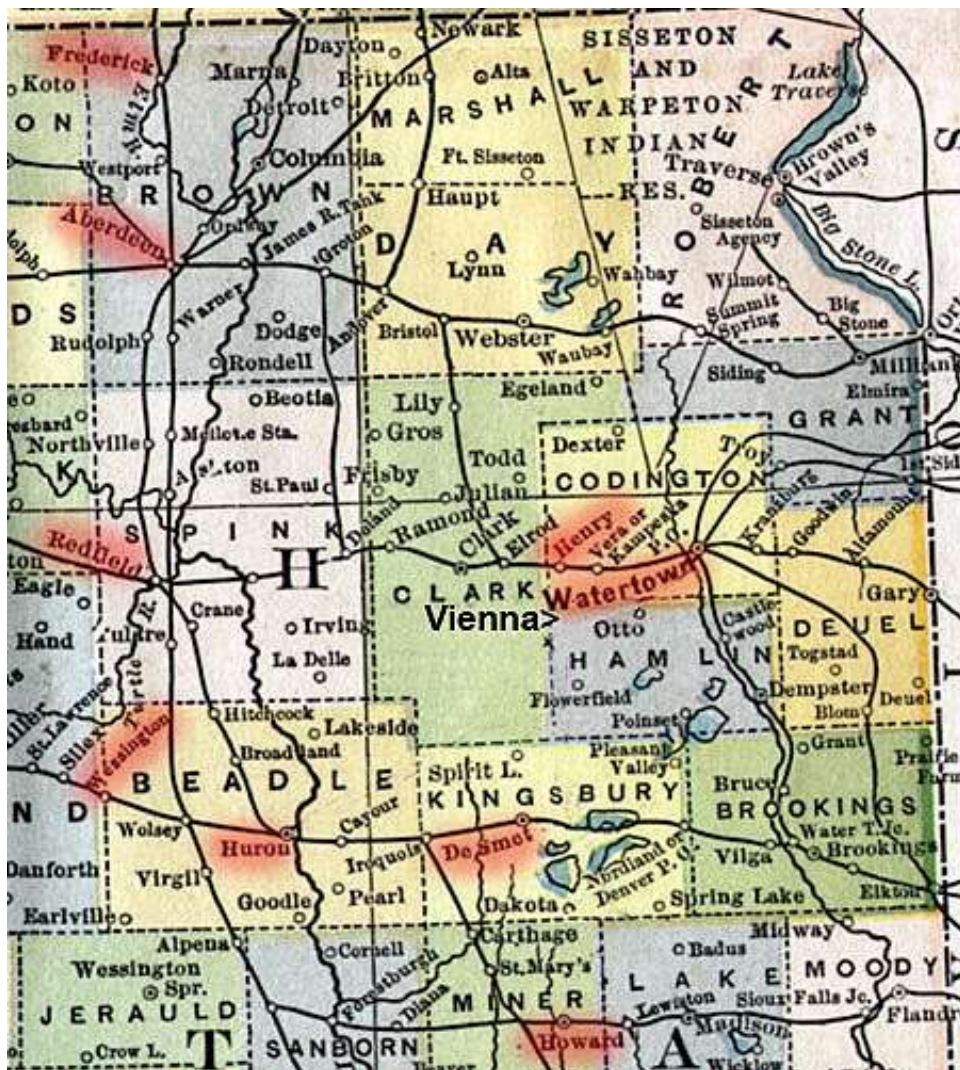
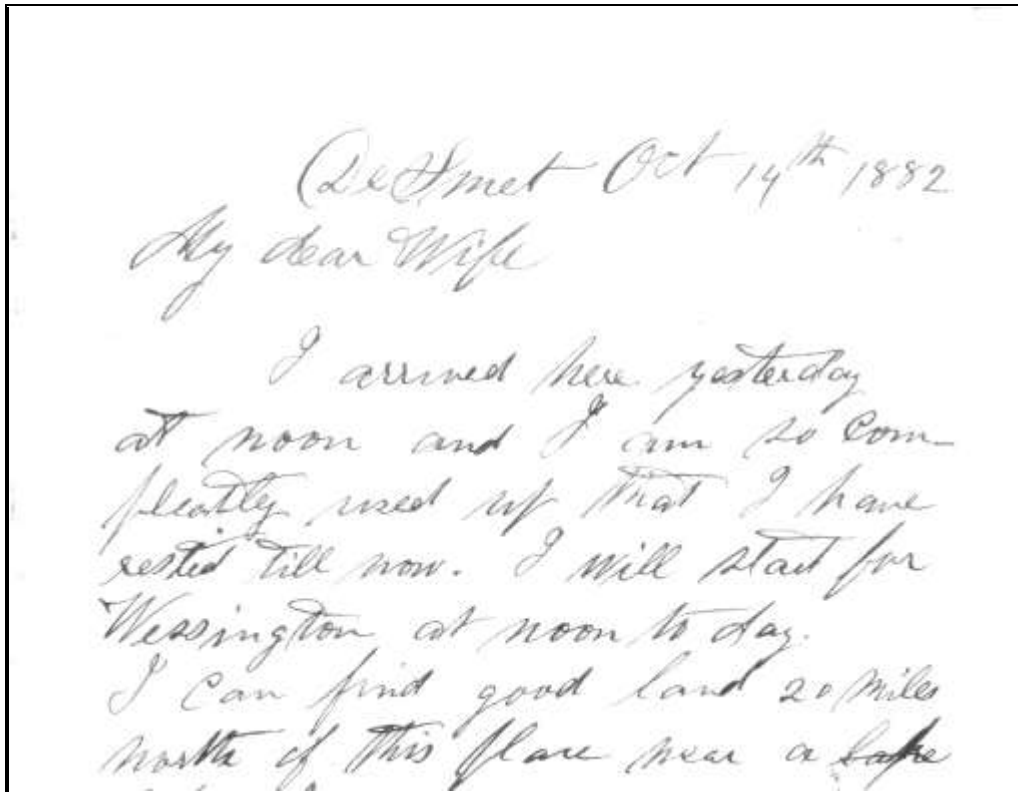


In the decade before October 1882 Robert Arthur Dixon operated a general merchandise store, living with his wife and raising four young children in Lisle, Illinois, near Downers Grove. Robert had decided to "move on" and was determined to claim land in the Dakota Territories. In October he boarded a train for Howard, 600 miles west northwest of his home, in what is now South Dakota. During his search for a claim he corresponded with his wife Sarah Jane (Rowland) Dixon and many of the original letters are in possession of my cousin Dean Essig (Robert and Sarah are our great grandparents). Dean forwarded copies and my transcriptions of those letters are provided here in chronological order. Be aware that each letter had to travel more than 600 miles by buggy and train and often took several days to reach its destination.

First, here is a map of the area Robert was traveling. Each town mentioned in the letters is highlighted. He started in Howard, at the bottom of the map. Vienna, where he ultimately settled, is near the middle:

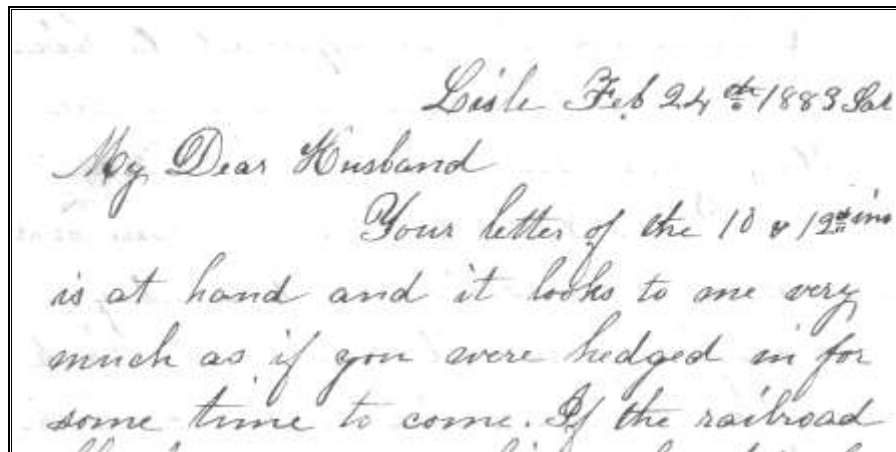


Here is sample of Robert Dixon's script:



