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Letter from Cornelius Vander Meulen to Karl de Moen

Cornelius Vander Meulen

Johannes W. Visscher

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January 20, 1849

Zeeland, Ottawa

A letter from the Rev. Cornelius Vander Meulen to the Rev. Karel de Moen, giving a full report of the Zeeland settlement.

Printed in the pamphlet, "De Toestand der Hollandische Kolonisatie in den Staat Michigan..."1849.

Translation by Johannes W. Visscher, Cleveland, Ohio, 1935

Archives of the Holland Museum, Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College.

Arne van der Meer

Zeeland, Ottawa
January 20, 1849

To the Honorable Dr. de Moen.

Dear Brother:

For a long time I have desired to write to Dr. B. Much work has hindered me every now and then. Now it is your turn where, as your Honor has written to Dr. Van Raalte about a letter of Dr. S. to a friend from Zwolle, in which is mentioned that in Michigan there is nothing else than pine and bass wood and wants to prove it by my writing to his Honor. It is painful to me to notice the insignificance of these comments. Then we get comments both direct and indirect that are made by Dr. S. then there is a cry of distress from W. Then considerable is written by Dr. Z. and others who have been sent for that purpose. But everything carries the earmarks of over-anxiety, worldiness and faithlessness. And we would be pleased to change this current. It appears to me it is better to rest in God's guidance than to act in such a way. I feel myself obliged to testify against this, in spite of the respect and love I have for the aforementioned.

We have corresponded together and Dr. S. has shown me his good location and the fertility of the land, etc. Still he spoke in doubt of Michigan and many other things. I answered in short that it appeared to me that his land might be better in appearance and fertility, but that I and all the folks here were satisfied that the forests were a blessing for a colony such as ours where there are but few well to do people, and that no poor people could settle on the prairie, which is very evident from the condition of things. There is no wood to build a house for man or beast and no fuel for reasonably cold winters. They must make caves in the ground and cover them with sod and live in them.

Further, I wrote to him that my opinion of Michigan was quite different. Yes, that I wished that his Honor had settled here, that we then together with God's blessing could have done something far greater, but where this was not to be, we should be satisfied with God's doing, and if his Honor and his people were satisfied, it was well, that also our folks were satisfied, that we may believe that with regard to each other and not doubt it, but to notice it as one of the blessings of God rather than that each one of us should think that he has the best place. Now satisfaction is the whole of it.

In such a way I have always written the truth, so that his Honor now writes, "I am pleased to know that you are getting along so well and are succeeding so well." We will close with regard to this. If the Lord is with us we will succeed though all things appear against us.

Nevertheless, I think it is a work of the devil who thinks that something is going to happen here against his kingdom, which really does happen. Our children are confessing Christ. Yesterday we had present three children of one family who confessed Christ as their Saviour. In the Netherland they worshipped sin and the world.

Now we thus have many proofs. This I always consider first and of greatest importance. My reasons why I left the Netherlands have not been to become great or rich in America. No, but because it became evident to me that Church and State would disagree. And God in His thoughtfulness had opened a way of escape. Dreading the approaching troubles, I made a move with God's help for which I am still grateful and for which I thank God daily. That we did not make a mistake is clearly becoming more evident. I have passed through many days of worry, especially on the trip, although the Lord has comforted and sustained me. In August, 1847, we stepped ashore where Dr. Van Raalte had settled, but with an immediate freedom and joy in my soul, so that I was able to stand all difficulties. We found Dr. Van Raalte in the woods. Here and there they had put up log houses and tents. Everywhere prayers ascended to God and the singing of Psalms could be heard. Many people murmured and were despondent. I told them what really was my opinion, and that we could not with a good conscience do otherwise. Where the Lord had brought so many of His people--the choice of the land was already done by Brother Van de Luijster, who had come here before I did, six miles east of Van Raalte where we have lived peaceably ever since. The ground that was seeded and cultivated has yielded bountifully.

Often we have spread out in different directions from our village. We have built a Church of 60 by 40 feet on which there is a small steeple with a bell in it. It is filled every Sabbath and we enjoy God's blessing. We have a God-fearing school teacher. In short, the Lord has done much to the surprise of many of us. With reference to our condition, I will tell you how it is at present. We are not rich. There are but few among us with means--by far the most of us that are now here are penniless. Some can buy a little land, a few can invest in stock and have the land cleared. Now, however, the condition of rich and poor is such that to my knowledge none has suffered from lack of plenty of white bread, potatoes, pork and meat.

Transportation we do not have as yet, as the growth of the settlement is such that we can sell all we have. The interest of the Americans is great, as you all know. The State of Michigan has given 4000 acres for opening up Black River, 5000 for roads. Now again the Government gives \$5000 for said river. Soon we will see the river opened and then we will, with God's blessing, ship a vast amount of lumber, which was that so despised pine lumber. To mention something, I have made more from seven pine trees than I have paid for the 20 acres on which I live; just to make shingles for roofs. And then what would be the result if this continued for three years? Dr. Van Raalte is located 20 miles from Grand Haven on a good road where there are good facilities to ship goods by steamboats in every direction.

Ten miles to the east of us is Grandville. There also are daily steam-boats. With regard to the climate, that is not so exceptionally good. Around here folks are well. During the past year we had four deaths from the 300 people,--two grown folks and two children. He undoubtedly must all die. I shall not speak of particulars, trusting that Dr. Van Raalte will do that. My family, wife and children, are all well, healthier than in the Old Country. So it is also with Van de Luijster, your old friend. He sends you hearty greetings, as also does Brother Van Hees of Rotterdam.

Give my hearty greetings to Dr. Brummelkamp and family. Greet all brethren.

May the Lord do what is right. What He wishes to make of us, I trust in His knowledge. Up to the present He has done well. When first Dr. Van Raalte came here with that small company and with such small means, what would become of it? The Lord, however, has provided. Last year we again thought, "Now, it will tell the story." Still, we have progressed a great deal, even to our surprise as we look backwards. Now we again can start questioning, and so it will continue. Still it is fitting for us to believe and trust the Lord who has done so well.

I am glad the Lord keeps us so dependent. Otherwise we would forget Him. With the Lord we can accomplish great things. The Lord teach us to lose selfwill, wisdom, carefulness, strength and power, but find everything in Him. May He grant you to recognize Him in all your ways and to allow you to taste His love in your hearts.

Now with hearty greetings,

Your friend and Brother,

G. Van der Muelen.

Cornelius van der Meer

Zeeland, Ottawa
January 20, 1849

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Your friend and Brother,

C. Van der Muelen.

1849

Pamphlet: The Condition of the Holland Colonization in the State of Michigan, North America In the beginning of the year 1849 Mentioned in Three Letters of the Honorable A. C. Van Raalte, C. Van Der Meulen and S. Bolks to C. G. De Moen. With two charts after which a letter of the Honorable G. Baay of Alto, Wisconsin.

Translated by Johannes W. Visscher during Jan. and Feb. 1935 at Cleveland, Ohio.

Netherlands Museum, 1975. Gift of Helena Visscher Winter.

(A translation of De Toestand?)