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Article Summary: Harden served on the Nebraska Territorial Supreme Court 1854-1856. In letters to his wife and his mother at home in Georgia he complained bitterly of loneliness and the cold during his first term. In the warmer seasons of 1856 he had a more favorable opinion of the Plains and even suggested that he would have moved his family to Nebraska if his wife had been willing.

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Cataloging Information:

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Letters From Pioneer Nebraska

by Edward Randolph Harden

Territorial Judge, 1854 - 1856.¹

RUTH K. NUERMBERGER

When Nebraska Territory was organized in 1854 one of the judicial appointments went to Edward Randolph Harden of Georgia. His experiences as a tenderfoot on the frontier reflect not only conditions in Nebraska but his own character. As a judge he was apparently quite successful, but he lacked the firmness and decision of character which would enable him to win in the fierce competition for position and wealth in the new country. For unknown reasons he did not carry out his intention to move to Nebraska in 1856, but returned to Georgia where he lived until his death.

Edward Randolph Harden was the son of Edward Harden (1784-1849) and Mary Ann Eliza Randolph (1794-1874). Early in the nineteenth century Edward Harden occupied a position of wealth and influence in Savannah where he held various local offices, such as justice of the peace and state legislator, and operated two nearby rice plantations. Late in 1810 Edward Harden married Mary Ann Eliza Randolph, daughter of Peter and Lucy Ann Randolph of Virginia. Their first child, Mary Eliza Greenhill Harden, was born in 1811 and their son, Edward Randolph Harden, about 1813. The two children grew up in the best society of Savannah and enjoyed its educational advantages. During 1819-1820 the family spent a year in England and on the Continent. This excursion was probably financed by the sale of Mulberry Grove plantation for \$10,000. In 1827 Edward

* These letters form part of the Edward Harden Manuscripts preserved in the Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

Harden purchased a plantation in the up country and in 1830 the whole family moved to Athens in Clark County, Georgia. Here Harden began the practice of the law for which he had been licensed in 1828.

During 1829-1830 Edward Randolph Harden was a student at the University of Georgia in Athens. He then joined his father in legal practice. In 1837 he married Sarah Brown of Athens. At about the same time his sister, Mary E. G. Harden, was courted by John Howard Payne, the author of "Home, Sweet Home," but her father would not permit the match on the ground that Payne was a wandering ne'er do well. The romance became in later years the most cherished tradition of the family. Mary E. G. Harden never married, rejecting several later suitors.

Edward Randolph and Sarah Brown Harden's children were: Susan Anna, born about 1842; William Hamilton, born on April 7, 1844; Frank Randolph, born in 1849; Greenhill (a daughter) born in 1852; a child born on September 24, 1855, who apparently died young; and Lewis, born in 1858. About 1846 the family left Athens and moved to Lafayette, Walker County, in the northwest corner of Georgia, where Harden practiced law with only moderate success. He was also active in local politics, being a delegate to various state conventions, and in 1847 served in the state legislature. For a time in 1848 he edited a Democratic paper at Ringgold. Through his political connections he obtained, early in 1850, an appointment as station agent at Ringgold, then the northwest terminus of the Western and Atlantic Railroad.

He continued in this post until July, 1854, when he received the appointment as judge of the first court in Nebraska Territory. After a month spent on the journey, Harden reached Bellevue, Nebraska, early in December, 1854, remained about four months, and reached home again on April, 10, 1855. The journey the next autumn consumed only nineteen days. Apparently he spent the winter, returned to Georgia early in the spring, and then came back to Nebraska in June, 1856, especially for the purpose of seeing the country in summer. His impression was so favorable that he determined to bring out his family and settle permanently in Nebraska City. What prevented his doing so is not revealed in the correspondence, but the fact of his mercurial and fickle

temperament easily accounts for a reversal of decision. Whether this, his wife's disinclination to pioneer, or some other reason prevailed, in any case Edward Randolph Harden returned to and remained in Georgia. Shortly thereafter he moved to Dalton (also in northwestern Georgia) where he was again station agent for the Western and Atlantic Railroad. In this post he continued until the Civil War began.

In March, 1860, Harden was appointed a supreme court judge of Utah Territory, but he declined the office. In May he was a delegate to the Charleston Democratic Convention where he withdrew with the Georgia delegation. He spent the summer campaigning for the Douglas ticket.

During 1861-62 he saw limited service in the Confederate army. In 1863 he and his family moved to southwestern Georgia where Harden spent the remainder of his life in a hopeless struggle against poverty. He was for 12 years county judge of Brooks county where he died on June 12, 1884.

Harden to his Mother:

Ringgold, June 29th, 54

My dear Mother

I have rec'd the appointment out of Eight hundred applicants of Judge of the Supreme Court of Nebraska. I am told that the salary is three thousand Dollars per annum, and twenty Dollars mileage for every hundred miles going to the place- It is the same position in the territories, that Judge, Nichol's in Sav: is in the States. I can go from here to Nashville Tenn: in 6 hours pr RRoad, and thence by steam Boat all the way to Nebraska - can accomplish the trip in 8 days, and at an expense of 35\$ - I am rejoiced that I rec'd this appointment, instead of Utah, which would have taken 2 months, & which I had made up my mind to decline, had it been offered to me - If my poor father was alive how proud he would be at my success - and I am sure that you and Conta² ought to be proud - It is the first Judge that we have

² A pet name for Mary Eliza Greenhill Harden, Edward Randolph Harden's sister.

ever had in the family. I have resigned my depot office³ to take effect on 1st of August next, and shall come to visit you at Commencement⁴ . . . I shall be compelled to leave about the middle of October next, and may perhaps be absent one year - I want to try and get Mr. and Mrs. Brown⁵ to come up and stay with Sarah⁶ until I come back, and determine whether I will move or not - . . . now is my tide - if not taken at its flood - I will not rise - many of my prominent friends in Geo - in congratulating me - give it as their opinion that if I live now, in a few years I may be in the United States Senate. . . . My name is in the papers every where - the only appointment from Georgia - and many highly complimentary notices, among those who know - me - I think our old Athens paper ought to speak out for me- . . .