Dearest Oct 14th 1882
My dear Wife
I arrived here yesterday
at noon and I am so com-
pletely used up that I have
rested till now. I will start for
Wessington at noon to day.
I can find good land 20 miles
north of this place near a lake

Followed by a sample from one of Sara's letters:



Dear Husband
Your letter of the 10 & 12th inst
is at hand and it looks to me very
much as if you were hedged in for
some time to come. If the railroad

Now, the letters:

Dear Wife, I have just arrived and I find the mail will go east in half an hour so the time is short for me to write. I wrote to you this morning and fearing you will not get my letter I will	Howard Oct 11 th /82
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repeat what I want about my discharges. Send them to Wessington in Beadle Co. I have 3 discharges. Put them in a large envelope and put on enough stamps. Send by return mail. I think I will go north from here as I have heard there is government land there. I find that a Free Claim is hard to be had anywhere as that is the first thing that those want who do not want to pay and one is all that is allowed on each Sect. I am disappointed in the growth of the grass it is small as a rule but the land seems to be rich. I think corn will not do as well as in Ill. The early frost has spoiled it this year anyway.

The wind is blowing very hard today and it is storming some but with all this will be a fine country soon. I have not time to write much now but will from the next point. I will start tomorrow morning for De Smet on the NW R.R. directly north from here. I will then know more about the place than now.

I send my love to you and all the little folks and Mary.

Your Robert

The "discharges" mentioned here are proof he was a Civil War veteran, allowing him to file a soldiers claim for an additional section of land.

"Mary" refers to Mary Brice Rowland, Sarah's older sister.

Lisle October 13th 1882

Dear Husband

Your letters of the 11th inst were both received tonight. I directed a letter to Huron and sent it over to the office & Minnie brought home your letters, but there was not time for me to get your discharge papers over before the mail train so I suppose they will not go till tomorrow night. If you should not get the letter I sent to Huron perhaps it would be well for one to repeat a part of what I wrote in it. Levi Mertz brought the hard coal yesterday & said he would bring the soft in a day or two that he thought it would be at the Grove last night as he had a bill for it. We are all in about our usual health. Mary is better than when she came. The potatoes have not arrived yet but the weather has been rainy a part of the time & so unfavorable for digging them. I was so glad to hear from you tonight; it seemed to me quite time for a letter to arrive. Am glad to hear you were feeling well. The children send love & kisses to Papa & Sadie wrote a little letter & sent in the other one of mine to you. I will try & do just as you have directed with those papers of yours but I am sorry to have them trusted to the mail. How strange that we should have forgotten them. One thing more, I think I will try & send your earmuffs also in this letter. Mary wants to know if you have seen any snow yet.

And now hoping to hear from you often

I remain yours

Sarah J. Dixon

J.T. Escher sent out a map & Attorneys card to you. The card I will enclose. His land is marked as being directly north of Cavour about 12 miles, in the second of those little square divisions, on the northwestern map. I see this Attorney also loans money at low rates. Please find out the usual rates of interest there in Dakota either of him or some other reliable man.

S.J.D.

The abbreviation "inst" stands for instant, or this month – within this month.

Cavour is just east of Huron, South Dakota.

De Smet Oct 14th 1882

My dear Wife,

I arrived here yesterday at noon and I am so completely used up that I have rested till now. I will start for Wessington at noon today.

I can find good land 20 miles north of this place near a lake. I will go and see it if I am not suited at Wessington. The fact is I am one year too late for these parts, everything is going wild. The people are wild about everything. The country is good, in some respects very good. In Miner Co. most of the water is bad but in Kingsbury Co. it is good. The weather is very fine. Could not ask better.

I had a very hard tramp from Howard to this place. I went into the North East corner Miner Co. to look at untaken land. I found all the people there had just come from Norway and they are no better than the [illegible, looks like "Nix fa story"] and the land is flat as the Chicago flat. But this Co. more rolling and some places hilly and the lakes are splendid the soil is rich good for hay, wheat, corn and oats and for potatoes, onions and turnips wonderful. There is a turnip in this room that is 11 ¼ lbs. weight. The grass hoppers do fly over here every year and sometimes light and do some damage.

Most of the people are very poor. They live in miserable shanties and if the blizzards are half as bad as we have heard they all the wonder is that they do not freeze to death. The country is very wild although it is all taken. There is but a few settlers yet. The towns are growing very fast and look fine.

There have been some prairie fires. Last week a doctor went out from this place in a buggy some ten + miles and met a fire and his mare became frightened and threw him out and broke his leg and in this helpless condition was burned to death.

I do not think I will try any more long trips on foot. A pedestrian may travel over small states like Iowa but when it comes to the plains of Dakota he had better keep near the R.R. Keep all the walnuts that we have got for I find that some are sending after them to Ill. I hope you are all well. I expect to hear from you at Wessington. It seems so long since I left home and still it is but a few days. I hope I will find a good place soon, when I see others preparing for their families to come I feel like doing the same. I know that I am remembered at home and we are trusting together in Him who directs the affairs of His children. I pray that He will direct us now in this our time of need. I hope you will have no trouble in sending my discharge.

My love to all my dear ones at home.

Your Husband

Wessington Oct 16/82

My Dear Wife

I am sadly disappointed. I arrived here yesterday the 14th and have been waiting for them papers since. The mail comes only once each day so I must wait until tomorrow 4 o'clock P.M. I did expect so much to hear from home today as I went to the P.O. There was a letter but when I opened it nothing but them miserable ear muff and not so much as one word, I do not understand it. I suppose you must have sent my discharges but why are they not here. Well I will wait for tomorrow's mail and if they do not come I will start for Old Wessington and then I will have to return here for them but if I get them I will not return here. When you receive this send a line to this place to let me know when you sent them and if I return I will get it if not I will let you know where to write next. I am afraid they are lost but I will wait patiently to see. I am now quite well. I have been ailing for some time. The weather is fine today and I hope it will continue. I hear good reports from Old Wessington and I hope I will be able to locate there. I will send you a line tomorrow before I start. I went to meeting yesterday in a store in this place liked it very much. The Methodist are building a church here I helped to work some today on the building.

I send my love to all.

Yours,

R. Dixon

Wessington Oct 17

I have just received the discharge papers all right I am very glad. It is very hard waiting. I will start tomorrow morning for old Wessington and if I am not suited there I will go direct to Brown Co. I do not like this place the other side is better than this side of the river. The weather is still good. Tell Mary that there has been no snow yet.

I do not think I will get the letter you sent to Huron. I do not know where you could write to so that I could get it. I will write you from my next point soon as I get there. As for my health I can say "Richard is himself again." Tell Sadie she must write to Papa again. Love to all.

Your Husband

R. Dixon

Oct 18

Morning I will now start for Old Wessington and with God's blessing I will find a place for our future home. It is a beautiful morning I hope it will continue. Love to all my dear ones.

Yours

"Other side" is De Smet, on the other side of the Dakota River.

Huron Oct 21st/82

My Dear Wife

I arrived here last night from Wessington Hills and I now say to that place Farewell Wessington, and if forever all the better and still farewell Fare Thee Well. I will now go to Aberdeen and there take the C.P. & M. R.R. to Frederick in Brown Co. Send me a letter to Frederick and if it comes in time I will get it. If I am not suited up there I will come back to where Asher Claim is located. I think the land is better in that direction than any I have seen on the north side.

I have just learned that money can be loaned here for ten percent fast as they can get it on real estate. That is what that attorney said.

