

They Had A Wonderful Time: The Homesteading Letters of Anna and Ethel Erickson

edited by Enid Bern

Introduction

"When my sister and I homesteaded in North Dakota more than 50 years ago, we had a wonderful time." So said Ethel Erickson in writing about their homesteading venture in Hettinger County in 1910.¹

Mr. and Mrs. John Chinn and nine-month-old baby, Josephine, close friends of the Erickson family, had come to Cannon Ball Township in Hettinger County where they settled on a homestead in the spring of 1908. In the fall of 1909, Anna, the older of the two Erickson sisters, came to visit the young family. Frail since a bout with scarlet fever and diphtheria, she was impressed by the invigorating air of the prairies and enamored of homestead life. She began to think seriously of finding a claim and located a prospect about two miles from the Chinn's homestead on which a walk-in-room had been built into the hillside; a stairway on the inside led to the house proper, which was built of lumber. The owner sold his relinquishments to Anna, who promptly filed on the land.²

After a six-weeks' visit she returned to Iowa to make preparations for moving to North Dakota the following spring. Since the father, a storekeeper, was very enthusiastic about the enterprise, he ordered a complete set of necessities for the girls to take with them.

Ethel, the younger of the Erickson sisters, was teaching school to earn money for college, but postponed her plans because she, too, was included in the venture. However, she could not accompany her sister until the close of the school term, and her mother went with Anna and enjoyed immensely putting in the garden, helping with the housework and visiting their good friends, the Chinns, who were now their near-by neighbors. Ethel arrived in July and her mother returned to Iowa.

The Chinns, joyful at the prospect of having close friends from their home town of Marshalltown, Iowa, live in the area, helped "the girls" locate and set up housekeeping. It was, in fact, Mabel [Mrs. Chinn] who had taken Anna to search for a homestead. "Old Tom" was a safe, reliable horse that Mabel had at her disposal for pulling a single-horse buggy. Now that the girls were in need of transportation, Mrs. Chinn generously let them have "Old Tom" while they lived in North Dakota. Close association made homesteading a pleasant undertaking for both the Chinns and the Erickson girls, who looked upon it as an exciting adventure and gloried in the challenges that accompanied their new style of life.

Ethel became the first teacher in the new town of Bentley. During the winter months the girls stayed in town and still met homestead requirements by driving home on weekends. Thus, the girls were saved the loneliness of being confined to the claim throughout the coldest weather. Anna commuted on her land by making proof of settlement, residence and cultivation after 14 months from the date of making entry and paying a certain fee per acre. The girls then returned to Iowa.

After the death of Anna and Ethel, letters written to their parents during their homesteading experience were left to the Chinn daughters, Mrs. Josephine Sipling and Mrs. Mildred Hitchings, also of Marshalltown. Through their generosity, we become beneficiaries of the experiences of the venturesome Erickson sisters.

Lengthy and detailed accounts of their active social life in the peppy and rapidly growing little town of young families and single people, as well as personal and irrelevant portions, have not been included in the letters that follow; otherwise, the wording remains unchanged.

—Enid Bern

Liberty, North Dakota
September 20, 1909

Dear Folks: Hope you have by this time received all the postals I sent from St. Paul, Aberdeen and Lemmon³ so you won't be worried about us. John [Chinn] had been at Lemmon over two hours when our train got there. It was so late, you know, and it seemed dandy to see him although I almost thought I would have to come to Bentley today on the stage. The stage comes from Lemmon to Bentley every day and is a real good one. Lemmon is a dandy town, all new and nice buildings and so level — no trees. The trees disappeared when we got past Aberdeen. That is a hustling town, too. The country mostly is level and you can see for ten or twelve miles, but not around here for there are so many "buttes" just like small mountains, about a mile away; none on John's land.

The drive from Lemmon was quite long and seemed longer because I was tired. John's place is exactly 25 miles straight north of there and it took us four hours to drive it. When the train got in it was 3:30 by my watch but just 2:30 by the depot clock so I gained one hour. Scenery is "great" — much better than I thought it could be without trees . . .

Tomorrow Mabel and I are going to Liberty for the mail, etc. — three miles. We can see the railroad men working a mile north; expect to ship grain out on it by the first of the year. Ethel, I think a claim will be all right if we are not too far from a town.

Josephine is a dear and plays out-of-doors all the time.
Must close, Anna

September 21, 1909

Tuesday . . . Mabel and I went over to Liberty today for the mail and then to Crary's and Max's.⁴ Crarys were glad to see someone from home and Georgia wants me to come over there next week. She begins teaching in Mott the first of October. We get mail at Liberty three times a week. I am feeling fine, eat and sleep dandy. My trip did not do me up nearly as much as I thought it would. Mabel is just as good a cook as ever. Today we had wonderberry⁵ pie, something like blueberries, grown especially for this country. There are lots of them but hard to pick.

Now, Papa, this is for you. Everyone [John and Crarys] have been telling me about a claim about five miles from here that belongs to a widow who is awful anxious to sell but has

¹Enid Bern, *Our Hettinger County Heritage* (Hettinger, N.D.: *Adams County Record*, 1975), 70.

²The legal description of the quarter follows: SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 6, Township 133N, Range 91 and SE $\frac{1}{2}$ of SW $\frac{1}{4}$, lots 2,3,5.

³Aberdeen and Lemmon are major points on the Milwaukee Road in South Dakota. Lemmon supplied the Hettinger County area prior to the construction of branch lines through that part of North Dakota.

⁴The Max Chinnns were John's brother and family. Mr. and Mrs. George Crary, sons Charles and Floyd and families, son Will and daughter Georgia, were other Hettinger County homesteaders who came from Marshalltown, Iowa.

⁵Wonderberries, raised in many homestead gardens, belong to the nightshade family. They were not good to eat raw, but made delicious pies and preserves once vinegar or lemon juice was added.



Anna Erickson

—Courtesy Enid Bern



Ethel Erickson

not proved up. She has a good frame shack built and a sod room joining it for coal and storing things and a good drilled well which alone cost \$150 and seven acres broken. They think if she would sell for \$400 or \$500 it would be a snap. We would have to live on it for 14 months straight (can't be away for more than three weeks on any claim), then prove up and pay perhaps two or three and a half dollars an acre or else come twice a year for five years . . . Ethel could probably teach. They will have to put up new school houses for there are so few . . .

I'm glad I came now, as the trains will be awful crowded during October. They were nearly crowded now — lots of travel on this road and so many little new towns. Yours, Anna

Liberty, September 24, 1909

Dear Ethel: I suppose you think it is time I was writing to you and so do I. Have been on the go nearly every day since I came. The first few days were rather cloudy and cool but yesterday and especially today have been beautiful and nice and warm during the day.

Today I went to Mott with Georgia Crary. She came over this A.M. about nine o'clock and wanted me to go, so I got ready and we had a nice drive and got home about 5:30. It is twelve miles to Mott. It is not a very large town now, but they are building all the time and are grading the streets and it is all together a busy place; more so than I could imagine for being so far from a railroad. They are now grading for two railroads. The Milwaukee will be finished this fall and the Northern Pacific next summer sometime. There are the most land offices and lawyers and real estate agents there and everyone seems busy. There are three or four nice general stores, a drug store, three banks and two hotels, etc. There is just one school and one room and Georgia thinks it will be quite a task for one teacher, but thinks there will surely be another room added by the first of the year. They are talking of a county high school which they want to build there.

Georgia knows so many folks there and there are so many young folks, so I met a lot of them and some who were acquainted in Marshalltown and around about there. All seemed real nice.

Bentley⁶ is just a general store part way between here and Lemmon, also a post office and a sod house where a woman lives and serves meals to people who happen along — stage passengers, etc. We are going over there to the fair tomorrow — don't know whether it is state, county or district.

The Liberty⁷ post office would make you laugh! It is about as large as a good sized dry goods box with one corner chopped out for the post office. Have a small stock of groceries there for an accommodation.

About next week I'm going to try to ride Old Tom. Think we know where I can get a saddle. Mary left her old riding skirt here so I have that to wear.

The wind here has been awful hard on my face, also the hard water, although I did use borax in it. Yesterday I got a big pail of soft water from Max's and it is fine. Some places, when folks dig their well they get soft water and sometimes it is awful hard. Mabel still gets water from the spring. John hauls it up in barrels. He says it is about as easy as pumping it. There is not so much alkali in it, but some mineral, I think, perhaps sulphur as the water looks blue and green.

Crarys are coming over here Sunday for dinner and Georgia and I are going to climb the buttes. My! I wish you were here. I am wondering if you would like it; I believe you would for a while. It is so different and perhaps you would like it "awful" well. I do hope we can get a claim if it will be good land and not too far from town; land is surely booming here. . . . Write to me soon. Yours ever, Anna

September 27, 1909

Dear Mama: John is going to start to thresh tomorrow — not here, though. Five or six of the neighbors have bought a threshing machine and then go from one place to another. John has some flax to cut yet before he will be ready.

It has been real warm for several days and the wind has blown terribly, but today it was calm and real warm. Saturday we drove over to Bentley to the "Fair." We almost decided not to go but had your letters that I wanted to mail so we

went. They really had quite an exhibit and the store was crowded and the graphophone played, and there was a man out on the prairie selling canes and running a prize shooting affair. We stayed just long enough to buy a few groceries and mail our letters . . .

We had such a nice visit yesterday with Crarys. Mr. C. is sure a booster for North Dakota land and Mrs. C. likes it pretty well but mostly because her children are here and because it has done Georgia so much good. Georgia's school begins next Monday . . .

Mabel and I have been talking of going to Lemmon one day and coming back the next when I register — if she can't go I will go to Bentley and go down on the stage. It is quite expensive to keep a team there over night . . . Goodby, Yours, Anna

Thursday, September 30, 1909

Dear Mama: Mabel and I are alone now for awhile as John is off threshing — has been since Monday and don't [sic] come home for dinner or supper. About a week after next they will be here, but guess they can get done in a day and a half.

We sew and work in the morning and then go somewhere in the afternoon most every day — after the mail or calling on some of the neighbors. Today we picked wonderberries and went to the farthest garden and got some muskmelons and two watermelons. We nearly live on muskmelons. Mabel's are just beginning to ripen but the neighbors have supplied us with all we can use.

Today I rode Tom, not very fast to start, though I went out in the pasture after the cows, but succeeded in bringing only one back. So then Mabel had to go. I felt quite like a "Westerner."

How are you all? Hope Papa is getting along all right. I think I'll come home all right after a while when I get fat, which I surely ought to do as I eat and sleep so much — don't do much of anything else. The weather is fine although the wind blows most of the time so we have to tie our hats on good.

Josephine is a regular "gad-about" — wants to go bye-bye every day and always thinks she must dress up. Her hair curls nicely in six curls besides what is tied up on top. She wakes up real early in the morning and begins to jabber to wake me up. Mabel and I sleep together but in the morning Josephine wants to get in our bed.

They say that Lemmon is crowded already with land seekers — don't think I will go down until the middle of the month. Perhaps they will be thinned out some by then . . .

