

An “American Letter” by Norwegian Immigrants

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Letter (3 pages)

Bondar, Gunder Asmundson, Aadne Asmundson Bondar, and Kari Evensdatter.
Letter to siblings in Fyrsedal, Norway. Deerfield, 17 January 1854. In Gunleik Asmundson Bondal Collection. State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

We are firmly convinced that you have waited a long time for a writing and information from us in this, our foreign home. This step to find a way to this our farm on which we have settled was a chance course as over the ocean we went forward to take to this moral state.

We left Crag 8 days after Santenhun Day and finally reached New York after 8 weeks and 3 days of sailing.... We came to New York on December 1, at 6 o'clock in the morning. On the 2nd we left there at 6 o'clock in the morning and on the 3rd we were in Albany at 6 o'clock in the morning. The canal begins in the town of Albany and goes to the town of Buffalo. From there begins the long inland journey from New York to Koshkonong, it is called karskland in Norske.... The way has been long, about 300 Norske miles.

In the month of April we moved 3 miles farther west to Torge Halverson's home. There we stayed a year in his house and Hungus Holer and his wife Anne were also there. They bought for themselves 20 acres of land from Torge Halverson and then we bought 124 acres of land beside them from the government, which owns a lot of land here. Now it is all sold hereabouts....

It is almost unbelievable how fortunate it has gone for us the whole time in the new world. There is no one of our ages here who have climbed upward as fast as we. Cattle is now high priced so the first thing each of us did was to sell cattle for 80 dollars each. We own 4 milk cows, 2 that are 2 years old, 2 that are 1 year old and 1 calf. 5 driving oxen, 10 hogs or swine, 20 chickens, 2 geese, and 5 sows. This fall we butchered 4 pretty big hogs.

This fall we cut so much wood that we can sell a hundred dollars' worth. We had a desirable and fruitful year. It is not often that we have this much wood and it also has a high price. There are several here who have cut a thousand bushels of wood... The price per bushel is a dollar, and that is expensive.

The new railroad has just been finished to Madison, which is 3 Norske miles west of here. And everything is expensive here that we need to work the land. We bought a plow to work up the new ground with for 12 dollars. . . . A four wheeled wagon costs 61 dollars. One thrashing machine for 25 dollars. 2 iron spades for 2½ dollars. Animals or cattle are high priced. A cow costs from 15 to 20 and 25 dollars. For the very best is 30 dollars. Driving oxen are usually sold two together. It is called a team. The cost is 50 to 100 do, that is the very best. For a sow 1 to 1½ and 2 do. For a goat 3 to 5 dollars. For a pound of the finest wheat flour 2 to 3 cents. For 1 pound of pork or bacon 3 to 4 cents. For a pound of butter 6 to 12 cents. For a pound of tallow 10 to 12 cents. For a pound of candles from 12 to 14 cents. A pound of coffee 12 to 14 cents. For a pound of tea 50 to 60 cents. Clothing varies in price. Cloth that is ½ wool is 50 cents a yard. For the finest wool cloth 1 dollar a yard. All cotton material 10 to 12 cents a yard. Linen 1½ yards is 10 to 12 cents a yard. The best linen is 12 to 25 cents a yard. A pair of boots is 2½ dollars. A pair of shoes is \$1.30 to \$1.50. A cap costs 50 to 60 cents. . . .

A pair of horses cost 150 to 200 dollars. There are many horses here.

All the different kind of good work tools here are so expensively made the Norske tools are like they were made by a child. All that man shall work with is made in a large factory that is usually driven by a steam engine. There are machines used to cut wood with. Some are called mower machines to cut hay with. Machines to saw wood with. Machines to thrash with. These machines are driven by horses.

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Wages vary with a year's time. In the summer, wages are 15 to 20 dollars for a month. In the Winter they are 10 to 13 dollars a month. . . .

Girls usually earn from 1 to 1.30 dollars to 1.50 for a week. The wage is the same both summer and winter. Their work is the same as a housekeeper in Norway. They have more respect for girls here than in Norway. When an American wants to hire a maid, he comes with a horse and carriage. . . .

And here it is so that a working man will never be from the husband's or master's table to eat whether he works for a shopkeeper or others. All shall be as highly respected. Yes, Americans are friendly and high-flightedness we cannot understand. We are so used to the proud Europeans who are haughty. . . . And one never sees an American with his hands at his sides as the foreigners do.

The land's riches and fertility is impossible for us to describe. . . . The land is not flat but rolling. It is layered with hills and valleys and mountains, which are higher. These stretch for the most part north and south. . . .

Cotton does not grow. Neither does sugar. That grows south of here. Coffee and tea does not grow in the whole of North America. When you wrote about some coffee beans, it is impossible for us to obtain them. They grow in South America under sunshine and a warm and unhealthy climate. Here the climate is cold, healthy and fresh. . . .

Here the prairie has had cholera and it has ruled as in Norway. It comes to take control, and it has dominated. Cholera has been here on Koshkonong, but this fall it has not been here in these easterly places. Aadne has been sick with it 2 times and both times we cured him. We all have been in good health the whole time and have had better health than in Norway. I have not been this well for many years. . . . Kari also finds herself well satisfied. Now we do not want to go back even if we were the owners of the best farm in Moland. This we know you cannot believe.

My wife has had 2 pregnancies since we arrived here. The first was in the year 1850 the 13 of April and then she delivered twins. One was named Grumund and the other Ole. Grumund lived just 10 days and then died. Ole is doing well. The other was born August 16 in 1853 and was baptized on the 25th. That one was given the name Tone in Baptism. All of our children are in good health, growing and thriving well. We do not want to forget to thank our Father in Heaven who cares for all in his creation every day of our lives.

I would not advise any stranger or rich man to come here to this ground as those who have large estates would wonder at the beginning. But those who are good workers will go on because one has to work harder here than in the Fatherland. . . .

Here there is a great desire to go to California to look for gold. Thousands of Norske and Americans are going and coming back with hundreds of dollars in gold and money. Those who go there earn 100 dollars a month. Knut Olsen Porsgrund has big thoughts about going there. I think he will. Before, money for the trip was 300 dollars. Now it is 100 dollars. Now there is a faster way to get there. The [wagon] train is now finished to California. Those who are so inclined and are able to go there are merely fortunate.

For me, Kari Evensdatter, I would like to kindly ask you who are there to greet my aged father if he is still living, and to all our sisters and brothers that we are living well and are with good health.

From your devoted brother, Aadne Asmundson, I believe that I would advise you to come here to America and that you would find it better here when you shall acquire 100 dollars when you earn only 20 dollars in Norway. This I am well acquainted with. I can get a large contract for steady work and get money. Otherwise do as you think, but my advice is the best.

Now we will go no further and must break off this our writing. With a diligent greeting to lovable and unforgettable sisters and brothers. And the same to all other relatives and known friends. Live well, and if we are not fortunate enough to see one another more in this world, may we all meet and go forward with gladness in the next. Write us a letter and tell of yourselves.

Koshkonong in Wisconsin the 17th of January 1854
Gunder Asmundson Bondal
Aadne Asmundson Bondal
Kari Evensdatter 1854