

Anna Maria Schano (née Klinger), Barbara Klinger, and Franz Schano, Letters from the United States (1850–53)

Abstract

Anna Maria Klinger was born into a poor family of winegrowers in rural Württemberg. In 1849, she immigrated to New York City, where she soon met and married Franz Schano from Bavaria. The Schanos stayed in New York, found work, and adjusted to life in a big city that was foreign, yet already boasting large numbers of German-speakers. They, too, served as anchors for chain migration, with Anna Maria's sister Barbara joining them in 1851, and other family members following in partly strategized sequence. The Schanos sent back both advice and money to facilitate their siblings' trips to the New World, along with family news, photographs, and descriptions of life in New York. Relations with English-speaking white New Yorkers, African-Americans, and Jewish residents of the city feature in their correspondence as well.

Source

Anna Maria Schano, née Klinger [New York, probably mid-1850]

[...] I've saved up to now in the time we've been married some 40 dollars in cash, not counting my clothes. Dear parents and brothers and sisters, I certainly don't want to tell you what to do, do what you want, for some like it here and some don't, but the only ones who don't like it here had it good in Germany, but I also think you would like it here since you never had anything good in Germany. I'm certainly glad not to be over there, and only those who don't want to work don't like it here, since in America you have to work if you want to amount to anything, you mustn't feel ashamed, that's just how you amount to something, and so I want to tell you again to do what you want, since it can seem too trying on the journey and in America as well, and then you heap the most bitter reproaches in those who talked you into coming, since it all depends on whether you have good luck, just like in Germany. Dear parents, you wrote me that Daniel wants to come to America and doesn't have any money, that is certainly a problem. Now I want to give you my opinion, I've often thought about what could be done, I thought 1st if he could borrow the money over there, then when he has saved enough over here then he could send it back over, like a lot of people do, and secondly, I thought we would like to pay for him to come over, but right now we can't since it costs 28 dollars a person and I also want to tell you since my husband wrote to you, the money we want to send you, whether you want to use it to have one of two come over here or if you want to spend it on yourselves, you just have to let us know so we have an idea of how much you still need, and you'll have to see to it that you have some more money, too, since we can't pay it all. [...] Things in Daniel's profession are not the best, he shouldn't count on that, it would be better if he were a tailor or a shoemaker, but it doesn't matter, a lot of people don't work in their profession and learn others or other businesses, since you don't have to pay to learn a trade in America. Dear parents and brothers and sisters, if one of you comes over here and comes to stay with us we will certainly take care of you, since we are now well known, and you needn't be so afraid of America, when you come to America, just imagine you were moving to Stuttgart, that's how many Germans you can see here.

And as far as the Americans are concerned, whites and blacks, they won't harm you, since the blacks are very happy when you don't do anything to them, the only thing is the problem with the language. It's not as easy to learn as you think, even now I don't know much, and there are many people here who don't

even learn it in 6 to 8 years, but if you start off working for Americans then you can learn in one year as much as in 10 years living with Germans. Dear parents and brothers and sisters, I'd like to be with you, you will surely be pleased to get the picture of us, to see me again, and I would also be so happy to see you again. In my dreams I've often been with you and also in my old job in Germany, but when I woke up, it wasn't true, but still I am happy in any case that I am in America. [...] We would have liked to have sent a few dollars along with this letter but at the moment we don't have much money, since I can well imagine you could use it now, but things go slowly the first few years, you have to take care of yourself, since the motto in America is help yourself. [...]

Franz Schano

[New York, date missing, probably late 1850]

Dearest parents-in-law,

[...] We had a lot of things to take care of, as young beginners, especially since it will be winter soon and we don't have any potatoes or other crops to harvest, so we had to buy food and fuel and other things that go along with them, all with hard cash, and just in the same day we got your letter I lost my job and was without work for three weeks and so all of this kept us from writing. But I have given up my profession and have taken up another that should be of greater advantage to me, I'm now learning the sculpting trade, but I can't expect to earn very much the first half year, it will get better after that. [...] As for the rest, we need more information about the best and cheapest thing to do, because it's like this, we don't think it is a good idea for Daniel to come over first, since Daniel's trade isn't good for anything over here and so he has to learn a new one. Instead it would be better if the two girls came over first, because within a few days we could get more work for them than they'd want. For the girls earn a lot more than he does, and he can be sure that after the girls have been here for just one month, we can then take care of his passage. We can set it up here so that the girls come over for the price of one and a half persons, since if you're not over twelve years old you're only charged as half a person, but it doesn't matter if you are already over 13 or 14 years old, if you just say you're 10 or 11 years old, that's how I arranged the passage for my mother and three brothers and sisters. [...] Now we would appreciate it if you could find out what the price is with food and without food, but you should say it's for one and one-half persons, we can pay to have them come over for forty dollars, but without food, if it turns out that the passage is cheaper over there, then we want to send the money, so please find out how things can be arranged the cheapest and safest, since we are not overflowing with money and it's not like we don't have to watch out, and we have to sweat for every dollar we earn, and my wife (your daughter) puts up with the hardest work for your sake, so take things in hand and get to work, we're doing it all most willingly to bring you to a better life; hopefully, Daniel won't feel passed over, since we only want the best for all of you and what we've written here would work out the best.

