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Article Summary: Donnell came to Sherman County in 1884 to take a claim of 160 acres. He wrote every few months to his family in Missouri, detailing the events and hardships of his pioneer life.

Scroll down for complete article.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Edwin (Ed) Donnell, Etta (Ettie) Terhune Donnell, Minnie Bell Donnell, Charles (Charley) Donnell, Charles (Charley) Long, George Terhune, Jennie Terhune, Dud Godard

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Photographs / Images: Ed Donnell, Donnell and an unidentified companion, a professional photograph of the Donnell family outside their home

THE LETTERS OF ED DONNELL, NEBRASKA PIONEER

EDITED BY CHARLES J. WILKERSON

THESE letters tell the story of one Nebraska pioneer during the years 1884-1888.

Amos Edwin Donnell was born in Illinois in 1859, the oldest of a family of five children. During his childhood and early manhood the family had moved from Illinois to Kansas and then to western Missouri. The family lived on a series of rented farms and had a series of unsuccessful farming ventures. The eldest son, Ed, the author of these letters, disliked Missouri and deplored the family's lack of success in that state. At the age of twenty-five he had become convinced that the solution to their economic plight was to get land and the permanency of the home which that land could provide. He decided to do what many another Missouri farmer was doing—to leave his home and seek his fortune among more favorable circumstances.

There were disturbing rumors that the good homestead land would soon all be taken, and, having decided on

Charles J. Wilkerson of Holden, Missouri, nephew of Ed Donnell, prepared the introduction and submitted the letters for publication. The original letters are in the possession of Mr. Wilkerson.

the big venture, he felt that he must act at once. With great hope and enthusiasm he and a similarly-minded friend left Missouri in the summer of 1884 to travel by wagon to Sherman County, Nebraska, where he took a claim of 160 acres.

The letters, written at intervals of two or three months, are a history of his hopes, his hard work, his discouragements, failures, and successes. They are personal and intimate, as letters to the homefolks are inclined to be. He records quite impartially the important and unimportant events of his life. Alone in his sod house on Christmas Eve he rather shyly reveals his homesickness. In the early letters there are firm avowals that he is not interested in marrying, but after a desolately lonely winter he is suddenly disgusted with "baching" and resolves to marry the chosen girl "just as quick as I can get money ahead to buy a cow." He tells the homefolks about the great celebration of the coming of the "iron horse" to Loup City. He relates the story of the digging of the well which was almost too deep. Season after season he recounts the progress of his "improvements."

He was probably a characteristic pioneer, motivated more by necessity and ambition than by the love of mere adventure. He was confronted always by nagging practical affairs which tested but could not destroy his hope and optimism.

Like many other pioneers, he was haunted by thoughts of the hardships of the family he had left, and although he continually coaxed and pleaded with them to come and share with him the opportunities of a new land, his mother and father would not chance the insecurity of his great venture. A part of their unwillingness stemmed from their very religious nature and their belief that Nebraska must be virtually godless because there were so few churches there. His reply to this opinion is one of the amusing points of the letters.

Like other pioneers, too, he was beset by the fear that perhaps he had not made the best possible selection of land and that perhaps somewhere there was another homestead that would be more profitable and more certain of success. He also wished for more land and wrote of acquiring an additional 160 acres in a timber claim, but despite his various worries, he felt the joy of seeing his claim develop from a barren stretch of prairie to a productive farm and a beloved home.

Because of the hard work, the rigors of a severe climate, and consequent failing health, Mr. Donnell left the homestead soon after 1888. He and his family moved to Arcadia where he engaged in business for a period of twenty-eight years. He died at Hulett, Wyoming, in 1921. At the time of the publication of these letters, his widow, Mrs. Etta Donnell, is living at Kearney, Nebraska. The original letters are in the possession of his nephew, Charles J. Wilkerson, of Holden, Missouri.

Sections of the letters which were not relevant to the story of Mr. Donnell's homesteading experience have been omitted. Paragraphing has been added, but the original spelling and punctuation of the letters have been retained.

Lancaster, Kansas
Atchison Co.
April the 13,

Dear Father:

As this is Sabbath day and we are laying over, I will drop you a few lines to let you know that we are both well and getting along very well considering the roads and the rainy weather. It commenced raining on us in Kansas City and has been rainy and cloudy ever since. We came from Wyandotte to Levenworth, 30 miles, from Levenworth to Atchison, 30 miles. We left there for Hywathe, Kansas that is about 55 miles from Atchison. We are about 30 miles from Hywathy, yet we have come over some of the rufest roads and country I ever saw . . . We stopped in Atchison and rigged up another set of harness and are

working four horses. We have to stop ever once in a while and clean the waggon wheels—the mud is so sticky that it fills the wheels up solid from the fellows to the hub, that looks like it is pretty tuff to believe but it is not half so tuff as the mud. We have got us a big bull purp. He is 11 months old and is about as big as Bounce was. He is savage and a good watch dog. We gave a dollar and a half. We call him Fritz.

We put up with a family by the name of Repstine. They are Russians and very relidgeous. He has a large barn we just drove inside the barn and sleep in the waggon and he furnishes all the hay that our horses can eat from Saturday eve to Monday morning for one dollar. That beats staying out in the weather. It is hard work finding timber to camp in . . . My love to all.

Goodbye
Ed Donnell

Loup Cy
June 15, (1884)

Dear Mother:

. . . I am sorry to hear of the storms you have been having down there . . . It is getting dry here but the crops are looking first rate . . .