We are going to Sunday school next Sunday, I think. Mabel says the singing is dreadful! Yours ever, Anna

October 3, 1909

⁶Bentley at this time was located in the NE¹/₄ of Section 4, Township 131N, Range 92W, in what is now Adams County.

⁷Liberty was originally located in the NE¹/₄, Section 28, Twsp. 133N, R.91W, in Hettinger County. In 1910, the Bentley Post Office was moved to the SW¹/₄, Section 13, Twsp. 133N, R.91W, a new townsite along the grade of the Milwaukee Road, and the Liberty Post Office was moved to the old Bentley site. See Enid Bern, *Our Hettinger County Heritage*, for histories of these places. See also: Mary Ann Barnes Williams, *Origins of North Dakota Place Names* (Bismarck, N.D.: Bismarck Tribune, 1966).

Dear Papa: I think I will go to Lemmon next week or sometime while it is nice. John hasn't time to go with me, or if he does will have to haul some grain. The trip will be too hard for Josephine so Mabel can't go and then they say there is a crowd there already and it would be hard for us to get the team taken care of. So, Mabel will take me over to Bentley and I will go down on the stage and come back the next day. It will be rather expensive but think it is the best I can do. They charge \$1.50 from Bentley and I asked the storekeeper if there was any reduction for round trip and he said there ought to be and that he would find out for me. Then the post mistress is going to find out about the crowd and what time the offices are open for registration, etc. I also have written a card to the girl I met on the train who was to work in a dry goods store in Lemmon, and asked her if it would be convenient for me to stay with her over night. She seemed real nice so think it will be all right. Otherwise think I can surely get in somewhere, being a lady!

While I am there also want to find out about the trains. John says he thinks the fare home is two or three dollars more on account of buying the ticket in South Dakota where they have three cent tare. Must close now, with much love, Anna.

October 10, 1909

Dear Folks: I received Papa's letter yesterday — rode over to Liberty (three miles, you know) on horse-back and was so stiff when I got back Mabel had to get me a cane to use. I thought I would have to be helped out of bed this morning, but was surprised to find myself all in good shape and ready for some more riding. I can't "lope" much yet, have to learn by degrees, I guess.

... I am still anxious about Mr. Morris' place and have slept on it and thought and talked of it so much, and I like the country still. I feel so well and eat and eat 'til I feel so full and then things still taste good.

I got a card from Miss Wolf at Lemmon and she said I could stay with her over night even if her sister did come ...

What do you think! I have even been offered a school to teach — isn't that the limit? I just laughed at the very idea of it ...

Must close now. Yours, Anna

Tuesday, October 12, 1909

Dear Ethel: Expected to get this mailed so it would go today but couldn't go to Bentley yesterday as we had planned because it got so cold. Sunday afternoon when we came home it was fine weather, but it turned cold in the night and we nearly had a blizzard, snowed some, so yesterday we hugged the stove all day ...

I am going to bring home several pints of wonderberries. Mabel wants me to so you folks can taste them. Cora gave me a piece of ground cherry pie Sunday ... Ethel, we will have to raise ground cherries and wonder-berries ... Love, Anna

Sunday, October 17, 1909

Dear Folks: Today Mabel and I went to the post office and I received both of Papa's letters. Then we went to see Mr. Morris again. There were some folks there looking at his claim. He came out and talked to us while the people were eating dinner. They had driven about 15 miles this morning, hearing he wanted to relinquish. There is also another fellow looking at it, but cannot pay all cash so he isn't counting much on him. I offered three dollars an acre but he said "nit." So, I told him \$600, but I couldn't get the money until the first of January. He said that would be all right, but of course if he can get more (before he goes home) from this other party they get it. He is going home the last of this week and will let me know if it is still for sale. Then if I decide to take it we can make the deal later, just so I decide for sure. He says it is worth \$1500 right now if only [it were] proved up. It is such a dandy chance that I hate to let it go if it is possible to get it. I will go and register next Wednesday and come back Thursday.

The John Chinn family about 1916: (l-r) John, Mildred, Mabel and Josephine.

—Courtesy Enid Bern



If I should get some good land it will cost quite a little to put up suitable buildings; that is, a warm shack, for it costs so much for lumber, hauling and labor, especially if far from a railroad. Perhaps, though, I can sell it if I get anything . . . Yours, Anna

P.S. This land that is to be opened — if one draws anything one has to pay 1/5 of the value down when you file, (that would be from 50¢ to \$6.00 an acre, the whole value, I mean) and then 1/5 for five years.

Tuesday, October 19, 1909

Dear Papa: I went to the post office this afternoon and received your letter and also the money from the bank. I then went to see Mr. Morris and after chasing all over the country found out that he had received a telegram late Sunday night and had gone to Lemmon yesterday morning to take the train home. Couldn't find out for sure whether or not he had sold out but don't think he has. I will write to him at Webster City tonight and tell him I have the cash and will also send his release blank which he can sign and send back to me so the land can be transferred at the same time I go to file on it. I will go to Lemmon tomorrow for fear Mr. Morris has sold . . . Yours, Anna

Sunday, October 23, 1909

Dear Ethel: Mr. Ford from Marshalltown, John's brother-in-law, came out here today to look at the country, etc. He came to Bentley on the stage, then took the Mott stage from there to within about three miles west of us, and then walked over. You should have seen us hustle, Mabel and I [sic], to straighten up the house when we saw someone coming. Things do get cluttered up so in a little house and callers are so unusual . . .

Hope you and Mama received the cards I sent from Lemmon. Weren't they dandy? I was so crazy about the picture of the "buttes" that I had to send it to you and blowed [sic] ten cents for it, too. Everything does cost in North Dakota. The merchants all believe in making hay while the sun shines. Guess they think their harvest will be short enough. It is getting settled here pretty fast now and then of course things get cheaper.

Now I must tell you about my trip to Lemmon. I certainly enjoyed it and had two good days of it. And you can never guess what my expenses were — just \$2.85! I certainly was surprised. Mabel took me to Bentley (eight miles) — took the stage from there at one o'clock for Lemmon (42 miles) — have to go out of our way . . . otherwise it is just 25 miles. Stopped at a half dozen mail boxes on the way and one post office where mail was delivered and horses changed. The stage isn't like the old fashioned ones we have read about, but looks much like McLean's "Schooner," only heavier and all closed in with curtains most of the time — large enough for three seats if necessary.

When I arrived at Lemmon I went to Walter's store and inquired for Miss Wolf. We had a nice little visit and then went and did my trading, buying stove pipe and stove bolts, etc. and telling folks I was going on a claim. Miss Wolf was perfectly lovely to me and took me to a lovely private boarding



Anna Erickson holds Mildred Chinn for a first photograph. The year is 1910.

—Courtesy Enid Bern

house for supper (not where she is) and then after supper she and her sister and myself went and registered. There was no rush just then but the evening train brought in so many that I could scarcely get a room. Someone who came said about 200 got off the train that night and hotels and saloons were busy. Miss W. took me to a nice little hotel but the landlady said she had no room and there was none in town. She was very nice and finally said there was a nice lady who had a room alone and would probably share with me, so I went up to take a look at the lady and let her get a squint at me. So, she took me in and I had half a good wide bed. She was about 35 years old, I guess, and of course we talked. She was going 65 miles south of Lemmon on a claim and L. was the nearest railroad. She had been there two days trying to get lumber and workers for her shack, etc. They are so hard to get and the season [is] getting so late that she was rather worried. She said she had spent over a hundred dollars on the claim already and hasn't a thing on it yet.

I was called at five — got up and dressed, had my breakfast at six and went down to the depot to see about trains, etc. Paid my bill (85¢) and started back on the stage at seven o'clock. The lady where I stopped for supper didn't charge me anything because I was a friend of Miss Wolf's. Wasn't that fine of her?

Well, to continue — coming back there were two young men on the stage, but I still had my seat by the driver. One was quite white-headed, [a] fat and jolly Swede boy, and the other was a friend of his and was bringing him out here to get a relinquishment. This one was dark and blowed up this country considerable [sic]. He owns a claim near Mott and I must tell you I made quite a hit with him! He took me to dinner at Bentley and that saved me 35¢ more. Had a pretty good dinner but had to eat on an old colored oilcloth in a sod house — just imagine, if you can! I just wish you could have been there . . .

You could teach the spring term at home, I think. Anyway you couldn't get in here before fall. The teacher they have now is not at all well — has asthma and hay fever so perhaps cannot keep it. Can't depend on that, however, but schools are plentiful . . .

I really believe Mama would like North Dakota — for a while, anyway.

Must close. Yours, Anna

October 29, 1909

Dear Papa: I got Morris' claim all right. Heard from him yesterday. Came to Mott today to deposit money and to file. He sent relinquishment papers to the bank. They will hold the money until I send them notice to pay after I get receipt for the land, which will be sent from Lemmon to LaMoille [Iowa]. There are nearly five acres more than the 160 acres which I had to take — this on account of it being on the correction line. This I have to pay \$2.50 an acre for now and then it is mine without having to pay any more when I prove up. This amounted to \$11.85 which I borrowed from Mabel. Please send this and also money for me to come home on . . . I have \$3.50 now, but don't you worry. I could relinquish now and make \$100, but in the spring land will be impossible to get here and so will be worth something.

Don't tell inquiring friends, if they get to know it, that we are coming up here to live. Spring it on them easy and say for the summer anyway and then *perhaps* for the winter, for they will be horrified if they think we intend to winter here. They have an idea Dakota is so awful dreary, etc., but I know better — like it more and more.

I *walked* to Liberty for the mail yesterday and feel no bad effects today. Must stop and start home. Lovingly, Anna

November 1, 1909

Dear Mama: I suppose by this time you have received the letter telling you I made the deal with Mr. Morris and I am glad that I got it. Everyone thinks it is a good investment. We drove over there yesterday and it looked good to me. The land is not level, just nice and rolling. There are lots of things in the house which belong to Mr. Morris' brother-in-law who has a claim joining mine. I saw him when in Mott and told him I had bought the place and to get his things out this week. I will go over there, too, and see what I want and what he will let me have. Then we can talk about the rest when I come home . . . Either the change or the climate have [sic] agreed with me for I have never felt better and I am sure I have gained some . . . Yours ever, Anna

Anna at this time went back to Iowa to make preparations for moving to the claim in the spring. The following letters were written after she returned to North Dakota with her mother.

*A.F. Morris, who lived on the NW¼-34-133N-91W in Hettinger County, was evidently a brother to the Morris from whom Anna Erickson bought the relinquishment.

*A.A. Bentley came to Hettinger County in 1907 from Wisconsin. He promoted development of a town and farmed until 1912 when he returned to Wisconsin, later becoming the mayor of LaCrosse. He eventually settled at Fulton, Illinois, and organized an insurance company. See the *Mott Pioneer Press*, November 21, 1935, 1, for a brief obituary.

April 24, 1910

Dear Papa and Ethel: We got to Bentley just at noon and John was there to meet us. He had the spring wagon so we brought both trunks and a sack of flour (\$1.65). Got to Mabel's about 2:30, not so very tired . . .

