

Linda Schelbitzki Pickle

Gender and Self-Representation in the Letters of Nineteenth-Century Rural German-Speakers¹

The personal documents of German-speaking immigrants in rural areas of nineteenth-century America exhibit characteristics that are similar to and, in some ways, different from those of Anglo-Americans of the same time and place. Certain of these characteristics and the self-images the authors wished to project are related to their gender. In this study, I intend to explore the ways in which the immigrants represented themselves in letters written to their homeland and how gender roles may have influenced this.

This exploration is complicated by a variety of factors. Historical archives in the United States contain relatively few personal documents written by rural non-English-speakers. This is the result of many factors, not the least being the loss of foreign language ability on the part of their descendants and the consequent tendency to throw out old, indecipherable written texts. The letters that German-speaking immigrants wrote back home are among the best primary documents for insights into their experiences. But these resources also are scant. The director of the largest collection of emigrant letters in Germany has estimated that 100 million private letters were written from the United States to Germany in the nineteenth century. Yet that collection, the *Bochumer Auswandererbrief-Sammlung*, housed at the Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany, contains only about 6,000 letters.²

Social and demographic factors also had an influence on the small number of primary sources left by the immigrants. The nineteenth-century German-speakers who came to America and settled on farms were predominantly members of rural families and interrelated groups rather than individual immigrants. They wanted to continue the way of life they knew in the Old World but at the same time improve their chances for economic advancement for themselves and their children in America. They were relatively uneducated, pragmatic, hard-working people, with many demands on their time and little inclination to spend it on creating written documents that afford insights into their inner lives. This was especially true of the women among the immigrants. What Joan Jensen wrote about the paucity of first-person written records from nineteenth century rural English-speaking women in America was even more true, perhaps, of the women in these groups: "These factors then,—illiteracy, long and exhausting work hours, scarcity of uninterrupted leisure, and the absence of a

practical need for written communication—all affected the amount of written material that has come down to us.” Nineteenth-century farmwomen worked very hard in the house, garden, and barnyard, but those from North and Central Europe may have also participated in fieldwork to a greater extent than did Anglo-American women. This was partly a factor of economic class, as scarce resources in many immigrant families dictated the participation of women in heavy labor, just as it did in other rural families with limited means. But rural traditions in German-speaking areas of Europe, where women routinely worked in the fields at times of peak labor needs, also contributed to the great demands on women’s time and energy.³

Other ethnic factors helped to suppress the number of first-person testimonials by German-speaking immigrant women from peasant backgrounds. In such families, generally patriarchal in structure, the husband was more likely to be the “official” correspondent, even to his wife’s relatives. Women from German-speaking lands were also more likely to be illiterate or semi-literate than were their English-speaking sisters. Of the 6,000 letters in the *Bochumer Auswandererbrief-Sammlung* (among which the documents used in this paper are found), only about 15 percent are by women, although women made up 40 percent of the nineteenth-century emigration.⁴ Yet German-speaking female immigrants, like the men around them, also wanted to maintain bonds to family and friends left behind. It is due to this desire to keep up family ties, even over great distances, that we owe many of the primary sources written by nineteenth-century German-speaking rural women and men. In this study, I look at two collections of letters that such rural Midwestern immigrants wrote to family members in their homeland. Although these letters are only a small sampling of the immense transatlantic correspondence of that period, they have the virtue of offering fairly extensive evidence over time of typical ways in which both male and female immigrants represented their experiences.

Immigrants of all ethnic backgrounds and at all periods have probably had similar, interwoven purposes in writing letters to their homelands: to impart both personal and general information, to maintain contact with loved ones, and to use their letters as a forum for self-representation. Their letters have probably also always exhibited certain prevalent themes centering around the trauma and the outcomes of emigration: loneliness, cultural alienation, (mal)adjustment to new conditions, prosperity or the lack thereof, accomplishments (often associated with descriptions of hard work) and failures. The letters of men and women have many such elements in common, and yet the style and the content of their self-representation also reveal gender-related differences. The scope of this study is too limited to allow general conclusions about variances between the letters of all male and female immigrants in nineteenth-century America. But it is my belief that in the case of German-speakers from rural areas, some of the most marked differences can be attributed to inculcated expectations of men and women in regard to behavior, attitudes, and self-image.

The gender roles that nineteenth-century rural German-speakers were accustomed to were essentially those of an agrarian, pre-industrial society. In their European homelands, women did productive labor in and near the home. They raised, prepared, and stored foodstuffs, and they were in charge of the garden and of barnyard animals.

They were responsible for the clothing of the family and they supervised children and their labor in the home. The cooperative nature of family labor ensured that women's work was recognized and valued to some extent in their immediate environment. Their status as "the first workers in the household" gave them a certain degree of power and authority within the family. But it may also have led to their increasing legal and economic subordination in the 1700s and 1800s in German lands. As one researcher has noted, they were simply too valuable to be allowed autonomy. That is not to say that women always quietly accepted the nineteenth-century official rhetoric and policies that sought to reify a hierarchical, male-dominated control over them and the property they brought into marriage and that limited their control over income they directly produced. Bountiful evidence exists that in personal relationships as well as in court processes women asserted their autonomy and the value of their contributions to the family and family economic enterprises. Nonetheless, the private sphere circumscribed nineteenth-century rural German-speaking women's Old World gender roles, and legal restrictions reinforced those roles by limiting women's economic and personal independence.⁵

Men also worked hard in the Old World family farming enterprise. They were responsible for fields and pastures, for the supervision of hired and family labor in the fields, for the maintenance of farm equipment and buildings, and for the trade or sale of harvests and large animals. But in contrast to the women around them, rural German men also had important public roles. Some of these, like their formal roles as spokesperson for the family in communal meetings and the church council, for example, derived from long-held tradition. Other established patterns of male dominance gained legal underpinnings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through laws that sought to deprive women of economic independence. As the German-speaking lands moved into a market economy, men gained additional power and authority as the representatives of the farm family in commercial livestock and grain markets. Harder to document, but no less important, men played public roles in the social intercourse of the community, particularly that which took place in the village pub. The local *Gasthaus* was more than a place to drink beer. It was also the primary venue where information was exchanged, where business was conducted, where men contacted the wider world. In this male domain, a man's behavior, conversation, and display of prosperity (or betrayal of the lack thereof) cemented or called into question the social status of his family within the network of extended kin and village neighbors. In the pub men also exchanged information about conditions and events within and outside of the village, information that became increasingly important in the new market economy. The leisure time granted to men for these activities was not frivolous, but rather consequential for their personal standing and for the prestige and economic well being of their family. Women had no parallel role outside the home and family, and this contributed to a strong tradition of female subordination in Old World German-speaking communities, especially as the market economy grew. As was the case with other European peoples, public roles and economic forces influenced the power relationships between the sexes, and generally not to the advantage of rural women.⁶

The gender roles and relationships outlined above for German-speaking peasants in Europe were not very different from those typical of the American rural residents and communities that the immigrants joined. Nineteenth-century farm work, the division of labor according to gender, and the influence of the developing market economy on the relationships between farm men and women were similar across the United States, no matter what the ethnic background of rural residents. These parallels in daily routines and family relationships and the degree to which many rural immigrants could isolate themselves within family and ethnic enclaves made the adjustments to their new environment easier on the whole than it was for many of their compatriots who settled in urban settings. The potential to focus inward on family concerns and on the ethnic community also enabled them to retain traditional patterns of interaction and behavior. This, too, is revealed in their correspondence. In the present study, I explore how the immigrants' letters reflect the traditional gender-based differences in self-representation that they brought to America.⁷

To illustrate this, I use as representative case studies two collections of letters found in the *Bochumer Auswanderer-Briefsammlung*. The twenty-two extant letters sent by members of the interrelated Kessel and Rückels families date from 1859 to 1892. They were sent to the parents and sister of Regina (Rückels) Kessel and Gottfried Rückels. The Neumeier family collection contains ninety-two letters and fragments of letters that three sisters and their husbands wrote from Iowa between 1892 and 1915 to the women's parents and siblings in Germany. Although the letters of the two families were written during a period of more than half a century, they attest to a consistency in self-representation among rural German-speaking immigrants.