Yours affectionately

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

P. S. Ask Conta would she not like to go with me out to nebraska and write a history of the country. I shall stay mostly at Fort Leavenworth [*sic*] on the Missouri River, a beautiful Town built up with stone, and 600 Government Troops - and the cream of the society in the west - The officers of the army & their wives [*sic*] and many fine and polished citizens.

I have not time to write more at present, but will talk it all over when I come down.

E. R. H.

Harden to his Mother:

Ringgold July 3rd)54.

My dear Mother

Letters of congratulations are pouring in upon me from my distinguished friends in Georgia, at my recent success - one of which just rec'd from Hon: John H. Lumpkin,⁷ Judge of the

³ Edward Randolph Harden had been station agent on the Western and Atlantic Railroad at Ringgold, Georgia, since 1850.

⁴ Commencement at the University of Georgia.

⁵ Mrs. E. R. Harden's parents.

⁶ Sarah (Brown) Harden, wife of Edward Randolph Harden.

⁷ John Henry Lumpkin (1812-1866) was born in Oglethorpe County, Georgia, attended Yale and the University of Georgia, studied law with his uncle, Joseph Henry Lumpkin, and practiced in Rome,

Superior Court of this judicial circuit, I enclose to you - . . . My fellow citizens of Ringgold propose to give me a public dinner in honor of the event. I have not as yet rec'd my official appointment, but presume it will come on in a few days.

[Ringgold Aug: 9th)54.]

I rec'd my commission as associate Judge of the Supreme Court of Nebraska, from the President a few days ago.

M. W. Riden to Harden:

Athens, Geo Oct. 7th 1854

Hon. E. R. Harden,

Dear Sir:-

I learned, yesterday, from your Mother that the appointment of a Clerkship in Nebraska was in your hands. Her suggestion and desire as well as my own wishes and ambition embolden me to solicit of you the situation. Your mother has ever been so much my friend that I do not doubt she will address you very earnestly in my behalf. But as you will naturally inquire what are my qualifications for a post in which a failure on my part might bring some discredit on yourself, I herewith transmit testimonials both as to character and capacity from Mr. Wm. N. White,⁸ with whom I have been the past two years; and, also, from Rev Dr. Church⁹ Col. Wm. L. Mitchell¹⁰ and several other

Georgia. He served in Congress, 1843-1849 and 1855-1857; was defeated for governor in 1857, and was judge of the Georgia Superior court, Rome circuit, 1850-1853. It is this last office to which Harden refers.

⁸ William N. White was a member of a prominent Athens family.

⁹ The Reverend Doctor Alonzo Church (1793-1862) was born in Vermont, went to Georgia in 1816 where he taught school, became professor of mathematics at the University of Georgia, and in 1829 president of that institution, where he remained until his death. He was a minister in the Presbyterian church. (*Cyclopedia of Georgia*, I:382f.)

¹⁰ William L. Mitchell, a resident of Athens, was chief engineer on the Western and Atlantic Railroad in 1850 and a trustee of the University of Georgia. He strongly favored secession in 1850. (Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, ed., *The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb*, American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, II (1911), 194, 567.

gentlemen with whom you are acquainted. W. Hope Hull¹¹ and Gov. Cobb¹² would have been added; but they are at Clarksville.¹³ I thought, however, I should be more likely to lose the situation by delaying the application than from a deficiency of testimonials - you knowing personally most of those whose names are attached to these I send.

As to Politics, I have always voted with the Democratic Party.

Should you confer the office upon me, you will place me under the highest obligations to yourself now and hereafter, as it is an opening in which I feel that I could do myself credit - meanwhile awaiting your determination and reply, I remain

Yours Very Resp'y;

[Signed] M. W. Riden.¹⁴

Mrs. E. H. Harden to Harden's Mother:

Ringgold, Oct. 23rd 1854-

Dear Ma

As the time approaches for Mr Harden to leave home I feel very bad, to morrow court commences in this place, the following week he leaves. I have been endeavoring to persuade

¹¹ William Hope Hull, a resident of Athens, was a neighbor and cousin of Howell Cobb. Hull was very active in local politics and was a delegate to the national Democratic convention in 1852, and again in 1856 when he supported Buchanan's nomination. From 1872 until his death in 1882 he was a trustee of the University of Georgia.

¹² Howell Cobb (1815-1868), a resident of Athens, was a prominent lawyer, served in congress, 1845-1851, was governor of Georgia, 1851-1853, again in congress, 1855-1857, was Secretary of the Treasury under Buchanan, was chairman of the convention which formed the Confederate government in 1861, and a brigadier-general in the Confederate army. He was a trustee of the University of Georgia, 1831-1839 and 1842-1868.

¹³ Clarksville is the seat of Habersham County in the northeastern corner of Georgia.

¹⁴ Martin W. Riden was a resident of Athens, and had been a student at the University of Georgia in 1850. He served as secretary to Judge Edward R. Harden in Nebraska, 1854-1856, and was elected first town clerk of Nebraska City in May, 1855. (J. W. Pearman, "The Early Annals of Nebraska City," Nebraska State Historical Society, *Publications*, XV (1907), 141.

him not to go until the spring then he could remain all the summer and return home in the fall when he would have nothing to do there. I will feel very uneasy about him all the time he is gone for we see accounts of Indian depredations continually, there are six thousand Indians now in the Territory. I enclose you a list of Catastrophies that I cut from a paper yesterday, can't you persuade him to remain until the spring when the weather will be so much more pleasant for Travelling, he will hear by that time how Gov. Burt¹⁵ and his party are getting along. I think my delicate health would be sufficient excuse for him to remain until the spring. I have been very busy for the last month or two preparing his wardrobe I have every thing in readiness he has an abundance of warm clothing I had his overcoat you probably recollect a dark green overcoat that he wore down to see you two or three winters ago died [*sic*] black and newly lined through with flannel it looks as well as a new one & is very warm he will travel in it with his cloak around him, he has bought a nice pr of water proof boots & had a double breasted velvet vest made lined all through with flannel, & he says he intends purchasing in St. Louis a Buffalo Robe & a fur cap. I have put up a little box of medicine, for him such as Baitmans drops, Jacobs Cordial an infallible remedy for bowel affection, red pepper, sage & various other little matters for him. his trunk is all ready, . . .