I was so busy and in such a stew about getting a piece of land that I could not compose myself long enough to write. Well, I have homesteaded 160 acres of land in this county, about 16 miles from the county seat.¹ I have traveled around over the country a good deal this spring looking for land and I like the piece I got better than any that I saw that was vacant, but I am not altogether satisfied yet. I am going to try to get a hundred and sixty more and that will make me 320 acers. I have six months to get onto my land. I intend to put up a house and stable this fall and

¹ The homestead, located in the northwestern corner of Sherman County, was on the W² SW⁴, NE⁴ SW⁴, NW⁴ SE⁴, Section 15, Township 16, Range 16. He signed for the homestead on June 11, 1884 and received his patent on May 2, 1890. (Federal Land Office Tract Book, Volume 116, p. 221. Mss.) The county seat was Loup City. [Footnote information was provided by Donald F. Danker, Society Archivist. Miss Meroe Owen of Loup City was of great assistance in procuring information to interpret the letters.]

move onto it. I want to break some more and then I will team the rest of the time till fall. I will have to live on my land 5 years and then I can prove up for ten dollars, or by paying \$1.25 an acer at the end of six months I can prove up. I expect I will go to Custer Co. to get a timber claim for there isn't any in this county. There is some more vacant land next to mine. I wish Charley² was old enough to take it. I think a young man without a home is very foolish to stay there. I am well pleased. I consider that I have made a thousand dollars at least calculation for this is bound to be good country. There is good prospect for a railroad through here. the worst objection . . . is the fuel there is no timber here to speak of. Coal is here not so high at the railroad. I have been 4 trips to Grand Island after goods—that is 40 miles.

Charley³ homesteaded a piece of land yesterday. We are about ten miles apart—his is in the edge of Custer. I still have my horses yet . . . and I have done a good deal of traveling with them since I left home. I expect they have been on the roads as much as 1200 miles besides the other work they have done. They are all in very good fix. Jack proved to be a very good horse, he is as tuf as a pine knot.

You wanted to know if our clothes got spoilt along the way. They did not, only we lost a quilt along the way . . . on a windy day it blowed out of the waggon.

I have saw 7 deer and lots of Jack rabbits. I have killed one Jack rabbit. I will send the ears to Charley. Aunt Jennie and Rachel and Ettie⁴ are sitting here at the end of the table picing a three gallon bucket full of lettus and 42 redishes.

Monday eve

You wanted to know if we were baching. We are still living with these folks we traveled with. There was another young man came on the cars with their goods. He and I run together—his name is Dud Godard. He and George Terhune and I took land side and side the same

² Charles Donnell was Ed's younger brother.

³ Charles Long was a Missouri neighbor who had come to Nebraska with Ed.

⁴ Mr. and Mrs. George Terhune and their daughters were Sherman County neighbors of Donnell. He and Charles Long had travelled to Nebraska with the Terhunes. The Ettie mentioned became Mrs. Donnell.

day. We went and bought us a couple of breaking plows and Dud and I are going to our claims to break in the morning. We will sleep in the wagons while we are there. I expect we will plow 3 or 4 weeks. Breaking plows are high, from \$23 to \$25 a piece.

We have done our own washing once. The folks that we live (with) would do our washing but we wont let them. They did wash up all our dirty close after we got here and did not charge for it. There is 16 of us in one house and it smaller than the one you are living in. We had a heavy rain last night. The mill at Loup City was struck by lightning and damaged a good bit. . . .

I have not been dressed up but once since I left home.

You write often. Dont wait for me for I dont have time to write to any boddy.

Ed

Loup Cy
Aug the 1/84

Dear Mother:

. . . I have been harvesting for some time. There is as much harvesting to do out here as there is in Mo. and hands is as hard to get and wages is as high. I have mad \$8 this week and I have two more days to work. If nothing happens the corn crop will be immense, wheat and oats is good. I like it a great deal better out there I think than C⁵ does. You know his turn. He fooled around and set up binders during harvest and didnt make much rather than take a holt and do hard work. You wanted to know what was the reasons we separated. For several reasons. He got contrary and wouldnt take land where I wanted to. The day we went to look at the land I took it was a hot day and we drove up onto a high place and stopped and he was too lazy to get out and walk over the land. There was five of us and three of us got out and walked over the land while he and another fellow took their pistol and shot at a mark. We took the land, and he went off and made fun of it and he had never saw hardly any of it. Besides, I have been furnishing three horses and him one and I did most of the

⁵ Charles Long.

work and he got half the profits, so we desolved pardnership. There is too familyes in the house one in each end he boards with one and I live with the other. He has to pay board and all I do is to furnish as much provishion as I eat and they dont charge a cent for cooking. When I leave my dirty close a laying around they wash and iron them and they wont do anything for him. He has had the ich most of the sumer. I kept myself rubbed up with that chunk of asifidity you gave me before I left home to keep from taking it. We are friendly enough, but I think he is kind of jealous of me because I get along better with the people and am making more than he is now I dont want a word said about this to nobody.

Write often. If I dont write much I think a good deal. . . .

from Ed

Loup
Oct26.

Dear Mother:

I received your letter yesterday eve was glad to hear that you were all well and everything went off smoothly at the wedding. I would like to have been there but it did not suit me to go I could not leave my work. It rained and sleeted all day yesterday all day I was out in it all day. The people out here seem to think it was pretty ruff but I didnt mind it much. I am a heap stouter than I have been for a year or two. I got Adda's card—think it is real nice. I guess I get all of your letters. . . .

I guess I have plenty of socks. You wanted to know how I was fixed for the winter. If this week stays nice I will be fixed pretty well. We are all going to move onto our land tomorrow. You said you wanted me to get married and not be living by myself. I dont no anything about getting married and dont know now that I ever will. Oh say is the Gossett girls married yet? If you want me to marry and know of any girls that want to marry just give me a breeze, please.

Well Mother we had a big prarie fire last week it done a good deal of damage I told Lizzie about it in her letter. I will send you a couple of Loup papers. I wish you would

send me a Holden paper once in a while. . . . you wanted to know how I was fix for winter I am fixed better for every-thing but bed clothes I will have to buy some blankets and comforts. . . . Write often and not wait for me.

From your Honey

Ed.

Dec. the/24
Balsora, Nebr

Dear Parents:

. . . I am well and hope this will find you enjoying the same blessing.

It has been cold for the last two weeks—been snowing a good share of the time. It has been 22 below. They say it is colder than they ever saw it before.

Tonight is Christmas Eve. Where are you all going? I am going to set by the fire at home in my sod house. If it is not too cold tomorrow I am going a deer hunting. We have been out twice this winter and killed four, 2 do and bucks. We divided equal, there was four of us out. If Charley had come over before he left (for Missouri) I allowed to send you a piece . . . Direct [letters] to Balsora,⁶ Sherman County.

