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Letter from Cornelis van Malsen to His Family and Relatives

Cornelius van Malsen

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July 12, 1847

Holland, Ottawa County, Michigan

A letter of Cornelis Van Malsen to his family and relatives, telling them about the safe arrival in America. The ocean trip took thirty-three days, a fact which his sister had not related. When they left Vlissingen on May 4, "We estimated that about a thousand emigrants left Vlissingen with us." P. 39. They arrived in New York June 6. They reached Holland June 26.

As for finding work, "Yesterday we sent a group of laborers and servant girls to the little city of Kalamazoo and there they were received with open arms." P. 42. He adds, "Rev. Van Raalte has much courage. I am happy that I can be of service to him." P. 44.

The letter is full of information about the trip and exudes the fervent piety of the writer.

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MICHIGAN HISTORY

Lewis Breeson, *Editor*

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David Ward: Pioneer Timber King

Rolland H. Maybee

WITHIN FOUR MONTHS of his seventy-eighth birthday, David Ward, Michigan's undisputed pine king, died at his Orchard Lake home near Detroit on May 29, 1900. He died a multimillionaire and perhaps Detroit's wealthiest citizen. From 1836 to 1900—sixty-four years—he lived in Michigan, selected choice pineries for Detroit and eastern clients, became Michigan's most extensive pine-land holder, and lumbered extensively in many parts of Michigan and Wisconsin, conducting personally his wide business activities, vigorously, quietly, but always profitably. His life was the personification of the era of rugged individualism. For him business success became an obsession. Reared in almost abject poverty, a victim of ill health, scorned and scoffed at by rich relatives, later earning small wages as a surveyor, a schoolteacher, pine explorer, and commercial fisherman, young David Ward in 1851 at the age of twenty-nine finally abandoned all other pursuits and entered the scramble for ownership of Michigan pine lands. He became the most eminent figure in the rise and development of Michigan pine lumber, spurred on by personal pride, a bitter family feud, by ambition, a keen mind, and by an indomitable energy.¹ At maturity, David Ward was still a small man in stature, but with an unusually large head. He stood only five feet five and a half, weighed less than 150 pounds, was well built, not always healthy, but took to the woods as naturally as an aboriginal." While spending

¹In compiling this paper I have made use of *The Autobiography of David Ward* (New York, 1912); *The American Lumberman*, June 2, 1900; the *Detroit Evening News*, May 29, 1900; the *Detroit Journal*, May 29, 1900; the *Detroit Sunday News-Tribune*, May 26, 1895, February 26, 1899; Thomas Donaldson, *The Public Domain* (47 Congress, 2 session, *House Miscellaneous Documents*, part 4, volume 19) (Washington, D.C., 1884); John Ise, *United States Forest Policy* (New Haven, 1920).

a printer of Zwijndrecht. An illustration of the cover may be found in *Ebenezer*, edited by Dr. Henry S. Lucas, which appeared in connection with Holland's centennial celebration. So far as the editor knows, only one copy of Van Malsen's pamphlet, that in the Historical Collection, survives. The editor is indebted to the Historical Collection for the loan of this copy in translating *Letters from My Children in the Colony of Holland*. He believes they are worth publishing in *Michigan History* for they show a deep religious feeling of the colonists and they give a picture of the colony during its early days as it was experienced and written by three of the settlers.

The younger Van de Luijster had hopes of becoming a minister; nearly every letter contains the news that Van Raalte was so busy with other work that he had no time for tutorial tasks. Consequently young Van de Luijster, who married Cornelia Van Malsen on September 12, 1847, busied himself with other tasks. Two of the letters were written by Cornelis Van Malsen. He did not remain in Michigan long but returned to Buffalo, where he died shortly after.

Deep religious feeling runs through all the letters. Emphasis is placed upon the Dutch colony as a place of opportunity. There is considerable advice as to what provisions should be brought, what to fall to beware of, and how the emigrant should conduct himself upon arrival in the United States.

EIGHT LETTERS FROM MY CHILDREN IN THE COLONY OF HOLLAND

A. Van Malsen

DEAR READER:

I hereby call to your attention eight letters written by my children from the colony at Holland. Originally I had no intention of publishing them, but when God's plan dictated that I was to follow, I wanted to leave these letters for the benefit of my family and relatives and to bid farewell. Now it appears that God has different plans for me; I am inclined to withhold these pages, but urgent reasons restrain

me. There is a good deal in these letters that will prove of value to other emigrants, and my words of farewell are as sincere as though I had personally left. The Dutch settlement in Michigan was favorably received and encouraged; recently the governor of that state addressed the legislature and praised the colonists so highly for their piety and unselfishness that, at his suggestion, it granted seven thousand dollars for the construction of three roads, as well as for the development of the mouth of the Black Lake in order that seafaring ships may visit the colony.