Several members of the Kessel and Rückels families, most of them in their twenties, emigrated in 1857 from Wiedenbrück, a small town between Bielefeld and Hamm in what is now the northeastern part of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. They seem to have gone first to St. Louis and then moved out onto farms that they bought or rented soon after their arrival. The two primary families represented in the letters were linked by blood and in at least two generations by intermarriage. Gottfried and Amalia (Schnutenhaus) Rückels had been married three years and had a three-year-old daughter and another child on the way when they left Germany. (Both children died either on the trip or soon after their arrival in St. Louis.) Gottfried's parents had given the family farm over to his older brother August, which probably meant that the latter had paid off his siblings for their share in the estate, thus enabling Gottfried, his brother Johann, and his sister Regina to emigrate. The Rückels family also included three sisters who stayed in Germany. It was to the home of the youngest of these, Mina, that Gottfried's and Regina's parents moved at the time when the extant correspondence begins. Regina's husband Fritz Kessel also came to America with several siblings, among them his brother Johann and his sister Johanna. The latter married Gottfried's and Regina's brother Johann and moved to Texas some time before 1859. The Kessels also brought their parents to America with them, indicating that the entire family emigrated, perhaps selling what family holdings they had before doing so. The elderly father died soon after arriving in America, but Gertrud Kessel lived for thirty-five more years, moving from one child's home to another. Her maiden name

was Schnutenhaus, the same as that of Gottfried Rückels's wife Amalia and also of his mother. The correspondence often makes reference to this close network of relatives of varying degrees of consanguinity located on both sides of the Atlantic. The Gottfried Rückels and Fritz Kessel families lived near each other on Mississippi bottomland farms in southern Illinois. Regina Kessel, Gottfried Rückels, or Amalia (Malchen) Rückels wrote all but two of the twenty-two letters in the collection. They are addressed to the Rückels parents and sister Mina and family in Wiedenbrück. Perhaps because Amalia (Malchen) Rückels's mother-in-law was also related to her by blood, she wrote lengthy letters to her husband's family, a rather unusual practice among rural German correspondents.

The Neumeier sisters, Wilhelmine, Christine, and Frederike, were born in Herbsen, a small village in the area of Waldeck, in the state of Hesse (now in the southern part of North Rhine-Westphalia). The daughters of a landowner with three other children, including two sons, they could not inherit the family farm and chose to emigrate, one after another. Like so many other immigrants, they traveled to the part of America where they already had relatives and friends from their Old World community. Herbsen villagers named Rock had gone to Davenport, Iowa, in the 1850s and then followed the railway west, buying and selling farms as they went. In the 1870s and 1880s others from Herbsen followed them, including one of the Neumeier sisters' paternal uncles, who joined the growing expatriot community sometime after members of the group located on inexpensive land in Woodbury County in far western Iowa. In 1882 or 1883, at the age of nineteen or twenty, Wilhelmine Neumeier emigrated there as well, along with or soon after fellow Herbsenite Wilhelm Herbold, whom she married in April 1883. About seven years later her sister Christine, twenty years old at the time, joined her there and worked for a time as a hired girl, as she had done in Hesse. In 1893 Christine married a grandson of the first immigrants from Herbsen, Fritz K. Rock, who spoke German at home but could not write it, having been born and schooled in America (Christine Rock, letter of 22 November 1893). The last sister to emigrate, Frederike, came to Woodbury County in 1900. She was twenty-seven years old and evidently unable to find a husband in Herbsen. A year and a half later Frederike married Heinrich (Henry) Hinkhaus, a North German neighbor of the Herbolds and Rocks in Woodbury County who had been in America for sixteen years and had visited Germany and Herbsen a few years earlier, probably on a wife-hunting trip (Wilhelm Herbold, letters of 20 December 1897, 3 February 1898, 18 April 1898).⁸

The two collections illustrate the importance of gender for the style and content of letters written by rural German-speakers. They are in some ways not typical collections, in that letters by women make up an unusually large proportion of each, but this is, of course, in part why they offer good material for the present study. That the women in these families wrote home more often than seems to have been typical of female German-speaking immigrants has various reasons. As stated above, Malchen Rückels's in-laws were related to her by blood, giving her additional cause to write. Regina Kessel did not have children for several years after immigrating and had her mother-in-law living with her, which gave her more leisure and incentive to write,

since her mother and mother-in-law were related (probably sisters or cousins). Christine Rock and Frederike Hinkhaus wrote home themselves because their husbands either could not write German (Fritz Rock) or were not members of the home community (Heinrich Hinkhaus). Their older sister Wilhelmine Herbold, on the other hand, wrote only two of the twenty-four extant letters she and her husband Wilhelm penned.

As noted earlier, one of the primary purposes of the letters written home was to inform those left behind about both personal and general matters of interest. Health, weather, crops, work, and social life are common topics in both men's and women's letters. This information was meant to reassure concerned parents about their distant children's lives, to seek or proffer sympathy, to inform siblings and others about life in America and about the potential for gains and losses that emigration entailed, and at times to boast about material progress the emigrants had achieved. The letters under consideration here contain all of these elements, but in varying degrees, depending on the author.

Christine Rock and Frederike Hinkhaus used their letters primarily to impart information about family events and the health and well being of themselves and others in the Iowa family and community. They also took pains to express concern for the same matters in the Old World family and village community. The two extant letters by Wilhelmine Herbold illustrate this as well. In the first (undated), written in the summer after Frederike arrived in March 1900, she wrote:

Liebe Elter euren Brief haben wir erhalten und daraus gesehen das ihr noch alle gesund seid und ich kann euch miteihlen das wir auch noch alle gesund sind[.] Vile Lieben Elten iche har [=hätte] euch schon lann gescheieben aber [h]iehr hat aber kein zeit zu scheirben[.] iche bin ald mit den 5 Kinder und vilen Arbeiten[.] Uns[er] klein Herbert kannt bald sizt[en.] will will nur das bild schick[en] von Herbert[.] die Christine Neumeier [a cousin?] ist 3 Wohn [=Wochen] bei mir[.] Schwester [Frederike] weiß[t ihr] ist auch noch bei Uns[.] ich wieß aus [=auch] noch nicht wie lans sie bei uns [bleibt.] baltmiteihlen das wir ein gut Erent [=Ernte] hat aber sehr schlechten Preiß[.] die Widerunk [=Witterung] ist bis jäzt noch zimlich gut aber es fängt jäzt an zu Reggen[.]

Liebe Eltern machen eu[ch] kein sorgen um Schwester Christine[.] was sie scheinbt [=schreibt] das ist die warheit [sie ist] sehr zufriden.

Vielliebe ich weil meine Brif enden um [=und] wenn es Gott will ist den[n] we[rde] ich bald zu euch komn, ich denk noch vielen an Vater und Mutter wen[n] wir noch mal zusammen sind.

Eine Gruß an Schwestern[.] Brüder und [sister-in-law] Elißen

Einen Gruß Schwager Kinde

Einen Gruß Eltern

Wilhelmine

Das Geld hat Schwester[.] schreibt bald wieder[.]⁹

Almost the entire letter addresses family and personal matters. Wilhelmine, who wrote home so rarely, took the trouble to do so on this occasion in order to reassure her parents that Frederike was doing fine, a concern they evidently expressed to her even after the second sister, Christine, had communicated the same information (Christine Rock, 18 April 1900). Wilhelmine also gave reasons for not having written that informed her family about her life in America. Her references to harvest and weather conditions are dryly informational and straightforward. These conditions were crucial for the family farming enterprise and it was natural that Wilhelmine should report on them. But in spite of the importance of the farm economy in her life, the manner in which Wilhelmine writes of the weather and harvest makes it clear that they were not her reason for writing.

Wilhelmine's other extant letter is very much the same in tone and content as the previous one cited, but is even more terse. She probably wrote this undated letter in July 1904:

Liebe Mutter

Ich fühle mich veranlaßt Euch ein paar zeilen zu scheirben in hoffnung das
Euch mein schreiben bie guter Gesundheit antrifft was bei uns der Fall ist[.]
das ist das beste[.]

