

*Uriah and Mattie Oblinger,
Homesteader
Letters
1873*



Uriah Oblinger, circa 1870s.

Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society
RG1346-49



Mattie Oblinger, circa 1870s.

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Uriah Oblinger homesteaded in Nebraska in the 1873. He came out alone first, and wrote back to his wife, Mattie, trying to prepare her and their baby for the reality of life on the plains. [The letters are edited for grammar.]

"Ma, you must make up your mind to see a very naked looking home at first. [You will see] nothing but the land covered with grass and a sod house to live in. The prospect will no doubt look monotonous enough to you at first — no fences (as none is needed) in sight. But we have a soil rich as the richest river bottoms of Indiana and no clay hills. . . One thing we won't have to do here is clear land before we can put up a house. All we have to do is plow up some sod (which will hang together for a half mile without breaking), cut in lengths to suit, and lay up a wall & cover it and you have a house.

"Within the memory of men now living, all this vast extent of land from the Missouri River to the foot of the Rocky Mountains was covered with nothing but what is called buffalo grass and inhabited by nothing but wild beasts and wilder men. But now, for nearly 200 miles west of the Missouri River, the occasional spot of buffalo grass is pointed out by the pioneer as the waymark of a vegetation that . . . is being replaced by that more useful prairie grass called bluejoint which is the pioneer's hay & fodder. The wild animals & wild men that, but a few years ago reigned supreme all over this beautiful extent of country, are fast passing away before the approaching civilization of the 'pale face' (as the red man is wont to call him). In a few years they will be numbered among the things that were. And what was once known as the 'Great American Desert' will blossom as the rose.

"Surely the hand of Providence must be in this, as it seems this desert as it has been termed so long, has been specially reserved for the poor of our land to find a place to dwell in. This is where they can find a home for themselves and families, and where they can enjoy the companionship of their loved ones undisturbed by those that have heretofore held them under their almost exclusive control."

Within a year, Mattie did travel to Nebraska and — perhaps because of her husband's warnings — she loved it. Here's her letter home from June, 1873.

"I think there will be a Methodist preaching place established in the neighborhood before long as there was a Methodist preacher around a few days ago hunting up the scattered members in the country. He said the conference had sent him here.

"So, you see we are not entirely out of civilization. I know if you was here you would not think so. I have just as good neighbors as I ever had any where and they are very sociable. I was never in a neighborhood where all was as near on equality as they are here. Those that have been here have a little the most they all have cows, and that is quite a help here. I get milk and butter from Mrs. Furgison who lives 1/4 of a mile from us. I get the milk for nothing and pay twelve cents a pound for butter. She makes good butter.

"Most all of the people here live in Sod houses and dug outs. I like the sod house the best — they are the most convenient. I expect you think we live miserable because we are in a sod house. But I tell you in solid earnest, I never enjoyed myself better. But George, I expect you are ready to say, It is because it is something new. No, this not the case. It is because we are on our own, and the thoughts of moving next spring does not bother me. Every lick we strike is for ourselves and not half for some one else. I tell you this is quite a consolation to us who have been renters so long. There are no renters here. Everyone is on his own and doing the best he can."