John has my wheat in but doesn't know whether he can break any this spring or not. Perhaps I can get on the good side of Mr. Morris⁸ and have him break some . . . with a steam plow. The Crary boys also have a steam plow. But the trouble is they don't like to break such a little bit . . .

John has the floor cemented and the stove put up . . . We haven't been over yet . . .

John got half way home on Tuesday. He went after our goods and stopped on the way as it began to rain hard. He got home Wednesday morning . . .

Tomorrow we will go to Mott as Mabel has some business there. Then we will get some sulphur to burn in my house . . . Guess the bugs have been pretty thick over there but they haven't thawed out yet . . . The incubator was just hatching when we got here — got 77 good chickens . . .

I'll send you a map of the new railroad so you can see where our new town is. It is building up fast and A.A. Bentley⁹ is the chief man. The post office will be there after a while, but can't tell whether it will be [named] Bentley or Liberty.

Ethel, they elect a new school board in July, so this old board won't elect the teachers for next fall. If Miss Wehsner don't [sic] want it I guess you will get it. She rather wants to go to school next year. Georgia will teach in Mott and stay on her claim long enough to hold it down. They didn't have any school January, February or March . . . Lots of love, Anna

Liberty, April 28, 1910

Dear Ethel: A week ago last evening since we left home and it seems such a long time! We haven't so very much done either and still we have been working all the time. It takes so much time to go back and forth. Tomorrow morning we will go over to stay. Will plant a garden about the first thing, now, as we can live over there even if it is not so straightened. Will also set the incubator.

Mama and I drove over to the new town today to get some oil and matches and a few things we need. They are busy there putting up new buildings as fast as they can. A.A. Bentley has moved his Liberty store and part of his Bentley store over there; there are four other buildings going up. One is now used for a restaurant but will later be a barber shop, one a hardware store and don't know what the other is yet. Then there is a blacksmith shop and livery barn. So, by the time the railroad is through they will be ready for a boom. I heard the graders had just one month more of work and then the work of laying the rails would begin.

Today we got our stove blacked, so that looks better — [it] is a dandy stove and bakes fine. Our greatest trouble is no table. We will use Mabel's reading table until we get one. Perhaps John will make us one. We filled our straw tick last night and you should have seen our buggy load this morning when we left Mabel's — simply stacked, cat and all. I do hope

May 14, 1910

we can get a horse — will simply be lost without one. How much do you and Papa think we could pay for one?

It is so pretty here now. Everywhere the fire burned is now lovely green and that is nearly as far as we can see. The prairie grass is so long that it takes a long time for the green grass to come through it . . .

Love from both. Yours, Anna

Bentley, May 2, 1910

Dear Papa and Ethel: We are more settled now and look quite cozy although there are . . . many things to be done . . .

Yesterday Mabel, John and Josephine were over for dinner; then Max's came and we all went to church. Max has a two seated rig so he took Mama and me. Preaching was at a school house three miles north of here at two o'clock. The preacher's name is Douglas. He is Congregational and has a claim somewhere near Mott. He told us he is Scotch, is a fair talker and middling good looking.

. . . We looked over the 60 [acres] next to me yesterday and most of it is pretty good. There is one hill where you can build your shack and overlook the whole country. Don't think it is taken yet. John said he would try to find out when he went to Mott. It is risky to delay filing on it for it may be taken any time and may not . . .

I measured this upstairs room the other day and it is 15'3" x 19'3" — too big for one room — would really make two. We have three widths of the carpet on one side of the stove pipe and one on the other; then have the fur robe in front of the bed. Mabel will spare us some rag carpet to help with. The couch sleeps fine but it gets cool at night and I can't keep warm alone so then I have to get in with Mama. Love, Anna

Friday, May 6, 1910

Dear Ethel: Today we have papered our box, cupboards and under the stairsteps to keep the dust out of our pantry. Have made curtains for same out of an old gray skirt of Mama's. Mama baked bread yesterday and cinnamon rolls. We washed the day before; had to hang the starched clothes in the house as the wind blew so . . .

Did I tell you about the steam plow we saw working Sunday? There are three of them working around here now. They turn over ten or twelve furrows at a time. Have two crews so they work day and night and Sundays, too, where folks will let them.

I walked over to Cora's Tuesday to get some milk and cream. She said I could have all I came after. It didn't seem any walk at all. I wish my shack was on their road — they have so much travel there . . .

I do hope you get the school on the hill. We can see the school house from here — the top of it. Then when we get a horse I can take you and go after you. I don't think you can file on the 60 if you don't get the school, as you won't have any money to build a shack with or to have any breaking done.

. . . Mama says she could stay here a year all right if Papa was here, too, (and you, too, of course). That wouldn't be any trouble at all then. She says she misses a man being around even if they are lots of bother. Lots of love, Anna

Dear Papa and Ethel: . . . This week I have been planting more garden. We need rain so bad . . . I bought some fine cabbage plants — got two dozen for ten cents.

We have a cat, white and tiger, just a kitten. Has been here three days so think it will stay. The first night we found three dead mice in the coal house. The mice have been pretty bad . . . in the cave and barn. I shot a squirrel¹⁰ yesterday. They are bad, too. It is the first time I tried shooting them.

Ethel, the new town is nearly five miles from us but it really doesn't seem that distance. If they still keep a post office at Bentley, which I think they will, that name can hardly be changed and as Liberty is the post office that will be moved. Perhaps the new town will be Liberty but this is just what we hear and cannot tell anything about it yet. A.A. Bentley is "the" man, and is trying to run things his way. They are circulating a petition to have a town just north of Mabel's a mile and a half, between Mott and the new town and think they will get it. I signed even if it won't do me much good. I'll be as far from one as the other.

Perhaps John will sell Tom to us if we want him. He is 14 years old, perfectly safe but not much of a beauty. [He] is a good goer. Has a ring bone on one foot. Does that hurt a horse, Papa? Don't think he will sell him for less than \$75 but can probably pay part now and part later. Will look around first. Horses are scarce and awful high. Prairie fire killed so many and the railroaders work their horses until they drop in their tracks . . .

We have some money yet — don't need anything just now, only for butter and eggs and milk . . . When John goes to Mott he will get us some things we need — lumber, etc. So will have to have money for that . . . Need two screen doors which we *have* to have. The doors are \$1.60 apiece and 20¢ for hinges. Also another roll of tar-paper which will have to be put on before winter . . .

I like it better here all the time, only wish I could get out and do things. There is so much to do. Am anxious for Ethel to come and only hope she will like it . . . Mabel and John are so good to us and we do enjoy going back and forth so much . . .

We have Tom all this week — left him loose in the barn last night and he got out. I heard him but wouldn't go put him in. We haven't found him yet this A.M. I walked about three miles before breakfast hunting him. Think he went over to Max's. Will wait 'til Mabel comes before I look any more. Love from us both, Anna

Liberty, May 22, 1910

Dear Papa and Ethel: Today has been lovely! It stays light such a long time. From 4 A.M. until 7:30 P.M. it is nice and light . . . I know because I have been up watching the incubator. I am disappointed in my hatch. Have 68 to 70 chicks, good ones, and killed five or six that were crippled. I thought I should get 80 anyhow, and don't know whether it was me or the eggs . . . Perhaps I didn't sprinkle them enough. Tried to take good care of the incubator and watched it good [sic] . . .

¹⁰She means a ground squirrel, or 13-striped gopher.

Hopwoods at Liberty want me to take some pictures of their engine and plow for post cards. They thought the ones I took were fine. The Liberty post office will soon be changed to the new town; then the stage and mail will go from Lemmon to Bentley and Bentley to the new town until the railroad is in.

Mr. Iseman from Marshalltown buys so much land up here. He bought a quarter or perhaps more of railroad land east of me a ways this spring for \$15 an acre, \$500 down. Kept it a couple of weeks and sold it for \$25 an acre with \$1000 down — land with nothing done to it. Wasn't that good? . . .

May 26, 1910

Dear Papa and Ethel: We were over to the new town yesterday and they told us that it was to be Bentley and the old Bentley was to be Liberty. Now won't that mix folks up? I would laugh if the government would fool A.A. Bentley once and call his town Liberty . . .

The joke on us is that Mr. Morris came and got his potatoes out of the cave yesterday after I had picked them all over nicely and thrown all the spoiled ones out. I didn't think he wanted them as he never came for them, so I gave Mabel a couple bushels for seed. I'll never tell him that, though. We also have used them since we came. Glad I got that much for my trouble, anyway. Then more trouble — when the "kid" came for the potatoes the dog came and ate up a nice herring that we had outside in a pail. We were so mad. I bought it over to Bentley and paid five cents for it (got two — Mabel took one).

Love Anna

Friday the 27th [1910]

Dear Ethel . . . You will be terribly fooled if you think there are no birds here; there are lots of them — meadow larks and many different kinds of blackbirds with red or yellow on their wings. Some birds I don't know — look something like wrens.

The meadow lark sing so pretty. The scenery is pretty here, I think, only in a different way than at home. I am so anxious for you to come . . .

John will work some for me after his crops are all in.

I think your money is well invested, the way land is selling now. Iseman has raised his to \$30 an acre. I talked to the man that bought or rather filed a "coal" right on Mr. Whitney's land. His is Mr. Ross — lives in Mott — is Clerk of Court. He paid \$10 an acre and now wants \$18. He said I ought to buy it [because] it joined mine. I told him I thought he asked too much . . . Love, Anna

June 3, 1910

Dear Papa and Ethel: . . . Tomorrow Mabel and I are going to Bentley (the new town) and will send this from there . . . We still get our mail at Liberty. They say when Liberty post office is discontinued it will be moved to old Bentley and that will be Liberty. But the town they are trying to get just north of Mabel's wants Liberty post office and that of course will be Liberty.

