

"An Account of Conditions in North America"

An Open Letter from the pioneers at Muskego to the people of Norway
Published in the Christiania (Oslo) *Morgenbladet* newspaper on April 1, 1845

Something like a year has now gone by since the hearts of nearly all among us were filled with foreboding and discouragement, brought about by illness of various kinds and in part by want of the very necessaries of life; a condition which at the time prevailed among us because of crowding into our midst of large numbers of our countrymen who, lacking in funds to continue their journey, found themselves compelled themselves to sojourn here. It was a season of sorrow, such as to try the patience of several of us to the utmost. A certain few, overwrought in mind, even spread the most thoughtless rumors, accompanied in some cases by curses and expressions of contempt for America, as much as to say that God had no part in creating this land, a land so highly endowed by nature that even its uncultivated condition must be regarded as in effect half cultivated when compared with the native state in Norway and many other European countries; a land which for centuries has been a safe refuge for exiles from nearly every state in Europe, exiles who have, almost without exception, found here a carefree livelihood after conquering the first difficulties that beset every pioneer community, provided only that they bent their minds on gaining through industry and thrift the necessary means of subsistence. There are some who complain of the trials that immigrants at first must meet; but with all such persons should feel a sense of shame when they recall what history has to tell of the sufferings of those earliest immigrants who opened they way for coming generations by founding the first colony in the United States, the Virginia colony.

Not only were they visited by contagious diseases and by famine; they had also to fight against wild beasts and Indians. Through such misfortunes the colony was on several occasions nearly exterminated and had to be reinforced. At length, of some six hundred colonists about sixty were left; these survivors, facing certain death from famine, found themselves compelled to leave the shores of the country in boats which they had built in the hope of reaching the banks of Newfoundland and of meeting there with fishing vessels on which they might return to England. But, as it appeared, such was not the will of God. Just as they had embarked they came, at the mouth of the Potomac River, the gateway to the colony, across some ships that had been sent out from England for their relief. Thus encouraged they returned to continue the work of settlement that they had begun. So they fought and won their victory; and so they became the immediate occasion whereby it has been made possible for twenty millions of people to find abundant resources in the United States, a number which is supposed to be capable of being

doubled more than once before the opportunities here shall have been exhausted. Should not we likewise, with brighter prospects than theirs, entertain the hope of winning by perseverance victories like theirs and of gaining what we need to sustain life!

Or should God, who in his word has laid upon us the precept, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,' not crown such an undertaking with success, inasmuch as He has so richly endowed this land and made it more fitted to produce all manner of food for mankind than perhaps any other country in the whole world; more especially under the present conditions, when overpopulation in Europe, greater than at almost any earlier time, has made emigration a necessity.

The dissatisfaction that showed itself at the beginning among many of the immigrants at this place had its origin for the most part in an unseasonable homesickness more to be looked for in children than in grown people; it arose from such circumstances, for instance, as that they had to get along without certain kinds of food to which they had been accustomed, that this or that article in their diet did not have the same flavor as it had in the old home, that they suffered from the lack of some convenience or other, or that they missed certain of their friends with whom they had before had pleasant association. By taking such things to heart they permit their minds to be filled with unquiet longings that must remain fruitless. Meanwhile they lose sight of all those former difficulties, of the whole gloomy prospect of material success under which they labored heavily in the land of their birth; and so they now imagine the place where they were born to be that land of Canaan which at one time they supposed to lie in America. One who tries to forget bygone things and to look forward instead, and who pursues his lawful labors in patience and in the fear of God, will surely not find his hopes disappointed if he will only aim, so far as his material needs are concerned, to be content with his daily bread. We have no expectation of gaining riches; but we live under a liberal government in a fruitful land, where freedom and equality are the rule in religious as in civil matters, and where each one of us is at liberty to earn his living practically as he chooses. Such opportunities are more to be desired than riches; through these opportunities we have a prospect of preparing for ourselves, by diligence and industry, a carefree old age. We have therefore no reason to regret the decision that brought us to this country.

An attempt has been made to prevent people from coming to this country by representing America as a suitable refuge for released convicts or such men as seek to escape the wrath of the law. It is true that many persons of this type come hither and that here as elsewhere there are altogether too many wicked men. Yet this state of affairs is unavoidable, inasmuch as good men and evil are permitted to come in, the one with

the other; nevertheless, assault, robbery, and theft are much less common here than in the lands from which such men may have come. At all events, misdeeds of this kind are unheard of among us, and so no one need shrink back from America on this account. Attempts have also been made to frighten people away from this settlement because of the presence of illness among us last year; yet although the summer is just past was unusually wet and cold for this latitude, we have not suffered from any epidemic, in spite of certain fears during the spring; and we have reason to hope that we shall continue to be spared.

By reason of the circumstances just mentioned, namely the privations and the sickness that visited our colony and robbed most of us of the gains of our labor, some among us found it expedient to turn to our friends in Norway with a request for assistance in building the church of which we stood in such great need. The response to our request has been so unexpectedly generous that we have been enabled to complete after a fashion the church building that for some time has been under construction in this settlement. Wherefore we take occasion to express here our thanks to the honored donors, the following named men:

Hr. Proprietaer T.O. Bache, Walle pr Drammen 200 Daler
Hr. Stadshauptmand N. Bache Drammen 100 Daler
Hr. Kjöbman T. Bache Drammen 50 Daler
Hr. Kjöbman E. Olsen Drammen 50 Daler
Hr. Kjöbman J. K. Lykke Throndhjem 10 Daler
Hr. Simoen Svendsen Lier 15 Daler
Hr. Tollef Mörch 5 Daler

The newspaper editors of Norway are hereby respectfully requested by the undersigned, their countrymen, to publish this account in its entirety and without change in their daily press, and to append our several names.

The settlement of Muskego, in Racine and Milwaukee Counties, Wisconsin Territory in the United States, Jan. 6, 1845.

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Ole Knudsen Reiaa Nubrud
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