

Letters from Russia

Huck, 28 July

My dear valued friend Georg Niederhaus in Lincoln, Nebraska:

Please forgive me for taking so long to answer your letter of 13 February 1923. I have been recovering for a very long time (*ed. note: apparently from an illness*). I want to first tell you all about what's going on at your birth place. For some days I have brought the packages of clothing from Grimm by myself and gave them over to the widow Louise (*last name obscured, possibly "Nolte"*), Tell Rebecca that with her valued gift she has made those poor families very happy. And you, my very dear old friend Georg Niederhaus, have brought me and likewise my wife, such joy through the precious gifts that you have sent to me. We had no thought that we would be remembered by you, your son Georg and your daughter-in-law Eva Katharina. I have many friends and acquaintances in America, yes, even many of my former students, but not a one of them has pleased me as much as your dear valued friends and acquaintances in Lincoln, Nebraska who have considered me for such a valuable gift. To all of the former, yourself, and to all concerned who have sent me this valued gift and loving contributions, my wife and I send our heartfelt regards and thanks and a "God reward you!"

We know that you and your love are so very far away from us, (*word obscured*) whose love for us, the good Lord, the Master of everything good, we will call on, and have already done so, that you and all of yours full of love, be blessed, and you be richly rewarded in the here and now and then there in Heaven for what you have done for us. The feelings in our hearts are not capable of being written down because they are unspeakable (*ed. note: because there are no words to describe them*) but we are convinced that our faltering words of thanks have been accepted and you yourself satisfied for having so kindly taken on our troubles.

You, dear cousin Georg Niederhaus, who are the leader of this beautiful and praiseworthy kindness, in the same way, to your loving sons and your wife, we say yet an especial thanks because you have not forgotten us. You shall not remain unrewarded.

I am sad to say that both pairs of shoes are too small for me. However, I can work through the others. The stolen 14 pairs of shoes were replaced by your son Johannes.

There were many pieces of clothing, that you, dear benefactor, that you had sent to us which clothed many of the half naked but still by no means has the need been halted. It is always the same persistent "What is that among so many?" The famine is widespread overall but the need for clothing is for the aged. Here everything is so expensive that it is fast becoming impossible for one to be able to afford clothing. When a shirt of poor quality Sarpinka (*ed. note: find cloth*) comes to 200 million Rubles, one can easily imagine how impossible it is for a poor man to clothe his family.

What will still come to us Germans on the Wolga River, and how it shall come, lies dark before our eyes. The hand of the Lord lays heavily upon us and it will not become better. We are beginning to get desperate.

Also the great need and travails have not kept our people from sinning. It comes true before our very eyes what the prophet has foretold: "You strike them and they feel it not, you rebuke them and they do no mend their ways."

The inestimable help our German people from America have sent, remains pointless for most: yes, to the contrary, only more hate and disharmony are seen among them. Yes,

it is true that mistakes and injustices were made with the distribution of products and pieces of clothing due to decadence as well as also from sloppiness (*ed. note: lack of order, or disorderliness*)---When people are working there remains the possibility of error, that also cannot be ruled out. Many were blindly given too much trust, this trust was then completely misused and the damage discovered too late. At times the poorest of the poor were also guilty of being judgmental and were not content, yes even with larger accumulations from benefactors. The approaching year also brings with it again the many difficult troubles with burning materials, Fodder and especially with clothing.

Happily, the harvest here is underway, yes, even though in many places it is a bad one. By now most of the little people have paid their taxes, but there remains little left over for them except to be rescued by the next life. The American Relief Committee has early on efficiently prepared, we ourselves are not wholly left to our own devices, and many of the poor and desolate are now determined to learn for themselves what resources are available through American support.

In the future, should you or anybody under you, you dear benefactors in Lincoln, Nebraska and in all of the States of America, feel the need to aid their suffering friends in Russia, to help and feed them, he should do it with dollars. There is much hardship still to be addressed.

Our religious nature has been almost totally lain aside. Our churches and school buildings must be totally refitted, but the problem is where to find the means (*ed. note: the money to do the refitting*). Many parsonages and church administration buildings stand empty and full of mildew, a venal house that has no masters. The hedges of the churches and "God's Acre" (*ed. note: the churchyard*) are in decay and are like a wild and desolate place. And wonder of wonders! the loss of interest in religion and church is even larger among many of our Wolga Germans. A year ago, during a bad hailstorm the window panes on the southwest side of the bed house (*ed. note: a community building used for visitor's sleeping quarters*) were broken and still today there have been no new panes installed. As a substitute the window openings are walled shut with mud and stones. I could still reveal many sad pictures for your eyes, from which you could see how backward our community, once so blessed and in the full bloom of prosperity, now is, and how many are themselves in a state of confusion and disorder. If the good Lord does not soon intervene with miraculous help, after another year the funeral oration over our once so famous Wolga colonies will be: Died of hunger, gone to the grave through neglect and indifference.

In this I now bespeak again my warmest and deepest thanks to all the benefactors in Lincoln, Nebraska and in all of America and will quickly come to a conclusion. I think, for now, that I have fulfilled my obligation..

Cousin Georg, your son Johannes would happily go to you in America if only it were possible that he could make the journey there.

You can, if it pleases you, take my letter to one of your German newspapers. I ask, in addition, that it be edited and printed by them. Whatever needs to be done to make it better, the editor can take care of.

All of the poor, who through your help have had their burdens lessened would like to convey their heartfelt thanks to you.

We all keep you henceforth in fond remembrance and we will not forget. We will hold your memory in love our whole life until our joyous reunion in the beyond where there is no more parting.

Right hearty greetings from us all to you, my still remembered.

To close, right hearty greetings and kisses from me and my wife to you, your son and daughter-in-law.

your thankful school master

J. Rusch

PS--Dear cousin Joh. Georg:

Our Pastor Wacker told me that the Norkans in Lincoln, Nebraska sent 86 dollars to their mother village Norka for the refitting of their church building. Couldn't you try to obtain a like offering from the dear Huckers in Lincoln, Nebraska for this purpose in their mother village of Huck? For this gift of love they would earn the thanks of the entire village. Give it a try, perhaps you'll succeed.

Himself