In regard to the weather it has run like this: Wednesday the first day I was here, high east wind raw and cold, Wednesday night thunder storm. Thursday Friday and Saturday clear nice fall weather. Sunday N.W. wind cold. Monday cold till noon then mild. Tuesday & Wednesday beautiful fall weather. Thursday and Friday warm like summer, today cold N.W. wind and dry. In other words this makes the 3rd windy and cold day since I came here. There has been frost most of the nights. Yesterday I walked in my stockings for miles coming from Wessington Hills, and as I stopped to wipe the sweat from my face I thought how I would look with them ear muffs on me, what do you think about ear muffs in Summer?

By the way I received the letter you sent Huron and old as it was I was glad to get it. Tell Sadie I got her letter and was very glad I understood it all. Sarah I am somewhat discouraged about this country. There is desert wildness about it that I have never seen before about any other place but still all the people out here seem to like it. I do think it is a very healthy country.

Free Claims are all taken unless in some out of the way place so that two ¼ is all that I can get. I think that the best we can do is to locate and try it two or three years and if we are not satisfied sell out and move south. I can put what they call soldier's filings on one ¼ and Preempt another, live six months on the Preemption then pay the \$200 and get a deed. Then move on homestead six months then we are entitled to a deed and then as I say if we are sick of the country sell out. I hope to hear from you at Frederick if it comes in time. Good bye to all my dear ones. God is good to me in blessing me with good health.

Good bye

R. Dixon

Aberdeen Oct 23rd/82

My Dear Wife

I did not arrive here until midnight Saturday, it is slow traveling in this country. I am now going to start north. Think I shall work from station to station and have a good look at the country. I find it much better here than south. The boom is greater up here. People coming from all parts and taking every kind of land they can find. I think I can find land in the north of this county. The cold wind of Saturday stopped in the night and Sunday was beautiful and this morning is very fine indeed. I went to church yesterday three times and to Sunday school. I am not quite so well now. I think the water is hurting me. Changing from place to place the water is so different. Some wells are good and others are filled [illegible; looks like "Alenly"] or Salts saltpeter or some miserable stuff, but otherwise I think this is a healthy county. I think more so than any I have ever been in. Now good by.

Love to all my dear ones at home.

R. Dixon

De Smet Oct 24th 1882

My dear Wife

I suppose you will be very glad to hear from me but will be surprised to find me writing from this place.

I went to within one station of Frederick and when I saw the county and learned that all the land was taken within 10 to 15 miles of the R.R. and all the Free Claims within 20 miles I concluded to come back here and take two quarters just 20 miles north of this place. I would not take it the first time I came here because it was too far from town but I find it only a matter of time until there will be a R.R. there if not two, one from east to west and the other from north to south and further it is much better land, better watered; and better water this last reason to me is important as I have been sick the second time from the use of the miserable water.

I have not seen it yet but know what kind of a county it is and two farmers living there described it to me; so I shall go tomorrow to see it and if it is as I expect and if not taken I will try to hold it. All the chance there is for my getting it is the [illegible; looks like "Csond"] have pushed on and overlooked it; but if it is taken I think I shall return to near Frederick and do the best I can. I have a thorough knowledge of the county and all I have to do is to locate. I find this a hard thing to do, my heart sometimes almost fails me. I am trying to trust in Him who doeth all things well, with His help I will make no mistake.

I shall return to this place tomorrow night and in a few days let you know what I have done. I send love to all my dear ones at home. I called at Redfield thinking I would get a letter but did not. I will let you know in my next where to write.

Your Husband,
R. Dixon

This Hotel is newly refitted and refurnished throughout, and is first-class in every particular.
C.C. Wiley's Hotel

Watertown, D.T., Oct 26th 1882

[The heading above is printed on the stationary, Robert wrote "Oct 26th" on the printed underline.]

My Dear Wife

I have just arrived here and am now making arrangements to go and see some land southwest of this place, there are some hopes that I will locate soon in that vicinity. The land I was going to take north of De Smet was taken so I failed. I think my chances for success is now better. I will know in a few days. The crowd to the front is greater than ever, if I fail here I do not know what to do. I want to hear from home very bad, when you receive this send me a few lines to this place and a short letter to De Smet and one to Frederick so I will be sure to get some one of them. If I locate it will be necessary for me to build a shanty on one piece in order to hold it and I must live there some time and then go and get my family. How long I can have to get my family I do not know but I must keep sharp lookout for the fight is a hard one, hard to get and hard to hold, you see I am one year too late. Claims are being contested at all points. I will preempt one forth which I must move onto at once, and put what they call soldier's filings on the other which will hold it six months. Then I must homestead it. I think then I will have six months to move onto it, so you see in order to get two claims I must commence now and work sharp. I find my expenses are running up fast, every costs so much but if I get a good piece of land I will be glad I came to Dakota. The weather is somewhat colder but clear and dry. No use for the earmuffs yet. Tell Mary that I have not seen any snow yet. Hoping that all my little ones are well and sending love to all.

I remain your
Robert

This Hotel is newly refitted and refurnished throughout, and is first-class in every particular.
C.C. Wiley's Hotel

Watertown, D.T., Oct 30th 1882

[The heading above is printed on the stationary, Robert wrote "Oct 30th" on the printed underline.]

My Dear Wife

"The Die is Cast." I have located in Hamlin Co. on the west line 6 miles south of the north line, Township 114, Range 55, south ½ Sect. 6. I am 12 miles due south of Henry, a new station 18 miles west of Watertown in Codington Co. Henry will be our market and is the place I want you to write to soon as you get this letter. Write soon and often direct to (Henry, Codington Co., Dakota.) I am well pleased with the land I have got, it is good. I think better than any that I have seen west of here. Our nearest neighbors is at present is 2 ½ miles distant but remember the land will soon all be taken. So we will soon have plenty of neighbors. I feel thankful to God for this land. I have tried to trust in Him and believe He has directed me.

Now comes the tug of war in order to hold my Preemption. I must move onto it now and live on it some time. I can then go and get my family and hold my right. You see the great trouble is in proving up; I must furnish four witnesses to swear that I have lived on it 6 months allowing me reasonable time to get my family. At the end of six months I must then Homestead the other ¼ Sect. which will be easily done if I can move onto it then. Now what I want to do is to go to Henry, get lumber and build a good shanty on my Preemption that we can move into in the spring then build a house on my Homestead. In fact this is all I can do under the circumstances. I will go to Henry this afternoon. I hope to hear from

you by the mail that will soon be here if not I suppose I will have to wait till a letter reaches me at Henry. Good bye; my love to all my dear ones at home. Write soon as possible to

Your

Robert

Henry Oct 31st 1882

I am now preparing to build a big shanty. The lumber will cost over \$100.00. This lumber I will want for a stable when our house is built. I have spent up to the present time \$80.00 leaving me \$70.00 on hand. I bought me an overcoat for \$8.00.

Last Saturday we had a very high wind and since that the weather is quiet cold but dry and clear. It will be necessary for me to have more money. I do not know how much it will cost to build the shanty. All things are very very high. I must have half and it is hard to get; especially a team to take out the lumber. I have engaged one for tomorrow but I have not money enough to get all out now so I want you to send me some by Express. Send it to this place there is an office here.

Send me One Hundred and Fifty dollars so that I will have enough to buy a ticket to come home with when the shanty is finished.

I suppose you will have to go to Chicago for the money if some good friend does not find some of the unpaid bills. Send it from Downers Grove; put it in a large envelope and have Mr. Brown the station agent direct it in an Express Envelope he will give you a receipt.

I want you to send it soon as you possibly can. Perhaps you had better not pay the charges on the money, as I can do it here; it may come quicker. Sarah I am sorry to put you to so much trouble but what else can I do. I sent you a letter yesterday from Watertown giving you the news so I have but little more to write. My health is good and I know that all was well at home. I would feel happy but not having heard from home in so long I am very uneasy. I hope you will write immediately.

Oh how I would like to see all my dear ones today, time will soon pass and I will come to you all. Let us be more earnest in our prayers for God's direction, blessing and care. Dear wife our lives are short and are passing away fast, our work is not for ourselves but for the children that God has given us. The struggle is hard some times but with God's blessing to cheer us and our love for each other and our little ones we can be happy here in His sin wrenched world and finally gain that rest that remains for the people of God.