I am deeply grieved by the death of my dear son Cornelis Robart, who passed away at Buffalo, in the state of New York. The news was learned via an American newspaper and the article described his godly life and death; I hope to treat this article later.

God is who need not answer for His deeds, who wounds and heals, who supports us and be gracious to each one of us.

Yours affectionately,
A. B. Please excuse the errors in the placing of footnotes.

HOLLAND, OTTAWA COUNTY, MICHIGAN

12 July, 1847

TO MY PARENTS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AND OTHER DEAR RELATIVES
AND FRIENDS:

God be thanked! We have arrived in the haven of our desire. God has heard and answered your prayers and also ours. The Lord was with us and so we did not fear. Due to favorable weather, we flew across the ocean in only thirty-three days. At four in the morning, on the fourth of May, we left Vlissingen. We sailed past various ships. I estimated that about a thousand emigrants left Vlissingen with us.

While at Vlissingen, on Sunday, I twice spoke a few words of exhortation. By evening we were able to see England with the city of Dover quite nearby. The city is well situated. During the night, between the sixth and seventh of May, we left the channel and found ourselves on the ocean. On the seventh, seasickness began to trouble us. There were three of us who were bothered but little; I was indisposed for only a half hour. Cornelia and two others suffered most—only the entire voyage—but she is now well again. On the eighth of May, as well as on two other occasions, we were becalmed; some, because of their ignorance, thought the calms were storms. We experi-

enced no storms whatever. Our voyage was a prosperous one with winds usually favorable. Often I thought: How can this sometimes be such a raging sea! It taught me God's might. No wonder that I sometimes thought: I am now separated from everything; I am with God alone. At times I experienced moments when my soul pondered over God's might. That was especially true at sunset. Also, when the sun arose in the morning, it reminded me of the Netherlands, with its thousands of memories, foremost among which were those of my loved ones. Then I prayed for you, my dear relatives, probably at the same moment that you were kneeling before God and asking favor for us at the throne of Grace.

Once we saw an iceberg of unbelievable size, a floating mass. Sometimes fish as large as horses, etc. It was wonderful for me to see the effervescent sea appear at night as though it were fire, due to phosphorescent action. One night we saw the northern lights above Jupiter; the first mate, who was with me, had never seen it so beautiful.

Four people died at sea:¹ an old woman and three children. Van Luijster and I took turns officiating at the short burial services (in which all the people were reverently gathered on the deck).

When we finished the corpse was committed to the sea. Then the captain asked us to write out our service for him and this we did. Such a burial is a gruesome scene. We had many who were ill on board, but the Lord blessed the ministrations of Dr. V. Nus; among other cases was one man whose right shoulder had been injured by the pitching of the ship. If he had not been treated, he would have been unable to care for his wife and three children. We have ample reason for being thankful that no more accidents occurred because often the baggage would roll around. Besides, many people wore wooden shoes. I consider it best not to make a voyage to America such as that while wearing wooden shoes.

On Sundays we were at liberty to have religious services; if the weather were mild they were conducted on the deck while captains, mates, sailors, and all the passengers reverently listened. Van Luijster and I took turns leading these services and, so far as possible, chose appropriate texts. How pleased we were that there were some

¹On this ship were 180 emigrants, among whom were eighty children; many of the passengers were ill, even when they boarded the ship.

my insects to be found even though we did experience some warm weather. Our captain insisted upon cleanliness.

Anyone who comes over should be sure to provide sufficient changes of clothing. I write this in all sincerity. Our folk were a cleanly people. Although I had access to a cabin, I was usually between decks, where conditions were just as good and in some respects even better. Correlia, who also had cabin space, left it after a few days and also chose to live between the decks. It is a good thing to take some refreshments along, such as prunes, lemons, dried apples, currant juice, etc., etc., in general there was peace and love prevailing on board, but a certain amount of compromise is necessary among so many passengers. Insofar as possible choose the same time of year we did for the trip. This information is sufficient concerning our voyage. Arriving at New York on the sixth of June, I found, among other acquaintances, Mr. Scholte. We were glad to find each other in good health. I hope to write Rev. Brummelkamp. Be sure to read his letter or a copy of it, it contains important items which I can not best repeat at this time.²

Our overland journey cost us a great deal of money and also grief.³ I want to warn each of you against Ellinckhuijzen and his partner who, speaking Dutch and posing as friends, are in reality the greatest of scoundrels. I can not emphasize enough that you should learn English. Knowing that you will be bringing a treasure with you. How often we have felt sorry for a person who looked as though he were not possessed of his reason and was openly cheated without being aware of it. One learns quickly from an experience like that. Anyone who has not learned English in the Netherlands need not be surprised if, at first, he understands little of what is said here, for the accent here is strange; however, one soon becomes accustomed to it—sometimes within a half hour—as was the case with myself. All American industries are on a large scale, and I can say from experience that bread is to be found everywhere; nay, more than bread for all who will work, whatever be their