Vielgeliebte Mutter

Es wer wolh ein groß F[r]eude wen[n] ich an den 70 jährigen Gebutztag
kann bei dir

dir Lieb Mutter [sein] aber der Wegt ist zu weit[.] aber ich denk in Himmel
komn wir zusamn[.] Gott gebe das du liebe Mutter noch lang lebet[.] theile
Euch mit daß wier das Jahr eine schlechter Frühjahr gehabt haben es hat bis
gegt [=jetzt] festgeden [=fast jeden] Tage gerehnt[.] Weize ist gut das Korn
ist schlecht[.]

Herzlich gegrüßt Von allen un ich liebe Mutter[.]

Glück und Sege an Begutztag von Tochter

Wilhelmine

Again it was a special event that occasioned this letter: her mother's seventieth birthday. Wilhelmine's lack of letter-writing practice is evident in the awkward transition from her wish that her mother might live many more years to the cursory, but seemingly obligatory report on weather and crops. The main purpose for writing, however, is clear: a wish to express and consolidate personal and family connections.

The same can be said of the letters that Regina Kessel and Malchen Rückels wrote home from Illinois. The first extant letter written by Regina (2 October 1859) is a good example. It is much longer and more literate than the preceding by Wilhelmine Neumeier Herbold, which probably says something about the differences in education

between the two women, as well as about the amount of time each could dedicate to writing:

Theuerste Eltern, Schwester und Schwager, so wie Kinder
Endlichmal nimmt eure nachlässige Regina die Feder zur Hand, euer aus Liebe volles Briefchen zu beantworten. In Gedanken wandelte ich manchen Tag an eurer Seite, aber in der Wirklichkeit bleibt immer weite Ferne zwischen uns.

An den Zeitungen hatten wir längst ersehen daß Kriegsunruhen vorhanden, und euer Brief bestätigte die Wahrheit. Dies tat uns recht leid für euch Ihr Lieben, dies wollte ich nicht gerne hören. Daß Du lieber Vater und Mutter noch einen schweren Krieg unterliegen müßtet, und das, liebe Schwester, daß schon zum zweitenmal der Mann von Deiner Seite geraubt. Dies ist hart, und noch härter das Wort zum Gedenken zu hegen müssen, daß zwei lieb und verbundene Herzen sich wohl nie wieder zu sehen bekommen. Aber Gott sei Dank, es ist wohl alles wieder still und ruhig eingeschlafen, dennoch müsset ihr dort immer wieder einer traurigen Zukunft entgegensetzen, und Deutschlands Herrscher, wenn sie auch schlafen, wachen sie als immer in ihrem tobenden Geiste wieder auf.

Ja liebe Schwester, Du schreibst: Hätten wir Flügel, wir flögen zu Euch, Ja hättet ihr das, und flöget bis zu Ende des Meeres, so würden wir Euch da selbst abholen und mit Freuden heimführen. Dieses Weges, glaube ich, würden wir uns am ersten in diesem Leben wiedersehen, wir befürchten aber, würdet Ihr lieber Vater und Mutter die Reise noch mit antreten, ohne Flügel, daß Euren Geist eher aufgeben müßtet ehe Ihr in unsere Arme eingeschlossen.

Aber dies ist auch nicht gesagt, denn was Gott will erhalten, kann kein Sturm weder Wind noch Wogen des Meeres was tun. Einem jungen Menschen tut dies aber alles nichts so leicht, wer eine gute Reise trifft als wir, der ist nicht bang, ich würde mich nicht fürchten, morgen wieder so eine Reise anzutreten. Das in Eurem Brief befindliche Blatt haben wir mit Freuden genommen und gelesen, Mutter [Regina's mother-in-law] kann es schon lange auswendig, und sagte mannichmal: "Ich muß machen, daß ich es kann, daß wenn Du hin schreibst, schreiben kannst, daß ich es kann." Dies war mir immer eine herzliche Freude, wenn abends oder morgens ich auf der Küche Essen kochte, Mutter auf der Stube saß und an dem Lied lernte. Und so wurde auch noch immer ein wenig von Euch gesprochen, dies könnt Ihr Euch wohl denken, mit sprechen aus Deutschland verkürzen ich und Mutter uns manchmal die Zeit, denn der Schwager Johann und mein Fritz sind gewöhnlich im Feld oder Holz am arbeiten. Und so leben wir recht vergnügt und zufrieden.

Liebe [sister] Mina, Du schreibst, Du hattest den Schwestern den Brief zugeschickt, und ihnen geschrieben, sie sollten selbst schreiben oder Dir einige Zeilen zuschicken, dieses aber alles tun sie aber nicht, welches mir recht leid tut. Ob sie unser ganz vergessen weiß ich nicht, oder ob die

schwesterliche Liebe ganz in ihnen erlöschen will, wie die Schwester Lottchen mal zu mir schrieb, als ich auf der Rose diene. Mutter sagte neulich auch noch, man sollte doch meinen, Euer Hanna [Regina's other sister] schrieb doch mal, ich sagte drauf, das sollte man auch meinen und Lottchen gewiß, denn die kann so gut schreiben. Nochmals viele herzliche Grüße an die beiden von uns alle und wir lebten in der Hoffnung, bald ein Briefchen von Ihnen zu erwarten.

In this first half of her letter, Regina, like Wilhelmine Herbold, is concerned with acknowledging and continuing family bonds, even as she concedes that she will never again see those she left in Europe. She expresses concern for her family's safety and gratitude for their thoughtfulness, and is at pains to show how strong her affection and that of her mother-in-law for them still is. She also indirectly chides her two sisters for not writing her (knowing that her letter will be forwarded to them), a complaint that is repeated in each of her letters, including the last one we have from her (22 May 1892).

In the second half of her letter on 2 October 1859, Regina brings her family up-to-date on the events in her life, including news of harvests, prices, and weather. This news, however, has a female flavor to it:

Wir hatten letzten Herbst 3 Acker Weizen gesät, wo wir 80 Büschel von geerntet haben, er war etwas zu geel, denn er hatte sich stellenweise gelegt, sonst hätte er noch besser gegeben, es war aber keiner hier im Boden (Tal), der so viel Büschel vom Acker bekommen hat. Unser Welschkorn steht auch gut, es ist so hoch, daß, wenn einer eine recht lange Harke hätte, so würde die Spitze nicht gut ausreichen können. Wir wollten Weizen ins Korn säen, da ist neulich paar mal etwas Windsturm gekommen, und es ist vieles umgefallen, und so geht das nicht, so müssen wir das Korn abhauen und denn den Weizen säen, dies macht viel Arbeit. Die 3 Acker, wo wir Weizen gehabt haben, hat mein Fritz letzte Woche in Gerste gesät. Den Weizen hatten wir mit der Maschine gedroschen, es sind hier nämlich Leut, die haben eine Maschine, gehen damit von Farmer zu Farmer, nehmen ihre Bezahlung demnach der Mann Büschel gekommen. Wir hatten 12 Mann Fremde, wohl einige die aus Freundschaft kamen und wollten mal gucken wie es ging. Mein Bruder [Gottfried Rückels] half uns und Schwiegerin Malchen war auch bei uns und half mir und Mutter etwas und freuten uns zusammen. Unsere Kartoffeln sind nicht so gut, als wir sie vor 2 Jahren hier gezogen haben, die Ellmen sind dran zu fressen. Bohnen sind sehr gut, zwei Fässer eingemacht und soviel trocken, daß wir sie den Winter lange nicht alle essen können. Kappes so gut wie in Deutschland nie gesehen, wir machen 3 Ohm ein. Ein Faß haben wir schon verkauft für 4 Dollar. Wir mußten ihn schon einmachen, weil er reif war und an zu faulen fing, denn dieses alles treibt sich hier sehr. Denn wo Hanna und Lottchen wohnen, können sie nicht mal einige gute Bohnen reif kriegen, und hier könnte man zweimal

welche pflanzen. Wir hatten ungefähr 500 Kappes gepflanzt, nun könnt Ihr denken wie gut er war, denn wir behalten doch noch welchen für diesen Winter frisch zu essen. Zwiebeln haben wir wohl 2 Büschel übrig. Mutter meinte neulich, wenn Du, Mina kommen wolltest und die Kappes und Zwiebeln holen, dies sähen wir lieber, als wenn wir sie verkaufen, gewiß. Unser Vieh wächst gut heran. Wir haben dieses Frühjahr 5 Säue melk bekommen. 37 Pils von den 5 Fesen, 36 sind jetzt noch am leben und sind recht quall und schön. 10 Schweine haben wir in der Mast liegen und eins geschlachtet, welches wir und der Bruder geteilt, denn ein ganzes verdirbt einem noch. Heute morgen kamen Johann und mein Fritz aus dem Holz, hatten eine andere von unseren jungen Sauen gesehen mit 6 Ferkeln. Letztes Jahr hatte uns Gott heimgesucht, aber dies Jahr streut er auch seine reiche Segenshand über uns aus, wo wir Ihn nicht genug für loben und danken können.