Yours

R. Dixon

Now we come to more of Sarah's letters. Looking at the photocopies it is obvious she wanted to limit the amount of paper in the envelope. Her script is on both sides of each sheet (the ink has soaked through the paper and the shadow of words on the opposite side show through). She writes notes, or the children write notes, in the margins or across the top of a page. I'm sure postage was a consideration, but the paper itself was expensive and her efforts to conserve are obvious.

Oct 31st 1882, Lisle

My dear Husband

I read your letter (written on the 26th at Watertown) last night and was quite surprised to find on the map its location. Judging from the way you write I conclude it will be some time before you get back. I think it would be a good plan for you to take up a timber claim this fall after you have made sure of the two other claims even if it (the timber claim) is far from the R.R. If they are so valuable for others they probably would be for us & if you take it up & find it not best to keep it why it is easily given up. If you do not settle

where you are, why not go up to the Northern Pacific or Red river valley? Perhaps it really is better land & if it is colder that would not matter as much if we did not stay long. My last letter to you was written to Frederick & in it I wrote the opinion of the new M.E. minister at Cass who has lived for 24 yrs in southern Minn. and 1 yr in Dakota. He says if he was going to Dakota he would go to red river valley, says him valley is sandy & the soil soon impoverishes when wheat is raised. As a family we have been pretty well since you left us most of the time but latterly Minnie, Bertie, Stevie & Sadie have not been so well. Night before last Sadie kept me awake most of the night but last night was better. Stevie has hurt his foot now so that I have been obliged to keep him out of school. It appeared to be only the skin removed from the bottom of the foot & was done with the stub of a weed but it does not heal up and it gets better and then worse again. I think his blood is bad. The weed may have poisoned it some however. Peter came over & stayed all night with us last night. Hough has paid him that note. Peter came over to see if I wanted to lend that money of mine to Mr. Huggins for 1 year at Cass and as it is drawing no interest where it is I don't know as I can do better than to land it. If so I suppose I will have to get it in the same way you directed me to get for you. Sadie says just now Mama will you please write my letter for me and upon being asked what was her letter she replied. "Some of it is my wov (love) to all & I want it wote (wrote) we all wite (right)."

But I must close. I did not have time to copy all of this first letter before the train so I sent the other two & will send this I expect in the morning. Keep up good courage about finding the claims if you have not already located. "What man has done man can do," you know is the old motto. I am sorry about your not being well be sure and keep me posted about your health. I heard after you went away that my cousin's folks Mr. Hulitts in Rock Co. Minn. sent a pressing invitation to you by the Smarts to come there and see them. If you can make it convenient I would like to have you do so but now good bye. Remember that morning & evening at least & often during the day you are prayed for at home. Minnie says tell Papa I wish he would come home. Bertie says tell him things are getting on snugly at home. & Stevie says tell him my foot is sore & isn't any better. I hope with Gods blessing you will be able to locate soon. May His hand guide us.

Your loving wife

Sarah J. Dixon

"M. E." refers to the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Dixon's were members and Robert later became a minister in the Free Methodist church. "Cass" was a small community (it no longer exists) about five miles south of Downers Grove. "Peter" is Sarah's brother, Peter Agate Rowland, who is a farmer in Downers Grove with a wife, Sarah (Roe) Rowland, and young son.

Henry Nov 6th 1882

My Dear Wife

I am not waiting for the money to come. I have spent all I have and am now penniless and in debt so you see I am very uneasy. I have pushed the work on the shanty all I could last week. I have got nearly all the lumber out. I had to go with each load myself.

The weather was good last week till Saturday we had a heavy rain with thunder and lightning. I was out in most of it, got wet, did not change my clothes, did not take cold and never had better health in my life.

I have read your letter of Oct. 31 which you sent Watertown, also your card of the 1st inst. I was very glad as this is the first I have heard from home since I was at Wessington. I am sorry to learn that the children have been sick but I am thankful they are better. You did not tell me how your health was. I hope you are well. Tell Stevie I am sorry his foot is sore. I hope it will soon be well again. I am glad to hear from all my dear

children; the love that comes from home cheers me very much. I see from your card that you had not received my letter which I sent for the money. I do hope you have sent it as I directed and that I will receive it today. The mail leaves here at 10 A.M. and comes from the east at 3 P.M. so I thought I would write so as to send today. If anything has happened so you did not receive my letter for the money I will repeat I sent for \$150.00 asking you to Express it from the Grove. I hope you received the letter and lost no time in sending it. The weather is mild and spring-like today but foggy and may turn to a storm so you see how anxious I am to get the shanty built so we can move into it when we come in the spring and then have time to build our house next summer. When the shanty is built I will come home. I suppose you have loaned your money to Mr. Huggins. I think you would have done better with it to have bought a Claim out here from some one that has got a title. There are many that sell as soon as they prove up and there are very many men out here buying up such land. There are no Free Claims on this side of the Sioux River but I think I can jump one soon near my farm as the holders are not living up the law. Nearly all the Free Claims were taken by people living in the east, very few by settlers, so they are not here and do not take care of them. I hope to hear from you this afternoon and receive the money. I will write if I do.

Love to you all. Write soon and continue to do so. With God's blessing I hope to see you all soon.

Yours Robert Dixon

Henry Nov 6th 1882

My Dear Wife

I have just received your letter of the 4th inst. I am glad it seems like a visit at home. I also received the money all right. I am afloat again but I find it slow doing anything here. I must go to Watertown tomorrow for nails. The hardware store in this place is out. As this is the second letter I have written to you today it will be short. Now about calling on our friends please look on the map and you will see the journey is a long one and would cost me ten dollars and with the poor accommodations on the R.R. three or four days time.

There is one quarter on the same section of land that mine is on not taken yet. It is a good one. There is another on the next section south of it that is quite good; now if anybody among our friends would like a homestead the claim is a good one. Enclosed find paper showing our claims and other adjoining land. The expected railroad is all a matter of uncertainty. It may come and it may not. You ask about my journey here. I came on the Chicago M. & St. P. R.R. Henry is on the North Western. I do not know the route. I think there would no trouble for a person to come here; but remember this, a Lady must travel on a first class ticket; it takes a first class man to travel on a second class ticket (remember that). The land office is at Watertown.

I see on the map showing the North Western R.R. a cross R.R. running southwest from Watertown. There is no such R.R.

c

Yours R. Dixon

Henry Nov 15th 1882

My Dear Wife

I have just come in from our place and was glad to receive two letters, in fact half a dozen of letters. I was very glad to learn that you were all well. My health is very good.

I am very tired just now as I have walked in and worked hard yesterday. I have got the shanty so that I can move into it which I will do tomorrow. I see from your last letter

that you do not understand that when a person Preempts land it is necessary to move onto it at once and live on it six months then prove up. This is what I am doing. I will then Homestead my soldier's filing and then have six months to move onto it. I must have four witnesses to swear that I have lived on my Preemption six months. Now I am going to establish my home then come home on business but must return during the winter and then return for my family in the spring. This is the only way that I can get two claims.

Now about the people, they are as a rule Americans, a few Germans but very few. The Methodists hold meeting at Henry every other Sabbath. I stop when here with a Methodist family by the name of Crawthorn. Mrs. Crawthorn I think is a true Christian woman. What our near neighbors will be we must wait till they come before we know.

You ask me about the land. I can say it is good, very good. It is strange how I came to get this land, I believe that God sent me here and I receive it as coming from Him. I thank God for His goodness to me in send me to where I am so well pleased. I am going out to live in the shanty tomorrow and in a few days will return here on my way home but do not know just how soon so you had better write me a few lines when you get this. I can get it before I start.

And now my dear children I am very glad you sent those kind letters all of you. I would write a letter to each one of you but I am so very tired. I will ask you to excuse me. I hope to see you at home before long. Mary wants to know about springs or running water. Tell her to wait till I come home and I will give her a description of the quarter that I have chosen for her to Preempt in the spring if she lives on it six months she can pay the two hundred and get a deed. Asking the Lord to bless us all I close:

R. Dixon

Lisle Nov 18th 1882

My dear Husband

I was very much relieved by receiving your letter of the 15th inst this morning. I had become very anxious about you I was just on the point of telegraphing out there. Your last letter was dated Nov 6th and as this is the 18th it was nearly two weeks since I had heard from you. Your letter does not state whether you had written between those two dates.