[Signed] S. E. Harden

¹⁵ Francis Burt (January 13, 1807 - October 18, 1854) was born in Edgefield District, South Carolina, the son of Francis and Katherine (Miles) Burt. He was educated at Pendleton Academy and studied law. In 1831 he married Georgiana Hall and to them were born eight children. He supported nullification in 1832, served for many years in the South Carolina legislature, was editor (1847-1851) of the *Pendleton Messenger*, and in 1853 was appointed Third Auditor of the United States Treasury. In this position he distinguished himself. On August 2, 1854, President Pierce appointed him Governor of Nebraska Territory. On September 11, 1854, Burt with his son Armistead set out for Nebraska. Illness beset him on the long journey, but he pushed on and arrived at Bellevue on October 6. He took the oath of office on October 16 and died two days later. (Clyde B. Aitchison, "The Life of Governor Burt," Nebraska State Historical Society, *Publications*, 2nd ser., I (1894-1895), 25-38; Thomas Weston Tipton, *Forty Years of Nebraska, at Home and in Congress*, Nebraska State Historical Society, *Publications*, 2nd ser., IV (1907), 141.

Harden to his Wife:

Bellevue Dec. 2nd 1854.

Nebraska Territory

My dear wife

I arrived here after a most fatiguing journey of just one month from home. I have seen the big Elephant¹⁶ as the saying is this time, but thank God amidst all my trials I have enjoyed pretty good health - but low spirits and a disease called homesickness has visited me occasionally. I am now at the Presbyterian mission house here, which is the only house in the place except some mud huts - and I want to try and stay here until the winter is over, as I am comfortable here with Mr. Hamilton¹⁷ the missionary and his clever Lady with whom I was very fortunate to get in. This is a beautiful country, but I don't like it. It is the most melancholy looking country I ever saw - but in ten years time it will no doubt be settled up with an enterprising and thrifty population. You can look on the map and see where I am 10 miles below council bluffs [*sic*] on the Missouri River. I am at least 1600 miles from home. There are at this mission some 20 young Indian children, boys and girls, being instructed and civilized. I went into prayers last night and saw them and heard them sing. We are surrounded by Indians, some of them look very grim and surly. I was [*sic*] walking down to a trading house yesterday evening about half mile from here, and met three warriors - very cold and high wind blowing - their bodies were naked, and buckskin leggings around their legs. They had tomahawks [*sic*] as bright as silver- I stopped and motioned to them to let me handle a tomahawk as it was the first that I had seen. one grim looking old fellow, as ugly

¹⁶ A slang expression indicating that one was well traveled. (John S. Farmer, ed., *Americanisms - Old and New*, 224).

¹⁷ William Hamilton was born in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, on August 1, 1811 and graduated from Washington College in 1834. After teaching school he became a Presbyterian minister in 1837, married Julia Ann N. McGiffin and started west to a mission station on the site of St. Joseph, Missouri. The mission at Bellevue was established in 1846 and in 1853 Hamilton was transferred to it. He conducted a manual labor school for the education of Omaha and Otoe Indian children. (William Hamilton, "Autobiography," *Nebraska State Historical Society Publications* (1885), 61-73.

as the devil handed me his, but said not a word. I gave it back to him and moved on, feeling a little curious, every once and a while looking behind me. I see them all around me every minute in the day. I am now satisfied with adventure, and satisfied that this country and this life wont suit me. I shall return home on the first boat that comes up this Spring, if my life is spared, and I feel certain now that this country will never see me again, but I shall hold on to my office long enough, to draw pay sufficient to pay all my debts and to buy me a litle [*sic*] farm near Ringgold, and there will I stay. Judge Ferguson¹⁸ and his wife a clever little Lady and all their children are living near here in a Log Cabin. She has her Guitar and a canary bird with her, and she goes about among the Indians as though she had been accustomed to them all her life. She as well as the judge seem delighted with the country. I shall stake over my claim before I leave, and have an agent to attend to it for me -- It may be worth something for the children some day. There are great chances for speculation here, and fortunes will be made. Judge Ferguson has located a valuable claim near here for himself. You must write to me at this place . . . and you may look for me if my life is spared about the 1st of April next. I cannot get home earlier than that time if I wanted to as the boats will from this time cease to run up the Missouri River.

Do inclose this letter after you have read it in an envelope to ma as my chances for writing are so bad that I wish to make one letter answer a twofold purpose - Write me all the news how you get along keeping house & so forth and all about the dear children. O how I do want to see them and you and ma & Conta-

When I come home In the spring we will all go to Athens on a visit. I am received with great deference every where. But

¹⁸ Fenner Ferguson (1814-1859) was born in Rensselaer County, New York, studied law and began practice (1840) in Albany, moved to Albion, Michigan (1846) where he continued in the law and entered state politics, and was appointed chief justice of Nebraska Territory on October 12, 1854. In August, 1857, he was elected to congress and took his seat on December 7. His election was contested by his predecessor, Bird B. Chapman. Mrs. Ferguson was a sister of Uriah Upjohn, also an early settler. (*Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, 962).

I would not be absent again from my little family and encounter the perils and privations that I have encountered since I left home for the whole Territory of Nebraska.

I cant get any washing done - no women here except Indian squaws - and we have to wait on ourselves no negroes . . . Kiss the dear children for me. I will write to you often.

Your affectionate husband

[Signed] E. R. Harden.

Harden to his Wife:

Bellevue. Nebraska Territory

Dec. 9th 1854.

My dear Wife

I am so anxious to see you and the dear children, that sometimes it seems that I shall almost go distracted. It is distressing to be separated from those I so dearly love 16 hundred miles, and no chance, if I wished of getting home now until winter breaks, and Oh what a climate - cold and piercing winds the coldest weather we have at Ringgold, is pleasant compared to this climate.

I will start for home, on the very first boat that comes up in the Spring, and hope to reach home at least by the 1st of April, and unless my views, and feelings and opinions undergo a great change, I shall not return. It is a poor country no Timber, sickly, and out of the world and settled up with Savages.

