



# LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## Letter, 1844 [Transcriptions]. Call Number, Box 139 Folder 24

Wells, Milton

[s.l.]: [s.n.], [s.d.]

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/HRZBN4XEWD2TU87>

This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17, US Code).

For information on re-use see:

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/Copyright>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.

APR 2 1957

Robert Jackland  
Racine, Wis

Rev. Milton Wells  
Burlington, Racine Co. Wis. Ter.  
Aug. 20, 1844

Mr. Charles Hall  
Secty. of the A.H.M.S. (*Am. Board for Home Missions*)  
150 Nassau St.  
New York

Dear Brother,

I have defered making out and sending my second report till I might hear from you, either through the bearer of my other, or the draft which I have hoped to receive by the arrival of every mail. My dissappointment in not receiving aid from your society as soon as I had expected, ( a dissappointment occasioned by negligence on the part of my churches) has very much restricted my labors, for the year is now well nigh spent. My field of labor, as you have already been apprised, extends over a large territory. The places where I preach are from five to ten miles apart. All of the families in this field are, or ought to be visited at least once a year, the church oftener, and the sick still oftener. Many places within the bounds of my Societies ought to have occasional preaching -- they are calling for it and I could give it to them had I a horse; but for the want of means with which to purchase one, I have been obliged to do without. Consequently much labor has been omitted by me, the performance of which would have been duty, could I have obtained a horse even by hireing. But this, in most cases, I have not been able to do. I hope, however, this excuse, as well as the difficulty and fatigue of always footing it, will soon be removed by the reception of a draft from your Benevolent Society.

The remainder part of this sheet will be filled, or partly so, with an account of the Norwegians, a large settlement of whom is found in the town of Rochester.

This settlement occupies a space of country commencing about 5 miles above the village of Rochester, on the Fox River, and extends up that river about ten miles, with a breadth of several miles. The number of inhabitants, I am not able to give. It is thickly settled, however. The majority of them know nothing of the English language and from best authority care nothing for it. An English school



has been taught among them one or two winters, by means of which a few of the children have acquired some knowledge of the English. Many of the parents, however, reject the opportunity, and with a sort of self-conceit say "they have no need of English." A few of them possess abundance of pecuniary means -- have neat and comfortable dwellings and live well. But the majority of them, especially those who emmigrated from the barren highland regions of Norway, are poor and miserable, and know little of the arts of husbandry whereby to gain a livelihood; Consequently they have been wasted by famine and disease to a fearful extent. The amount of wretchedness and suffering which prevailed among them last winter was such as absolutely to mock all description. One family I visited in which I found every individual, eight in number, prostrated with disease. Two of them, the father and a daughter of some 16 years of age, were then shaking violently with a fit of the ague. The daughter, shoeless and nearly destitute of all clothing, stood hovering over a few live coals, by the side of which stood an old, filthy looking, copper teakettle, from the spout of which they would take their turns in drinking. The others were huddled together into bunks filled with prairie hay, with nothing over them to shelter them from the rigerous cold of a December day, save a few sheep skins sewed together. Aside from the teakettle, we saw but one article of furniture, and that a wooden bowl partly filled with what I took to be shorts kneaded and prepared for baking. This, as near as I could learn, was all they had in the house with which to support life.

In another family which Mrs. W. visited in connection with the physician, she found the sick mother in bed with the dying husband, with no one to admister to their necessities, or even to speak a word of consolation to them save two little girls of some seven and nine years of age. Before the fire stood a little naked child, reduced to a perfect skeleton, and having every appearance of being literally starved; for so far as could be judged no disease was preying upon it. At another hut where the physician called he found a dead man lying upon a bench out of doors and ten sick ones, some of whom were dying in doors. These are by no means isolated cases. They are just what might have been witnesssed almost any day during the last winter. One hundred deaths are reported to have occured among them. These startling disclosures might seem at first to astonish one, considering that they are in a country distinguished for its abundance, as well as Christian Benevolence. Whether that vigilant charity which is ever on the alert to seek out the abodes of want existed in due degree, we will not undertake to assert. We fear not. Many palliating considerations may however be offered in extenuation; among which I may state, that this settlement, forming a distince community, speaking a



foreign language and withall jealous of every thing American, also wrapped up in ignorant self-conceit, may be supposed not to enjoy much intercourse with our citizens. Consequently their condition must remain hid from our observation till it becomes so insupportable that the convulsive heaving of starvation and death, no longer able to endure the shameful and inhuman barrier of National prejudice, rolls their tale of woe on the diffusive winds of heaven, in a language not to be misunderstood by common humanity. It must be further observed that a large portion of these sufferers consisted of emigrants who had just arrived from Europe in the last days of lake navigation and without any means of self support, the frosts of a sterile winter closed upon them, and no alternative remained but to force themselves by the scofes into the poorly provided habitations of their countrymen. Herded together, as they were, in narrow abodes, by the combined influence of famine and personal impurity, they soon became victims to fell disease. In their distress they were not altogether neglected. The wakefull and sympathetic ear of Samaritan kindness was at length arrested by the sad tale of misery, and forth sped messingers of mercy without stint or grudging. Barrels of flower and meat were dispatched with praiseworthy promptness and soon the emaciated sons of want had reason to ascribe thanksgiving to Elijah's God. Many of their children were taken into by the Americans; so now it is very common to find a Norwegian boy or girl in almost every family. This people have a minister settled among them. They call themselves Lutherans. There is one family among them who have been in America several years and have become hopefully pious. They speak and read English. They have very little intercourse with the others; owing as they say to the enmity existing against them on account of their religion. They regard them but little better than Catholics. Although they attend on the outward ordinances of God's house, yet as a people they give no evidence of real piety. A sabbath school has been established in this man's house, and all invited to attend. Some few, perhaps 15 or 20, have done so. It is to be hoped that by proper management and persuing a judicious course with them their prejudice may ultimately be removed and their hearts become accessible to the truth. That this may be the case we look to him who has the heart of all men in his hands, and is no respecter of persons.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the receipt of a draft allowing me to draw on your Society to the amount of \$75. I suppose there are \$37.50 now due me. My commission will expire on the first of Nov., if the \$75 then due me can be sent when due, I will wait and have the whole sent together.

Affectionately your Br. in Cht.,

Milton Wells