I am glad to hear your health continues good & that there is a prospect for your speedy return home. Be sure & write a few lines advising us of the day you take the train for home, then if any accident occurs your friends would be furnished with some data as a basis from which to work.

The children were much pleased with your recognition & notice of their letters to you. They have been looking forward ever since they sent them for an answer. Today is Stevie's birthday & he wants me to send Papa a piece of his birthday cake. Minnie says "Tell Papa I made it." You will find it enclosed in a piece of paper. It is a chocolate cake but you will probably hardly be able to tell the difference between it & a piece of bread by the time it reaches you. Stevie says tell Papa I am seven years old.

I am glad you are so well pleased with "our farm." I think it must be a very nice piece of land indeed since you are so perfectly satisfied with it. There are about a hundred and one things I would like to know about it but I suppose I had better restrain my curiosity till you get home.

I am glad you have found some good Methodists up there but how in the world you are going to contrive to move into & live in that shanty up there without anything to move I cannot understand. Will you buy a stove & a blanket & try soldier's life again? But I suppose it is of no use for me to ask questions as I shall probably receive no answer till you get home.

The train will soon be here & I must stop writing. Hoping either to hear from or see

you soon.

I remain
Yours

Sarah J. Dixon

Grandma & all join in sending their love to you

Good bye

Robert was building the shanty, 12 miles south of Henry, from Nov. 6th through the 15th. Writing would not have been a priority.

Lisle. Dec 18th 1882

Dear Husband

Your letter of the 16th inst telling of your safe arrival in Henry was received this morning. It finds us in about our usual health. Minnie has been quite oft of health for 3 or 4 days but is better now & began going to school again today. I got home all right Wednesday night & found the family all right also. Peter came here last Saturday; brought the beef (107# at 6 ½ ct) & took those chairs back to the Grove to be mended. His wife and himself are going to celebrate Christmas by entertaining his wife's relations. I am glad to hear that your health is good & that there is a prospect of our having some good neighbors just a little nearer than Mr. Chase. Are they to live east of us near the M.E. settlement? Like you Robert I feel that every dollar should be carefully & wisely expended but I believe that in this matter of locating in Dakota the Lord is leading us & while I feel that the utmost care ought to be exercised in our expenditures I have thus far for the most part of the time been free from anxious corroding care concerning it. This sometimes astonishes myself when I think of the position I will be in, separated from so many of my dearest friends & sometimes when I think of this my heart "almost" slips from its mooring & has to struggle hard to regain its rest. Perhaps it is the hope that after all they will either come to us or we will return to them for something within bids me trust in the Lord & all will yet be well. About that gun it has been expensive but it is probably best you got it. Do be careful & not shoot yourself now you have got it. There, how is that for advice from a soldier's wife? I suppose you had not heard from our farm when you wrote as you did not say whether things had been disturbed or not. A man who called himself a templar stopped at the door tonight to ask if he could stay all night with us & was of course refused. I will copy the deposits & also the drafts since Aug 10th & you can see how the bank account stands for yourself. (over)

Aug 10 By Balance	\$1,711.23	Checks	
Sep 14	380.06	Aug 21	86.91
Sep 20	250.00	Sep 4 th	97.50
Oct 9	<u>300.00</u>	6 th	114.45
	2,641.29	15	94.17
		15	26.93
		Nov 3 rd	150.00
		4 th	350.00
		Dec 12 th	28.00
	2,641.29	13 th	<u>200.00</u>
	<u>1,147.96</u>		1,147.96
Balance	1,493.33		

You had better pay particular attention to your clothing judging from the condition of things at home. I am much surprised myself at the result. Perhaps I have not figured right but I think I have.

It is nearly 12 o'clock and all are quietly sleeping in bed. It is time I too was there. I wish you could be with us & spend Christmas the 13th anniversary of our marriage at home

but as this cannot be let us remember & pray especially for each other on that day.

Good night my dear

Husband

S.J. Dixon

Excuse poor writing, something ails the pen. [The script was smeared and hard to read.]

Robert was in the "general merchandise business" at Downers Grove, until his departure in 1882. Many of the references in these letters are to bills owed and bills paid by various customers.

Lisle, Sat. Dec. 23rd 1882

5 o'clock A.M.

Dear Husband

I have been quite disappointed, by not receiving that letter which you was to have written on Monday, for I was very desirous of knowing how you found things out home, or near home, but as you have not written I suppose it is because you could not, & I must wait.

I have not much news to write from home, things are jogging on in about the same old style. Mother is still with us & we are trying to get some "Sunday coat" made for the little boys. Our health is just now pretty good. We have been suffering somewhat from colds brought on I think by going out in the wet snow Sabbath morning. The children however escaped the croup & I escaped the neuralgia so we have much to be thankful for. We had quite a snow during Saturday night & Sabbath morning & although it ceased in time for church Mr. Kellog did not come down. Miss Howard came out to church & found herself at S.S. [this is "Sabbath School," for the adults] & finally came in the class. I tried to induce her to teach but she said "I won't" so I proceeded as usual & we had quite an interesting lesson.

Our school here is dismissed till after New Years. I am sorry to have the children lose so much time. I think we will spend Christmas at home. Mary & Phebe were planning for us to come & spend it with them but I do not like to leave the house alone here at night & it is so far for us all to go & come back again the same day. I meant to have asked you what you thought of leaving the house alone here some while you are away.

The weather for the most part of last week, after you went away, was quite cold, below zero, & this week has been stormy beginning with Sabbath. It has rained generally, but a part of the time has alternated with snow. There is but little snow left on the ground now & it is not raining but it is hard to tell what kind of a day it will be as it is not yet light & is just cloudy.

I do not think we had better give up that other $\frac{1}{4}$ section of land if we can possibly help it. We can probably get it now at less cost than any other time. The children are not yet up but I will have the last page for them to write on. Mother wishes to be remembered & hopes you will have good luck out there alone. She frequently says "if there was only two of them." Trusting that Our Father will take care of you & so I remain as ever your loving wife.

Sarah J. Dixon

Dear papa I hope you did not forget your compass or fox traps how do you like your gun I am sorry it cost you so much I wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year well my share of the paper is used up lovingly Robert R.

Dear papa I wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year did you get your traps and your compass have you shot anything with your gun have you trapped a fox or caught anything with your trap Stephen W. Dixon.

Dear Papa I wish you a Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year. I was thinking this morning as I looked at your scarf that you ought to have taken it instead of that shawl as the space is very small. I must close from your loving daughter Minnie Dixon.

[On a separate page:] Dear Papa We found another piece of paper just in time so I thought I would write a good long letter as it would not cost any more. I am quite well. We are not going to have any more school next week and I guess not new years day. I am very glad of it. I have got along very well at school ever since you went away. George Gaul asked the teacher a great many times to go out when it was not necessary and once when he was out his class spelled and went home and left him and when he came in the teacher raised his ruler at him and his seat is one of them patent seats that their seats turn up and he thought I suppose that it was down and he sat down right on the floor his hands & heels went up and all the scholars began laughing and the teacher laughed too but I must close again with love and best wishes from Daughter Minnie C. Dixon

[Written across the top of the first page:] Sadie has just been reading her part of this letter & it is like this "Sadie Ellen Dixon I wish you a Merry Christmas. I want you to build me a little house & things in it like Mama & I hope we will have pretty flowers in Cotie." Thinking this would assist you to read it I give you her version of it. Mr. Hesterman brought the 4 bags of potatoes yesterday morning. Says if I need money I must let him know. I assured him then that I should need some by New Year. Wishing you a merry merry Christmas I am as ever Yours S.J.D.