Regina's report is concrete and thorough, but colored by the kind of "human interest" and domestic details that she knew would be of special interest to her mother and sister: the food crops raised and preserved, growing conditions in field and garden, the communal aspects of threshing by machine and sharing a slaughtered animal with her brother's family. She also attempts to deflect any envy that her comments on the bounty of her garden might arouse by proposing to share it with her parents and family, if it were only possible. Although she may be proud and glad about the harvests they are enjoying, she also is anxious not to antagonize her audience by being perceived as boasting. So she "properly" acknowledges the hand of divine providence in her good fortune.

At the end of her letter, Regina turns again to personal comments addressed to the recipients:

Liebster Vater und Mutter, Euer Geburtstag ist entweder bald oder vorbei, welches ich nicht weiß. Wir alle wünschen Euch Gottes Segen, Frieden und daß Ihr derer noch viele in guter Gesundheit und Zufriedenheit zurücklegt, bis Ihr ein hohes Alter erreicht und der Herr eine viel bessere Stätte bereitet hat.

Ihr wißt ja wohl, daß der Schwager [Fritz Kessel's brother] Hermann eine Farm gerentet hat, und Albert und die kleine Malchen bei sich hat. Der Julius ist bei August, sie sind alle, so ich anders nicht weiß, recht gesund. Einen besonderen Gruß von Mutter an Euch Eltern. Wir grüßen Euch alle herzlich, und es küßt und umarmt im Geiste Eure Euch liebende Tochter und Schwester Regina Kessel.

Lieber Vater etwas an Dich: Wenn Du jetzt mal wieder nach Essen reist, so besuche aber auch mal den Schwager Wilhelm Kessel und Mina, die freuen sich recht, denn es regnet zu Hause ja nicht mehr in Weizen.

Liebe Mutter und Mina, etwas vergessen. Wir haben diesen Sommer so viel Äpfel von anderen Farmern geholt, denn sie waren hier so gut geraten, daß

die Leute, welche einen Obsthof hatten, keinen Pfennig nahmen, wer sich die aufsuchte, die auf den Boden gefallen. Wir haben bereits 10 Säcke voll geholt, welche uns bloß 20 Cents gekostet. Wir haben uns die Äpfel getrocknet, haben wohl 2 Säcke voll getrocknetes Obst, und essen grün, soviel uns lüst. Nochmals Ihr Lieben, lebet wohl.

Ihr schreibt uns, wir sollten die Briefe nicht immer freimachen, dies müssen wir hier. Alle Briefe müssen hier freigemacht werden. Wenn Du liebe Mutter nun nicht willst, daß, wir sie nicht all bezahlen sollen. so könnt Ihr Eure frei machen, wie Ihr wollt.

A concern for maintaining good relations is evident in Regina Kessel's letter and in the others she and her sister-in-law Malchen Rückels wrote from Illinois. They attempted to include the distant loved ones in their new life in America by describing that life in terms the Old World family could understand and appreciate and by using an inclusive, conciliatory tone. In this, their correspondence reveals gender-marked attitudes and behavior typical of nineteenth-century rural German-speaking women.

Christine Neumeier Rock and Frederike Neumeier Hinkhaus's letters home, although longer than their sister Wilhelmine's, exhibit the same general format and emphases as hers and parallel those of Regina Kessel as well. They regularly mention weather and crops and sometimes livestock and prices as well. But they never discuss these matters at great length or in a personal style. The letters always contain inquiries about the health of the family in Herbsen, especially of the parents, and report on the sisters' and their families' health. When Christine Rock became ill with an unspecified "female disease," she and her sister Frederike Hinkhaus related their concerns but also attempted to reassure their mother (letters of Christine Rock, 4 December 1904, 13 July 1905, 1 January 1909, 7 April 1909, 4 July 1909; letters of Frederike Hinkhaus, 13 December 1908, 29 March 1909, 3 July 1909). Christine eventually underwent treatments that took her away from home, first to Chicago for five weeks and then to Sioux City for daily doctor consultations and sitzbaths from Monday through Friday for several months (Frederike Hinkhaus, 13 December 1908; Christine Rock, 7 April 1909). This unusual situation indicates both the serious nature of her condition and the extent to which her family was able and willing to invest in improving it. Christine wrote: "... es ist sehr hart für meine Kinder, und kostet viel Geld, aber mein Mann ist immer zufrieden er sagt nicht einmahl ein Wort das es zuviel kosten täht, er tuht ales was in seinen Kräften steht, das sagen ahle Leute" (7 April 1909). Both sisters wrote about how Christine's family coped with her ill-health: that her fourteen-year-old daughter Emilie was quite accomplished in housework, and that husband Fritz Rock "kann sich sehr gut in der Hausarbeit helfen" (Frederike, 13 December 1908) and was helpful and uncomplaining (Christine, 4 December 1904, 7 April 1909). Eventually Fritz Rock had hot running water installed in their farmhouse so that Christine could have her daily baths at home, an exceptional convenience and instance of male consideration (Christine, 4 July 1909). Frederike wrote: "hätte sie nicht so gute Pflege dann wäre sie gar nicht wieder besser geworden" (3 July 1909).

It is unfortunate that none of Wilhelm Herbold's letters from the period between 1904 and 1909 have survived. It would have been interesting to know if he referred to Christine's illness and related matters. Perhaps the nature of the illness would have made it improper for him, as a male not related by blood to Christine, to do so. However, we can only speculate. Wilhelm seems to have been the kind of person who downplays the health and emotional concerns of others. The only extended reference he made to the health of family members in America was to his own after his recovery from a serious lung infection (14 June [1900]). In the same letter, written about three months after Frederike arrived in Iowa, he countered his parents-in-law's concerns about her homesickness by saying: "Es sind Leute die Dumheiten nach Deutschland schreiben das Brauch Ihr Aber Nicht zu Glauben." He continued: "Fredrieke hatt es nicht anders gegangen wie Es meine Frau u[nd] Christine gegangen hatt Nehmlich die Erste Zeit, Etwas Heimwehe das hat sich schon gegeben." The person who had written "die Dummheiten" was probably Frederike herself. Wilhelm's impatience with what he perceived as weakness in others comes through here as elsewhere in his letters. Considerations for the feelings of family members seem not to have always weighed heavily with him.

Christine and Frederike wrote about the latter's initial homesickness in quite a different fashion. Frederike was the last sister to come to Iowa and the oldest at emigration among the three, and she seems to have been particularly conflicted about going to America and leaving her parents. Wilhelm Herbold reassured Frederike and her parents in the years before she left Germany that her life would be better in America and that he and Wilhelmine would help her adjust (letters of 29 February 1896, 2 August 1896, 28 January 1900). Once Frederike resided in Iowa, Christine and Wilhelmine both assured their parents that she was fine, as noted above, and Frederike herself tried to represent matters in the best possible light most of the time. But of the three sisters, Frederike wrote most frequently and hid her feelings the least. Especially in the letters she wrote in the first year and a half after emigrating, her strong bond to her mother is evident. Her age at emigration (she was twenty-seven) may also have contributed to a higher degree of difficulty in adjusting to America than had been the case with her sisters. She asked her brothers and sister-in-law to write her more often since her parents found writing difficult. She reminded them in every letter of their obligation to take care of their parents, and asked her mother not to weep for her. She became especially upset when they did not hire a girl to help her mother (probably to do the work that Frederike would have done, had she stayed in Germany). On this occasion, she wrote that she had "cried herself sick" about this and accused them of neglect. She concluded by addressing her sister-in-law and then her brothers with these reproachful words: "du hast wol so viel nicht mehr für mich übrig und so auch du lieber Bruder Ludwig und lieber Christian es tuht mir sehr leid das ihr mich so gantz vergessen hab da eir [wir] toch so lange Jahr zusammen gearbeitet haben oder seid ihr fro[h] das ich ford bin" (undated letter [probably January 1901]). Shortly after her wedding in October 1901, she admitted: "... an dem Tage wo wir Hochzeit feierte da war es mir so schwer um Herz euch meine liebe nicht in der Mite zu sehen" (undated letter [end of 1891 or early 1892]). Such emotional self-revelations are rare

in the correspondence, however, and otherwise appear only in responses to news of the death of the sisters' father and older sister in 1902 and of the latter's daughter in 1906. The Neumeier sisters were anxious to represent themselves as content with their lives, primarily, it seems, in order to assuage any worries their relatives (and especially their mother) might have had about them.