Ed

Balsora, Neb.
January 9, 85

Dear parents:

I received your letter a few minutes ago and will answer immediately. Your letter was so heavy that I had to pay 2 cents to get it. . . . I will try to answer your questions. . . .

⁶ Balsora was a rural post office in northwestern Sherman county. The name was later applied to a church and school in the vicinity. (Meroe J. Owens, *A Brief History of Sherman County, Nebraska* [Norfolk, Nebraska, 1952], p. 115.)

I am 2 and 1/4 miles [from Balsora] but the Mail comes by Loup City it comes to Balsora 3 times a week. It has to come 55 or 60 miles by stage. . . . I live 12 miles by section line northwest from Loup City on the south side of the middle Loup River. I have no chickens, hogs or cow. Am going to get some hogs and chickens pretty soon and a cow when I get able.

My bed tick is as good as it was when I left home. . . . Us boys between us have 3 cumforts and 4 horse blankets we use for bedclothes. I have the same horse blankets I had when I left home. Bob has two new ones. Feathers is the same [price] here that they are there but I dont want you to be buying me a feather bed. . . .

If I live and keep my health until next fall I expect to have another 160 acers of land. You seem to think we have a terrible cold country. Well, it is pretty cold but I haven't thought of freezing out yet. The oldest settlers say this is the coldest they ever saw it here. I went to Loup and back in one day—as cold a day as we have had this winter and only stoped once to warm and didnt freeze either. Their was nother fellow went with me. . . .

You used to think I was a terriable harum scarem fellow but I guess when I was put to the text I was about as firm as anyone. I have took it ruff and tumble and no one has herd me complain. From the time I left home until the latter part of the summer I did not have my clothes off a fourth of the time at night for most of the time was on the claims and on the roads hunting land or to Grand Island. . . .

I am going to get some hogs and chickens right soon and live at home and board at the same place.

Write imediately, Love to all.

Ed

Balsora, Ne
Feb. the/18

Dear Mother:

. . . Well it will soon be a year since I left home. Although I have been terriable lonesome sometimes it dont seem long since I bid you all adieu.

We have had a pretty hard winter and I have stayed in the house more this winter than I ever did in any one winter. Didnt have much that I could do in the bad weather. Bob has bought a claim and is going to move onto it in the spring. If Dud and I dont bach together I will be by myself. I am going to get my bread baked through the work season. There are two or three of the neighbor women have offered to bake it for me. My neighbors is real kind.

I told you I got 2 Christmas presents and I got 2 more since. One is a match safe made out a black cloth trimmed in blue with three blue tassels, and a watch pocket to hang on the wall—it is made out of green cloth all flowered with red crochet work and three silk beaus, 1 at the top and one on each side. A nice meat dish, and a shaveing mug that cost 75 cents. Dud gave me that.

Have you got a place to go yet.? I think so much about you moving around so much. Well, the longer I stay in Neb the better I like it. I am going to set out a lot of shrubbery this spring if I keep my health. I cant improve the place all at once though because you know I am not able.

Tell Father to see what he can get for my cultivator. I will have to have one in the spring. They sell high out here. If he cant sell it perhaps I will have it shipped out. Write soon and tell me all the news. . . .

Ed.

Balsora Nebr.
March the/11

Dear Mother:

I have just received your letter. I am well and been busy getting stuff to plaster today. It was about dark when I got your letter—I was cleaning my yard, sweeping it with a willow brush. We are having fine weather now—regular spring weather. I just wish you could hear the prairie chickens here in the mornings about sunrise.

Well, dear Mother, I like Nebr fine, but I get teriable lonesome sometimes when I get to thinking about you folks at home and how you have to move around. The other boys is away and I am by myself tonight. I got the last pair of socks you sent, was ever so much obliged to you for them. . .

I have dishes I havent got much bed clothes but it will soon be summer.

I went to a spelling school the other night. There was too teachers there and I spell them all down.

I wish I could have been at home the night the folks was there to sit till bedtime. . . . How many horses and colts is there on the place now? Is Queenie still lame? Have you still got old Black? I dont like baching a bit. Dont expect to bach always. My light has played out, will quit for tonight.

Thursday morning: Well it is foggy this morning. . . . I wish Charley had a piece of land out here. If he and Bell would come out Bell could take land and Charley could work it. In six months from now there wont be a foot of land to take out here anyways handy to me. I measured my land off the other day and there is a lot of box alder sprouts on it I didnt suppose I would get-four or five hundred some as high as my heal growed that high last year. They get burnt down every year with the prairie fires. I am going to break around them. Write soon and often.

Ed

Arcadia Nebr.
April the/16

Dear Mother:

I am at Arcadia getting my plow sharpened and while I am waiting I will answer your letter. . . . I have been farming some and helping a neighbor dig a well. I have made some garden. I got some bluegrass seed today to sow in my yard.

Charley [Long] got here last Wednesday. He stayed at my place a week. . . . Charley says if he had as good a claim as Ive got he would be satisfied he thinks I am getting things fixed up nicely and I think so too. I have my cooking and everything, but you can bet I dont lie in bed in the morning, I could hardly get Charley up against I would have breakfast ready.

Tell Bell the cake was just splendid. I took a piece down to Aunt Jennies and they pronounced it boss. . . .

I have got a lot of box alder trees, maples, willows, and horseradish, sage and pieplant set out. Am going after strawberries and goseberries Saturday. Write soon and often to

Ed

Balsora, Nebr.
July the/5

. . . Yesterday was the fourth. I went to Arcadia did not have much of a time for it commenced to rain about seven o'clock and rained most of the forenoon. . . I haven't been very well for a week or so but am O.K. now though. I will get through breaking and get my corn laid by this week am going away to work a while I don't know whether I will freight from St. Paul or Loup City or work on the new railroad. . . I will be gone most of the time until hay harvest that will be about the middle of August. They aim to have the railroad completed as far as Loup City this fall. I can see Loup City plainly from my place.

The census taker was around the other day—he was also taking the valuation for the county. He valued my claim and what stuff I had at sixteen hundred dollars but I don't believe that I would take that for it. I have new potatoes and I am going [to have] some rhubarb pies tomorrow. . . About 45 of the maple seeds you sent me lived.