"Mary & Phebe" are Sarah's sisters, Mary Brice Rowland and Phoebe Maria Rowland. Mary lives with their mother, Celia (Smart) Rowland, next door to their sister Ann, in Downers Grove. Note that Sarah spells her sister's name "Phebe." Phoebe is a school teacher in "the Grove." Robert had obviously returned to Lisle sometime between 18 Nov. and 16 Dec. This letter also contained Robert Dixon's Civil War discharge papers - needed to prove entitlement to the "soldier's filing." He had previously acknowledged receipt of these papers on Oct 17th.

Lisle, Ill, Jan'y 6th 1883

Dear Papa

I thought I would write and tell you what I got New Years. Aunt Phebe gave me a paint box. And mama gave me a sheet of music & it was called The Old Musician and his harp. I think that was the one you like so well. I like it real well and so does mama. Have you had a blizzard yet? I hope not. Uncle Fred's birthday is next week. Thursday he is going to have a party. We are invited to go. Uncle is 50 years old. I guess we are going. We spelled down Friday I was first one down. Of course I did not like it very well. But I would rather set and look on than to have others look at me but I shall have to close & a

Good By

from

Minnie

P.S. Please write to me in your next letter.

Minnie

Sadie's letter

Dear love to all I'm well & Grandma bought some apples.

"Uncle Fred" is Frederick Manning, husband of Sarah's sister, Ann Rowland.

Lisle Sat. Jan 6th 1882

[Actual date is 1883]

Dear Robert

It is now one week & 2 days since I received a letter from you & I am looking

anxiously for one tonight, shall send down for the six o'clock mail. I have written twice a week to you. Do you receive all my letters? We are all pretty well now. Phebe has gone home & commences her school on Monday next. I hear Bro Cordes is recovering. Mother was there & saw him last Monday.

Fred is intending to celebrate his 50th birthday next Thursday (11th inst) & wants us to be sure to come, will meet us at Downers, says it (his 50th birthday) don't come very often. I wish you could be there. I think we will try to go. I think Sadie is very anxious to write to Papa but as I have but a few moments to write in I think she will have to wait till next time. Minnie is writing. The boys are off coasting with their sleighs. The Collector was here yesterday & I paid our tax \$4.24. I do so hope I shall hear from you tonight. One week seems long enough without it running over that time. The last letter I received was written just after Christmas. I have not heard lately from John's folks. Have not seen them since you went away. The boys have gotten back & send their love.

Good by my dear Husband. May God bless & keep you & us all till we meet again.

Yours truly

Sarah J. Dixon

Sadie's kiss * to Papa

Lisle Jan 27th 1883. Sat.

My Dear Husband

I have been hindered from writing to you until the day is so far spent that I shall only have time to write a few lines. John & May with two of their children have spent the afternoon with us & have just gone away. We have had a very pleasant visit and they and their family are in good health & spirits. Mrs. Gleason, May says is real well. She has not yet walked but the Dr. says the bone has knit together firmly & she may bear her weight on her foot in a week more.

They are expecting Charlie out from Chicago tonight to bring her some crutches. Charles' little girl has had the Pneumonia & the Dr. said he did not know as she would live for a couple of days but she is better now. I have not gotten a letter from you this week but hope to receive one tonight. Perhaps this stormy weather we have had will block the R.R. again however so I shall not hear from you for a while longer.

I hear that Hesterman is expecting to come to Lisle to keep store so I suppose Mr. Craigmile will take the Cass store. The weather has moderated but does not thaw & there is a large body of snow still on the ground. I hope you have not as much there. You do not write about the M.E. settlement near there. Is it all a myth?

May sent her love too & she says Charlie is talking of writing to you about buying some land for Willie. Mr. Brown was expected home from Dakota last week. Norman Whitney's oldest son, lately married, was badly injured by the car, almost fatally. He was running on a freight train.

Write as often as you can but don't go out in a storm to mail letters or to get mail. With much love I remain.

Yours truly

Sarah

[Written in margins:] Bertie says I did not get a chance to write tonight as I went sleigh riding with Uncle John. I hope you are well.

Mr. Power an old soldier comrade of yours called to see you last night. Wanted you to sign some papers.

"Uncle John" is John Wilson Dixon, Robert's youngest brother. "May" is his wife; Lucy May (Gleason) Dixon. John took over the family farm in Downers Grove and added some land to continue farming for a living. He and May have four, soon to be five, daughters.

Lisle Feb 2nd 1883. Fri.

My Dear Husband

It will be two weeks tomorrow since I received your last letter. I walked down to the Depot today in a driving northeastern snow storm in hopes of hearing from you but had to come home without a letter. Mr. McMillan tells me that all the R.R.'s up in Dakota & Minn. he thinks are blockaded, and have been so since Tuesday, so I suppose that will account for my receiving no letters this week. I was in hopes I might receive a letter written & sent between the two storms but as you are so far from the office you may not have had a chance to send. If I only knew you had provided yourself with plenty of provisions & coal to last through the stormy season I think I would not worry but I fear you have not. I wish this stormy time was over. We are having an exceptionally cold stormy winter here. Yesterday morning Mr. Fret Hatch's thermometer stood at 26 deg below zero. I looked at ours about 7 o'clock & it said 16 deg below zero. We had three magnificent sun dogs yesterday morning. I think the finest I ever saw. Towards night it moderated considerable & this morning with the mercury at 2 to 4 above zero it began snowing & blowing. It has stormed hard all day. About 4 o'clock it began to rain instead of snow & thundered & lightened several times between that & six o'clock while rain, snow & sleet contended with each other for mastery & still continue to do so at nine o'clock this evening.

We are tolerably well but Minnie & Bertie are complaining some & seem to have some symptoms that Sadie had before she came down with chicken-pox. Stevie seems real well.

After I had heard Sadie's prayer tonight, in which she prayed for you & all of us, she bowed her little head again & (unprompted by one) said "O Lord please bless Papa and bring him home safe again & love my dear Mama & Papa for Jesus sake. Amen." Was it not a sweet little prayer for such baby lips to frame unhelped?

I have not much news to write & as I have no letter to answer & it is getting late I will say Goodnight. May you be kept safe from all spiritual & temporal harm is the prayer of your loving wife.

Sarah J. Dixon

Dear Papa

I have got the chickenpox it itches like everything. We haven't heard from you for two weeks. Mamma has made arrangements that if I let her take care of my money that she will give me a fifty cent piece she thinks she picked up a 1/2 dollar on the bureau. Grandma gave me 10 cents and told me to give her 6 cents. My chickenpox has begun itching hard again so I will stop. Minnie sends her love. From Bertie P.S. Please write to me.

[scribbles, probably from Sadie]

Dear Papa

I did not feel like writing and told Bertie to write for me. I tell you chickenpox is not any fun. My throat is awfully sore. Did you ever have chickenpox. Good bye. Minnie
Feb 2nd noon

Stevie wants me to write for him this morning. He says "Dear Pa I have got the chicken pox & Sadie is just about getting over it. I dug a path out this morning to the road. We couldn't tell the walk from the ground there was so much snow. Mama gave me two calendar cards. Good bye in this one. Stevie"

[Written across the top of the first page:] Mother says in speaking of you she does "wish she could hear from the boy." I fear it will be some time yet before we do. Minnie, Bertie & Stevie are all broken out this morning with what seems to be chickenpox. I thought Stevie was going to escape but find that he too is breaking out with it. I should think I would hear from those receipts if you have not got them as they were sent or registered on the 17th inst.