[Anna Maria Schano continues:]

[...] In short you don't take the trouble to write, we try harder, we sit down 3 to 4 times when we write to you, you can well imagine that I am also excited when I get a letter, what the news will be, I would also be glad if father or mother would write me too, I imagine they can't write very well anymore, but that doesn't matter. [...] Also, please write me too how old Father and Mother are, I don't know any more exactly. [...] But if he [Daniel] doesn't want to wait so long, then he should take one of his girlfriends and bring her over here, if they have the money, that's also not right of him that he wants to come to America and take none of his girls along. I suggest he chose one of these two, the one he thinks he can get along with the best and who will be a good housewife, it's certainly true he can't take both, it's too bad about the other one. [...]

Franz Schano

New Jork, March 19, 1851

Dearest parents-in-law,

[...] We have complied with your wishes as far as we are able to and so we have signed up for Barbara's passage here and it's like this, she goes from Mannheim to Haver [Le Havre] and from Haver to here, she'll have to take care of her food herself. She'll go from Mannheim to Rotterdam and from there to Haver, she should go, when she gets the money and she's finished packing, with this ticket here in this letter to Mannheim to Wilhelm Deissman, and there she will get three tickets, one she has to turn in in Mannheim when she gets on the steamship, the other when she goes from Rotterdam to Haver and the third in Haver when she gets on the ship, she'll also hear about it in Mannheim and we've sent her 15 guilders [...] which she should hold on to since she still has to buy quite a few things. [...] And when she's asked at the depot if she has everything she's supposed to have, then she should say yes and she should be sure not to take anything more than what we've written, and she shouldn't be scared if they say she can't leave or whatever else they might say, then she can just say straight out I have everything I need and if she stays in Haver for three days, she'll have to get her own food, if she's there longer she must be paid two and a half francs every day / Our address is still the same.

Franz Schano

[New York, probably 1851]

[...] She doesn't need any papers except her certificate of citizenship from the mayor, since she won't be asked on the journey. And she ought to bring along a potato sack about two simmers in size and then a straw sack and a pillow and anything else like that she needs and she should set off as soon as possible. And remind her again about what my wife wrote, that she should behave herself so she doesn't arrive here in a wretched state and becomes the laughingstock of everyone here, and all we want is what's best for her, so she should take to heart these few words I write with the best intentions, as your faithful brother-in-law. Enclosed in these two pages we are sending you the city of New Jorck, one is a view of the city and some buildings, the other is a map with the streets and there where you see the small white square with No. 1 on it and the line drawn behind it, that's where we live.

The street is called Church Street and it's pronounced like *Tschotsch Stritt*, or in German *Kirch Straße*.

And Barbara mustn't forget to take along our address so that when you get to Haver you can write us a few words and the name of the ship. [...]

Franz Schano

New Jork, July 16, 1851

Dearest parents-in-law,

To relieve you of your cares and worries, we feel obliged to write you that Barbara arrived here safe and sound after a brief sea voyage of 26 days, that is she landed here Friday night, June 14th and she tried to find us on Saturday but couldn't, and in the evening we heard that she was here and then until ten thirty at night we went around to all the inns and couldn't find her, and when we asked the people who were on the ship then one of them said she went to Philadelfi with some others, someone else said she already had a job somewhere else and so we had to go home again, and we hardly slept a wink worrying about where she might be, and early Sunday morning we went back to find out where she might be, and after we had been in several inns, we heard that she was staying at an inn called Wälti, and when we got there she was already standing outside on the steps and recognized Mari right away, then we brought her and her trunk back home immediately. And what I also want to report briefly is, as Babete told us, that Daniel

should come over with his girl next spring, and be so kind as to let us know ahead of time so we can send money for Katharina so she can come over together with Daniel. Our address is still the same.

[Barbara Klinger continues:]

Dear parents and brothers and sisters, I want to let you know what kind of journey I had to New York. [...] On the 18th we boarded a sailing ship, from Havre to New York I was at sea for 26 days on the ship, there were 725 persons with the sailors and we only had a storm once. [...] But it was nothing compared to the voyage Mari had, the ship had 3 decks and one cellar completely under [below] water, the people slept in the 2 lower ones and in the two higher ones there are two kitchens, two toilets, two stalls, in one there are geese and in the other ducks and chickens and a pigsty and another stall for cows, there was one cow and in the back there is another small room, where the mates and the 3 cooks who cook for the sailors, they were blacks, one had his wife along, she was a black too, and the ship was named Wilhelm Tell, it is one of the biggest ships that go between Havre and New York and even when the wind was strong it can't throw it around like the little one, it also rolls more, such a big ship on the ocean is like a nutshell swimming in the lake at Korb. [...] And we want to send you these 12 guilders by the fall, when I've also earned something, now you'll have to be patient since they've spent so much money on me already, they bought me a dress, a big scarf for 2 dollars and a hat and a pair of shoes, that cost them a lot, because I can't wear my clothes on Sundays, we've altered them all, narrow sleeves and long-bodied, I wear them workdays, here you don't go out of the house without a hat or a *Barnet* [bonnet] you don't go out on the *Striet* with your head bare, they all look at you and you'd be laughed at. If I were to run into you, none of you would recognize me with my hat on. By this winter I want to have my picture taken so you can see me again. [...]