Excerpts from a letter written by Malchen Rückels to her husband's family illustrates much the same sort of desire to reassure the relatives of the immigrants' well being, while also sharing with them the difficulties they had had to overcome without the support of their family's physical presence. Malchen began her letter by commiserating with her mother-in-law, who had been having eye problems, and then wrote:

Es vergeht fast keine Stunde wo ich nicht an Dir denke und manches erinne, daß Du stets für mich und meine kleine Auguste sorgtest, doch trotzdem das liebe Kind so früh hab entbehren müssen, welches mir jetzt noch manchmal Tränen auspreßt. Aber auf dessen Platz hab ich jetzt ein tüchtiger Bub, der den 10. dieses Monats 1 Jahr alt wird, er heißt Gustav und fängt nun allein an zu laufen. Er ist stets gesund gewesen, und hoffe, Gott der Allmächtige wird auch ferner seinen Segen dazu geben. Mich freut sehr, liebe Schwiegerin, daß Du von einem tüchtigen Knaben glücklich entbunden. Küße Ihn in meinem Namen, und lasse Ihn gedeihen zu der Eltern Freude. Ja, liebe Mina, Ich wollt Ihr wärt mal alle hier bei uns. Vater u. Mutter, Schwestern und Brüder, daß Ihr mal sehet wo wir geblieben sind und wie es Euch hier gefiele. Aber, aber, es kann nicht gehen. Wir werden Vater und Mutter wohl nicht anders sehen als im Traume, doch wir wollen es dem Allerhöchsten überlassen, und Ich sage Euch liebe Eltern, schlaft nur ruhig und seid nicht besorgt um uns, denn wir leben hier gut und haben von allem genug. (4 February 1861)

After wishing the family good health and happiness in the new year, Malchen continued by saying that her family and Regina's "leben auch in Frieden miteinander" and see each other "fast jeden Tag, oder jede Woche." She went on to report on her relatives in Germany and then described how her own family was making money by selling corn, pigs, and wood from their farm. She also mentioned that she, unlike Regina, had not yet been able to make any money with butter or eggs, but that she did intend to sell 100 pounds of lard and had made a featherbed from her 30 geese. After listing all the livestock that the family owned, she concluded:

Jetzt habe ich alles bemerkt was wir haben, und Schuld haben wir auch nicht viel. Darum liebe Eltern seid unbesort, wir kommen schon durch. Wenn wir nur gesund sind und arbeiten können, dann legen wir uns gewiß nicht auf die faule Haut. Regina das gute Kind schafft auch so hart [wie] sie es gelernt hat. Sie verkauft viel Butter und Eier. Ich denk sie hat auch alles von Ihrer Seite geschrieben, Ja liebe Eltern glaubt nicht, wie mein Vatter, wir wohnten

in der Wildnis, nein, hier ist fast alles Land bewohnt, sodaß ein Farmer an den anderen grenzt. Nicht weit von hier ist Schul u. Kirch, aber alles englisch, wo ich nichts [da]von verstehe wenn der Pfaf thut predigen, darum gehe ich nicht hin.

This letter by Malchen Rückels is dated a day later than one from Regina Kessel. The two letters probably were sent together to the Rückelses in Germany. The closeness of the two women and their families is clear, and both express the same wish to convince those left behind that all was well and that Old World bonds continued strong in America.

In her New Year's letter a year later, Malchen reassured the family that they had not yet seen any of the disturbances due to the pre-Civil War conflicts across the river from them in Missouri. "Wir sind noch glücklich beisammen, und haben noch satt zu essen, und noch von allem zuviel, denn man kann kein bischen verkaufen..." (27 January 1862). But she also took care not to appear unduly confident of their good fortune: "Ja liebe Mina, du hast recht, man kann nichts entgehen, man mag auch hinziehen wo man will, was einem auferlegt ist findet einen doch, man mag sein in Ost oder West." This sort of pious comment is common in immigrants' letters. But Malchen was also answering concern expressed in her in-laws' earlier letter, and so it was proper for her to be modest in her response. She was aware that a too-self-assured tone might not sit well with the Old World family.

The Neumeier sisters also remained anxious to maintain good relationships with their family in Herbsen. Only rarely does a negative note enter the correspondence, as in Frederike's early letters from America when she scolded her siblings about not taking proper care of their mother. Similarly, on 13 July 1905, Christina chided Ludwig, the older of her two brothers, for not having written a few lines for their mother in answer to her last two letters. Christine also slipped in a rebuke to Ludwig's wife Elise in her letter of 20 November 1899, saying that an Iowa neighbor from Herbsen would soon visit the home village and that he could confirm that she and her husband "darben nicht," as her sister-in-law had evidently once indicated in a letter. Christine also adopted a sharp tone when asking for her inheritance after her mother's death, writing that she should have had it already and that she had worked hard at home before emigrating. She even went so far as to include a picture of her Iowa house and to say that her brothers would probably be amazed to see it (22 January 1911). Her motivations in doing the latter were perhaps two-fold: to show that her impatience did not stem from financial need and to assert her economic status and equality in the face of what her brothers might expect their sister, a woman, after all, to have attained. But she then added a postscript: "schreibt bald wider, seih mir nicht böße, den[n] es ist nicht mehr wie mein recht um was ich schreibe." Christine evidently did not receive payment from her brother for three more years (1 January 1914), but continued to write him and his family regular, friendly letters in the interim. Generally the sisters presented themselves in a conciliatory manner and did not boast about their possessions, perhaps so as to maintain good relationships with their family in the homeland. An example is the appeal Frederike made to her brothers to write her: "... da wir doch so

lange zuschamen gewesen sind und nun so weit von einander getrennt sind werdet ihr doch wohl so einmahl schreiben und wir verbleiben uns getreue Geschwister" (25 April 1900).

The Neumeier sisters also represented themselves as part of a harmonious extended family in America, as did the Rückels and Kessel families in Illinois. Christine and Frederike Neumeier reported visits they exchanged and news of all three sisters' families. They seemed concerned to communicate that they were still bound by family ties of affection and that they continued to value this, even if they (particularly Frederike) lived some distance apart and only saw each other occasionally at church or on holidays. Only once does a hint of some envy among the sisters come through. Christine Rock wrote of the Herbolds' fine new house as having cost a lot, but, she added, "sie habens" (23 July 1899).

The sisters extended their effort at family harmony on both sides of the ocean to the men they married. Soon after arriving in Iowa, Frederike told her family that Wilhelm Herbold and Fritz Rock treated her like brothers (1 August 1900). Later she praised Fritz for his care of Christine in her illnesses (3 July 1909). In her letter of 9 December 1901 Frederike also made an effort to smooth over Wilhelm's abrasive comments in a letter (not extant) that he sent her family after returning from his visit to Herbsen in the spring of 1901. Wilhelmine's husband seems to have indicated that the gifts the sisters' parents sent back with him to America were not all they might have been. To judge from such references in the correspondence and from the general tone of his letters, Wilhelm must have posed challenges on occasion to the sisters' efforts to preserve family harmony. Before Frederike's future husband Heinrich Hinkhaus visited Herbsen in 1898, Wilhelm alerted his in-laws to Heinrich's visit, characterizing him as "Ziemlich Blöde" and hard to understand because of his Low German dialect (20 December 1897). It is unlikely that Wilhelm changed his opinion of Heinrich after the latter married Frederike and, to judge by his blunt style, it is equally unlikely that he hid his disdain very well.