"Sun dog" is a halo effect in which sunlight refracting through ice crystals makes it appear there is more than one sun on the horizon – pictured here:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_dog]

Lisle Feb 16th 1883 Fri

Dear Robert

Your letters of the 22nd ult & also of the 9th inst have at last reached us, just as I was about going to the Grove to telegraph to Henry to see if I could get news from you, or rather hear from you, in that way. You can imagine how welcome your letters were when I tell you I had not heard from you for four weeks your letter having been dated Jan 15. I have not yet received a card showing that the P.M. at Henry had delivered the registered letter containing those receipts to you & you do not say you had received them but I suppose you must have done from the way you speak of the papers in your Watertown letter. I am glad to hear they are all right as to date &c. I am also in the dark as to the amount of mail you have received from home. With but one exception I have written to you two letters each week until last week when I wrote but one & this week also I shall write but one. It was rather discouraging to a person writing twice a week to have written half a dozen letters without receiving any reply. But now that the way has begun to open I hope it will continue so. I had not heard anything about the scarcity of coal in Henry before receiving your letter written at Watertown. Had you written any letter to one between Jan 22nd & Feb 9th? The family are now in their usual health. The children on the whole have had this winter much better health than usual, none of them having been threatened with croup except Sadie and she only once. Fred came over to see us Wed. night & stayed till Thursday noon. All the friends over there usually well except Lizzie who is recovering from the mumps. By the way I suppose our children have been exposed to them as Bertie says one of the boys at school came back to school saying he had had the mumps & his neck was all swollen up. Fred requested one to ask you to bring two of those snaps for cattle that you was talking to him about when at home.

Is the name of our Dakota stove "The City of Troy"? Last Wed. it commenced to thaw here in good earnest & last night in the night it thundered, lightened and rained like a summer rain. This morning the whole county seemed [illegible] with water & it still raining heavily. Through the day it has rained heavily & on the mist & clouds clearing away about five o'clock this afternoon we discovered that the river had overflowed & Mr. Meillers pasture was transformed into a small lake with its shores extending into his stockyard & orchard. There was no school today on account of the storm as the roads were almost impassable with the remainder of their two or 3 feet of snow & the water that had fallen through the night. Tonight however the wind is in the northwest & everything freezing up. You did not say when you expected to come home but I gather from the tenor of your letter that you did not think it best to come till after you had advertised. Am I correct?

Mother & the little ones are all quietly sleeping and it is time I should follow their example. Trusting that Our Father will protect, bless & bring you in safety home again I remain.

Yours

Sarah J. Dixon

[Written across the top of the first page:] Wm. Oldfield is to have a Sale tomorrow & there are also to be two more next week. If you were only here probably you could buy some things you will need. I fear in only two weeks to get ready in you will have to pay high for things. Can you think of some things with the price you want to pay that you would like to have Fred or Peter buy for you? Fred spoke of it when here.

The abbreviation "ult" stands for the Latin "ultimo," or last – a date last month, during the preceding month – is often found in pre-1900 correspondence. The previously mentioned "inst" means within this month. "&c" is an archaic abbreviation for "et cetera."]

Lisle. Feb 20th 1883 Tue.

Dear Husband

I have received two more letters from you, both however, written before the Watertown letter; one dated Jan 29th the other Feb 6th. Old, however, as they were I was very glad to receive them and to learn how you had been getting along during all those severe storms. I am glad to hear that your health continues good. Glad also to hear that you were in better spirits. Oh my dear Husband, let us never doubt that our Father's tender care is over us, and ours, and that He will not permit us to suffer, or be tried one iota more than is positively necessary, for our highest good. I have received great comfort & help this winter trusting in Him and I believe that He will be with us all the way through if we but continue to trust in Him.

Our health continues to be tolerably good. If the children are to have the mumps they do not yet show signs of it, but it is not yet time, I suppose. Dear Mother is still with me. Indeed I do not know what I should have done without her, especially during that cold weather, and while the children had the chicken-pox. My own health has been quite poor a part of the time. I was not down sick still I was far from well. I believe I forgot to tell you in my former letters that I had had that front tooth extracted which I had filled last summer.

Stevie & I went up to the Grove last Saturday, to get supplies for the family; Graham, kerosene, dried apples, &c. Went to Bro Cordes, & saw the newcomer a bright pretty little girl. Bro Cordes had preached on two Sabbaths since his sickness. He said the last two services were the best he had ever had in Downers. Three persons asked for prayers in the evening, and one after the meeting closed. Harry Blodgett & one of the Carpenter boys were among the number. Let us pray for them that they may have a blessed work of grace there. Mr. Hobart's people have all left the Grove. The Blanchard mill has been closed all winter & is advertised for sale. Frank being advised by Dr. Leduc to do no more work for some time. Says he cannot tell what is the matter with him but he must have rest. Minnie was much pleased to receive a letter from you all to herself. I am glad you wrote to her on the all important subject of religion. I think it would be well also to do the same by Bertie. The boys were much pleased with their letter but will hardly answer this time I think. Be sure & write a little letter to Sadie, all to herself, for she felt very much as though she ought to have one, when all the rest had received theirs. Feb 21st. Mother would like to have you bring her one of those snaps for cattle like those Fred wants & she says if they are not too large so as to be troublesome to you she would like two of them. Do you expect to come home immediately after advertising? between that time & proving up? I understand from your letter that you do not intend to come before. My paper is nearly filled & I will close. Sadie sends a kiss to you & puts it on the paper right here * Mother joins with me in sending her love to you. The other children are at school.

Hoping to hear from you soon I remain

Yours truly

Sarah R. Dixon

[The "Sarah R. Dixon" signature is clearly written. Then across the top of the first page, in tiny script, she writes:]

Mr. Hesterman called last week in response to a note from me & paid \$5.⁰⁰. Said he would finish up paying the rest of the bill this week if he possibly could. He also brought three bushels of corn for my chickens. Sadie says "I want to write to Papa my own self. I want to write a whole sheet." The school at Lisle is undergoing an examination by Mr. Bloom & each scholar's papers are to be sent to the state fair. Today is the last day of examination. You never told me what Mr. Chatfield did about the rest of his bill. The weather has become

milder since last Friday & Saturday's freeze & for two or three days has thawed considerable again I hope the thaw has reached Dakota & that the R.R. will be opened again [rest illegible].

[Then up the left margin of the first page she writes:]

I would just like to pull your ears for that reflection on my questioning propensity but I suppose I shall have to wait.

Lisle Feb 24th 1883 Sat.

My Dear Husband

Your letter of the 10 & 12th inst is at hand and it looks to me very much as if you were hedged in for some time to come. If the railroad blockade is not lifted by this thaw that we have had here I don't know when to expect you. Mr. Brown & James Clifford however have gotten home so I suppose there must be a way out of Dakota somewhere. Since I last wrote to you our health has been pretty good. Mother is at home & Ann has been with me. She went to the Grove this morning & has not yet returned. It is raining here today, raining and freezing; everything covered with ice & water standing all around. I hear that Mrs. Freeman of Downers is very sick also that Mrs. Beidleman is not expected to live. It is said to be very sickly at the Grove this winter.

Peter, Sadie & Ann all came over to make us a visit on Thursday morning and Mother went back with them. Phebe's school closes in four weeks more. Ann has returned from Downers & says tell Robert I hope he has had a happy time keeping bachelor's hall. She says she don't like it at all because you are there & because we are going there but she don't wish you any bad luck. This last she did not intend I should write.

I am glad to hear the news about the new R.R. & only hope it is true that it is going through to Huron and that soon. If we only knew it would, it might make some difference with our calculations.

About what time to you expect to come home anyway? Do you have any idea of staying there till after you prove up? If you do not I think we must have nearly if not quite fuel enough to last while we remain here. I think we have about half of our hard coal left & perhaps $\frac{1}{4}$ of a ton of soft besides a little wood. I hardly think it would be best for me to order any more coal at present. I am glad you can get coal again. It seems that you have not had as much snow there as we have had.

I am much pleased to have you write so approvingly of the services on the Lord's day in Henry and also that you were so favorably impressed with the Christian people there. I think we had better join the church in Henry when we get to Dakota, if it is a long way from home. It will be a church home & that is a great deal.

Ann heard at the Grove that one of John's girls has had the chickenpox; also that Mrs. Gleason has not yet used her crutches & will not try though they desire very much to have her do so. She intends to walk without them. We did not have any school last Sabbath on account of the condition of the roads & it looks tonight very much as though there would be none tomorrow. It is so wet. I am so glad to hear you keep well. The Lord is very merciful to us this winter in giving us better health than last.

The children & Annie join with me in sending their love. I miss you very much at home dear Robert.