Today we were at Mabel's for dinner and Mr. and Miss Hiers were there, too, nice people. He lives just east of me a little ways. His folks live just a half mile from Bentley. He worked for lawyer Stone for a while and had this place of Morris' listed as a relinquishment and Mr. M. then wanted \$1000 for it. He thought I got it cheap . . . Love, Anna

June 10, 1910

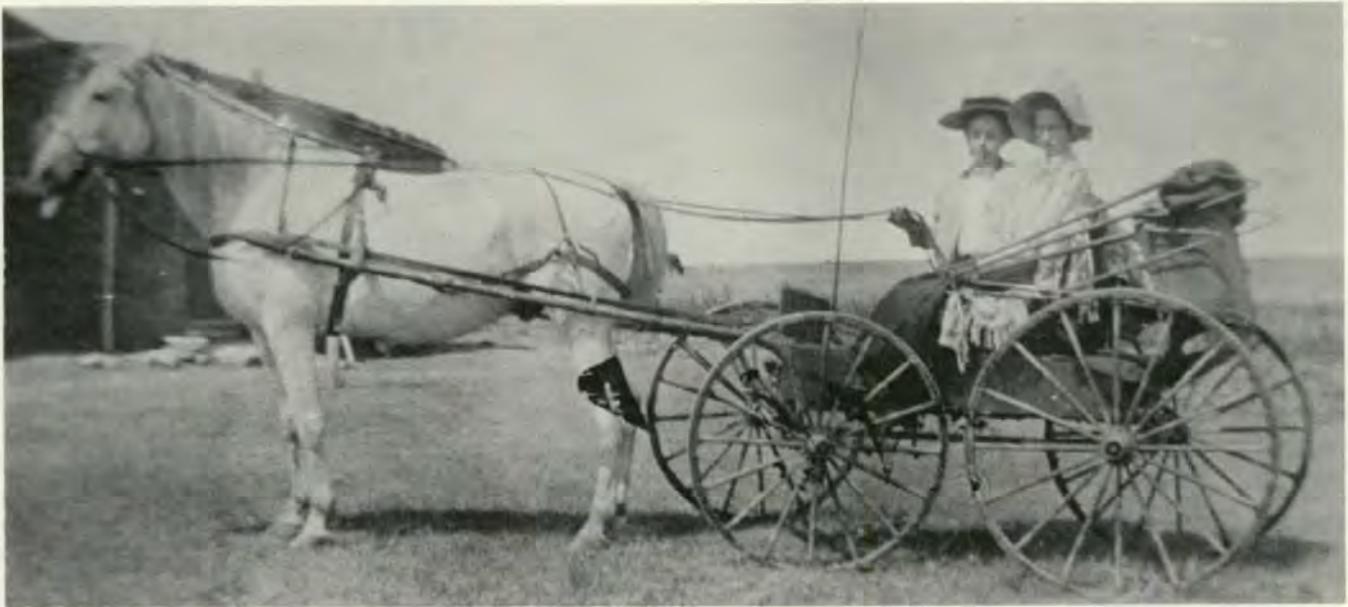
Dear Papa and Ethel: We are thinking today how tickled Ethel is because it is her last day of school and I suppose Papa is glad, too.

We have had some rainy weather. It did so much good and has started things growing fine. We have had such a time with the chickens when it is rainy. When we have Tom here we can't put them in the barn so have to have them in the kitchen or coal house and then they nearly set us crazy. Of course Tom is out on the prairie even if it does rain, but the

"Rock Hollow," the Erickson sisters' homestead shack, had a cellar with a walk-in basement and a fieldstone foundation.

—Courtesy Enid Bern





A horse named "Old Tom" and a buggy provided the sisters with transportation during their homesteading days.

—*Courtesy Enid Bern*

barn is too damp for them and then it is too hard to keep them perfectly clean. The chickens are doing fine and grow fast.

The wheat looks good although it is rather thin in some places. Next spring I'll only get $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the crop unless I can hire someone to put it in, which would be best, I think, if it can be done. I think there will be a little hay on my land to cut, not much though, enough for myself, perhaps. You see the fire burned it all off and it won't grow enough this summer.

We have had Tom this week and I just wish Mabel would sell him to us. He is about what we want as he is so gentle and easy to take care of. Part of the time I just tie up his halter rope and let him go and he doesn't go away very far. Then, if I don't want to watch him I stake him out. I give him two quarts of oats once a day unless I use him, then I feed him twice. Is that all right? When he is out he just eats grass all the time . . .

Well, I have heard of a good claim to contest between here and Mabel's. The man wants to prove up next month but he can't do it because he hasn't had continuous residence of 14 months . . . A person could either contest him or get him to relinquish for a little sum. It is on the main road about five miles from town and if they get a town north of John's it would be only five miles. There is a house and barn but no well . . .

Papa, if I get a chance to have six to ten acres broken and I think I have, shan't I do it? It has rained enough to make it easy breaking and a good time to put in flax. Mr. Danielson will charge four dollars an acre; then I will try and hire him to put it in . . . It is not too late if done next week and seeded before the 20th . . . It think it will pay to do this if you have to borrow \$50 or \$100 . . . Yours, Anna

June 15, 1910

Dear Papa and Ethel: . . . Papa, do cheer up and don't get

lonesome. You should be able to stand it if we [sic] are and we are doing fine. Your notice of no breaking came too late. Mr. Danielson is here now and will break five or six acres and put in flax this week . . . We are boarding him for some extra work he is doing for us and if so he will pay some board. He sleeps in the barn. We spread out the kindling and put the straw tick on that and he brought a blanket and quilt. He is nice to have around (is Swede) — lives next to Mabel's. Is enjoying himself as he gets tired of "batching it." . . .

We had a fine rain last night and some hail. It did pour and thunder and lightning. Hope we have more as it makes breaking easier . . .

The stage goes from Lemmon to Bentley every day and one goes from Bentley to Lemmon. The folks at old Bentley are mad as hops because they took their post office away from them and didn't [bring] Liberty down to them as A.A. Bentley had promised to do. The man that is boosting for the first town east of Mott says he is going to make it hot for Mr. Bentley and has sent for a post office inspector. Mr. Pierce is his name so suppose if they get a town they will name it "Pierce."

Ethel, you can come out most any time you think for Mama will be ready to come home after a couple weeks' visit with you. She isn't at all homesick, though, only of course would like to see you both . . . Love, Anna

July 1, 1910

Dear Papa and Ethel: . . . Wednesday we had a fine rain and everyone felt better over it. It will help most of the crop although some was too far gone to revive . . . Those hot winds were something unusual. When John's roof blew off it lit on their buggy and broke a wheel. *Smashed* it, so we have to divide up with mine now until they get it fixed . . .

I haven't any flowers at all. The chickens ate them up. Only the gladioli bulbs are growing pretty good. When the

chickens roost around the door and Mama gets sore at them I tell her to remember they are worth 75¢ apiece, if not more.
Love, Anna

July 5, 1910

Dear Papa and Ethel: . . . I got 20 birthday cards; wasn't that a lot? Well yesterday we celebrated. Had a picnic dinner here at my house — John's and Max's and us; then about one o'clock started to Bentley. There was an awful big crowd but there was enough room for everybody that came. The prairies aren't crowding! . . . A.A. Bentley's store was a beehive all day and the way he sold pop . . . and lemonade wasn't slow . . . People were there for miles around — some clear from Lemmon. They had fireworks in the evening and Mama and I would have stayed but we would have been afraid to come home alone . . . Now this is how convenient it is to be without trees! After I had gone to bed I could look out the window and see the fireworks display in Bentley. Just the high ones, of course, sky rockets and balloons . . . Love, Anna

July 13, 1910

Dear Folks: Suppose Mama is home today and we are anxiously waiting to hear from you. John got home from Lemmon at 6 o'clock . . .

Yesterday we all went across the river to vote to move the school house where we have Sunday school . . . There was a big crowd at election and it was quite exciting. Heard today the voting turned out 30 to 31 in favor of moving it, but they had to have a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority so guess it stays. Also elected teachers. Today I tried to find out about that but haven't yet . . .

This morning as John got up and went out of doors he saw a coyote run off with a hen. He got the rifle and went chasing it — chased and chased all over the buttes but couldn't find a trace of him. We are going to watch for him tomorrow morning. Suppose he'll come back after another breakfast. We shut

the chickens up tonight so they can't get out until we let them . . . Yours ever, Anna

July 17, 1910

Dear Ethel: . . . I don't like to tell you, but you didn't get the school near us. Miss Wehsner changed her mind and took it. They gave you one about 10 miles north of us across the river, which of course you can't take. I am going to apply for the Bentley school for you as they have to make some arrangements for a school there . . . I *do* want you to come, though, and guess something will "turn up." It will be better for you to do your own talking when you come but I'll say something about the school in town . . .

Anna

(Ethel arrived at the homestead in July.)

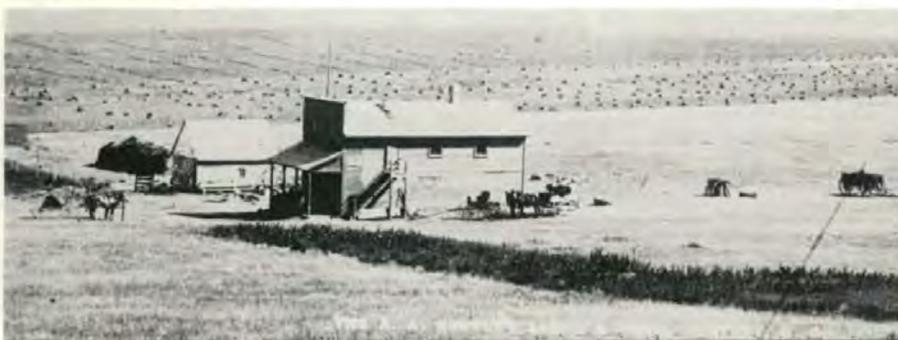
Tuesday, August 2, [1910]

Dear Folks: At last I'm at our own shack and so far think it is *fine*. I'm having a lot of fun but can't tell just what I like about it here. In fact, I can't see nothing to like but just the same I *do* like it very much. I just couldn't come home for Anna would not stay here without me here and besides I think I shall enjoy it. I am quite sure of getting something to do.

We stayed with Mabel until yesterday morning, then took Tom and came home. Had so many things to take so we left our cat and chickens. I think they will enjoy visiting for a day or two longer.

Haven't my trunk yet. It's over at Max's but hope I can get it today. They accuse me of making a hit with the stage driver for he only charged me a dollar for my trunk from Lemmon to Liberty and the other one only a quarter from Liberty to Max's. For myself \$1.50 the first part and \$.75 the last . . .

We baked today and Anna had fine luck with her bread and cookies. I think it looks real cozy in here and we are planning the fixing of it for winter . . . They say the rails will be through to Bentley September 1 . . .



Bentley was originally located in Adams County . . .

but was removed to the Milwaukee Road right-of-way in 1910, and the new town hosted a 4th of July celebration that year.

—*Courtesy Enid Bern*



Another squirrel in the well! I got it out this morning. I suppose it was in yesterday but we've been using the water. I don't know what we will do. We need a cat here to catch them. We'll carry the water from Max's springs for a while until fresh water runs into our well . . . Love from us both, Ethel

August 8, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: . . . Ethel thinks she will like Dakota and I hope she gets a school — think she can get something as there are two new school houses to be built in this locality this fall . . .

The Cray's have a header to cut their grain with this year so John got them to cut over to my place. They cut there last Tuesday afternoon and an hour or so Wednesday morning. We got lunch for them Tuesday evening. We didn't know they were coming and were all ready to go to Bentley to get something to eat, as we just got home Monday. So we set lunch on the table and they went and helped themselves. It cost 65¢ an acre to get the header but it saves a lot of grain that couldn't be saved with a binder. The flax isn't doing anything — a few patches here and there show up — some may get their seed back. John was over Saturday and got me a load of coal and plowed firebreaks way around the buildings.

A week ago Sunday we had a nice time at the river. It looked like Iowa — the first timber I had seen . . . wasn't a large crowd — just a few besides those who were at Sunday school . . . Much Love, Anna

Thursday, August 13, 1910

Dear Folks . . . This afternoon we go to Bentley; will have the tires set if possible and do several other things. I haven't heard yet about the school . . . I won't know for some time about it for they don't have the election 'til a week from Saturday, the 27th. It makes it a little hard to have things so undecided, not even to know whether I can teach or not. I will try to go to institute at Mott next week if Anna can get someone to stay with her. Think I must go if I can and then perhaps I will have to take exams the last of the week . . .