²The emigrants from Zeeland, which included my two children, were determined even before leaving Antwerp, to join the colony of Rev. Van Raalte. At New York they were urged, not exactly in a Christian manner, to change their minds and unite with others going to St. Louis. It was decided to do this. At New Orleans, not understanding the situation better—they broke their agreement, in a perfectly legal manner, and made another which would bring them to Michigan. Because of the foregoing misfortune and the eleven-day stay on the canal between Albany and Buffalo; one should use the railway.

occupation. The Hollanders are esteemed everywhere and if they are acquainted with English their prospects are indeed good. Yesterday we sent a group of laborers and servant girls to the little city of Kalamazoo and there they were received with open arms.⁴ On our journey overland we encountered several trustworthy men who gladly furthered the cause of the Hollanders. We did not make the trip directly across Michigan⁵ but instead sailed entirely around; this was at least a hundred dollars cheaper, for there was little demand for the hauling of goods by rail to our little colony.⁶ Thus we arrived on the evening of the twenty-sixth at our present settlement. The point of debarkation from the steamer is a two hours' journey from Rev. Van Raalte's⁷ residence. Van de Luijster and I hurried over there, the trip being expedited by the finding of a boat, which we appropriated as a boat—like so many of those to be found here—consisting of a hollow tree trunk. What a joy to greet Rev. Van Raalte and to learn that he was well. Just imagine this—from that time until now I have been living at the minister's house! I hope to be of great help to him by doing some of the detail work with which he is burdened, also by acting as interpreter for some of the English people who come here, and by drawing some maps showing our location and its immediate vicinity. When I have more time, I hope to send you the maps, or perhaps Rev. Brummelkamp will send his over if you ask, and then father can show them. You see, I am sending this either this week or next along with some letters for Rev. Brummelkamp. I think the area selected has been well chosen and is unusually well located for trade.⁸ There are so many things to do! So many! God strengthen us!

Dear Parents! I sincerely hope you are coming, but do not come until you have heard from me again. There are various reasons

⁴Wages are triple the amount usually paid.

⁵This can be done by railway as far as Kalamazoo.

⁶The opportunity for doing this will doubtless increase, for the distance is only six townships, or a journey of ten to thirteen hours.

⁷They landed at the mouth of Black River and Black Lake through the river reaches Lake Michigan.

⁸"... unusually well located for trade," between two important rivers, the Grand River, about a four hours' journey to the north; and the Kalamazoo River, flowing in a southerly direction and three hours away, while the Grand River traverses the colony itself; with its thousand colonists now and thousands more that will follow, it will soon stretch to both rivers. See the important letter written by Rev. Van Raalte on January 30, 1847, from Detroit and published by Rev. A. Brummelkamp. Arnhem, J. W. Swaan.

suggest this. And if it should become necessary for you to come very soon, inform me so that I can make the necessary arrangements. One need not worry about trouble here; employment can be found immediately both in and outside of our colony. On an average one can earn not less than six *schellingen* daily and as much as one and a half or two dollars. In some respects the servant is better off here than is his master. There is much joy among the people at being free from the persecutions found in the Netherlands and also because it is so easy to obtain bread. Insofar as is possible I hope to inaugurate plans to employ some of my poor and believing friends here.

How tragic it is to endure poverty in the Netherlands, while here all that is waiting for people.⁹ From various quarters I was asked to go to New York and Buffalo to stay as a lawyer upon quite advantageous terms. But I would rather be with my people. As yet I cannot answer the questions asked me, but no one need be concerned about employment. Several reasons dictate that I be more familiar with this area before I answer all the questions I was asked. Now, dear parents, brothers, and sisters, I do not doubt but that the Lord will soon bring peace to me. Hooze Zwaluwe brings to mind many events and reminiscences.¹⁰ Some pleasant,¹¹ also many that are not.¹² May God comfort those who sought to cause you suffering and perhaps are still trying to do so. And that to their own sorrow. But be cheerful. God will scorn those that scorn you.¹³ May Mrs.—, the wife of B—, become more and more aware of this; it will be up to her. May all the right children of God beware of her; I loathe her position—God is the judge. I recall the last day at Hooze Zwaluwe, when I happened

How the price of various necessities has tripled within a few months and every God-fearing resident of the Fatherland prays that order will come out of the present disorder and true light out of the reigning darkness, can be better portrayed by the well-chosen words of the poet Isaac Da Costa. These would fill a good sized volume.

