

Transcript of a letter from Anton Burkart

Green Bay, February 28, 1856

Dearest brother-in-law!

I received your letter on February 16 and saw from it that you are all still healthy, which made me very happy. Not even five months have passed since we had a deep sorrow. It is just as my brother said, "Nothing comes by chance!" It was January 2, when my wife fell ill and died in childbirth after a four-day illness without having given birth to the child. I had two doctors there, but it didn't help; she had endured a torturous death. She was always hearty and in her right mind until the last moment. She knew it in advance. On New Year's Day in the evening, when we were in bed, she said that a friend had told her that she had seen a bier being carried out of our house, and that she had seen the child lying in the cradle. Then she said that nothing good would come of it. I told her she should trust in God, who will direct it for the best. Since my brothers had died, she had given nothing at all about the worldly. She had changed completely, she didn't want me to work so hard anymore. She meant, if we should not bring up children, we could make nevertheless our life now, we had plagued ourselves enough. She had always said that she wanted to do what she could for the children (- her expected children), therefore we would not become poor. She was very fond of little Joseph, who is my favorite. Just before ... is, I asked her if she had nothing to say. Then she said, she would like to die, but what should you do with the children. If I could live only a quarter of an hour healthy with me and see her child alive, then she wanted to die gladly, I could speak almost no more word. I told her to be content, I wanted to bear fate gladly, if only we would see each other again in the hereafter. She said she hoped we would meet again. I asked if she had anything else to say. Said she had promised a chasuble in the church (=promised to donate it to the church), that I should buy and pray to it. And last: send money to my father and mother, and write that I still pray on my deathbed and would have thought of them". "I want to pray for you that you will be well". And to the children she told them to pray diligently and follow well, then you will be well. She said goodbye to each of her friends. She said she would see our Savior this night. The last one she said: "Anton, put on my white shirt, and you also get dressed and leave with me". I asked, "Where are we going?". She said, "To heaven!" So I had to pick her up and she passed away to the Lord. As much as she had suffered, her last breath was easy. You cannot imagine the situation we are in. But all with God! We had been married for twelve years on January 7. She was always cheerful and very sincere. The funeral was one of the largest ever held in Green Bay. They were all very sorry for her, was good against anyone who meant well. I lost in her a good and a capable housewife. Who would have taken care of the children like she did? It was not in her family. She always said that she wanted to do good first. Before my sister-in-law we had four orphans, the ones from Belgium. Two of them had the disease, of which my brothers died. The smallest was two years old. These children were so neglected that we did not even believe, we bring them with the life away. We could not get a human what was she going to do? She had to clean them, and she was very pregnant. She cried as often as she washed the children, and often said: "it is hard for children who do not have a father and mother". We wanted to keep two as our own children before my sister-in-law died. My brother-in-law Haußer is at my house. There are 14 of us at the table, 8 of whom go to school. The worst thing is that one of his girls' school teachers, Minna, has "falling sickness"

(epileptic seizures). We cannot leave her alone anywhere. The children are well behaved. Anton and Friedrich have to work in my store, and Hauser has his own store now. As for me, my business is going pretty well. I have taken on a great deal of work now and will also build two business buildings for myself this summer, 2 storefronts, one each 22 feet wide, 60 feet long, 28 feet high, each of which will earn me four to five hundred dollars rent. I bought a place on the business street last summer for the sum of \$1300. The square is 44 feet wide and 116 feet long. And serve place I cannot leave it like that, because there is a great capital in it. I could get 2500 for that square now, it's one of the nicest squares in town. If I can build this building this summer, then I'm secured. I have really good luck as far as business is concerned. I always get the most work that brings money, which is quite rare now. I still have over 1500 dollars outstanding from last year. Because here you have to go on credit, otherwise you can't do business. Because I built the church, it gave me great prestige and confidence. At first, everyone said I would have to go bankrupt, but now that I have done well, everyone is envious of me, although I have made the church 500 dollars cheaper. But I did it well with God's help. Every man has friends and friends (good and false friends), but right always remains right. For the Germans in this country are now quite different, because there are now all nations together, and you have to be very careful before you do something speak.

As for the country, everything is very expensive. We also have a very cold winter and little snow. Food is suddenly as high (expensive) than two years ago. This is due to the Russian war. The flour and meat all comes away, The flour costs 165 pounds 20 guilders (165 pounds for 20 guilders), pork 165 pounds for 50 guilders, potatoes per "bushel" 2 guilders 30 kreuzer and so everything is expensive.

(The following note on this: the author of the letter converts the prices in America at that time into German currency; at that time, 1 guilder should correspond to the value of about 3 dollars). Now I want to write you how it is with the Nitermeier (Niedermeier=name). He is a real good-for-nothing. He and Strasser are two real prisoners. I could have recently almost brought them both to the state prison for four years, if I had followed other people. As I wrote to you, Niedermeier was supposed to go to my brother on his land (note: presumably a purchase was agreed upon, but the debtor did not pay), but it did not take long and every day he was drunk. He also wanted to shoot himself in his drunkenness. So I put an end to it and sent him away. Now he runs from one end to the other and does nothing. He also owes the 3 0dollars for food and lodging, but he won't get far. One should beware of compatriots! He wants to go to Germany next summer, if he has money.

I will close my letter with the hope, if we remain healthy, to speak to you verbally when circumstances permit. I greet you all from the bottom of my heart.

I remain your sincere brother-in-law, Anton
Burkart.