Try and manage the best you can until I return. I am making great sacrafices [sic] to try and make something for my dear little family. Send this letter in an envelope to ma, when you shall have read it. I enjoy pretty good health, but have a perpetual cold Mr Riden & Mr. White¹⁹ seem much homesick and discouraged, Mr. Riden particularly. Take good care of your yard and premises, and I calculate to spent the balance of my days in Ringgold - if my life is spared to reach home. Do kiss the dear children all for me, and tell them that I will bring them all presents when I come. I have engaged an Indian woman to make

¹⁹ Possibly William N. White of Athens, Georgia.

some mocasins [*sic*] for you and Greeny and Anna, and will bring the dear little boys something. The Gov: of this Territory²⁰ slept in my room last night on a Buffaloe [*sic*] skin, and has assigned me, my post 35 miles below this at Nebraska City on the Missouri River - I intend when I get there, and I expect to Start next week, to take up my winter quarters at that place, to locate my Land claim and hope it may be valuable to the dear children, and perhaps to ourselves.

I have sent on my papers to day to draw one thousand Dollars, my salary which will be due me on the 1st January next- I have not up to this date heard one word from home since I left. The next letter you write after this, you had best direct to Nebraska city - Nebraska Territory as I will hereafter be located at that point. I shall count the days from this until the 1st April you may depend - Write me all the good news, and for God sake cheer me up as much as you can, for I am the most low spirited mortal you ever saw. Everything is awfully high in this country - I have all my own wood to cut, and bring up into my room, make my own fires and in fine I am certain that when my present stock of clean clothes are exhausted that I will have to go to the wash Tub. Our government here is in a perfect stew about the location of the Capital - They are going to try to have T. B. Cumming [*sic*]²¹ removed from office, on account of charges of corruption. . . .

²⁰ Thomas B. Cuming.

²¹ Thomas B. Cuming (December 25, 1828 - April 15, 1857) was born in Genesee County, New York, the son of an Episcopalian minister. The family later moved to Michigan where Thomas attended the state university, graduating in 1845. He was then appointed geologist in an expedition to explore the Lake Superior area. He served in the Mexican War, then became a telegraph operator at Keokuk, Iowa, but soon began journalistic writing. His ability shortly made him editor of the *Dispatch*. While at Keokuk he married Margaretta M. C. Murphy. As a result of his editorial services he was appointed Secretary of Nebraska Territory where he arrived on October 8, 1854. Ten days later he was acting governor, following the death of Governor Francis Burt, a post which he occupied until February 20, 1855, and again between October 25, 1857 and January 10, 1858. There was much dissatisfaction in Bellevue when he convened the first legislature at Omaha. (J. M. Woolworth, "Thomas B. Cuming. An Eulogy on the late Governor Cuming delivered at Omaha, April 17, 1858," Nebraska State Historical Society, *Publications*, IV (1892) 80-85).

Kiss Greeny & Bub and all a thousand times for me. Your affectionate husband.

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

Harden to his Mother:

Bellevue Nebraska Territory

Dec. 9th 1854

My dear mother

Since I left home I assure you that I have gone through trials enough to have caused the heart to sink, but thank God I am at my post, and journey's end at last, and rapidly recruiting from this awful trip - The Stage turned over with us coming just before day one morning, nine passengers inside and four outside, my hand was considerably hurt but it was only a skin bruise. We were compelled to run down the Cumberland River, an angry stream 21 miles with our baggage in an open skiff, with one man to row us, and as we approach the mouth of the River, the wind sprang up a gale and caused the waves to run so high, that I thought every moment that we should be capsized, but by the kind Providence of God we were all spared - We were 4 days and 2 nights on a St. Boat to St Louis Mo: and 9 days on another Boat from St. Louis to Morton Mo: and then had [to] charter a carriage to bring us 160 miles [to this] God forsaken wilderness. I am awfully disappointed with this country. Just imagine a vast expanse of Land like the ocean, without a tree to be seen, bounded by the blue horizon and you have some idea of Nebraska. The prairie Land is rich indeed, but really not enough Timber in the habitable portion of the Territory for fire wood, much less for building purposes, and how they ever expect to build houses, unless they freight Lumber from St. Louis I am at a loss to know I have entered upon the discharge of my official duties, but shall return home on the first Boat that leaves in the Spring, and my opinions will have to undergo a great change if this gloomy wilderness ever sees me again. Mr. Riden is awfully discouraged, but I try to cheer him up. These half starved, and naked Indians stealing every thing they can lay their hands upon are all around me - I have some

times to keep them off with a stick, they annoy me so much begging. The[y] will come wrapped up in their skins the women with their "paposes" [*sic*] upon their backs and stand by my window and look in [upon] me by the hour. The warriors with their bows and arrows and tomahawks- They Knock at the window and hollow out "how," meaning how do ye do - I hollow "how" back at them and pay no further attention to them.

I cant walk out or ride, but I meet dozens of them - the meanest, and most degraded Indians I ever saw. The Omaha and the Ottoes -

I would not give Catoosa²² county Geo for the whole of Nebraska. The climate is awful cold- Thermometer sometimes 17 degrees below Zero- If I dont freeze this winter - I wont freeze in this climate another. The Missouri River just opposite where I now am has been in the last week frozen over so that person[s] walk over on the ice. Do write to Sarah often and cheer her her up. I am thank good [*sic*] enjoying fair health - but turned Indian. You would not know me wrappd up in furs and Buffaloe [*sic*] Robes, and Buckskin pantaloons and blanket with a hole cut in the middle and [put] over my head. Should I live to get home I will bring all the family down to see you, and we must try and make arrangements to live all together the balance of our days.

Write to me at "Nebraska City," Territory of Nebraska, and give me my Title, as I am beginning to be known through this country. My love to Conta.

Your affectionate son,

in a distant Land 16 hundred
miles from you -

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

P. S. Dont say to anyone that I am displeased, and burn up this letter - as I am very popular with the people and they all think I like the country.

E. R .H.

²² Catoosa County is in northwest Georgia. Ringgold is the county seat.

Harden to his Wife:

Bellevue. Nebraska Territory.

Decr. 18th 1854.