Well, when we got home about 6 o'clock we saw two hawks fly away from down near the slough. We were so afraid they had been feasting on chicken. Then, right out in front of the chicken box lay a dead skunk. I shot him in the head to be sure he wasn't playing 'possum. We can't imagine what killed it — it's all puffed up as though it might have been poisoned but I'm quite sure it didn't get a chicken. We haven't had the funeral rites yet, but will soon. One chicken died this morning, but aside from that they are doing fine.

We had a couple callers Monday P.M. — Miss Halfhill and (May) Hopwood. One nice thing about it here is that when you see someone coming you have time to straighten up the house and yourself, too, before they arrive and then hard luck if they go past! Must stop now. Love, Ethel

[Note from Anna] — We just buried that awful creature — dug a hole every bit of six inches deep. Have taken a picture of my chickens so you can see what a flock . . .

August 14, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: . . . We had a hard rain yesterday and

last night and now our spring is full to overflowing. The rain came nice without much wind so it didn't drive in the house much. It still was cloudy this morning so we didn't go to Sunday school and found plenty to do bringing in half drowned chickens (four small ones) and drying the boxes, etc. . . .

Mabel and John were over this afternoon — said if we didn't come over there they must come here . . . A hawk *nearly* carried off one of her largest chickens yesterday but dropped it when she scared it away. She chopped its head off quick so she could use it. The hawks have been around here, too, but are such small ones I didn't think they could take a chicken. We got our gun and go on a chase occasionally — when we haven't the gun we see them or it perched on a nice knoll or post. The squirrels aren't bad now that we are living here and Bobby is around; then Ethel wounded two and scared them, I guess . . . Love, Anna

[Same envelope]

Dear Mama: What Anna forgot was to thank Papa for the post cards and she prevaricated, too, for we only brought in three drowned (I mean half drowned) chickens this morning. I got up at 4:30, put on the rain coat and rubbers and went out to see if the chickens had survived. They were all right and so I tumbled back into bed and had a couple hours more sleep. It was just pouring down rain and I was afraid the chickens were getting wet.

Our old hen disappeared. Something must have carried her off, perhaps a coyote. We hated to lose her and we had just gone to work to make a nest for her in the barn and was waiting for her to lay some eggs. Next week we are surely going to build a chicken house, move the sod from around the 2 x 4's and put a roof on it. We have a good many odd jobs for next week, but first of all we (?) are going to make Mrs. Hamilton's dress. Anna is going to bake bread tomorrow. I let her do that part of the work for I think she needs the practice and will need to know how before I will. Then we want to wash, too. Anna says we can begin to take in washing now since we have so much water. We like to do it every week if we can so it won't be so big.

Anna called me a "rag mason" this morning for the water began running into the basement — a regular waterfall — and I stuffed in rags and plastered it up with mud which then washed down. It was rather funny. The water came down through a squirrel hole, I think, so we are going to fill that up before it rains again.

Last evening we were very disappointed for we were invited to a party at Patterson's and couldn't go on account of the storm. We made all plans to go on our way home from Bentley late in the afternoon for we hadn't received our invitation 'til then. We talked about what we should wear and Anna (not I) talked about the hit she was going to make. But after all the planning the only hit she made was with the bed and that lasted a good while.

Tomorrow they have another school election so perhaps in my next letter I can tell you something about a school. Institute is held in Mott beginning August 22. Teachers are *required* to attend and I don't see how I can but on the other



Homesteading required many skills. Ethel, the "Rock Hollow" carpenter, wrote, "We didn't wear slacks!" on the original photo. Even so, Anna found jack-rabbits to be easy targets during the open December of 1910.

—*Courtesy Enid Bern*



hand don't see how I can get out of it. Here it isn't like it is at home for people do not know me and I have no "stand-in" as yet.

John killed a couple of Jack rabbits yesterday and brought some to us when he came to stack grain. We stewed it and it was fine. Today we had scalloped potatoes and some more rabbit, tomatoes, tapioca pudding with raisins in it and cream. Then Anna made some marguerites¹¹ which were very nice. When Mabel and I went to Mott I got some meat — steak 15¢ and a ten cent roast which lasted us *four* meals . . . Lovingly, Ethel

Monday, August 22, 1910

Dearest Folks: We couldn't go to Mott today as we intended for it seems that the weatherman has played a joke on us. When we woke up this morning it was about like twilight — a red glow over everything. We had to light the lamp and could not see without it until after ten o'clock. The air is thick with smoke which causes it — from Montana forest fires, I suppose. It is clearing up now, though even yet (12:30) Whitney's shack can scarcely be seen from here — just the indistinct outlines of it . . . Hope that the atmosphere will clear up so that we can go to Mott tomorrow . . . Love, Ethel

[Same envelope]

Dear Mama and Papa: Today Mabel and John have been here; . . . We had fried chicken. I killed it myself and the hatchet was so dull that I had to chop about 16 times to get its head

¹¹There are three-inch square soda crackers topped with boiled icing mixed with raisins.

¹²James W. Foley (1874-1939) was considered North Dakota's *poet laureate* as a result of his many volumes of flowing, flowery, rhymed verse. A newspaperman who was secretary to two governors and editor of the *Bismarck Tribune*, he died in California. His residence in Bismarck is presently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Obituary: *Fargo Forum*, May 18, 1939, 1.

off. Did that last night and dressed it and my knife was so terribly dull that I had an awful time. I will surely get it sharpened or a new one before I dress another . . .

This morning about 5:30 Ethel yelled at me and said she smelled skunk so we got out in our night gowns with the gun and searched but didn't find it. We made a funny looking search party, I'll tell you, and bet the old fellow caught sight of us and ran. [Anna]

Mott, Thursday, August 25, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: This is such a grand day and we sure do appreciate it after almost a week of cloudy and smoky weather. I am in Mott attending Institute this week. Anna and I came Tuesday morning. Am staying at Crary's and the Institute is a little dry; still I am enjoying being here and trying to get wise.

Last Monday I received quite a bunch of lucky school news. The County Superintendent returned my certificate, saying if I wrote on preliminaries, which is very little work, I could have First Grade by writing on psychology, physical geography and geometry . . .

I'm a little tired tonight, but going to a lecture tonight by the North Dakota poet, Mr. Foley¹² . . . Ethel

Friday, August 26, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: I took her [Ethel] in Tuesday even though it was cloudy before we started. I started home about 2:30. Stopped at Mabel's and then went over to Hopwoods after May. Wednesday noon it started to rain. I had taken May home, then went to Cora's for milk and she asked me to stay for lunch. So, I did and then it rained so hard that I had to stay until about 3:30. It rained so hard I couldn't go after May and in fact Tom had more sense than I for he wouldn't move out of the barn, so I stayed alone that night. I was kind of scared to



While the flock of chickens clusters around Anna, the disappointed cat saunters away. Note the door to the root cellar at "Rock Hollow" at left.

—Courtesy Enid Bern

sit up after dark so went to bed early with the gun at the foot of the bed and the cat sleeping with me. I found that I was all safe the next morning and the rain had ceased and it was nice and clear. That day I had to stay home all day so baked bread and didn't set it 'til morning. I like to have May stay with me. She isn't a "scarey" person at all and is quite a talker and jolly. Much love, Anna

P.S. I paid Mabel \$25 down on Tom. Sixty dollars is the price and we have to have a horse. Perhaps she will take the incubator on him.

Bentley — August 29, 1910

Dear Papa: Mabel went to Mott with me Saturday to get Ethel. We took a team and my buggy. Coming home Ethel and I had to take turns sitting on a box and Ethel was so heavy she finally broke through when about a half mile from home (Mabel's). It was awful dark when we got home but Tom, the good and faithful beast, found the road without any trouble. Now we have turned over a new leaf and are coming home early before it gets dark.

In Mott they are doing lots of building and on some of the stores they are using this steel siding that looks like brick, rough and gray in color. I was inquiring about it and they say it is just the thing for shacks as it is fire-proof and if put on well is warm. It comes in sheets about 2½ x 6 feet; is cheaper than siding. They send to Butler Bros. in Chicago for it. Look it up in your catalogue and see what the price is . . .

The wind is worse than it has been for some time. The hawks have also taken some five or six chickens, I think . . . Will close now. Love, Anna

P.S. Honest, Papa, it seems that I am liking it better and better here. Do wish you could come and see how we live . . .

September 2, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: Yesterday we threshed and I have 24 bushels of wheat. Isn't that awful? Off of 24 acres got 48 bushels so he didn't even get his seed back. They threshed at Max's and John's, here, and what the boys put in on Harry's land. We cooked for them at Max's. Had 12 men but only for

dinner. They got through just before supper and went to Kibbel's. We had supper all ready for them, so Mabel and I hitched up and took some of the truck over for her to use. I bought 15 grain sacks for my grain and have it in the basement. Guess I won't sell it 'til it gets to be \$2.00 a bushel!

Max got Josephine a little wagon for her birthday and she was so tickled with it. She says she wants Anna and Ethel to give her a doll! We are going over there for a birthday dinner . . .

There will be a school in Bentley but they won't begin for a month or so . . . Ethel has told them about wanting the school and I think she stands a good chance of getting it as they seemed pleased with her certificate, etc. . . .

We about died laughing at Papa's instructions as to how to kill a chicken! Guess he will have to instruct us as to where the ears are!

We feel fine, and eat! My goodness! Cool evenings we cook lots of potato soup and say! — it's good. We are still using old potatoes . . . Love, Anna

September 5, 1910

Dearest Folks: It rained all day yesterday so we couldn't go to Mabel's as we had planned since we didn't get to go on Sunday. So, Josephine hasn't her doll yet. But this morning after we get our work done . . . we are going to Mabel's . . .

This is going to be the longest vacation I've ever had and suppose I should be enjoying it, though you know, of course, I should like to be doing something. It doesn't seem right for September to come and not find me beginning school work in some form. But really the change does seem a little nice. But I think I shall know soon about the school at Bentley . . .

We were sure 'nough sorry that it rained Sunday morning so we couldn't hear the new minister. We "fussed" up, too, to go to Mabel's and every time it grew a little bright we thought we could go and then the thunder would get "sassy" and roar louder than ever . . . I had to get out of bed yesterday morning early to put Tom in the barn. Poor thing was soaked and shivering. Had been out in the rain all night. I went back

to bed — you would laugh if you could see those early morning parades — such costumes! Yours forever, Ethel

September 9, [1910]

Dear Folks: I don't know whether I can afford to have a coat or not. I seem to have lost out all around. The Bentley people are sending their children to the school two miles west of town and so will not have a school there for awhile anyway. Not because they do not care for one of their own now — they are fighting hard to get the county to provide one, but they don't want to put one up on their own hook for I suppose that would be expensive for so few. They have arranged to take the 13 children from there in one rig. This makes the school large — 32 pupils and room for only 18, so I'm sure Miss Meadows is having trials. They intend putting in extra seats soon. I'm afraid this means that Bentley will not have a school until spring, though of course we can't tell. But at any rate I haven't a job and don't know what to do considering the financial part of it. What do you think about it? I have surely tried hard to get a school but in vain. I can be contented here all right, but it will be dreadful not to be earning something. We are worried about it, but don't know what to do . . .