I went to North Loup last week went down one day and back the next took down a load of hogs for a neighbor and brought back a load of lumber. Cleared \$6.25 besides my expenses. . .

How much is Denny to give for the cultivator? If I had known that I could not have got the money I would have had it shipped. It threw me in such a shape that I had to go in debt this month. I have no news to write so will close. Goodbye from Ed to the homefolks.

Ed

Basora
October the/8

Commence reading in the morning so that you can finish in a day

Dear Mother :

. . . Fall is here again. It has been cool for a week or two froze a little last night. I finished digging my potatoes yesterday, had 27 bushels, about a bushel of beats, brought in about a bushel of green tomatoes last eve to make picklelilly—

You wanted to know how I liked my new home and how I was getting along. I like Nebr first rate wouldnt look at a thousand dollars for my claim, butI have had poor health since July until a couple of weeks ago. I quit working so hard and am getting stout again. I have saw a pretty tuff time a part of the time since I have been out here, but I started out to get a home and I was determined to win or die in the attempt. I worked to hard in the fore part of the season, I would get up early and get my breakfast and get out to work. Scarcely ever set down only while I was eating from the time I got up until I went to bed at nine and ten o'clock.

I will tell you what kind of a house I lived in last winter. It was a sod house of corse, but it was so late when I got it built that I didnt get it plastered until spring. Nothing but the ground for a floor. A bedstead with wilow poles for slats. Boxes to sit on. And if it didnt look pretty rough I dont want to see anything that does. And there was nothing to do all winter so I had to make the best of it. There is lots of other bachelors but I am the only one I know who doesnt have kinfolks living handy so that they can help in the way of cooking. I had no relatives handy but I think I have as many friends as anybody Aunt Jennie and the girls has always been so good to me. They have baked bread and washed for me part of the time—would all of the time if I would have let them. . . . There is a large family and Jennie has a little baby about 2 month old and I think there have been sixteen different persons here from Nodaway County⁷ to see them and look at the country. I think all Nodaway County will be out here pretty soon. They all like it out here.

I broke out about 30 acres last spring besides putting in my crop and tending it. Have put between too and three hundred dollars worth of improvements on myplace. Have got a good crop of corn,, a floor in my house and got it ceiled overhead and a calico petition, a bedstead and cup-

⁷ Nodaway County, Missouri.

board, some dishes and chairs. I got five hogs. In fact, things look quite different to what they did last fall. Times is dull here now. Wheat is only worth thirty cents a bushel. I worked out some in harvest but havent got no money for it yet. A person borrows money here they have to pay 3 percent per month, the same as 36 percent per year. I had to borrow 20 dollars this summer that thats what I had to pay.

You wanted to know when I was going to get married. Just as quick as I can get money ahead to get a cow and to get married. I want to before I commence shucking corn if I can to Aunt Jennie's oldest girl. She is 18 years old. She is a good girl and knows how to work. We are going to get our pictures taken and send Home. A fellow cant do much good on a new place when he has everything to do both indoors and out both. She says if we marry right away she is going to do the work in the house and shuck the down row when I am gathering corn, but I will be glad enough to get rid of the housework.

You spoke about sending some bedclothes and I believe I will let you send them. I would like to have a featherbed. I have been trying to get feathers, but I cant find a pound at the towns or in the country. I wish you would find out what twenty pounds of feathers would cost and write immediately and let me know. . . . I dont want a word told that is in this letter outside of the family burn it when you read it.

I would have told you sooner about feeling so poorly, before but knew it would have done no good and would only make you uneasy. I had a bad cough for about a month but I don't cough any now and am about as stout as ever. I laid it to the working so hard in the spring. I intended to work on the railroad this fall but was not able. . . .

I am sorry about you losing Bird. I wish I had your stock out here to eat some of my good hay. Tell Adda to kiss the baby for me. Write when you get this and tell me all the news and answer all my questions. . . . Would have written a *long* letter, but didnt have paper.

Ed

Loop Citey
October the/30

Dear Mother:

. . . I have been laid up for two weeks with a sore hand a rising it was on the back of my hand. My arm was so stiff for a while that I could not move it. I am afraid that there is another starting. I had to make biskits left handed and do everything left handed.

You wanted to know when I was going to mary. I dont know. I cant till I get some money. Corn is so low I wont sell it at only twelve cents a bushel and I guess I will have to bach again this winter again. I could borrow money but I would have to pay such outlandish interest that I wont do it. I had a notion to write to Jim and see if I could borrow fifty dollars from him for a year. I would give my note and pay a reasonable interest. . . . Have Charley or Pa see him if he can let me have it send it and the note to Loup City. . . . If you dont think he has it to spare dont say anything about it.

You neednt to send those things until I tell you to—I dont want them as long as I am baching. If I mary this fall I am going to mary in the suit I had when I left ther—it is as good as the day I left home. My girl's name is Ettie [Terhune]. I will send our pictures right away, but we cant marry this fall unless I get some money. I have a little money coming to me but it will take that to pay what I owe.

Ed

Nov. the/10

Dear Mother:

I received your letter a few moments ago and thank you ever so much for the birthday present. My hand is better but I have had a bad time of it. I had five boils besides a rising.

I have been thinking very strongly of proving up here lately. If I do I will go clear to the southwest part of the state and take a timber claim and pre-emption. If I do I will sell my team and wont try to do anything only hold my land. If times get better so I can mary will stay where

I am, but I am not going to try to farm and bach. The railroad grade is all finished to Loup but the iron is only laid part way. If I prove up I will prove up in about three weeks.

You can do as you like about the ten dollars. If you dont need it for a while I will pay it back. If you do need it, dont send it. If you do send it, send it to Loup City in a registered letter—Balsora is to meddlesome. Your affectionate son.

Ed

Balsora
November the/27

Dear Mother:

Once more in the anals of time I will try to talk to you by way of pencil and paper.

Well, to start on, I will tell you of a weding we had in these parts on Thursday, Nov. 19—Miss Ettie Terhune to Ed Donnell, all of Sherman Neb. Yes, Ma, it is a fact. I was married the 19th at 2 oclock. We went to Loup City got the license went over to the parsonage and was married by Rev. Randolph, a Methodist minister, at two oclock in the afternoon. Drove back to their house about six where a table well loaded was waiting for us. We ate our suppers and stayed there until about 11 oclock and then came on up home. They did not have but a few there on account of the house being small.