My dear wife,

You can form no idea how anxious I am getting to hear from my dear little family. What sacrifices [*sic*] I am making to obtain the means to make them comfortable and happy in the world. It seems to me that I would give anything to see them. I am comfortably fixed in a snug little room at the Presbyterian mission house, at this place, where I calculate to spend the principal part of the winter. I am delighted with the amiable family of the good Christian missionary Mr. Hamilton stationed here. I held meeting for them last night, preached as I thought, quite a good sermon, to a respectable and attentive congregation last night. I have turned out to be a regular preacher in these wild woods - I feel so thankful to my God, for the kind protection that has been extended over me during the perils and trials of my tedious journey here. The most Southern district²³ in the territory has been assigned me by the Governor, at Nebraska city, about 40 miles below this on the Missouri River - I shall not go there however for sometime to come yet. I pray for you all night and morning, and pray God to grant me a safe return to my dear little family. I wish you would make Anna read a chapter in the Bible night and morning to the little family, and remember while she reads, that her dear father in a distant land, in the midst of savages is doing the same, and offering up heartfelt prayers for you all. I was much alarmed the other day. I rode up over the wild prairie the other day, in company with a gentleman to Omaha City, about nine miles above here, and when we arrived there the gentleman who went with me was compelled to remain at that place - So I had to return by myself - when I got about half way home, I saw in the distance about 600 yards 3 Indians wrapped up in their Buffaloe [*sic*] skins, with each one a rifle on his shoulder, coming towards me - I was riding

²³ Harden was of course the first district judge and held his first term of court, January, 1855, in a room at the Downs House. Martin W. Riden was first clerk of the court.

quite a fleet Indian poney [*sic*] and thought as the 3 Indians were on foot, that I would strike a brisk gallop and get out of their way - As soon as they spied me, then about 300 yards off - they stopped - and seemed to hold a short interview, with each other - they then raised a wild and terrific yell, and made rapidly towards me - I put whip to the pony, and made an effort to keep out of gun shot which alone by the fleetness of the little poney [*sic*] I succeeded in doing - all the time they were still yelling. I did not look behind until I reached the top of a high hill - when I stopped and looked behind, and saw that I had outstripped them, and they gave up the chase. I shall not venture to ride out again alone. I was told by persons here who know them that they probably intended to rob me, they are not considered otherwise dangerous. I was armed and had they overtaken me, I would have saved some of the gentleman with my revolver - but they having rifles had the advantage of me. They caught a man near here a few days since, and stripped him of every rag of clothing and all his money - but before they let him go they seemed to take pity upon him and gave him back his pantaloons, and sent him back here without shirt, coat or money. What devils - they ought all to be killed. Two hundred warriors are now camped in their skin tents, just in front of this house, and while I write the yard is full of warriors and dirty squaws, with their papooses or children swung on their backs. I am here alone - with not more than ten white men in as many miles around. Mr. Riden & Mr. White are gone to Nebraska city.

I dont fear them about the house - The only danger, is when they met you on the prairie. Since I recovered from the fatigues of the journey- I have enjoyed excellent health - The climate is awful cold- It takes me all my time to toat wood up into my room and to keep fire. I have to wait on myself altogether. You would hardly know me. Owing to the fact that I can get no washing done here I have been compelled to have some red flannel shirts made neatly ornamented with black braid - the kind generally worn here - which I wear in the place of the cotton shirts, which I have laid aside. I have been compelled as a protection to my face against the awful winds that prevail here to turn out my whiskers and mustachious, which with my red shirt, and blue blanket makes me look as savage as a meat axe. The papers

of this territory have noticed me in a very complimentary manner. Several copies of which I have sent to Georgia. I wrote a letter for the "North Geo: Times" published at Dalton. Send and borrow the paper from Esqr Dickson in which you will see the communication, if my letter has not miscarried. I sent by mail a few days ago - a pair Mocassins [sic] for you & a pair for Greenhill. Tell anna and the Boys that I am having some made for them which I will send as soon as finished. It has been snowing all day. The ground is now white with snow, and I am confined to my room, in perfect prison, only going out when I am compelled to get wood. I am awful lonesome. I am invited to a great Ball to be given on "Council Bluff City" to night 10 miles above here on the north Bank of the Missouri in Iowa, which you can see by looking at the map. of course I have declined going - I send you the invitation. The inhabitants of that Town are all mormons. I shall try hard to reach home at farthest by the middle of April next. Do Kiss all the dear children for me, and tell boys to behave well and learn their Books. I shall receive fifteen hundred Dollars for my salary, before I start home to pay all my debts and be square with the world. Take good care of yourself, and write to me always from this out. - direct to "Nebraska City" Nebraska Territory, and write at least once a week, as letters take one month to get here.

Your affectionate husband

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

M. W. Riden to Mrs. M. E. Harden:

Nebraska City, Jan. 1st 1855.

Mrs. M. E. Harden,

Madam:-

After encountering dangers by land in Stages upsetting and on water in skiffs nearly capsizing, we arrived in Nebraska on the 1st of last month. The Judge and myself have been in good health ever since our arrival. I am now in this place, where I expect to locate my Office; but your son has taken winter quar-

ters at Bellevue, where he has better accomodations than can at present be obtained here.

The soil of this Territory is extremely productive, the water very good, and the climate fine; but there is a scarcity of Timber. However, Coal-banks have been discovered, which will furnish fuel; but, it is a hard matter, in many places, to get timber sufficient to build fences and houses.

Brick and Adobe houses will be built; for they are much cheaper, here than wooden ones, on account of the price of lumber; which is nearly three times as high here as it is in Georgia.

This place is located on the site of "Old Fort Kearny" on the Missouri River. It is thriving finely, and, I believe, that there will be a great influx of immigration and business to this point, next Spring. The community are at present a rough-hewn set. I have seen several rows and a terrible fight, in which stones & knives played a prominent part. One or two of the combatants were severely injured; but no lives were lost. I make it a point to keep a respectful distance from such a fracas. But in the course of a few months, I think, the society will grow more refined.

There are several beautiful town sites on the "Mad Missouri," which are surveyed, laid out on large scales and denominated Cities; but the inhabitants are principally in the "mind's eye." I took the pains to count the houses in Platte City,²⁴ but I could discover only twenty in all !!!

Respects to my friends, and accept for yourself my kindest wishes for your health & happiness.