Papa, you should be here to eat the gizzard for that doesn't go very fast. Anna pretty near lost her nerve this morning when the chicken was on the block and the knife in her hand. Then I let the chicken go and that excited her and so she grabbed it and cut its head off (behind the ears). I'm sure I couldn't have done it . . . so this will be all. Love, Ethel

Tuesday, September 13, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: . . . Spent a good time chasing cows. Three from south came over and we were afraid they would eat our cabbages. Sunday Max's got into our hay and pulled it down, so today Max came over and stacked it up — looks better than ever now. Tomorrow we iron and bake. We don't find it any trouble keeping busy — there's plenty to do.

Tomorrow we have our mail delivered for the first time. Anna says if we could just have the milk brought to the door now we would be fixed — she is such a joker. We will use John's box if they [the post office] don't mind.

Papa, John just put in 25 acres and the wheat we got was just from the larger piece by the house — about 14 acres. The other was not worth cutting. The flax is growing fine now but of course it will scarcely have time to mature so will probably not amount to anything unless the fall should be late.

Love, Ethel

September 15, [1910]

Dear Folks: Your letters cheered me up to the top notch. I feel so well and am sure I will be contented . . . Our structure in the back yard is really beginning to look like a chicken coop. I was really angry when I saw that the cows had knocked down part of the wall . . .

Our slumbers were again disturbed last night. Several sacks of grain are still in the coal house with a sack of oats on top, and what did Tom do but come way up there and pull down the oats and paw the sack trying to get it open (it was tied). We took the oats in and the rascal began to eat chicken

feed, so we had to get up again and cover that up! It isn't because he is starved that he does such tricks. He just does it for fun, I guess. He makes me laugh so many times.

We think it would be a good idea, Papa, to have the heating stove shipped out with the house siding. Of course we haven't priced them here, but I'm sure they would be much higher than at the price you could get them . . . Love, Ethel

September 15, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: You wouldn't think we were in need of "cheering up" if you could see us. We *eat* and *sleep*, also work and can't find time to do nearly all we plan. Have to get out, too, when the weather is nice and it has been this week . . .

Mama, you remember how we had to chase cows last spring? Well, now we are at it again and we do get so provoked. We will go in the morning and tell our neighbor south of us that he *must* keep his cows home. They are the dark red ones with pretty tails, and Ethel says even if their tails are nice she isn't very crazy about the cows! Tonight when we got home they had "rubbed down" a lot of our hay stack. By the way, it is a nice little stack — not so very large — about half as large as one of John's big ones. They had also knocked down one sod wall of our chicken house which we are laboring under such difficulties to erect. So, you see we had reason enough to be sore at them and also the Russian who owns them . . .

I do hope I can stay here and not have to come home this winter, for the time would only have to be made up later. I'm sure we can be contented enough and don't worry, Ma, we won't go out if it looks like snow. People here look for a milder winter than they have had for two years, which have been pretty "stiff" in this part of the country . . .

I guess we told you how close we got to a young coyote the other day when we went over to Max's to stay all day. It just stood and looked at us, not more than two rods distance. Of course the rifle was home in the corner . . . Anna

"Rock Hollow" September 18, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa — We've been having just lovely weather the last few days — don't think I have ever enjoyed any finer. Have been out of doors most of the time.

The very most important news I have to tell this time is that we have finished the chicken coop and have the chickens installed, though as yet they don't know their new home for we've had to carry the whole flock into it for two nights. We built it against the stone wall, sod for two walls with a frame front, with door and window. It has a gable roof covered with straw and though it isn't great for looks it is good and tight and will be warm, too, I think. Tomorrow we will get some hinges for the door . . .

Today we have certainly enjoyed ourselves. Had planned with Mabel to take lunch to church and eat dinner there, then go to Little's this afternoon for some music. We went to church all right but not a soul showed up — hadn't heard there was to be no service today. We played and sang a while, then went to Mabel's. We had dinner there and this afternoon we all went over to Manning's. We found no one home

there except Mr. Manning, but Anna asked if they still had the piano. Guess he was a little surprised since he didn't know, but invited us in. Of course he knew John so that was all right. We played about everything we knew and surely enjoyed it. Anna's arms ached when she was through and my fingers were sore. The others enjoyed it, too, I know, but we decided they couldn't have had such a dandy time as we did.

Had fried chicken again today. It weighed four pounds after its head was off and when dressed weighed 2¼ pounds. A good one, don't you think? Then we had another treat — opened a can of pineapple and made a fruit salad of some of it. My! But that tasted fine!

We send you a clipping about the railroads. Mabel and John think they are quite smart because yesterday they saw a train of cars on the N.P. [Northern Pacific] road. We are so anxious to see them work. They say that the work goes ahead at about the rate of a man's slow walk. We saw the smoke of the machines today. They work on Sundays, too, you know, though Max was saying that they laid off this afternoon. I am quite sure that our things can be shipped out on the Milwaukee by the last of the month and if not, on the N.P. anyway. Everybody out here is quite hilarious to think that soon we can see a train or two go by.

The new town two miles north and a mile west of Mabel's is a sure thing now, they say. It is to be named Watrous and is to be the division point of the Milwaukee, so it will hurt Bentley some and Mott, too, I suppose. They say that some buildings go up right away and there is to be a bank and stores this fall.

It is just a year ago today that Anna first landed in this country. I guess she hardly thought then that she would be here homesteading the next year. And I am sure I never thought I would be here anywhere else and not working. But to be real honest, I am enjoying it. I've been here seven weeks and the time is going fast.

Today when we went to Manning's we drove through the buttes just south of John's and don't think I ever saw such grand scenery. The frost has just touched some spots enough to color them yellow or red, but most of the prairie is green. I wish you both could see how beautiful everything here looks.

Mama, don't weep, though we are going to just as soon as we have any time. Those Russian cows ate up every one of our cabbage heads! We told you about them bothering so and then Saturday when Anna went to the garden she found that every cabbage had been chewed off. We would have had all the cabbages we could have used and you can imagine how badly [sic] we felt. Friday morning we went down to see the Russians and to tell them to keep their cows at home. It was quite an interesting trip. Their house and barn were built together, a long structure, the house of sod and the barn of frame. The place looked fairly clean. The old lady came to the door (she was barefooted), and her hair was slicked up so tight with a little hard knot at the top, and all she could say was "nichts forsteh." So we talked to a young man who told us quite plainly that he didn't belong to the other tribe and he said he would tell the boss that evening. We haven't been bothered with the cows since.

Papa, you are keeping account of all our North Dakota expenses, aren't you? We are at this end of the line. We miss church — haven't had any for three Sundays now. They had preaching at Bentley this afternoon but we didn't know it until quite late . . . Anna says I must stop, so of course I must since she is boss. With much love, Ethel

P.S. Notice cur new name on the envelope. How do you like it?

[Note by Anna] I have to make Ethel "ring off" as she is using too much paper. My goodness, but you should see our coop. Guess we will have to take a picture for your benefit. Feeling fine but tired tonight . . . Anna

"Rock Hollow," September 22, 1910

Dear Folks: . . . I've been riding Tom several times of late. He lopes just swell only it is a little "slidy" without a saddle. And I haven't even a strap so that I can put a carpet on his back. it is a picnic, though . . .

Our livestock still is a great bother. It was Tom last night. We moved the grain so he couldn't bother that but we had put the milk out close to the coal house wall. I heard him out there but by the time I got out of bed and downstairs he had carefully pushed off the stones that held the cover down and was drinking the milk! There was just enough for the cat's breakfast. I was so mad, but we both laughed after I got back in bed — just couldn't help it. Had to use condensed milk for coffee this morning . . . Love, Ethel

Friday, September 23, 1910

Dear Mama: . . . Mabel sends her list and we wish you would send us some of those cotton flannel gloves and enough pillow case tubing for a pair of them . . . I think that covers all our needs for this winter . . . Love, Ethel

Bentley, September 29, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: My chickens are just fine and they are as crazy as our other livestock. When we come home anytime of the day they come to meet us as soon as we get in sight, (nearly) the whole flock, and we have to shoo and chase so Tom won't step on them. Today one of the hens made a terrible ado cackling about something so of course we chased out and hunted around for an egg. Guess she is just thinking about it yet. But the roosters can't crow — haven't anyone to teach them! We told Max we guessed we would have to borrow one of theirs to teach them how. Mama, they surely pay for all the trouble last spring — they are so good to eat we nearly have to kill one during the week. That is the hardest — to get them killed. I hate to do it so . . .

I paid \$15 more on Tom . . . Dug a few potatoes out of our patch today and they are good sized . . . My flax looks fine, if it can only have time to mature.

Anna

"Rock Hollow," October 3, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: Monday morning was so bright and clear. Yesterday we were at Mabel's. Chas. Crays were there too, and we had a nice time and a nicer dinner. We killed a chicken and took over. The day was not very nice, even in the morning when we started — a wind blew a gale. Then in the

afternoon a storm came up and it rained quite hard — looked as if it was going to rain all night, so we started home in it. Didn't get much wet but pretty muddy . . .

Last Thursday evening we thought it would rain and so just before we went to bed we let Tom loose, afraid he might suffer being tied out in the rain. Well, he wandered off and Friday we certainly had a chase. Had to walk to Max's in the morning — thought he had gone south with some other horses, so in the afternoon we both struck out. Went more than two miles south, I'm sure, and saw some swell scenery even if we didn't see Tom. Climbed the buttes so we could see a long ways. Also went to the Russians and I talked German to her. Asked her if she had seen a white horse. She understood all right, too, and I could understand her after a fashion. Well, no Tom that night and we were quite worried, but Saturday morning here came one of the Filler boys bringing the lost home and we were tickled. Tom got into their oats and they had shut him up all day. Otherwise I think he would have come home. He won't get loose again. But we are not the only ones to lose things. Hopwood's horses are gone this morning and Mr. Miller came asking if we had seen two strange pigs. We're right in style, you see, losing Tom . . .

. . . So, Saturday afternoon as I was sitting out-of-doors making another of those gunny sack rugs (and it's a beauty) she [Anna] brought out coffee and coffee bread. But the chickens bothered so — they are so tame and impudent that we had no peace and while Anna was "shooing" a hen on one side, a piece of coffee bread fell off her plate — a hen grabbed it and away she ran. Anna chased the hen and I laughed 'til I cried . . . Love Ethel

October 6, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: We suppose the boxes are on their way by now and we will be anxious to get them. It sure will seem like Christmas. You must have sent a lot to have to use three boxes . . . Today I got coal. One and a half tons. Fillers hauled it for me. It was \$2.60 for the coal and \$1.00 for hauling . . .