It seems so much nicer to come into the house and find everything nice and clean. I think that I have one of the best little women that there is. We havent got so very much in our house but she makes everything look neat and tidy and is willing to help me all she can. I hope some day we will be better fixed. I havent heard from home for quite a while. I havent been to Loup City for a week. Will go down Monday. I wish some of you could have been here to see us married. Will send our pictures [they] are not very good taken two weeks before we were married.

Ed

To Eds Ma:

You will be surprised to get a letter from one you have never seen, but Ed has give us a slight introduction. Ed has been with us ever since we came here. Ed is a good boy. I know he must have been a dutiful son, he speaks so often of his Father, Mother, Sisters and Brother and longs to see them. He would be better satisfied if you all was here. This country looks strange to what I was used to but we can make comfortable homes here that in time will be valuable. This country is so new, no timber, but we will have to be patient. In seven years a grove will be good size. I think it will be good fruit country.

Well, thanks to you for that receipt. Give my best wishes to Ed's sisters. Dont be uneasy about your boy, but I know how a mother is about her boy. Hoping to hear from you all.

M. E. Terhune.⁸

January the/18

Dear Mother and Father:

Ettie and I have seated ourselves to write to you. We are well with the exception of bad colds. We have had some very cold weather, but as a general thing it has been a much nicer winter than last winter. . . .

You wanted to know about the rail road. The road bed was finished to Loup City last fall but the iron wont be laid before spring. We will be between to railroads by this time next year. We will be about five miles from one and 8 miles from the other—the B and M and the Union Pac. They are going through to the Black Hills. Hoop Hurrah. Remember your son has 160 acres between them.

Hello Dick,⁹ you rascal you. Why dont you write? How is tricks and things? You ought to come out and see us. I have one of the sweetest wives you ever saw. . . . I wish you could all come out here and get a home. I like it better all the time. . . .

⁸ Mrs. George Terhune, Etta's mother.

⁹ Dick referred to his brother Charley.

I got the money and will try to repay you as soon as I can. I havent got a cow yet, am going to try and get one soon.

Ed

Arcadia, Nebr.
March the/2

Dear Mother:

. . . The reason I have put off writing so long was because I have been diging a well been working at it for 4 weeks—down 120 feet and still diging. I am always to tired at night to write. . . . We are thinking of proving up on the homestead and renting it out and going further west and using my other two wrights. They say the timber claim and pre-emption is going to play out this summer. If so I want to use my wrights before it is to late. This country is improving fast. Land rents redily for the third. . . . As Dud is going to the office and is waiting for this I will close. . . .

From A. E. D. and L. E. D.

June the/5

Dear Mother:

. . . First of all I must tell you about the big barbacue at loup City yesterday the 4 of June. The Rail road is completed to Loup City and Loup City and Sherman County celebrated the day that the first excursion train run in with a barbecue. The train run from Omaha to loup City, the first train came in at about half past ten. There was about 1500 hundred people on the train and about too thousand people standing down at the depot to cher and welcome them. They had a cannon up on the hill above town and when they saw the train come in sight they commenced firing. A real cannon not an anvil. The train was drawn with the largest engine I ever saw. It had flags all over it. The cort house and all the business houses around the square were decorated with flags. There was two brass bands and one silver band a playing when they came in. Ettie and I was standing on the platform when it came in.

I got to take off my hat and give three cheers for the first passenger train in Sherman County, and you bet I did. They had 6 sheep, 4 hogs and 2 calves roasted whole, and they tried to roast an ox but it was too big and they had to cut it up into quarters. Besides bread, butter chickens, pie and cake by the wagon load. They had tables set for about six hundred to eat at once. It was the biggest crowd and the grandest sight I ever saw in my life. There was lots of speakers, among the rest, Governor Dawes, Governor of the State. I could tell you lots more but I will have to quit and tell you how we are getting along.

Well, Ma, it will soon be ten years since I took my claim—too years the 11 of this month. It don't look like it did then. I have got quite a lot broke out. Got about 300 trees a growing 30 bunches of wild gooseberry 14 apple trees 5 mulberry trees 5 currants 25 plum 6 concord grapes 12 bunches of blackberry, and if nothing happens we will have strawberries next year till you can't rest. We will have about a gallon this year and fine ones too. We have got a good garden. If they do well we will have over a hundred bushels of Irish potatoes. We set out 250 sweet potatoes I have all my ground in corn except the garden. I want to get enough broke out this summer to make 50 acres.

You wanted to know if I sold my team. I did, I sold team, harness and wagon. I bought a team of mares and a spring wagon I got them for about half price. I traded the spring wagon for another one and I am going to breed all of them and raise me some colts. I bought me a new set of harness and another wagon. I didn't give as much for the three and the harness and wagon as I got for the too. The three I've got is all mares young good to pull. . . .

Ed

Arcadia, Nebraska

My dear Sister:

. . . You must pardon us for not writing soon I don't write much and Edd is very busy. . . . I have got only 18 little chickens and one hen setting. They won't go to setting. You wanted to know what teachers was getting per month, I don't know what a good teacher would get. I guess there is not many good school teachers out here. I know of

one that never taught before that is getting \$25 per month. I think there would be a good chance for teachers out here. . . .

Edd and Etta
Our Love to all

Arcadia, Nebr.
August the/3

Dear Mother:

I have just this minute received your letter. Think the baby is real pretty. I like the country first rate. I am proveing up on my place in order to use my other rights. I will have about 3000 bushels of corn to gather. I will have to hire help. I will give Charley big wages if he will fech his team and help me. Do as you like, but my advice would be come one come all. I will furnish you corn, hay, potatoes, a house and stables until next harvest if you will come.

I want to buy some yearling heifers and my neighbor wants to buy about thirty steers to feed. What can we get them for [in Missouri]? Tell Charley to describe his mules and tell me what he will take for them. Mayby I will buy them. I am trading around all the time. I made a trade the other day. I cleared about one hundred and fifty dollars.