Although Wilhelm was an energetic and personable correspondent who was eager to represent his own views and experiences, his letters do not say much about those of his wife. They do, however, offer insights into how male immigrants used letters to present their experiences in America. Probably the most successful of the three sisters' husbands in economic terms, Wilhelm Herbold accumulated 612 acres of land by 1904. In that year, he alone among the Neumeier sisters' husbands paid for an entry in the Woodbury County history, a compilation of pieces on prominent residents intended to showcase their accomplishments. Seemingly ever ready to turn a profit, in 1920 he subdivided part of his land adjoining Piersen for town lots. He also was one of the founding officers (in 1887) of the Lutheran country church all three families attended. In contrast to his sisters-in-law, Wilhelm included a great deal of information about farming conditions in his letters, and in doing so he usually placed himself and his accomplishments in a positive light. He could turn even the summer drought of 1894, which resulted in the loss of most of his crops, into an opportunity to boast about the wisdom of his having lived frugally and to mention that he had thirteen horses, 52 head of cattle, and 84 pigs to worry about in the dry spell (29 September

1894). Wilhelm's letters contain concrete and general information about himself and his family, but never include anything of a truly personal nature. He referred to his wife's subjective life only when he wrote that she did not want to return to Herbsen (2 April 1893), that she was too afraid of the ocean trip to go back for a visit (18 April 1898), and that she had been homesick for a while at first (14 June 1906 [1900?]).¹⁰

Unlike his sisters-in-law, Wilhelm Herbold was not always sensitive to the reception that his letters might have. Ten years after emigrating, he wrote a friend (perhaps his wife's brother-in-law) that he would only be interested in buying the ancestral Herbold farm in Hesse if it had at least 200 acres, since he already owned 320 acres in Iowa and so much livestock and machinery that the friend would not believe him if he itemized it all (2 April 1893). Not content with one such comment, he went on to say that he missed the congeniality of the village pub, but: "Dagegen führen wir hier eine Küche Täglich die Du dich Höchstens die Feiertage Erlauben darfst. Den[n] Schwiegerin Christine hat schon oft zu Uns Gesagt wen[n] Die Bauern in Herbsen so eine Küche führen wolten das könnten Sie nicht Lange Aushalten." In the same letter Wilhelm went on to explain his material success in a way that smacks of self-importance, but that probably also accurately states the reasons for this success both in his own case and that of other immigrants who could boast of similar achievements. He wrote: "ich habe mich Ungewöhnlich schnell Enpo[r]geschwungen was nicht jeden Glückt. Das habe ich meine Überlegenheit [zu danken] auch Etwas Verstand und Riskant war dabei." Such statements are claims to communal status that Wilhelm's old neighbors could not ascertain for themselves at a distance of several thousand miles. When we remember that immigrant letters were passed around and their contents became common knowledge in the interrelated Old World community, we can view Wilhelm's correspondence as a forum for the kind of self-representation that he would have had in the village pub, had he not emigrated.

Even though Wilhelm knew that his letters would be circulated, he sometimes expressed his impatience with and criticism of other immigrants from Herbsen who had not experienced some success as he had in America, or of Herbsenites who did not have the courage to emigrate. In his letter of 3 February 1898, he wrote of an acquaintance, Carl Pusohhoff, who had also emigrated fifteen years earlier, but who failed to gain the same material status as Wilhelm. He ascribed that to Pusohhoff's lack of formal education, which made him an easy prey to deception, and said that although he had not seen Pusohhoff for fifteen years, the latter had not gotten much smarter. In this and other letters before 1900, Wilhelm urged Frederike and the younger Neumeier brother Christian to come to America and chided them for their lack of initiative and belief in the opportunities in his adopted land (for example, on 2 August 1896 and 28 January 1900). He was not totally disinterested in these urgings, however, as he was always looking for hard-working German immigrants as hired hands. In his letter of 28 January 1900, for instance, he asked his in-laws to give Christ[ian] Herbold, a relative in another village, a dollar to buy Christmas gifts for the latter's children. He added: "ich denke bei Ihn[en] geht Es Wohl ziemlich Knapp. Wen[n] Er blos seine Junges herschicken dät damir Sie nicht auch so Ein Karges Leben zufüren Brauchtet

wie Er[.] Aber der Ungläubige Tohmas Thut Es nicht[.] ich würde Ihnen Gerne das Reisegeld schicken."

As the last citation indicates, Wilhelm was sensitive to suspicions that his reports on conditions in America and on his own situation lacked accuracy. In the same letter of early 1900, written a few weeks before Frederike emigrated, he warned her that she, too, would not be believed when she came to America and then told others how good conditions were there. Even his in-laws, whom he generally treated with forbearance in his letters, had to be "set straight" on occasion:

Lieber Schwiegervater Franz sagte Ihr hättet gesagt das ich dort auch mein Gutes Auskommen gehabt hätte wen[n] ich währ dort geblieben. Da würdet Ihr Bald Anders denken wen[n] Ihr mal Eine Stunde hier währt, ich bin kein Pralhans, aber ich sage Euch das ich keinen Schlag Arbeit mehr thun brauchget wen[n] ich nicht Will, so weit hätte ich Es doch wohl schwerlich in Deutschland gebracht (18 April 1898)

Wilhelm could not resist challenges to his self-image, perhaps especially from his wife's family. In part, this was probably due to the common desire of sons-in-law to prove their worth. I would maintain, however, that it was also natural for a man of his background to use the forum his letters afforded him to assert his merit, since the village pub was not available to him. Traditional gender roles encouraged him to represent himself as a man able to gain land and wealth and to provide well for his family. And in addition, Wilhelm may have seen himself as an example of the prototypical American self-made man. The language used in the 1904 Woodbury County history indicates this image when it speaks of Wilhelm's "extensive and valuable landed interests" and his "enterprising and progressive spirit." As an example of how a hard-working, intelligent, and entrepreneurial man could get ahead in America, he could feel added justification for proclaiming his personal and material accomplishments clearly and emphatically.¹¹

Not all letters by male immigrants offer such clearly contrasting evidence of gender-related differences in self-representation. Several of Gottfried Rückels's letters are an interesting mix of personal and general news, with concern for the views of the recipients mingled in with assertions of self-worth. On 7 March 1875, a year after the death of his only son in a farming accident, Gottfried wrote:

Lieber Schwager, wie Schwester, wie Kinder.

Euren langen wie lieben Brief haben wir am 6. März erhalten, und uns, das heißt, meine Familie alle in einem Kreis gesetzt und denselben gelesen, denn wir waren alle neugierig wie es Euch Lieben dort ginge. Ja Ihr Lieben es hat uns Tränen des Mitleids ausgepresst als die Zeilen uns Euer Wohl und Wehe verkündeten, doch Gott sei Dank, daß die schwere Zeit an Dir, liebe Schwester vorüber ist, Deine Kinderlast hast Du getragen, und jetzt werden sie auch an dessen Statt Dir wieder so viel mehr Freude und Segen bringen, denn gute erzogene Kinder ist eine Freude und Trost der Eltern. Denn wenn man erst

selbst Kinder erziehen muß, lernt man erst kennen, was für Mühe und Sorgen wir unseren Eltern gemacht haben. Ja liebe Schwester, ein paar so starke Söhne wie Du jetzt hast, muß ja eine Zierde im Hause sein, und ein Trost der Eltern, den die Feder nicht beschreiben kann. Ja liebe Schwester, ich würde der glücklichste Mann der Erde sein, wenn ich meinen lieben Sohn an meiner Seite behalten hätte, der die Stütze meines Alters gewesen wäre, aber der Mensch denkt und Gott lenkt, alles ist eitel auf dieser Welt.

Es war den Tag wo das Unglück passierte als wenn ich es geahnt hätte. Ich wollte das Kind immer an meiner Seite haben, aber es war, als wenn mich immer etwas davon abgehalten hätte, immer wollte ich ihn rufen, aber habe es doch nicht getan, bis seine Stunde zum Unglück geschlagen hatte. Da war es zu spät, da sah ich, wo ich gefehlt hatte. Ja liebe Schwester, den 15. April 2 Uhr nachmittags war die Zeit, wo das Pferd ihn in den Ketten auf dem Hofe herum schlepte, bis sein Gehirn ganz und gar zerschmettert war, 12 Stunden nachdem gab er seinen Geist auf. Ach liebe Schwester Du kannst es nicht glauben, wie mein Herz getroffen ist von diesem Schlage. Tagtäglich entrollen Tränen meinen Augen, wenn ich an meinen lieben Sohn denke.