The railroad bridge workers are putting in a bridge down by the school house. Oh! the Milwaukee will be here after awhile. It is two miles out of New Leipzig today and goes at the rate of two miles a day . . . A week from next Saturday will be a big time in Mott. They will have a barbecue and roast ox both days, one each day, I mean. The "crowd" will go one day. We'll go early and take our lunch and then start home early as it gets dark so soon now . . . All for now, and I'm tired, Love, Anna

October 12, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: . . . This afternoon we all went to town. On our way we stopped to see the railroad work which was very interesting. They are now straight north of "Rock Hollow." Looks quite "citized" to see a long train of freight cars on the track there at Bentley with side tracks and switch complete. A second crew is following at some distance doing the ballasting, so very soon the road will be used. I think that you can order stove and siding any time now and will come through okay to Bentley if prepaid. Am quite sure we can wait

for stove. Haven't needed one at all yet and if it gets cool can live downstairs for a while. Weather has been grand lately . . .

. . . If it isn't Tom that does mischief, it's the cat. Anna says the bother is good — breaks the monotony. He chewed off a big "hunk" of fresh bread yesterday — off a nice big round loaf. Then he rolled the big stone off which we had on the cover of a pan of milk and dumped the thing over — don't know how much of it he had left to drink. That was at night and in the morning the pan was dry. When we scold him he races upstairs behind the trap door — smart cat, all right! . . . Loads of love, Ethel

October 21, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: Tuesday of this week it rained so we worked in the house — put laths around the windows downstairs and up, also around the mop boards and up next to the ceiling and you don't know the difference it made in the atmosphere of the upstairs, especially when we started to paper. Got the east wall done from the north door to the corner all but the border and it will look swell when finished. Had a great time making the paste as it would get lumpy, but finally succeeded. We also have the south side of the foundation finished and it seems to be all right. Also half of the north side — it is quite a job for there are some huge holes to chink up with stones before cementing. Our house will be nice and warm, I'm sure, when sided and all, and I think the basement will never get so terribly cold. We have had to sit downstairs a couple of evenings this week. I keep a good fire and it keeps me busy shoveling in coal. That stove heats up fine when you get onto the way of running it. Wednesday we got our first heavy frost . . .

We can see the trains from here real plain and hear them plainer. It does [me] good to see that improvement . . .

A week ago I got some fine sirloin steak at Bentley (12¢ a lb.) and we sure did feast on it. 15¢ worth was eaten in two meals. Much love from us both, Anna

October 24, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: We are sitting in the kitchen tonight, not because it is too cold upstairs, but as Anna says, "It looks like sin." Have been papering today and expect to finish tomorrow . . . No, we haven't finished the foundation yet. Guess you don't know what a job it is. We try to pick out the nice days for that and *hope* to finish this week. We have to get it done soon for what do you think? I'm going to teach for sure this time. I've certainly had a great time about it and that is where some of our time went last week. They finally decided they must have a school at Bentley . . . They begin on it today and promised the board to have it ready by next Monday, but I'm quite sure they can't do that . . . Saturday morning the little Filler boys came over with a note from his father saying that I better put in my application for others were in and I might lose the school, etc. . . . So, we went to Bentley right away, and Mr. Bentley and Mr. Botton were ready to talk to me. They were very anxious that I get the school, but did not want to insist upon it with the board for they had been having so much trouble with them to get the school. Mr. B. was in favor of my talking to each member of it



Elaborate costumes caused great merriment at the masquerade ball described in Ethel's letter of April 23, 1911, and the *Bentley Bulletin* called the event "a complete success in every particular." Over 100 attended, but most avoided the photographer L.P. Bailey's camera.

—Courtesy Enid Bern

to sort of fix things up. Then we drove over to Chamberlin's. I knew he was on my side, and I was glad to find out that my troubles ended there for he had been appointed to select the teacher.

We got there just in time for dinner, so Mr. Chamberlin took care of our horse and they invited us to dinner (couldn't help it, poor folks!) and we certainly enjoyed ourselves. . . . Then we drove over to Mabel's . . . We were there Sunday, too, and so was Mr. Danielson. He is quite a Swede and I had to laugh at the things he has to say . . . So, this all means that about the first of December Anna and I will stay in Bentley five days in the week. I will get \$50.00. It will be so nice on account of sending and getting mail to live in Bentley during

the worst weather, but we surely will hate to leave our shack after fixing it up so nicely . . . We are so anxious to get our work done. Papering and masonry is pretty good work, but for a life job I think I prefer teaching . . . Love Ethel

"Rock Hollow," October 27, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: We have had our first taste of winter weather yesterday and today and have not suffered a bit. The wind is what has made it seem so cold and this afternoon when it stopped blowing quite suddenly it was quite a relief. We are quite comfortable in the house though we haven't the foundation finished . . . This morning we cleaned the upstairs room and it looks fine! Covered the cellar door with post cards. The

A blooming field of flax provided a ready-made opportunity for a photograph, and the Erickson sisters used the chance to document an "improvement" made to their claim.

—Courtesy Enid Bern



wall paper looks so nice . . . The tumbleweeds have been racing all day. They look so funny. They were going south-east and we were wondering if any of them got down into Iowa. And I must not forget about the snow — we did have just a little . . . Love, Ethel

October 30, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: It is almost impossible to get any feed for Tom. I had to take my packed eggs out of the oats and wrap them in paper so he could have the several feeds that it made. No one has any to sell as there was so little raised this year. There will be plenty shipped in a couple of weeks . . . If I can't borrow or steal some until then Tom will have to live on hay. We stake him out during the day . . . Yours ever, Anna

"Rock Hollow," November 3, [1910]

Dearest Folks: Tomorrow we are going to Bentley to see how the school is progressing — it will probably begin Monday. I'm going to drive for a while, you know. Tonight we are sitting upstairs and not a bit cold; in fact, we haven't spent but a couple evenings in the cellar. We have the cave cleaned out now, ready for potatoes, and all the new window panes in . . .

Do you have any Thanksgiving cards in the store, Papa? If so, perhaps you could send us a few. Loads of love, Ethel

November 6, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: We didn't get up 'til eight o'clock this morning — overslept . . . Didn't notice the time until we were through [washing] and there it was almost two. Just then Dick Danielson drove up with the load of hay. He hadn't had dinner either, so we got dinner for three and had a good one . . . Then Dick hauled over the straw and made a barn door, also fixed the barn roof. So, we think Tom is fixed for the winter . . . Talk about proposals in Dakota! Dick is thinking very seriously of going to Canada next year and he asked me to go along! Love, Ethel

Wednesday evening, November 9, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: Yesterday we received Papa's letter telling of shipment of stove . . . Yesterday was a fine day and you may be sure we worked out-of-doors as hard as we could. We made a fine door for "Aunties' House." Ethel says if she has to do carpenter work next spring she will surely buy a new saw. Then we cleaned the chicken coop and put fresh straw on the floor and then made a manger for Tom. We should have cemented but needed the door so bad and after that was done we were rather tired and couldn't do any more big jobs . . . I tell you we are proud of our door we made. Love, Anna

Sunday, November 13, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: The stove and siding have come. I know you will be as glad to know that as we were . . . But not a word of the boxes yet!

The school house is finished and I begin tomorrow. The livery man will take care of my horse and have it ready for me each evening for 25¢ a day. It will be such a relief not to have to bother with it.

The schoolroom is small and easy to heat, I think . . . We have been getting up so late — this morning it was after eight

. . . but tomorrow we begin new and get up before it is light, I suppose. I can drive to Bentley in $\frac{3}{4}$ hour . . .

Yesterday we drove to Chamberlin's, two miles north of Bentley, to get my contract. Had to cross the river, ford it, and Anna was so scared — got the whip out and it was too funny to see her try to make Tom go fast so we wouldn't get stuck. It's perfectly safe, though, for they use the road so much. There was a little ice in the water.

We are going to bed now for we don't want to get another pail of coal. It is just a little after eight . . . Love, Ethel

Dear Mama and Papa: I have been getting along fine driving this week; had no trouble keeping warm. School goes fairly well . . . rather delayed because the supplies were slow in coming. I have no desk yet. There are 15 pupils — none of them advanced.

Today I had the front tires set and I told Anna I was almost lonesome coming home without the rattle . . . I get home about 5:20 or 30 — not later. In the morning I leave home about 7:30 . . . and get to town about 8:15 . . .

I'm just a little tired tonight, so won't write more. Love, Ethel

November 20, 1910

Dear Mama and Papa: John is somewhat better but still tonight we were all a little discouraged about him. He suffered a good deal last night and this morning at five they had to send for the doctor. He is so terribly bruised. His whole body is sore, and he has to lie flat on his back . . . I know you are anxious to know the particulars. Friday about noon he came from the field with a large load of oats, and as he was crossing the firebreak the jolting broke the front board of the rack and he fell just behind the horses. It frightened the team so his "whoa" wouldn't stop them and the wheels ran across his body just between the pelvic bone and the ribs. He was lying on his back. Then the back wheel, instead of running right over him, pushed him along for a little while over that rough ground . . . Mabel ran and walked almost down to Kibbel's to send for the doctor . . . It was after three hours before the doctor could get there . . . The doctor spoke very encouraging again this morning . . . Anna has been with Mabel ever since Friday afternoon . . .

We have certainly had great experiences in the last few days. Last night I forgot the key when I went home — left it with Anna, so I had to crawl in one of the west windows . . . This unsettled life is terrible, but they are dandy to me here for they want Anna to stay with Mabel.

The neighbors are so good. They will all turn out to stack John's grain — flax — tomorrow . . . Mabel will need Anna. She can do nothing but wait on John. That takes all her strength . . . we will keep you posted. Loads of love, Ethel

[Letter undated but envelope says 11/25]

Dear Mama and Papa: I feel that I have almost neglected you the last week or so, but I have been more than busy as I suppose you know. Today we have cooked for threshers who were over at Dick Danielson's — three meals, four for breakfast, ten for dinner and six for supper. Tomorrow they will be here and we will have another siege of it.

John has been up today in a chair and also walked some, so you see he is improving — faster than we had hoped for and a surprise even to the doctors.

Sunday if we can leave here we will have our Thanksgiving dinner at home. Love, Anna

November 27, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: Sunday night and we're really at home — first time since John was hurt, and it seems good. We certainly had a great celebration on Thanksgiving, cooking for threshers, as Anna told you, and if we didn't have them all Friday and for breakfast Saturday morning. It was quite a relief when they went — almost ate Mabel out of house and home. There were as many as 14 part of the time.

John sits up now every day and walks around. Yesterday he went as far as the barn . . . Heaps of love, Ethel

Thursday evening, December 15, [1910]

Dear Mama and Papa: We have our room in town now and have it furnished enough so we can stay here nights and have lunch and cooked some, too, what we can on the alcohol stove. The heater is such a tiny thing that there is room for only a large cup on top which we heat water in. The heater gets hot as a "little red wagon," as Herbert says. Sure doesn't take much fuel, either.

We have the cot in. Ethel . . . brought it in, tied on the buggy; had the top tied down to the front springs and pretended it was an auto. It surely has been funny — the loads we have taken . . .