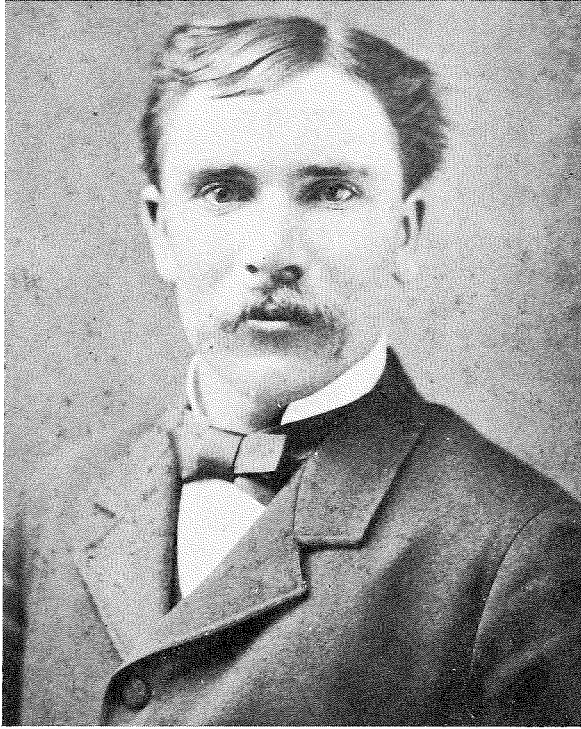
Tell me what you can get all kind of stock give in exact figures mayby I will come back. . . . Write immediately

From Ed Donnell
your homely son.

Written in haste.

Be shure and say you will come and leave that cussed place.

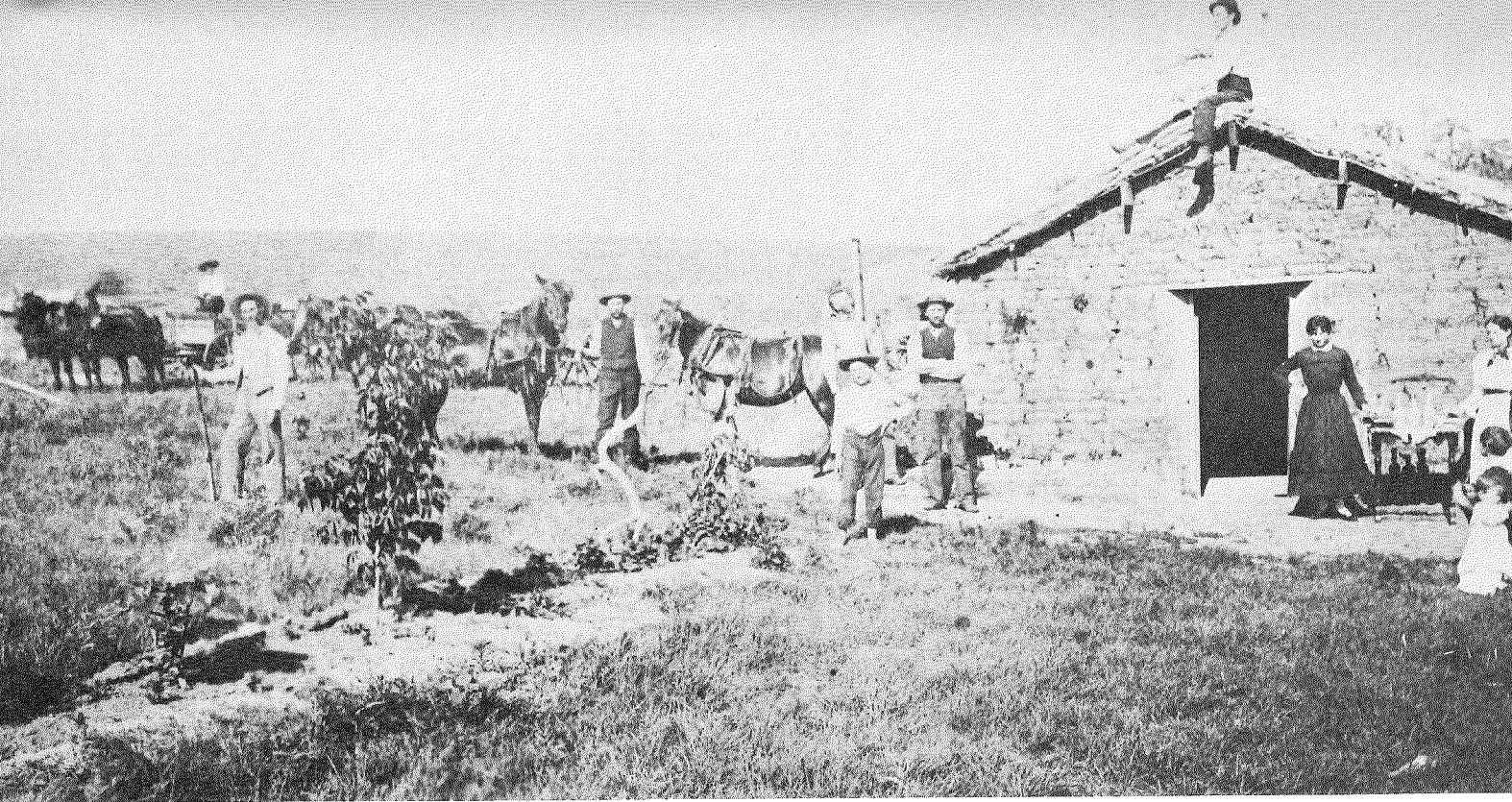
Ettie is at home canning plums. Tell me whether you will come in the next letter so I will know whether to put up hay or not.



Above—Ed Donnell

Below—Ed Donnell, at left. His companion has not been identified.





"We had a photo of our house taken. . . . I am standing by the house holding my horses, Ettie dressed in white, Merta by the door. Aunt Jennie, and Ted and Lizzie by Ettie, George with the gun in his hand. The other little boys are Ollie and Jesse. John Welty at the corner of the house, the others is Etties cousins. . . ."

Arcadia
Aug 13, 1886

Dear Home Folks:

. . . The weather has been very warm for the last few days having lots of rain. The crops look well. Arcadia and Loop City on the boom. Charley Long has been here helping me dig a cellar. He is going to Arcadia today to work at carpentering.