Gottfried went on to report the birth of a second son nine months before, gave his five daughters' ages and information about their schooling, and then, evidently in response to his sister's complaints about the difficulties of making a living in town, he asserted: ". . . auch das liebe Schwester ist mal gewiß, der Landmann ist unabhängig von jedem anderen Geschäft, ein Landmann der seine Sache zu lenken und zu regieren weiß und etwas weiter kann gucken wie ihm die Nase steht und dabei fleißig ist, das ist gar keine Hexerei gut ab zu werden, denn der Landmann ist immer der erste, der satt ist und dann verkauft, was übrig ist, dann nimmt es nicht mit Gewalt so viel Geld um das nötigste zu kaufen." Perhaps aware that this might be perceived as boastfulness, Gottfried continued with words intended to reconcile his sister to her harsher fate: "Doch liebe Schwester, wir können ja doch nicht alle Landleute sein, Stadtleute müssen auch sein, darum sei zufrieden und trage Deine Leiden mit Geduld, alles dauert seine Zeit, später wirds schöner, sagt Fritz Kessel. Auch wir alle liebe Schwester haben auf Dornenwegen gewandelt, wie wir amerikanischen Boden betreten hatten. Keine Sprache, keine Sitte, keine Freunde."

The content and tone of the letter thus far seems not much different from that of letters written by Gottfried's wife Malchen or sister Regina Kessel. Although Gottfried affirmed indirectly in the passage cited above that he was doing very well on his Illinois farm, he also softened that message by reminding his sister that hard times and difficult adjustments had accompanied the material success he had attained. In the remaining half of the same letter, however, his tone became less personal and attentive to his recipients' point of view. He expressed reluctance to finance the passage to America for two of his sisters' children and also refused to come fetch them, since he could not leave the farm for long. He chided her for not following his advice and using some of her inheritance money a few years earlier to send the children to him: "Die Kinder hätten das lange wieder zurückverdient, und auch sich selbst gekleidet, und Dir das

dreifache zugeschickt, als was sie jetzt in der Zeit in Deutschland verdient haben." He reminded her that hard work was necessary for success in America, that weather like the previous cold winter could prevent even the best-laid plans from coming to fruition. Then he went on to proclaim the wisdom of his and others' decision to emigrate:

Doch liebe Schwester ich habe von allem genug, alles im Überfluß. Die Schwäger Schnutenhaus in Kalifornien machen glänzende Geschäfte, werden alle reich, wie wir von dort gehört haben, auch freuen sich der besten Gesundheit. Ob Du es weißt weiß ich nicht, vor zwei Jahren haben wir ein neues Haus gebaut, kostet zweitausend Dollar, dies hatten wir nötig, das alte wurde uns zu klein und die Familie immer größer.

At the end of his letter, perhaps feeling badly about his own good fortune in the light of his sister's difficulties, Gottfried promised to send her one hundred dollars in thanks for the good care she had given their parents. He then closed with the conciliatory phrase "Nichts für ungut."

But in the message Gottfried added after receiving the hundred dollar bank draft from St. Louis (4 April 1875), he again criticized his sister for not sending her children to him earlier and for mistrusting his assessment of opportunities for hard-working people in America. He gave proof of those opportunities from his own progress: "Ich habe diesen Frühjahr wieder 35 Morgen neues Land unter den Pflug gebracht, aber alle das tun andere Leute, die für mich arbeiten. Arbeiter im Überfluß. Auch habe ich wieder ein 160-Morgen-Landgut im Prozeß, ob ich es gewinne weiß ich nicht." Sympathetic though Gottfried was to his sister's straitened circumstances, he also could not resist representing himself as the one who "saw beyond his nose," was willing to work very hard to get ahead, and now had the material possessions to prove his wisdom and acumen.

In his next extant letter (9 March 1877), Gottfried returned to many of the same topics and themes as on 7 March and 4 April 1875. He began with thanking his sister for her letter and with news of his ten-year-old daughter Sophia's poor health and Malchen's having given birth to their tenth child. He went on to report on the bad floods along the Mississippi that cut his crops to a third or fourth of their usual yields and resulted in the loss of the majority of his pigs. But he also tempered this bad news with more positive information:

Dies hält mich ein Jahr vom Geldauflegen zurück, denn es nimmt sehr viel Geld, um meine Farms zu bestreiten, da ist Steuern 200 Dollar, 400 für meine Arbeiter, die große Haushaltung, Schmied, Wagenmacher, Sattler, Schuhmacher, Doktor, Apotheker u.s.w. Ich habe vor acht Tagen 80 Acker oder Morgen Land gekauft zu 20 Dollar per Acker, alles urbar, gut für Mais. Das Land hier in der Gegend wo ich wohne, ist ausgezeichnet gut. Es bringt immer sozusagen doppelte Ernten, daß heißt, wenn man seine Arbeit gut und in der Zeit tut, als wenn man auf schlechtem Boden wohnte, was auch schon der Fall ist, in nicht weiter als zwei Stunden von uns entfernt, kommen

Leute hierher um Ihren Mais zu pflanzen, weil ihr eigener Boden zu schlecht ist, und der Weizen bloß von 20 bis 30 Büschel per Acker, ich habe mal 11 Acker Kleelandweizen gehabt, der hat 35 Büschel vom Acker gebracht, das war eine Ausnahme. Wir haben hier genug deutsche Farmers, gute, fleißige Leute, fangen sozusagen mit nichts an, werden aber alle gut ab. Auch haben wir hier eine deutsche Kirche. Nun, liebe Schwester, prahlen will ich nicht, nur der Wahrheit gemäß, und ich wette einen Tausenddollar, wer von dort hierher kommt und es nicht findet wie es meine Briefe austragen. Es hat wohl in aller Welt seine Plage, das weiß ich auch recht gut, auch ich liebe Schwester habe meine Plage, mehr wie recht ist, aber ich sehe nichts anderes nur, als daß Plagen und Sorgen in diesem Jammertal zu Hause sind, und wer da sein ehrliches Leben will machen, der muß sich schon etwas gefallen lassen, denn das Sprichwort sagt: "Fleißig sein bringt vieles ein, laß die Faulen träumen", und ein anderes sagt: "Früh zu Bett und früh wieder auf, macht gesund und reich im Kauf". Auch liebe Schwester, der Verstand kommt mit den Jahren, Du kennst mich noch von Vollmers her, wie früh ich des Morgens an Hand war, mich brauchte keiner zu rufen. So bin ich heute noch, liebe Schwester, ein Oekonom mit Fleiß und Energie und mein ehrlicher ausdauernder Fleiß und Sparsamkeit hat mir die rauhe Bahn für künftige Jahre gebahnt . . .

Gottfried, like Wilhelm Herbold, clearly expressed confidence in his abilities to get ahead either in the Old World or the New. In this same letter, he asserted that, had he stayed at Vollmers, he might well have ended up "ein Kavalier. . . stolz zu Roß über meine Güter reiten." (Perhaps by marrying the heiress to the Vollmer farmstead?) As it is, however, he had done very well, although his success had also brought challenges: "Ja, liebe Schwester, ich muß es mit Wahrheit gestehen, meine Farmen dehnen sich immer weiter aus, die Last auf meinen Schultern wird immer größer, aber nur Geduld und Mut bringt alles auf den rechten Platz, so lange wie ich lebe, geht alles wie am Schnur gezogen, jeder in meiner Umgebung weiß, daß er meinen Worten und Willen Folge leisten muß." Gottfried made it clear to his readers that he was master of a large and complex farming enterprise.

Gottfried concluded his letter of 9 March 1877 in this fashion:

Du schreibst, Du bist krank gewesen durch Erkältung und Gartenarbeit, ist es denn nicht anders möglich, Dein Leben zu machen als wie ein Esel zu arbeiten, was machen denn deine andere Umgebung und wo sorgen die für? Habt Ihr Euch nie einen Taler erspart in den ganzen 20 Jahren, daß ich Deutschland verlassen habe, und Ihr ruhig einer unverhofften Zeit könnt entgegensehen, sehr traurig wenn das der Fall ist. . .

