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6-15-1874

### A Letter of A. C. V. R. to His Son, D. B. K.

A. C. Van Raalte

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June 15, 1874      Cawker, Kansas

A letter of ACVR to his son, DBK, about his stay with a family in a sod house on the prairie. He has preached two Sundays now and installed a consistory. He also refers to his daughter-in-law, Helena, widow of his eldest son, Albertus, who is deceased and her children. Apparently ACVR and the family are supporting Helena and the grandchildren due to the mysterious disappearance or death of Albertus [jr.]. ACVR gives a full report on farming conditions in Kansas and the pioneering life. [As yet, I can find no information about the sudden disappearance of son, Albertus.]

Calvin College Archives, ACVR collection, box 8, fldr 124.

*Calvin Hall Arch  
ACVR coll  
Box 8, folder 124*

Cawker, Kansas

June 15, 1874

Dear Dirk,

Yours of June 3 I have received, the only one. I thank you for sharing things in which I have much interest. You are correct in saying that being so completely among strangers, one longs the more for tidings from home. By now you surely have my letters from Kansas. I hope I can now receive them quicker out of Cawker. I am pleased that my room is ready and that all are longing for my coming. Ben's baby is by now surely a pleasant child. I really would like to see her and I hope that may soon take place. I believe that Ben's farm has a healthful location, which at times is good for a baby. Greet Ben and Julia--I greatly miss the little ones of Spring Lake. There are no babies where I am here. The youngest is already ten years, I think. Don't let Ben risk too much injury to himself in teaching my horse. I'm glad they are going to do well with the town and schoolhouse, even though we will feel it in our taxes.

It is too bad that Jan does not as soon as possible make clear the ground of the blooming peach trees (without that they can't grow), even though he must cut a path through there. Even so, it may well be too late. As to the painting in Helena's house: just so they use Chase recipes for the white washing, the same as that used for white wood. One could use a workman and pay that expensive man with money. Mr. C. Doesburg has Chase, but I turn it over to you. Greet Helena and her dear little children for me. Did you not receive from me the letter of Ravenstein from Rotterdam? You already know from my other (letter) that I live in a little sod house with a wooden floor; meanwhile we eat with the family who lives in a brick

cellar with a clay floor. All good and well, except that the temporary roof (next Spring they will put up a stone building with pieces from the lime stone beds) is too flat and occasionally lets water through. My sod house is plastered inside. If they are plastered on the outside, it is suitable all right. Mine is only plastered in the front. They have thick walls and are therefore much warmer than the defective log cabins. Only they don't have good window work and therefore they are drafty. The roof is made of planks on which hay is laid and then on that is laid dirt from the cellar depths. That makes a perfect roof, even if it is not thickly covered. On mine all kinds of weeds are growing, in spite of the lack of depth and the dryness. When I came here, there was a good rain. After that, eight or ten days of dry, sharp, mostly cold weather. Everything suffered. Yesterday there was a beautiful rain and fine follow-up weather. Maybe there will be more. Well plowed land has good oats, the other is bad. The land is rich, but it requires two to three years before it is a little ready. Due to the dry climate, the buffalo grass is very short. In the valleys, or sheltered areas, it is longer--of a different kind, and there it is mowed. Potato fields are mostly in bloom. Bugs are there but they don't cause much harm. Corn looks good, although on newly opened ground it never amounts to much, at best, a half crop. Pumpkins and watermelons are also planted and do well. I think that our people, although busy with cattle breeding, have missed the right source of income, that is, sheep breeding. Here there are large pieces of land which they themselves have--hills, often heavily plowed, enclosing many miles in the square, all growing various kinds of grass. Every farmer could easily keep 500 sheep besides his farming. In those sheltered valleys the grass grows early and long, thus, except for those hard, cold snaps, the sheep could graze in the winters also. If they had done that in the beginning instead of putting their money so much in

land or rather farm equipment, they would have a good income. The man who can put a thousand dollars in sheep can live here as a prince. But now people will very slowly come in this. Here and there is an American in the area around here who has grabbed hold of this rope (some do it with cattle) and has become large. It is a land area much like South Africa. Here, too, the prickly pear or cactus grows in the wild, thus very dry. Therefore it is here a land for chickens, much more though, a land for sheep.

This dry climate has a good affect on my health in spite of the lack of many of my favorite things. So far, I have not had to take any medicine except only Febrifuge for strength. Nature is active now. The water that always was in short supply and at times a dark, black-like red, is now colorless and abundant! Although I often am vulnerable to draft, and in my room in cold weather I do catch a cold, each time so far it goes calmly away without a cough or rheumatism, so much so that it amazes me. I can't give credit to any means except to the high, dry climate. In the meanwhile, it is for me a matter for great thanksgiving: I had not been able to think that what was imperceptible to me would be so much to my benefit. Obviously sickness and death do occur in various forms but I could not imagine that the climate should produce such a powerful influence; it being evident to me that the feverishness of the liver and what is bound to it, giving way to helplessness and inactiveness, is helped the most.

Saturday I began riding a horse and I hope to do that more. It is a small but lazy beast. I have now preached two Sundays, twice each day. At such a time I do need Febrifuge, and sometimes my sleep is hindered but generally it doesn't have any continuing result. The first Sunday I had to inaugurate a new log church--everything built in pioneer style. Yesterday after a rain shower, it was too cold for me there. The wind played around my neck and I got a sore throat. Using a cough drop, I could

continue preaching, but I did think that I would have to experience something very bad. However, today I know nothing about it anymore. Yesterday I installed a consistory. This week I must visit the children I am to baptize next Sunday. After that we must prepare things for the observance of the Lord's Supper. By then I think they will be ready to call a certain minister from the Neerland, whom some know, or a student. I have advised them to build immediately a good parsonage of sod, of one level, which they can comfortably do. Otherwise they won't get a minister. If they give him \$300 in money, free food stuff and fuel, and in general help him in his needs, then they will come in a hurry. These people must go ahead, otherwise they become scornful and despondent, and really, there is here no reason for that. I see a very good future developing for the people but it requires time. Naturally, most of the people are pleased that I am here. There are, however, several who are totally irreligious, infused with strange hobbies, and three or four seceders. Some are hinting whether I can stay here, but they don't dare wait on that, and I myself don't dare make a decision about that. I take note of the hinting of providence. Some time I think about coming home the middle of July when I will have things somewhat in order here. Be so good to write me which students will take their final exams, and when that is completed, write me then also, that same day, who has passed.

Greet Mina and Chrisje and please me by writing quickly in return.

Your loving father,

A. C. Van Raalte

Be so good and send by express a package of some of the various kinds of Bibles lying upstairs.