Your Friend,

[Signed] M. W. Riden

N. B. Address me at Nebraska City, N. T.)

Harden to his Mother:

Bellevue. Nebraska Territory

Feb. 1st 1855.

My dear mother,

I have just recd and read over and over again your kind and affectionate letter of the 9th Ultimo - I have as yet recd

²⁴ Riden is probably referring to Plattsmouth.

but one from Sarah, under date of the 14th Dec. 54. The mails are very irregular in this country - Thank God I have but one more short winter month to spend in this intemperate climate - Why is it, that I have suffered all the privations, and encountered all the perils of this voyage, to live among savages, far away from my interesting little family - my widowed mother and sister, and all the tender endearments of home? - to make some money, and some reputation and character for my family - For them and them alone I live. . . . I have been treated and received here with great deference and respect by all. The newspapers have noticed me in very flattering terms. I had the honor of administering the oaths of office to the President of the Senate²⁵ and to the Speaker of the house of representatives²⁶ of the first legislative assembly, that ever convened in this territory, and in after years, when Nebraska grows into the dimensions of a Giant, State this fact will do for my children to pride themselves upon, and may stimulate them to make the same exertions to rise in the world, as I have done - I have attained as high a position as one in a thousand young men ever reach, and my political aspirations are now gratified - once it was a source of deep mortification to me, to think that while many of my contemporaries and early associates, were rising up, that I was in the background - but now I am ahead of many of them. I have not as yet determined what I shall do - and will not determine until we all get together once more, and talk the matter over. The hardness of the times, which are not at a crisis yet, makes my monthly salary worth much more, and with my family out here, I could easily save one thousand Dollars a year; but I shall never abandon my home in Ringgold - It was there that I took my rise, I have friends there, and there I expect to end my days, tho' I may conclude to serve out my term of office - It has been awful cold here for the last three weeks - the thermometer ranging from Zero to 7 degrees below all the time. I really thought that I should freeze, clad in buckskin coat and pantaloons, which I have been compelled to wear to keep out these piercing winds that sweep across these naked praries direct from the snow

²⁵ Joseph L. Sharp from Tennessee.

²⁶ A. J. Hanscom from Michigan.

clad rocky mountains - I am only about 375 miles from the spurs of the Rocky mountains. Do write to Sarah often, and write to me and direct to "Nebraska City - Nebraska Territory." I shall hold two courts before I start for home - the last Court will be held 3d Monday in March - and then I shall move for home with all the speed that Steam can carry me - I am well and hearty - my complexion has improved much in this cold climate - I have not been sick a day since I have been here - my love to Conta.

Your affectionate Son,

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

To Harden's Grandmother

Ringgold April 10th 1855 [sic]

My dear grandmother,

Knowing how anxious you are concerning the welfare of my father I write to inform you that he arrived home safely in this mornings train. He requests me to write to you and let you know that he has arrived safely under the protection of God, he was eleven days in coming, he brought a good many Indian curiosities with him which amuse the children very much. * *

[Postscript written by Edward R. Harden]

P. S.

My dear Mother.

Thank God I am home once more in fine health and good spirits - but found the children looking bad from effects of scarlet fever. . . . I am worn out travelling - I have encountered more dangers and perils than I thought I could ever stand - and have made a bright reputation for myself and family. . .

Yours in haste. E. R. H.

M. W. Riden to Harden:

Nebraska City, N. T.

Sept. 14th 1855

Hon. E. R. Harden,

Dear Sir:—

Yours of the 22nd ult. came to hand day before yesterday. There is no news of any importance. That Pawnee Outrage²⁷ spoken of in last week's "News"²⁸ turns out to be a very exaggerated statement of affairs. The Surveyors were merely scared - there was no great harm done - no damage sustained.

If you see any one who wishes to come to this country, but is deterred by these Indian stories please assure him that they are without foundation.

In regard to your nomination for Congress, I would say that your friends South of the Platte are very desirous that you should serve them. Chief Justice Ferguson, however, said to Morton,²⁹ the other day, "Morton, do all you can to prevent his being a Candidate; for I cannot spare him from the Bench, we cannot get along without him."

My name has been used here in connection with the office of Probate Judge of this County; but I believe that I am not eligible. I do not wish the Office; for it has very little honor attached to it, and besides the pay is poor.

Capt. Giddings³⁰ has announced himself as a Candidate for reelection, to Congress. Henry B. Smith,³¹ a New-Yorker, is also in the field.

²⁷ As the letter indicates this was apparently a minor incident which, in the reporting, was much exaggerated. Indian marauders caused some damage to property of settlers along the Platte and thoroughly frightened some of them, but there was no loss of life and no real danger of serious trouble. (*National Intelligencer*, September 1, 1855, quoting the Omaha *Nebraskian* of August 15).

²⁸ The Nebraska City News.

²⁹ J. Sterling Morton.

³⁰ Napoleon Bonaparte Giddings, (1816-1897) was born in Clark County, Kentucky, grew up in Missouri, was an official in the Republic of Texas, served in the Mexican War, practiced law, and was Nebraska's first territorial representative in congress, serving from January 5 to March 4, 1855.

³¹ An unsuccessful candidate, not otherwise identified.

Your house³² is under headway and will be ready for your reception. I am sorry that Mrs. Harden's health is so feeble that she cannot come with you; for I think if she were once here, her health would improve in this dry, but cold climate. Bro. Gage³³ says that persons from the South generally do remarkably well.

Maj: White is now in Cass County taking the Census. He and I will go to Nemaha County on Monday next.

Give my respects to your Mother, Mrs. Harden and all enquiring friends.

Yours Truly,

[Signed] M. W. Riden

Harden to his Mother:

Nebraska city—

Nebraska Territory

October 22nd 1855.

My dear mother

I am here at last thank God safe, after a tedious journey night and day of nineteen days. We had fine weather but low water, and was compelled as last year to travel one hundrd miles by land. I arrived to [*sic*] late to become a candidate for Congress, and indeed I care very little about it. I am awful home sick some how this trip - more so than I was last year, but I will stick it out as long as I can and when I get home again I am determined to resign, and risk the chances of making a living with my family.

This place has much improved, but the people are mostly strangers to me and of a different cast from those to whom I have been accustomed. Sam³⁴ is well and has been well all the

³² Harden had taken a claim in Nebraska City and was building a house on one of his lots.

