdijk lives with nine other Dutch families. This area is fertile; heavy clay soil, not much timber in comparison with some other areas, but enough for building and fuel. So the land is much easier to cultivate than that in other areas. There is good water and the climate is healthful. There are no taxes or laws. All the taxes that are demanded here are one dollar for every 80 acres for the support of the schools for the children; also two days of work on the roads each year or the payment of two dollars for every 80 acres a man owns. If one sells land, he takes along two friends as witnesses and he is his own notary. There are absolutely no fees. When one is married, he goes to the priest and he is immediately prepared to perform the ceremony without demanding money. If one deserts his wife, which seldom happens here, he is found at state expense, wherever he may be, and brought back to his wife. There are no road tolls: in every section the farmers must keep the roads in good condition. If a village or town happens to have a bad mayor, he is deposed and immediately another is elected from among the citizens. He receives no salary. If one buys 80 acres or more of land, it costs two dollars/in tax; if one

goes directly to the land office it costs 25 cents per acre for purchase, but there are no recording fees. Preachers draw no salary here either. For that reason you need not be surprised if on Sunday you hear the blessed gospel preached by a carpenter, miller, or painter. No preacher here is recognizable from his dress on Sunday. Most of them are very friendly, much more affable than with us in the land of the Separatists. There are many Methodists here. On earlier Sundays, before I came to Milwaukee, I encountered a street preacher. If one says he is a Christian and lives like a Christian, he is respected. Catholics are not highly regarded. One can get most respect by simple preaching, without formality. They place small importance on church meetings, but preaching without attempting to form parties, without taking salary, while working for their bread, they approve. Brother, I hope all of you will remember me in your prayers! I have many need, you will agree, for I hope, if the Lord gives me health, to discover a great deal for you people. Advise everybody against settling in another state, for those who have lived in other places are coming here because they have found those places much too hot. Even here it is warmer than in Holland. Equipment is better here except for spades and shovels. Everybody must bring along his home remedies, especially Haarlem Oil, camomile, syrup and linseed. It is not necessary to warn anybody about the night air because that is healthful here and everywhere I have been. I have bought 80 acres and claimed 160. A claim gives you the rights to the land for one year. By the end of the year it must be paid, but no one can buy it in the meantime. This costs two dollars. No one can claim more than 160 acres and must first have become a citizen, which costs 75 cents. So, Brother, I am an American citizen and now enjoy the right of voting on any

and all matters, which is a weighty matter for a Christian if he plans to conduct himself in a Christian manner and to give Christian advice about schools and other matters.

During the summer the schools are taught by women, by men in the winter. Those who cannot teach well are dismissed and others hired immediately. Schoolmasters in the villages are paid from 14 to 18 dollars per month, in the cities they earn from 20 to 28 dollars. In May the children all get together and the best teacher is given a bonus. There are many Christians here, but also many irreligious people. Even so, there is no evident extravagance except the misuse of the name of God. At this place and where I have been nothing is sold on Sunday except among those who have recently arrived. Not much strong drink is sold in the taverns; in some states it is prohibited altogether. Anyone who wants to sell liquor must ask and get the approval of his neighbors or else he is not allowed to do it. There are many temperance houses in America. Anyone who has claimed land must build a house on it within 30 days and live in it or lose his claim. If the Lord gives me health I hope to complete my house during the next eight days. I have earned my keep ^{for three days} by carpentering, for one by painting, and for eight days by plastering. In the future I hope to be by myself and get my house and land in order. If the Lord makes it possible, I hope to go out working as much as I can in order to earn some money, a thing hard to do here in the interior because money is scarce here. Mostly one is paid by return of services or edibles. Nevertheless, I hope to earn something because now and then I have expenses for postage. I can get no letters in the mail unless I send them to New York and these must be posted at Fond du Lac which is 24 miles away. I would certainly be happy, brother B., that in

case acquaintances of mine move here, you would provide them with something for my expenses especially since I have had more traveling expense than the others. We had to leave Brother R. with his wife and five children behind in Rochester because he had an accident under a bridge. I lent him 20 guilders because the Separatists whom we met would not undertake to give him money,