One of my horses died this summer—the best one I had. It was quite a loss but not as bad as it might have been for I had a team left. Does any of you think of coming out this fall I wish you could. . . . I am going to commence to put up hay Monday. I am going to put up about 60 ton.

We had a photo of our house taken. It is very good but dont show much of the improvements. The stable is back of the house. It only shows one corner of it. Thats the hen house out by itself. I am standing by the house holding my horses, Ettie dressed in white, Merta by the door. Aunt Jennie, and Ted and Lizzie by Ettie, George with the gun in his hand. The other little boys are Ollie and Jesse. John Welty at the corner of the house, the others is Etties cousins. . .

From
Ed and Ettie

Arcadia, Nebr.
Nov. the 24,

Dear Home Folks:

I have had the tooth ache ever since Friday so bad I couldnt sleep I went to the Doctor with it but he said it was such a bad case he wouldnt tackle it.

. . . I am so sleepy I cant hardly hold my eyes open. . . . Ettie has been sick and I have been setting up a good deal

and and and and

We have one of the pretyest Babyes you ever saw.¹⁰ So

¹⁰ Ed and Etta had three children. Their first born Minnie Bell, grew to womanhood and married Fred B. Gould. The other two children died in infancy. (*The Arcadia Champion* October 28, 1921).

now you know the reason I havent written before this. She was born Sunday October the 24. My bible has no records in it and I wish you would put it down in the bible at home. The babe and Ettie are getting along fine now. We have had such a bad snow storm I think it was the wrost I ever sew . . . I have herd of some stock, hogs being lost but I guess it was carlessness. I kept everything warm. I had two black sows that had 14 young pigs. . . . Ettie being sick throwed me back with my work, but I had a warm place prepared for everything.

I worried more about you folks back there than anything else. The thoughts of you living back there and nothing to feed make me sad when I have plenty. If you lived handy I could pretty near keep you and not miss it. We have got plenty to eat We have our cave filled with such eatables as turnips, sweet potatoes, squashes and beats. I bought 35 bu. of wheat for 35 cents a bu.—bought it while cheap. We have plenty of everything but money and that is hard to get a hold of. The scarf got here safe and is real nice.

Ed

Arcada
Jan the/2 1887

Dear Mother:

. . . We are having a very mild winter for this country. Well I am busy most of the time and playing with Minnie Bell the rest of the time. That is the babies name. We call her Bell after Sister Bell. Oh how I wish you could see her—she is as plump and fat as she can be. She could hold a stick of candy in her hand and put it into her mouth and suck it when she was only 7 weeks old. We are going to have her picture taken the first time we go to loop City.

My well is 125 feet deep and I have quite a job drawing watter. I have 45 head of hogs and 7 head of cattle and horses to draw watter for besides what is used in the house. It is so hard to draw that Ettie cant draw it at all and I had a big crop of corn to gather out—near done—so you see I havent had much time to write. . . .

I am going to try and send you all a little Christmas present. I cant send anything very costly for I havent got much money. I had \$25 to pay out when Ettie was sick. . . .

Ed and Ettie

Arcadia
March 28, [1887]

Dear Brother:

Ettie is writing to the rest of the folks I will scratch a few lines to you.

We have had a month of pretty weather. People is done sowing wheat. I am going to put all my ground in corn am going to break out a lot more ground this sumer. I built me a little frame stable this spring. The rats eat my sod stable down or so that it fell. I may sell out this summer land is going up fast. My place is worth 2000. Wont take any less. If I sell out I am going west and grow up with the country. . . . They are working on the railroad between loop city and arcadia now. We will hear the iron horse a snorting in Arcadia by the 4th of July.

There is not many churches here yet, but I dont think it is any closer to hell than it is any place else for my new well is 125 feet to water and it is almost as cold as ice. I like to have churches and go to them, but I dont think God requires people to stay in a country where they shake their liver upside down or where they cant make a liven or have a home, just because they have churches. For my part, I like to have a little health and something to eat and try to lay up something for a rainy day and old age. Charley, you can do as you please, but if I were you I would make a break for a home as soon as you are old enough to take land. If I had started out to Neb when I was 21 if I hadnt a cent lef when I got here I would have been well off now. If you was of age and out here I could get you a claim but it would be rough but there is good land west of here and they say there is plenty of timber. If you want to come west I will help to keep the folks at home.

Your brother

Ed

Arcadia, Nebr
March the 28, 1887

Mother and family:

We received you letter . . . and the package you sent . . . Minnies dress is not much to large she will soon grow into

it. . . . There is a church at Loup City the Methodists they have preaching at the school houses. They have no church house at Arcadia but think they will have one before long.

Lizzie, teachers are getting \$25 to 30 dollars per month. Edd says to tell you if you can come right away he will get you a school.

You wanted to know what we make fires of. We burn corn. We have burnt from a hundred and fifty to 200 bushels this winter. Fed three head of cattle four head of horses and forty head of hogs.

The cars run from Grand Island [to] Kearney and from Grand Island to Loup City and they will soon be running up from Loup City to Arcadia they think by the fourth of July. Potatoes are from 25-30 cts per bu, Eggs 5 cts, butter 19 cts, corn 15 cts. Coal is from \$5 to \$7 dollars a ton. They have commenced to build a flouring Mill at Arcadia worth \$11,000. that will boom land up. Edd says he wouldnt take no less than \$2,000 for his place and I think it is worth it. . . .

From Edd and Etta

Arcadia
April 30,

Dear Parents Brother and Sisters:

. . . I am busy farming it has been raining considerable for a wile. . . .

I wish you could see Minnie. She is the sweetest and best little babe that you ever saw and I know it and everybody else that sees here says so. She gets a present every time she goes any place. She has got five nice dresses, and a nice gold pin, and three rattle boxes besides several other little things. All those were gave to her besides what I have got her. . . . When we take her to town Ettie cant hardly hold her long enough to let her nurse she will laugh and play with anybody.

My hogs arent doing very well now 2 sows died piging and only three saved of 11 pigs. I had then to fat I guess. . . .'

Ed and Ettie

July the/9

Dear Father and Mother:

Ed and I have been having very bad colds. . . . Last Sunday we was at a Sunday School picnic. We celebrated the fourth at Arcadia. . . . Everything looks nice. We have offul nice corn. Have about 8 hundred sweet potatoes plants out about a hundred cabbage plants out. . .