³³ Probably William D. Gage, a minister, who preached the first sermon in Nebraska City in August, 1854.

³⁴ Sam was a Negro slave belonging to Harden.

time and has many applications to work. Write often and tell Sarah to kiss the dear ones at home, and to write often to me.

Your affectionate son

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

Saint Josephs Mo:

January 1st 1856.

My dear mother,

Another year has rolled around and here I am, an exile from my native land, separated from my family and friends in obedience to the stern voice of necessity - In an intemperate climate, without any society but my own thoughts, with no human but my old faithful servant to whom I can unbosom myself, and reveal the workings of my mind - Sometimes sad, and inclined to deplore my hard fate; sometimes cheered up and revived by the reflection that under the protection of a kind Providence, that has thus far guided my erring footsteps in the path of duty, and has preserved my health, amid all the perils that I have encountered in the wilds of the far west - I have made a name and a reputation, that I hope has reflected honor upon my family, and my country - My dear mother permit me in a distant land, two thousand miles from you; to wish you a happy new year - May Heavens richest blessings rest upon your declining years - . . . The ardent desire of my heart is, that your only son may be permitted to meet you again, and to spend a few brief years, in the course of nature allotted to us to live together. To accomplish this object, I am willing to rebuke the whispers of ambition - I am willing to stifle the seductive influences of power and place, of fame and fortune, and be the contented tenant of an humble cottage with my little family around me.

I have just rec'd and read your affectionate letter of the 24th Nov: last. . . When it was handed to me I felt desponding. Slay [*sic*] bells were ringing - and gentlemen and ladies wrapped in their muffs and furs were riding constantly by my window— All full of live and gait, [*sic*] but I felt as one who "stands alone in the banquet hall deserted." - I have books and amuse

myself reading and writing letters home for the papers. Do write to often [*sic*] and direct to this place. I have rec'd but one letter from Sarah yet.

Sam and myself are well.

Your affectionate son,

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

Saint Josephs mo.

Jan. 21st 56

My dear mother

It does me so much good to sit down and write to you, that I fear I will annoy you with my letters. I unfortunately so seldom hear from home that it makes me sometimes very low spirited - only two letters from Sarah yet. Do spur Sarah and Anna up. I feel so bad when Sam comes from the office mail after mail "no letter Sir" - The thermometer this morning stood 12 degrees below zero - The oldest inhabitants here, say they have never had so severe a winter, but thank God I stand it finely - I never was in better health - I read a great deal, and watch the arrivals of the mails closely with the hope to hear from my dear friends at home. Do write once a week. I am very ambitious of fame, and of the good opinions of my friends. Do they often ask about me. I don't know what to do about my office—It is a fine office, nothing to do, and 500\$ in gold coming in every three months. I shall pay off all my debts this year, and have a small amount left, and then how free and independent I shall feel to owe no man a cent. I sometimes feel that I ought to hold on. I have no idea of settling permanently in this country, but if Sarah would be willing to come out with me next fall I would remain and serve my time out, and now that I am nearly out of debt could save enough to buy us a good home—If she could once get started she would not find it such a formidable journey. I have gone through the worse now, and have learned the ways of the country.

Sam is well, but seems hurt that Celia³⁵ don't send him

³⁵ Celia, a slave woman, was Sam's wife.

some word—make up something and write to him any how. I am yet undetermined, whether I will not return to Nebraska, and hold my Spring courts before I go home. If I do this I will not reach home until the latter part of May. I want to hear from you all as often as possible. A letter from home always cheers me up. I go to the theatre once a week, and to the Episcopal Church Sundays. Have you noticed that Judge Berrien was dead.³⁶ I saw it in a paper a few days ago.

Your affectionate son

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

Nebraska City, N. T.

June 25th 1856

My dear Mother

I recd your letter a few days since and was delighted to hear from home. I was quite indisposed for several weeks after my arrival here, but am stout and hearty again. The weather is intensely warm. I believe it is hotter here than it is in the South, but we generally have a good breeze, and the nights are cool. I am boarding in a good methodist private family - where I boarded last fall - good, plain people - I have a good room, but I get very lonesome at times - Nothing but necessity induced me ever to remain here, without my family, but as I am here, I want to try and stand it as long as I can, at least until I can save enough money to settle comfortably at home. I sold one of my town lots here the other day for Ninety Dollars cash. I did not pay for it until I sold it - interest and principal due upon it amounted to \$54.00, so I made \$36.00. clear - it was a vacant lot, adjoining the one on which my house stands. I have rented my house into good hands for ten Dollars per month, by the month with the privilege of taking it at the end of any month, should I be able to sell it - Improved property does not sell as well as vacant lots. This place is rapidly improving - and many persons coming

³⁶ John McPherson Berrien (1781-1856), a distinguished lawyer, was United States Senator from Georgia 1825-1829 and 1841-1852, and Attorney-General in Jackson's cabinet.

in this Spring and buying lots, but if I can sell my house, I don't expect ever to own another foot of ground in this Territory. . . I expect to deliver the 4th July oration next week. There will be a great demonstration here on the occasion. I have ordered a strong guard put over the man in jail for murder. I expect to have to try him in September - next - They are having a terrible time in Kansas. I have just learned that a man who is here now, passed through Kansas a few days since, and saw three men hanging on one tree - I don't know whether this is true - Reports are much exaggerated - But things are in a bad condition there. We are all quiet and peaceful here - Everybody friendly, and attending to their own business. I have had to make some important decisions since my arrival here, at Chambers, applications for Injunctions &c: I shall have much business at Court. I wait anxiously every mail to hear from home.

Your affectionate son

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

Nebraska City. N. T.