Good bye - Sarah.

Again, Peter Rowland is Sarah's brother; Sadie is Peter's wife Sarah (Roe) Rowland; Ann Rowland is Sarah Jane's older sister; "Phebe" is her younger sister, the teacher; and John is Robert Dixon's brother.]

Lisle March 1st 1883 Thu

My Dear Husband

The winter months are gone and it is really spring so far as the almanac is concerned; & now I hope the snow blockade will be soon ended. It has been thawing here rapidly for a couple of days, yesterday & today. There is a large stream of water and a still larger one there running past the house. South of us there is another large stream running westward across the road. There is much ice & snow still remaining to be thawed. I heard yesterday that they were looking for the railroad bridge at Aurora to give way.

I have been receiving letters from you quite regularly of late, the last one dated Feb 19th & 20th contained the statement by F.E. Curtis & the Wail from Dakota in both of which I was very much interested. Sadie says "Dear Papa I hope you are safe. I've got a hard tooth ache. (To me. Put that e on & that will mean I En had it.) Mama wote for me. That's all." "Mama, that's all I'm goin to wite." Mary is with me this week & would like to have you find out whether there is a bank there that does business with Chicago banks so that she would be able to get money in that way.

About that ten dollars I think I had better get a post office order if possible instead of sending it as you speak of. I think I will speak to Mr. McMillan about it & see if he can give one an order, if I can get down there through the water. I was not surprised that you needed more money after reading over the bill of expenses you sent to me. It seems as though the money melts away like ice in mid-summer. Do you expect to build the stable alone? About the time you have set to come home; have you noticed that it comes just at the time of the equinox? Would it be wise to be traveling just at that time & have only that stormy time in which to get ready? That blizzard you wrote about seeing must have been very bad indeed. I was almost hoping they did not have them there you have escaped so long. I heartily agree with you that "our happiness does not depend so much on how much we possess as on how much we love each other," & also on how submissive we are to the will of our Heavenly Father. I am glad your health is good. My own still continues better & the children also seem to be pretty well. There is much sickness still at the Grove I am told. We were all out to Church last Sabbath but Mr. Cosset did not come. It was exceeding slippery. We stayed to Sabbath school & I enjoyed it much. Miss Jealous, Mr. Mertz, Mr. Spore, Ann & myself were all that were in the class. It was the first time I had been out for several weeks to S. School & I have heard twice that the Clarion last week stated that Mr. Gress & Mr. Dixon's friends had not heard from them for sometime, not since you went out on the plains. It looks as though I had not better write to you after the 9th of March as it seems to take about ten or eleven days for a letter to reach you, at present, at least. I have not heard from John's & Charlie's families very lately. We pray for you at home & I hope we may all soon be reunited.

Yours with much love

Sarah

[Across the top of the first page she writes:] Your poetry about the Dakota blizzard is very good. Send on some more as you have much time in which to compose. Mary sends her love to you.

March 6th 1883 Lisle

My Dear Husband

I am receiving your letters now quite regularly, the last one dated Feb 27th I received yesterday. Am sorry to hear you have been favored with more snow, also sorry to hear that

the R.R. is still blockaded. It looks very much as if you were fast until old Sol exercises his melting powers upon the ice and snow in that frigid northern region. Perhaps you think that too cold a name to give to fair Dakota.

We have some snow left here yet, in banks &c, but most of the ground is bare. It thaws in the daytime & freezes nights. Last night we had some rain & also a little snow. It has been clearing up today & tonight is clear & starlight. We have been pretty well for the past week excepting Sadie who has been having the toothache. Mother has been with us since last Saturday. Mary & the children went to a spelling school, last Friday night, held at the school house in this place. Minnie & Bertie both spoke pieces, as that also (speaking) was a part of the program. Mary thought they did well, both in speaking & spelling. Minnie said just now "the afternoon before the spelling school I was the next to the last one to go down." "Tell Papa that." I hear that Mary Brookins is only waiting for the blockade to be raised before she starts on her Dakota trip, her destination being Fargo or at least that region. Me. Mr. Freeman's people are not thoroughly satisfied with Kansas & have written to find out how much it would take to purchase 5 acres with house &c where they used to live. \$1,500.⁰⁰ is the price now asked, being a rise of \$800.⁰⁰ since they left. Mr. Stratton of Downers goes to Iowa this spring & Mr. Cosset fills the long pulpit through March & April so we are minus a pastor but Mr. McMillan thinks Mr. Kellog will come down from Wheaton & fill the pulpit for a while. Louise Howard was at Sunday school last Sabbath & came in the class. Had quite an interesting talk and got along smoothly. She says she is not going to remain in Lisle long.

Things seem to be moving on at the corners here just about as usual so far as one can judge from outward appearances.

Are your doubts about the safety of leaving there about the 19th caused by the fear of our not being able to get back in time for you to prove up? About what time does the winter weather break up there generally, anyhow? Mr Whitney (Sen) of DG [Downers Grove] is very sick with paralysis. George Bunnel's wife is dead. She died at Len's in Kansas and was buried at Downers last week. Mrs. Freeman is better also Mrs. Beidleman. Mr. Beidleman it is said is drinking to excess also Mr. Taylor. Johnnie Doran has paid his store bill to us. Hoping to see you ere long & praying Gods blessing to rest upon you I remain with much love

Your affectionate wife

Sarah J. Dixon

[At the bottom of the last page:] Sadie looks for her letter from Papa every time now & is greatly disappointed that she has not yet received one.

[Across the top of the first page:] March 7th. Enclosed the \$10.⁰⁰ you sent for & sent it in my last letter on the 1st March. I hope I shall hear from you as soon as you receive it. Mother & the children send their love. Bertie says "tell Pa I didn't get a chance to write this time. Sadie says I didn't tell Papa I've got the hard toothache. Minnie's wax doll's (shoe) toes broke & the white shows. It is a nice bright morning again, somewhat cold but will probably thaw again today. We are getting four eggs a day from our chickens.

[Up the left margin of the first page:] Shall I write after the 9 of March to you?

Reading these letters I was struck by several themes:

- Constant banter over everyone's health – obviously a major concern in those days.
- Constant reference to the weather – which had a much more immediate impact on the kind of day you were having.
- The formal, respectful, yet obviously loving salutations.
- The references to their deep religious faith and their willingness to endure great struggle with God's help.

Then there is the story behind the themes. Robert's Dakota letters indicate he rode the rails for about 450 miles in search of his homestead; and that was after he arrived at

Howard. Once he filed his claim there's the little matter of walking twelve miles one way from the homestead to Henery every time he wanted to mail a letter, haul some lumber, or buy some more nails. Then hunker down in your handmade shanty for a Dakota Winter. Robert was forty eight years old in October of 1882. While you think about that, I'll be thanking Robert for any genetic material he may have forwarded.

Cass May 5th 1883. Saturday

My Dear Husband

I received your letter from Watertown Thursday night in the midst of an unusually severe rain storm. It rained nearly all day yesterday & this morning is still cold & cloudy & looks as though it might rain almost any moment. We have concluded not to start for Chicago till Monday. It is too cold & threatening to start out with the children. We will probably start from there on Wednesday morning. It may be we can get started on Tuesday morning but I think not as Emma was anxious we should make a good long visit. I do hope the decision about the land was in our favor. If you are thrown out of the preemption could not you preempt the one on which the soldier's filing now is & put your soldier's filing on the one you have been living on? And so hold them both.

Mary thinks she will buy those people out who are opposite our place but if we cannot hold both of ours one of them would be better for her I think. I wonder how our goods are getting along. Remember there was as many as 13 or 14 boxes of household goods. Sadie & Bertie cough quite badly yet but the other children's colds are better. I have had a severe cold but am some better now. I am glad your health continues good. Mabel says I am to tell you she wants to see you. Celia [daughter Mary Celia, "Minnie"] says I want to give him a kiss. Sadie says I want to kiss you & kissed the paper right here *

Good bye my dear Husband and may God bless & keep you & us till we meet again.

Yours afft.

Sarah J. Dixon