Ed and Etta

Sept 1
Arcadia, Valy Co. Nebr.¹¹

Dear Father and Mother:

. . . We have been having wet weather for 3 weeks and is still raining. The drough and the chintz bugs hurt the corn but there is a fare crop yet. There will be lots of corn to spare I will have plenty to do me and a little to spare I have 48 head of hogs and they eat a good deal of corn. I am trying to sell out. My health has been so poor this summer and the wind and sun hurts my head so. I think if I sell I will get me a timber claim and move to town for I can get \$40 a month working in a grist mill and I would not be exposed to the weather. A person dont have to live on a timber claim or wont have any taxes to pay on it for 8 years. Taxes is unreasonable in this county. My taxes will be about \$40 this year. If a person has to borrow a little money he has to pay 3% per month, the same as 36% per year. . . .

Ettie and Ed

Dear Father

. . . I want Charley to come out here and I will go with him to hunt a claim, but I dont want him to start by himself for it is a long lonesome trip. I think if he could get a good price for his team it would pay him to sell and come on the cars but if he cant, I want him to start with a good team. . . . and dont start with a very big load. . . . I am

¹¹ Valley County, Nebraska.

pretty hard up but I will try to let him have 40-50 dollars before he starts for he cant travel without money. . . . I think it would be best for him to let me manage for him a little, for I have come through it and I know how it goes and I can see where I hit it and where I missed it. . . .

I want you to write and tell me exactly what you are going to do and I will help you all I can. We have been talking of running a boarding house. Board is \$4 a week. How would you and Bell like to go in with Ettie and run it while Charley and Father and I go out west and take land and build houses? Has Bell still got her sewing machine? If she has, dont sell it, for she could get all the sewing she could do. There is a good opening for a dress-maker at Arcadia. . . . How much do you think it would take to get you all out here, besides what you have, I mean. All of you could come in the wagon—there are families here that came clear through from Ohio in the wagons. I dont want to winter here another winter to cold. I can do well here this summer. . . .

Feb the 2, 1888

Dear Mother and Father:

. . . Received your letters and the presents you sent us. . . . It has been so cold here this winter some days it was to cold for anyone to be out. Coldest weather that has been since we come here. Never heard of any one freezing to death wright around here but there was in several places. . . . The wind blows so strong here Ed has the head ache all the time in warm weather, that I dont think we will farm any this summer.

[Ettie]

Feb the/2 1888

Dear Mother:

. . . You wanted to know what I was going to do. I am going to town. I am after two jobs and I think I will get one of them. I intend to go out to colorado and take a timber claim and then come back and work this summer and try to sell my place. I am dissatisfied here for it has been

offul cold this winter—the coldest I ever saw. We had one storm¹² that you couldnt see 2 rods ahead of you in broad day light and it lasted about 48 hours. I was two miles from home when it came up I came home through it. The thermometer dropped 30 deg. in an hour and if wind would freeze mercury I dont know where it would have went to. My fuel has cost me about 2.50 a week this winter. . . . I expect I will lose my hogs. One of my neighbors lost seven in three days.

Ed

Letter from brother Charley in Nebraska to the family in Missouri

Aprile 14, 1888

Dear Mother:

. . . Well, we arrived at Ed's last Wensday about sun-down. Ed knew me before I got to the house and you may bet he was surprised. I think Ed has got a real nice little wife and they get along so well together. Minny is as pretty as a peach and sharp as a tack. Ettie has things fixed up real nice in the house—a sod house, looks pretty much as I thought it would. I dont like this country verry well, it is too rough. The soil is good but it is too cold for me. Ed is trying to sell out—going to grand island tomorrow to sell if he can. I am going on to Colorado even if Ed cant go, he doesnt know yet.

Love to all Charley

[An Appended Note From Ed]

Dear Homefolks:

. . . You bet I was glad to see Charley. I am going to try hard to go to Colorado with him. I finished seeding yesterday—sowed my hol place down to wheat and oats. Am going to try to sell if I can. . . . Spring is later than I ever saw it here. We are having dry cool weather, grass hasent started much yet. We thank you for all the presents

¹² This storm was the famous Blizzard of January 12, 1888.

you sent. . . . Charly is considerably larger than I am and he says I look offul small now. If I sell out we are going to Colorado to gather then I will let Charley work my team on his claim and I will go back there and rig him up a team and drive it out.

Ed

April the/25 88

Dear Mother and Sister:

. . . We was so glad to see Charley. Ed hadent thought of Charley comeing this way. Ed went to Grand Island last week to see if he could sell his place. . . . Charley stayed with me. I dont see how Charley and Ed can separate now —(they) think so much of each other but I think they will stay clost to each other. Mother, we cant thank you and Bell enough for the things you sent. . . . Bell, the apron is real nice, Minnie thinks a great deal of her dog. She got the mug and vases. They are so nice. The dried fruit is very good. You ought not to have robed yourself. . . .

Ed and Charley went to one of the neighbors to get some tree cuttings and they took minnie down as far as home so I thought I would write while they are gone. . . . Charley had one loaf of bread, some cookies, and most of the cake all of the jelly [when he got here.]

Ettie

April 28

Ettie has left space for me. . . .

You better believe I was glad to see Charley. I am trying to sell or trade out and go with him, if I cant I am going to help him to get started anyway. If I cant go him and Charley Long will go together. Charley L. has been away all week trying to sell his place and mine. I dont know whether he will accomplish anything or not. Charley wants to write some so I will quit.

From Ed and Ettie

As this is a partnership letter I will drop you a few lines. I will answer your questions. We were all over Lincoln, from one corner to the other. Our fare was \$12 1/4 piece. I will tell you a little joke. We left our grub basket in a grocery store over night and went to a hotel. We asked the fellow if he would open up the next morning in time for us to get it and he said he would. But he did not, so we had another fellow get it and send it to us, but he did not send it for two weeks. . . . The express was 55 cents. . . . Did Queenie's colt live? Try and get one of those pieces about the exhibition and send it to me. . . . We are going to try to do something that will count this summer.

Charley