[Anna Maria Schano continues:]

Dear parents and brothers and sisters, please don't be cross that we didn't write for so long, we just wanted to wait awhile so we could also write something about Barbara. Up to now she's been living with us, now she has a job in service working for an English master, they are bakers and they live in the same house as we do, she'll soon learn English there, she can already say *jess*, that means *Ja* in German, and she can also say *stritt*, that means *strase* in German.

[...]

Franz Schano

New York, June 18th, 1852

Dearest parents-in-law, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law,

[...]

What we read in both letters, that you have to struggle with such hard and dire times, this causes us the deepest pain, and we are so sorry that we weren't able to send you something a long time ago, but it was not possible to do so, since moving cost us about fifty dollars, but now we want to help out with ten dollars, only we have a different set of wishes and plans, if you want to do this, we have decided to add fifty dollars to what you can scrape together in order to bring father, mother and the three brothers and sisters over here, and if you were here I am sure that you could spend your old age living a much better life and in peace and contentment, but what I also want to mention is that if you don't have enough money to do this, I ask the other brothers and sisters and also the village to help you reach this goal, for I will do what I can and if the other brothers and sisters help out, it won't be for nothing since I promise to pay them back. All this can work out, given good will and harmony. [...] If you want to do this, let us know soon so you don't have to spend the winter over there. With regards to Babet's behavior I must say I am

completely satisfied in every way, I don't know what more we could ask for.

[...]

[Anna Maria Schano continues:]

Dear parents and brothers and sisters,

[...] You also wanted to know about Barbara, she is fine, she is so pleased and so happy that she is in America, she's never once wished to be back in Germany she is working for some French people, she likes it fine, she's paid back the money for her passage and if you saw her, you'd be quite surprised, she goes for a walk with us every Sunday, you'd see no difference in the way she's dressed. Dear parents and brothers and sisters, if you wish to come here to us then write us right away so you can come over this fall so you'll still have some food.

[...]

Anna Maria Schano

New York, September 4th, 1852

[...]

Dear parents and brothers and sisters,

[...] As far as Daniel is concerned, we can't help at the moment, he should be patient and wait until the other brothers and sisters are here so they can help too, but if he doesn't want to wait so long then he should arrange things with one of his girlfriends, from what I heard from Barbara, one of them has sold some property, you can use the money from that, if it's enough, to come over, here you can make a better living than in Germany. So many people are arriving from my husband's hometown and region and are already here. [...] Frantz's father is as old as mother and his mother is as old as father. They had 6 children, now they have 5. 4 brothers and one sisters, she's the youngest, she is as old as Chatharina and Frantz is the oldest, Frantz was also a soldier, but he had 3 more years to serve, but then he ran away when he was on leave, then he went to America with his father and one brother, and his mother and the other children came later. They are now living quite happy and content close together / All the best from Maria Schano.

Franz Schano

New York, January 26

[but probably February] 1853

Dearly beloved parents-in-law,

After a lengthy delay we are compelled to take up this burden to allay your fears. The reason why we have waited so long is of some importance but of no great interest. The actual reason is easy to explain since it has to do with what we wrote in the last letter, [1] that is, that Babett made an acquaintance, which we could see from the start would not be to her advantage, and we tried everything to dissuade her, but to no use, and now what we foresaw has come true, she now has a baby son that was born on February 17th this year for whom she has a father all right but no husband, and when we noticed that she was expecting, we urged him to marry her but then he said he had never promised to marry her and he wouldn't ever marry her, and anyway he was Jewish and wouldn't abandon his faith and didn't want to hurt his family, but all of this couldn't get him off the hook completely, and he asked that a contract be drawn up that he'll take care of her for six weeks before and six weeks after the birth and then afterwards

they will share the expenses for the child equally, and she got ten dollars ahead of time and her weekly wage one and one-half dollars.

One week after the birth he told us he had decided to pay her off completely, because he said she would cause him difficulties later on, and so we demanded one hundred dollars, then he wanted to pay fifty and so we made a deal that she gets fifty-five now and twenty-five in six months, and so together with what she's already gotten she'll have a hundred dollars and so this whole business has left her with a child and it will make it very hard for her to find a good match. [...]

NOTES

[1] This letter has not survived.

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