July 5th 1856

My dear Mother

I am anxiously looking for a letter from home. For the first three weeks after my arrival here I was much indisposed, but I am well and hearty as usual. I am boarding with a clever, pious, private family, have a good room, kind people, and good, substantial, healthy fare. [sic] If my family were only with me I would enjoy this summer very much. It is a lovely summer climate, hot in the day usually, but the nights are always cool, and pleasant. This place is rapidly improving. Houses are going up in every direction, and the population increasing rapidly. It is computed that our population is now 1600. We had a great demonstration on yesterday the 4th. I delivered the Oration. My speech took finely - after I concluded the audience gave me three hearty cheers, and then marched off in regular order to a free Barbacue prepared by our citizens for the occasion. I will send you a paper next week containing an account of it. There were about 2 thousand persons in the ranks, a great many handsome

and well dressed Ladies. We had a bass drum, a small drum, fife, clarionet - French horn, and two violins. They made fine music. It was indeed equal to any demonstration that I have ever seen in upper Georgia. The society is improving very fast. I am now inclined to come after my family as soon as my courts are over and return here with them early in November. I could do well and make money if I had them with me, so that I could be contented. My income is now \$2350.00 per annum besides what little I make outside of my salary &c: I sold one of my lots the other day for cash, and made \$30 clear - my salary is two thousand. The negroes you know hire for \$230 and I rent my house here for ten dollars per month, payable promptly every month in cash.

There is no reason now why I should not bring out my family. You would be surprised to see the growth of this place only two years old and has now 800 houses, and fine farms all round. The country is perfectly healthy. There has not been a single case of Cholera on the River this summer. The cold last winter I expect has killed it out. The man in gaol for murder, sent to me the other day, to ask me to let him go out to hear a temperance lecturer speak, under charge of the guard. I felt sorry for the poor creature, but sent word back to him that the temperance lecturer might go into the goal [*sic*], and speak to him as much as he pleased, but that he the prisoner could not go outside the walls of the prison—I have to be very firm and decided with these people. They are affraid [*sic*] of me, and I intend to keep them so. our September court will probably sit two weeks after which I intend to start for home. If Sarah would make up winter clothing for herself and the children and be ready to return with me I would not stay more than a week in Athens. Boats pass here up and down and to St. Louis almost daily. The undertaking is a small one one [*sic*] compared to what it was when I first came out. Excuse the haste in Which I write this morning. Do write me often.

My love to Conta.

Your affectionate son

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

Harden to his Sister:

Nebraska city. N. T.

July 7th 1856.

My dear Sister

I am much delighted with this summer climate, and have now permanently decided to bring my family out early this fall. . . .

I am doing well now and if I had my family with me I would make money fast and have a contented mind. My certain cash income is now \$2350.00. per annum with scarcely anything to do - and no exposure whatever - and if I do not succeed it will not be my fault. We have fine society here now. Industrious, temperate, and intelligent people. I made a great speech on fourth of July at this place. about fifteen hundred Ladies and gentlemen present. They gave me 3 hearty cheers. Toasted me at the dinner - I will send you a paper containing my speech published and the Editors remarks. My Courts adjourn about the 7th of October - When I shall start home for family and return immediately this fall. Sarah will be delighted with the trip and she would be happy if she was out here, particularly in the summer. You have no idea how popular I am among these people—free-soilers and all. I take tea out 3 times a week - I am so much better pleased with the country than I was in the winter. The country is perfectly healthy, not a case of cholera on the Missouri River this summer. St Boats pass up and down and from St. Louis almost daily. I am glad that I came back, I have saved several hundred Dollars by coming back. The man who built my house, who I have not paid tried hard to swindle me. He does not live here - He lives in Missouri. But I told him I would not pay him one cent more than I thought the work was worth, so I made him deduct \$160.00. I rented out the house which cost me in all \$993.00 for ten dollars pr month. I sold a lot I bought last year, which I did not pay for until I sold it, and made in cash. \$36.00. clear. We have a fine Bank here. Col. M. W. Riden is a director - I got \$750.00 from them the other day to finish paying for my House. I am as a King here. My word is the Law of the Land. The evil doers fear me, and the better part of the Community respect. Tell Sarah to muster up all her courage now, and expect soon to receive marching orders from Head Quarters. Tell

here [*sic*] I expect to issue orders in a few days for her to make up winter clothing for herself and the children, and be prepared to strike her tent. She will be pleased with the trip beyond her expectations when she starts. It is no great undertaking now. You come all the way by St Boat and Rail Road. Mr. Buckhanan [*sic*] will be elected President if he lives and at the expiration of my present term of service I can be reappointed if I wish I think. It will be ten years before Nebraska will be a state.

Do write me a letter. Give my love to ma and Sarah and children.

Your affectionate brother

[Signed] Edward R. Harden

Harden to his Mother:

Nebraska city. N. T.

July 18th 1856.

My dear mother

I am in fine health and fine spirits. The climate is so delightful [*sic*] and everything so lively, that it exhilarates [*sic*] me and keeps me cheered up. I have a splendid horse and buggy, which I bought for two hundred dollars, from a man who wanted to take a boat to St Louis. I was offered \$25.00 in cash for my bargain. I intend to keep the establishment this summer and then I start home in the fall I will sell it.

How much more lively this place is than Athens. Money is plenty, and every body in a rush. All friendly, and sociable. I take tea out, or dine out 3 or 4 times a week, and ride out with the Ladies frequently. There are many genteel, and respectable people out here, and if I only had my family here, in a few years I would be a rich man. It seems to me that I could easily make as much as my salary. We will have a rail Road here in less than two years - my house and lot will bring double what I gave for it - by next spring. It is surprising to me that Sarah is not anxious to come out when we could do so well. How glad I am that I concluded to return here. It has been worth fifteen hundred Dollars to me, but without my family I am not contented - Why is it that I could do so well in the world and rise

right up, and have to endure the privation of a separation from my family. But Providence is guiding my footsteps. My God is a better friend to me than I am to myself - He guided me back here, and never having spent a summer I did not see the superlative beauties of this country. How I do wish I had brought my family out last fall - I have a splendid little home here as neat as a new pin. Everything in the way of provisions in great abundance and cheap. The people all look up to me - but they make me mad calling me the "old Judge." They seem to think that a man can not be a judge, unless he is about 50 years old.

My dear mother, do use your influence with Sarah to reconcile her to come out with me this fall. She dont know what her interest is, but dont tell her that I wrote to you to this effect. When she once got started she would be delighted. She has staid at home so long that she dreads to move, but it is all in the start. Do write often. I wrote to Conta a few days ago. Give my love to her.

Your affectionate son,

[Signed] Edward R. Harden.