Perhaps feeling that he had gone too far in his criticism, he continued: ". . . doch liebe Schwester, ich meine es nicht böß mit Dir, ich würde Dir von St. Louis aus 50 Dollar geschickt haben, aber wie gesagt, die schlechte Ernte hat auch meine Taschen

leer gelassen, und denn das Land gekauft und 2 Maultiere gekauft. Kosten auch 260 Dollar, jetzt noch neues Pferdegeschirr u.s.w., mit alle dem geht das Geld leicht durch die Hände." Gottfried seems to have been oblivious to the irony of protesting his poverty and proclaiming his new purchases of land and livestock in the same sentence. The information about the constraints on his finances is intended first of all to notify his sister of the temporary complexities of his otherwise solid financial situation, and only secondarily to gain her understanding for his refusal to send her aid. In this letter, as elsewhere, Gottfried Rückels wanted to communicate the image of a strong, capable, and successful man, one who knew how to get ahead and who did not hesitate to criticize others less able than he.

The letters Gottfried Rückels wrote to his homeland illustrate that women's and men's correspondence could have many qualities in common. Gottfried could be thoughtful and considerate of the recipients' views and feelings, much like the women in his and other immigrant families. His sister Regina Kessel, like German-speaking rural farmers of both sexes, gave detailed factual information on farming conditions and named all of her family's possessions in a style reminiscent of male writers. But Gottfried Rückels also asserted himself as a spokesperson for the benefits of emigration and explicitly represented himself as a successful farmer, particularly in comparison to others, something his sister took some pains not to do. He may not have been as unabashedly self-aggrandizing in his self-representation as Wilhelm Herbold, but Gottfried Rückels also showed the same need to assert his worth in the public forum of the letter.

The pointed tone and content of Wilhelm Herbold's letters that contribute to his self-representation as successful entrepreneurial farmer were due in part to his particular personality. But they are also generally representative of the letters by rural nineteenth century male German-speaking immigrants that I have read, only in a somewhat sharper key. These men, if they were successful, found it important to tell others of that success in a manner that may seem overbearing to us today. This style also reveals something about the dynamics of Old World village life and men's public roles in it. Such self-assertion was no doubt important in order to maintain or gain status. It was perhaps even more necessary on the part of those who had broken out of the old social order and now lived too distant from the home village to show concrete proof of their success in the ordinary course of things.

Regina Kessel, Malchen Rückels, and the Neumeier sisters, on the other hand, wrote in a fashion typical of female immigrants. Their self-representation was primarily shaped by the desire to maintain positive contact with their family in Germany. They were sensitive to the ways in which they would be "read" by the recipients of their letters. Rural women had been bound by house and yard in Germany, and their concerns were with keeping harmony in that restricted domestic, familial sphere. The men of these households had been the public figures, the mediators to the outside world.

Men and women immigrants retained these traditional roles and self-images in America and expressed those patterns in the letters they wrote home.

Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Notes

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, 6-9 January 2000, and at the Rural Women's Studies Association Meeting, 22-25 June 2000, St. Paul, Minnesota.

² Wolfgang Helbich, "The Letters They Sent Home: The Subjective Perspective of German Immigrants in the Nineteenth Century," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 22 (1987): 11.

³ Joan Jensen, *With These Hands: Women Working on the Land* (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1981), xviii; Heidi Rosenbaum, *Formen der Familie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 80-81; Joan W. Scott and Louise A. Tilly, "Women's Work and the Family in Nineteenth Century Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17 (1975): 45. Sonya Salamon, citing a U.S. Industrial Commission Report on Immigration (no. 15 [Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1901]: 530), noted the difference between farmers of German ancestry and "Yankee" farmers in regard to the labor of women and children in the farm enterprise at the turn of the last century: *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming, and Community in the Midwest* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 20-21.

⁴ Wolfgang Helbich, Walter D. Kamphoefner, and Ulrika Sommer, *Briefe aus Amerika: Auswanderer schreiben aus der Neuen Welt 1830-1930* (Munich: Beck, 1988), 38. A fuller discussion of sources on German-speaking immigrants may be found in Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), Appendix A, 201-8.

⁵ Eda Sagarra, *A Social History of Germany, 1648-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), 410-11. One of the most informative studies on this topic is that by David Sabeau, *Property, Production, and Family in Neckarhausen, 1700-1870*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 88-146. Rosenbaum, *Formen der Familie*, 79-86; Reinhard Sieder, *Sozialgeschichte der Familie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 32-38.

⁶ Utz Jeggle, "The Rules of the Village: On the Cultural History of the Peasant World in the Last 150 Years," in *The German Peasantry*, ed. Richard J. Evans and W. R. Lee (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 279; Robert Lee, "Family and 'Modernization': The Peasant Family and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Bavaria," in *The German Family*, ed. Richard J. Evans and W. R. Lee (London: Croom Helm, 1981; Totowa, NJ: Barnes, 1981), 95; Sieder, *Sozialgeschichte der Familie*, 36; Rosenbaum, 84-5. Scott and Tilly note the disadvantages in public life for peasant women in nineteenth century England, France, and Italy ("Women's Work and the Family," 43).

⁷ Many studies focus on matters that illustrate the similarities between Anglo-American and German-speaking immigrant populations in nineteenth century rural America. John Mack Faragher explored the gender roles and separate worlds of nineteenth century Midwest men and women in his study of *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 88-128. Salamon's *Prairie Patrimony* finds many similarities between patterns of farm life as led by the descendants of German immigrants and of Anglo-American settlers in twentieth-century central Illinois (40-42, 54-55, 120-21, et passim). Jane Adams noted the same for southern Illinois in her study *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890-1990* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 84-100. On women's work on the agricultural frontier and in agriculture in general, see the following: John Mack Faragher's chapter "She Drained Herself to Give Them Life" in *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 110-18; Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988); Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 17-39. On the effect of changes in agricultural economy and production on family relationships and gender-assigned labor in

farm families, see Dorothy Schwieder, "Labor and Economic Roles of Iowa Farm Wives, 1840-80," in *Farmers, Bureaucrats and Middlemen*, ed. Trudy Huskamp Peterson (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1980): 152-68; and Jensen, *With These Hands*, 36-37, 46-48, 81-85. The patterns of self-representation I explore in this study are also not unique to German-speaking immigrants. Women's focus on domestic issues and on personal relationships and men's on asserting a positive self-image and status in the community were typical of other nineteenth-century individuals and groups. See John Mack Faragher's comments on the overland dairies he studied (*Women and Men on the Oregon Trail*, 128-33). Other related studies include: Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth Century America* (Coral Gables: University of Florida Press, 1972); Wolfgang Helbich and Ulrike Sommer, "Immigrant Letters as Sources," in *The Press of Labor Migrants in Europe and North America, 1880-1930*, ed. Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder (Bremen: University of Bremen, 1985): 39-58. See Pickle on the persistence of traditional gender roles and patterns (*Contented among Strangers*, 89-90, 105-11, 179-80, et al.). Salamon also notes this among the descendants of German immigrants in late-twentieth century Illinois. See, for example, "Yeoman Husband and Wife as a Management Team," *Prairie Patrimony*, 125-31.

⁸ Martha Kronenberg Polley. *Rock Family Tree* (Typescript, Iowa State Historical Department, Museum and Archives, Des Moines, IA), 34-35. Alice M. Flanders, comp., *Woodbury County, Iowa, Marriages*, vol. 1, 1881-99 (Sioux City, Iowa, n. d.), 23, 94. Except for these sources, the letters in the *Bochumer Auswandererbrief-Sammlung* are the primary source for the information on the Neumeier-Herbold-Rock-Hinkhaus and Kessel-Rückels family interconnections. Census documents in Illinois and Iowa provided no additional information.

⁹ I have inserted punctuation, words, letters, or other clarifications in brackets where I felt they were needed to assist understanding but otherwise have not altered the misspellings and grammar errors of the original texts.

¹⁰ Constant R. Marks, ed., *Past and Present of Sioux City and Woodbury County, Iowa* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1904), 511-12; Woodbury County Genealogical Society, comp., *The History of Woodbury County, Iowa* (Dallas, TX: National ShareGraphics [1984]), 90 and 149.

¹¹ Marks, *Past and Present*, 511-12.

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