

Collin Andrew

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History 202

PSD 18-9

Letters of Charles and Helen Wooster

The year was 1872 and folks were moving to make a new life out on the western prairie. Charles Wooster and his wife Nellie were just one of the post-civil war era families making the lengthy move for what they thought would be a better way of life. Charles was to take the journey from Adams, Michigan on his own to find land, build a house, establish a job, and establish what they would call home. Charles and Nellie Wooster would eventually settle in Nebraska. Charles and Nellie spent nine months apart writing letter after letter to one another. When Charles found what he believed to be the place, he was eager to write to Nellie. The first of many letters came on the March 14, 1872 from Silver Creek, Nebraska.

In his first letter, Charles described how much this place differed from Michigan, and that he has no idea what he will do there. "This is a station city or village consisting of the depot, a grocery hotel and one dwelling house" (246). Charles was planning to stay here for some time but was thinking that he would eventually move onto Grand Island. "you must make up your mind not to get home sick when you come, find what you may. If we find any peace or happiness on this earth, I suppose that at least 99 percent of it would be within our own home...." (246)

By March 27, 1872, Charles has now moved onto Silver Glen, Nebraska, and the heavy flow of letters was still in full force. People who were making the move out west on the prairie were terrified of Indians, "wild Indians". Through his letters, Charles talked of Indians and how there was no threat of attack and none of the women or children stood in any danger. "There is no danger here of raids from wild indians for the country is settled

many miles beyond and the wild indians are far away....”(246)

On March 31, 1872, Charles addresses a letter to his wife speaking of life and how pleased he is of the land. I believe that there is no better land in the country that I have chosen for our new home. Though at this point Charles's life with out Nellie was beginning to take a toll on him. Charles wrote to Nellie of how dirty his clothes are and he needed her for household chores.

Charles receives the news of his wife's departure from Michigan in the fall, "I certainly hope you will do so for it is very unpleasant for me to live alone and do my own house work" (246s). Charles and Nellie had arranged plans for the shipping of their belongings and all of the appropriate arrangements for Nellie's journey. Nellie was very adamant about the construction their home. She wanted a bedroom in the most beautiful place as possible and a back door, saying "If it is going to cost so much that you will not have money for a door I will stay in Michigan enough longer to earn money for a door; oh! I do want a back door so much!...." (247).

Charles was quick to reply with the regret that all of this was not possible but that she would be very pleased with the design that he had chosen. As nearly a month passed, Charles was writing to Michigan the completion of their home "I hope to get it enclosed this week and then we can live in it. I would do most anything to have you here" (247).

In response, Nellie's final letter to her husband announced that her father was lending them money with a very gracious loan rate attached.

In conclusion, these letters of correspondence between Nellie and her husband Charles provides us with an actual account of what it felt like to be moving west to make a better life. While there were no prevalent historical events mentioned in these letters, the letters nonetheless conveyed the feelings and the lives of those who lived at such a changing and important time in American history. Five years after Nellie had joined Charles in Nebraska Nellie Wooster passed away, Mr Wooster went on to become an editor of a news paper

and a local politition. Charles Wooster passed away in 1923.