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which cost 375 guilders, a plow for 40 guilders, a wagon for 125 guilders, four cows for 135 guilders, one year's living expense for a crew of four of about 400 guilders, and 200 guilders for small equipment. If there are more in the party the expenses are less than half as much because three yoke of oxen, a wagon, a plow are sufficient for four families, but everyone says that one cannot plow with fewer than six oxen. Grass costs nothing! I wish I could sell 600,000 pounds of my land for 50 cents per 1000 pounds. It is better than in your country. When one crosses the prairies, which are grasslands, he will easily get lost because the grass is higher than a man. I have a piece of land through which runs a stream of well water. It is eight or ten feet wide and flows swiftly, but I can see it from only two places because the grass is so tall. In the autumn, when it has died, I will be able to see for the first time how the stream runs through my land. When I was choosing a site for my house (which will be on a hill three feet above the water level) I had to cut the grass before me as I went because it was difficult to walk through. Now I make one more request, Brother B.! Wherever I go I am asked to preach. Until now I have not done it although I have read sermons on occasion. Why not? Because I don't wish to assert myself without your approval. If you are asked to do it, you are not asserting yourself you will say. This is true, of course, but there are some who will later say and intimate that you understood that this is why I stayed here. I can't earn any money doing this, as I have already said, but you know that I would like to do it. It is customary here to work the whole week and preach three times on Sunday and again on Wednesday. I cannot do that much, but I can speak a word now and again and the Lord will bless this, too. I cannot make long sermons, but the church services here last only one hour and that is good for the beginner. It is usual here to have two ministers in the pulpit, and the application and the concluding prayer are frequently though not always spoken by another besides the one who has delivered the sermon. Write me whether or not you

will give your approval. Until that time I will continue to read sermons. I have made all this clear to the people here who have invited me to preach. Greet all the students for me and tell them that I consider myself fortunate even though I must cook my own food and do my own laundry. It is pleasant to preach where the people have not caught the infection and the preacher is not preoccupied with proper dress or the party to which he belongs. Here a preacher can say with St. Paul, "These hands have served my necessity," and with Samuel, "From whom have I taken gifts?" Tell the students, brother, that it is not at all strange for a preacher, after he has preached four miles away, to prepare his own food and work hard the next day. Not as hard as in Holland, to be sure, but diligently, for the Americans are faithful workmen. So this is no place for students who have never had to work; working for one's keep is the watchword here. My letters must be franked; this must be done in New York. I would be pleased if your letters could be accompanied by one from J. L. My greetings to all, especially your wife and Mr. Veenhuizen. I wish to convey once again my cordial and genuine gratitude for the instruction I have received from you and Mr. Veenhuizen. Write plainly, brother, otherwise your letters are useless. Receive also my hearty and genuine greetings and wishes for the Lord's blessing.

Your loving and well-wishing brother in Christ,

R. Sleijster

/ p. s./

Let my father especially read these letters and please forward the enclosed letter to J. L. This will please me very much. I hope I am not asking too much. My address is:

Mr. R. Sleijster
Waupun, Fond du Lac County
Wisconsin, North America

If you know where the Arnauds are when you write, please tell me. Of those who left this winter or in the latter part of 1845 we know nothing except that one of them died in Schenectady, above Albany. Everybody should be warned about the William P. Paff German Inn, N. 5, Hamiltonstrasse, Albany. In Milwaukee there is a good hotel where I have been myself. The address is Adler's Inn, von Heinrich Lieber, Milwaukee. N.B.: you can't trust the Germans. In Buffalo be careful about Napoleon House, German Inn. The Hus Hotel is good there. Boland, te Besst, Rensinck and some others from Dinxperloo and Winterswijk are living here. I have noticed that many Hollanders have exaggerated in their letters; I will make it a point to tell both the bad and the good.

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