God has blessed us here, unworthy as we are, for more than twenty-eight

Eight of our sixteen children were taken from us by early deaths; a boarding school died and was buried without his parents seeing him either ill or dead; one of my instructors and his brother, not heeding my advice, drowned; the selfishness of some people, who considered themselves better than others, caused much grief. God forgive them and us our sins and unite our hearts through

Ever since childhood I have coveted the praise of men; this increased my pride but after a few years God used people to open my eyes and I was partially

to encounter her in company of some others. What arrogant
 "Women who are constantly studying and never will come to a know-
 edge of the truth!"—I hope she reads a copy of this letter.¹⁴

I would have written from New York and, in fact, had already
 begun to do so but was compelled to stop because of a lack of time,
 as well as a terrible headache. Looking back, I am glad of it. Now, my
 dear ones! God be your strength as well as ours! Heartily greet my
 relatives at Zwijndrecht, 's Gravendeel, Zwaluwe, in Gelderland, and
 all the rest. Remember me to my dear friends. Perhaps you have heard
 from Rev. Brummelkamp; write about it and enclose a copy of his
 letter. Oh, my dear relatives! Be of good courage! Be joyful! We are
 all strangers; peace awaits us at the further side of the grave. I end
 saying "Farewell" to all who ask about me. Greet Rev. M., Rev. B.,
 and other acquaintances. Greet all who love us. Pray for our welfare
 at the throne of Grace. Ye that fear God, remember me. Let us daily
 serve the Lord in righteousness. Inform Rev. Br. that the Van Raalte
 family is well. Rev. Van Raalte has much courage. I am happy that
 I can be of service to him. Preparing the maps is pleasing work, for
 I think: It is for those whom I love best. I end with a prayer that the
 Lord may guide our paths. Lord be with me and my dear family and
 relatives! Be with us in this strange land—lead us and make us
 by Thy deeds. Now, dear parents, relatives, and friends: God be
 with you all. Farewell!

CORNELIS R. VAN MALSEN

Especially greet Mr. de L— and family.

Many of my friends are here and this is a matter of daily joy to me.
 I believe there are approximately a thousand people here, and we are
 expecting hundreds more in our vicinity. I wish that you would
 send Rev. Br. copies of this letter and those accompanying it, written
 by my sister and Van de Luijster.

HOLLAND, OTTAWA COUNTY, MICHIGAN
 11 July, 1847

DEAR PARENTS:

You are probably anxious to receive letters from us. I have often
 said to Cornelis: "If only our relatives knew how well the Lord

¹⁴My heart still bleeds at the thought that the tongue, with divine permission
 when motivated by conceit and haughtiness, judges and condemns a neighbor

and prospered us!" It has been beyond expectation. I hope you
 have received the letter we wrote at Vlissingen; then you will know
 that we left the coasts of our country on May 4. That same evening
 we saw the coasts of England and the lights of the city of Dover. Two
 days later we were out of the channel and on the great ocean. I soon
 became seasick and was so ill the following five days that I was unable
 to keep down any food, not even a sip of water. I felt so miserable
 that I often cried that death was upon me. I finally recovered a bit
 but later, when the sea would become a bit rough, I would become
 more or less upset again; consequently I did not fall entirely in love
 with the sea. Van de Luijster was indisposed during the voyage too
 but is now better.

Several of our fellow passengers suffered from ordinary illnesses.
 I was permitted in the cabin but, after two days and two nights, pre-
 ferred to be between the decks, for here there was considerably less
 motion. I could always go into the cabin and enjoyed the friendship
 of the captain and mates.

We did not experience any storms, although we were occasionally
 calmed and then, if the ship lay in a slanting position, our house-
 hold effects would roll through each other. Usually we had mild
 weather; at times the sea was as a mirror. The nice weather also per-
 mitted us to sit on the deck, and, since this was beneficial to our health,
 the captain favored it. The Lord kept me from fearing disaster, and
 I will often thank Him for this. It was unusually calm when we
 passed the channel, which ordinarily is dangerous because of the
 storms, the sandbars, and shallows. There are beautiful views along
 the channel.

New York is a big and busy city. As soon as we arrived I realized
 that I missed most—a knowledge of English—for nothing else is heard
 in America. I met a few who spoke French, which made things easier.
 In New York I met Reverend S— and his wife and sister, also Mr.
 G— and his wife. The overland trip took twenty days, eleven of
 which were spent on board a canalboat and the remainder on a steam-
 boat. These are very large, having three decks. You can well imagine
 how strange everything was for us. We passed various cities and vil-
 lages and we stopped at different places, sometimes for hours at a
 time. This was especially true when we were travelling from Albany to
 Buffalo by canalboat and so we had an opportunity to see these places.