On Christmas Day we will be thinking of you every minute and wish we could be home just for the day. I haven't made one thing for Mabel or Cora and simply can't until later . . . Love to all, Anna

December 20, 1910

Dearest Father and Mother: But I'm sure you understand that I have truly been busy. So, here is my Christmas letter with more love than I could begin to put on paper . . .

Christmas Eve we have our program, either in the old hotel (not running now) or in the new store building that is going up. The program is not very long or very "fussy" but I hope it will be nice. I do not have to help at all with the tree. We go to Mabel's Christmas morning, though I wish we could stay to church here but that makes it too late. Next week I expect to have vacation. One week is plenty this year. Anna went to Mott last week to do a little Christmas shopping. Went on the train one evening and came back in the morning. We didn't go in very deeply . . . Still this year is the first Christmas tree and program in Bentley — and to help in that is a thing to be proud of . . . Yours lovingly, Ethel

December 22, 1910

Dear Folks : Hope you get this Christmas morning. We are sure okay and hope you are. "Merry Christmas." Love, Anna

"The Day after Christmas," [1910]

Just a few lines this morning, as I know you will be anxious to hear about our Christmas. We stayed here at

Mabel's last night and are slow this morning. Didn't have breakfast until after nine. We went home Saturday evening after the tree as it wasn't so very late — got home about 11 o'clock. There were lots of people at the tree and program and the tree and decorations were pretty and the program *good*. The Sunday school gave each child a box of candy and an apple, and the older Sunday school members got pretty Christmas booklets. We were glad to get to the homestead that night; it wasn't very cold nor very dark. Christmas morning we slept rather late, as we had opened our packages after we got home Saturday. Had a cute little tree and a fine dinner. Cora furnished the dessert and we brought cranberries, sweet potatoes and a few other things.

Christmas Day was lovely and not very cold. The wind blew fierce in the night and I was so afraid it wouldn't be nice. The box of candy Ethel sent you was some that she got at her school shower. She was so surprised! The children had a fruit shower on her Friday afternoon. She got 11 oranges, four apples, three boxes of home-made candy and a package of dates. Wasn't that nice? . . . Ever yours, Anna

[Same envelope]

Dear Folks: I was so glad the program was a success for there was a lot of work connected with it. Never before have I been in such a building at exercises of any kind — low ceilings and quite rough finishing but it looked fine after we got it fixed up . . . Our Christmas dinner was fine! We ate so much we were almost miserable . . . Love Ethel

New Year's Day [1911]

Dear Mama and Papa: We have our winter at last! It started in good and proper last night and my, but it was cold. This morning it was 21 below, but fortunately we didn't know how cold it was [and] didn't feel quite so frozen. We went to Mabel's yesterday noon to take her the things you sent, came home early and started to get things ready to leave at the homestead. We wrapped all the fruit and put it in a box in the cave, covered the inside door with tar paper, then carried several loads of straw down and covered the potatoes and fruit. So, we do hope now it won't freeze — anyhow we did the best we could with things . . .

We had to get up several times during the night to feed the fire and then it wasn't very warm this morning. Then you see we had to come to town, and as long as it was clear we weren't afraid of a blizzard. It didn't warm up much today, but about noon we packed up and we had a *load*, too, as there were so many things we will need in town if we have to stay a couple of weeks . . .

I seem to stand the strenuous life fine — feel good, eat good, and sleep, can't seem to get enough. Will try to rest some now for a week or two . . . Happy New Year and much love, Anna

Sunday Evening, January 1, [1911]

Dear Mama and Papa: . . . we washed, and that tells the whole story of the day . . . So, now everything is clean. Of course we took it slow so that we wouldn't get too tired. Anna baked bread the same day and then we cleaned up the house by lamplight. We did everything so that we could go to



Ethel Erickson taught the first school held in the new town of Bentley in 1910. Her students included (front, l-r) Walter Huber, unknown, Thyra Wilson, Idamae Bentley, Irvin Rowland, Harvey Hiers, Newell Hamilton, Alfred Botton; (middle) Hazel Bentley, Irene Rowland, Helen Rowland, Emmons Botton, Charlie Hiers, Gladys Lindsay, Tommy Lindsay, ?? Schwartz; (back) "Miss Erickson," Nellie Schwartz, Frank Rowland, unknown.

—Courtesy Enid Bern

Mabel's on Saturday . . . While there John brought home a little rocking chair for Josephine which Max had ordered from Chicago. She had been wanting one for so long ever since she saw one in Mott last fall and she was certainly delighted — I wish you could have seen her face when she first looked at it. It's a dandy chair — good and strong, low, but not so very small . . .

On the way home we stopped at Max's for what we called a New Year's call. Max was washing the dishes and had just finished a batch of "rocks" when we got there. They were fine, too . . .

I don't think I told you about a family here in town. The mother died this fall and the father was left with four little children from four to eight years . . . and now the father has gone away — went Friday before Christmas and hasn't showed up yet. Some think he has gone for good. I helped get them ready for the Christmas program. They were staying with neighbors. The poor youngsters were so poorly dressed. Got a pair of stockings for one of the boys. His own were nothing but rags. Since then, two are staying at one place, and two at another and are much better off than before for now they are at least warm and well fed. Anna is going to do a little sewing for them. Cora gave us some pretty good clothes which Edna had outgrown . . . Ethel

January 13, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: We are all O.K. and aren't minding the severe weather in the least. It has been cold this week, hasn't been above zero, I think, and most of the time near 20

below, but somehow it doesn't seem so cold only when the wind blows and it doesn't blow on the coldest days hardly ever . . . The stove in our room keeps it plenty warm — only of course we can't keep it all night; it goes out about midnight and is pretty cool about six in the morning, so we take turns getting up to build it and when once up don't mind it, but it is sure a trial to roll out . . . We get used to most anything in Dakota. Ethel says she don't think she wants even to see a stove next winter . . .

What do you think? Ethel has a beau — for tonight, anyhow. He's been hanging around quite a bit of late . . . Tonight is a concert and dance so they are going to the concert, but Ethel says she won't dance and told him so . . .

You would be scared if you knew what Ethel and I were thinking of doing. We're thinking seriously of adopting one of the kids whose father went off and left them. Of course we would have consulted you first. The father is back now so guess it's all off — unless he leaves again . . .

Mama, don't you think a frozen pump is so awful. Oh! if you lived in Dakota, everything freezes! One little boy that came to school the other day (seven years old) froze his face terribly. E. said she never saw anything like it. His cheeks were so hard you couldn't dent them. He walked 3½ miles. Think of that! His mother felt terribly bad about it. They didn't know it was so cold until after the children had gone. E. used kerosene which they say is fine for frozen hands or face. Then at recess she went for the doctor. The boy hasn't been in school since but the brothers say he is all right now, but they won't let him come while it is so cold . . . Must close



By the time the Erickson sisters “proved up” in the Summer of 1911, Bentley seemed destined for further growth. The picture was taken on July 31, about two weeks before Anna and Ethel returned to Iowa.

—Courtesy Ruth Ferguson

now . . . Trains are awful late this week. With much love,
Anna

Monday, January 16, [1911]

Dear Mama and Papa: Just think, the middle of January already and we haven't had any winter yet; that is, not what we expected to have. It has been cold, but no blizzards yet and not much snow so now the winter can't be so terribly long. We didn't go to the homestead last Saturday as it was too cold . . . Today it is snowing some . . .

Well, the first thing I must tell you about [is] the band concert and dance. I got to go even if I didn't have a beau. Mrs. Bentley asked me to go with them so I did and the girls think it a good joke because Mr. B brought me home. But they were very kind to ask me and were so nice and I wanted to go, so [I] did, and had a good time and now the frivolous part was that we *danced*. The first time for me and I managed pretty good by begging each partner's pardon for being so poor and for tramping on their feet. Ethel and Corta with their beaux came home early, about 11 o'clock as Corta had a fierce cold and E. thought it would be best to come home at a decent time in consideration of her position, you know. Bentleys wanted me to stay and help when they served supper, which was on the European plan, so I presided over the cash register, taking in the cash and making change for about two hours. Then I danced twice and came home. Got home at 2:30 and then I got laughed at for staying so late. Ethel said you would be terribly grieved and disappointed because I stayed so long and was so gay while if it had been herself you wouldn't have been so surprised. But I'm glad we went for the crowd was good, had a good time as simply everyone goes, even the superintendent of the Sunday school. People would think us awful “high-toned” or something if we hadn't gone. Now you can tell us what you think about it. But you may be sure we won't go to the extreme in this business. Girls are scarce here and the fellows plenty, — a few desirable ones . . .

Some night this week we are all going out to Little's to sing and play and have a good time . . . Went to Christian Endeavor and church yesterday . . . Anna

January 18, 1911

Dearest Mama and Papa: Our oil stove just came tonight and one of the men brought it up right away and put it together for

us, so it is now ready for breakfast . . . And how fortunate that so many of the business men here are young, for they are so very accommodating . . . Mabel is a peach. She wants Anna to come out there next week sometime for a few days anyway . . . So glad she can go, but I know I'll be more rushed than ever and lonesome without her. And what do you think — she is afraid she will miss some society when she goes. She is actually getting frivolous and gay and that's the truth so you see she must be feeling fine. I'm getting to like Dakota better all the time. We are getting acquainted now and it seems more like home to have a jolly bunch around. You know you can't help missing young people about.

Did Anna tell you about getting up a home talent play here? Have started it and think it will be dandy if it goes through all right . . . Love, Ethel

January 24, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: I am going out there [to Chinn's] tomorrow for a few days as John wants to go to Mott and has several trips to make. Will go to the homestead Saturday and either Max or John will bring Ethel out. If we aren't there once a week anyway someone may kick and we won't be able to prove up without making up some time. But I guess if Mr. — gets to prove up I can too, for he isn't out there very much. I'm not worried about it, but will go when I can to be on the safe side. They are getting terribly strict with homesteaders.

Last Friday afternoon I don't know when I have enjoyed anything more — Mrs. Bentley and I played duets. The piano was still in the store where the dance was. There was a fire as the carpenters were putting up shelves, etc., and we just had a nice time. She plays so nicely — doesn't bang at all. We had only two duets — one was hard and we practiced it a good deal . . .

We have subscribed to the *Bentley Bulletin* . . . Love,
Anna

January 25, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: Well, there is a new daughter at the J.A. Chinn's. Arrived this morning [Wednesday] at 4:30 A.M. — seven and a half pounds, I hear. When Max came in for the doctor he took Anna out with him — two o'clock.

Mrs. Hamilton told me this evening that the baby was a fine one and Mabel was getting on dandy. I suppose Anna will write to you soon, but thought that she perhaps could not get a letter off as early as tomorrow . . . It is surely lonesome without Anna and I hope she won't have to be gone long. So glad you both approve of our good times. Don't worry! You know we have a good deal of sense! I guess I like Dakota all right now, but don't worry, I'll come back to Iowa . . . Heaps of love, Ethel

January 28, 1911

Dear Mother: Mabel and "Mildred Emily" are getting on fine. I am going out this morning [Saturday] to Mabel's first, then take Anna home with me. They say the baby is a second Josephine. We're well — and I have been on the jump taking care of room and school both. I miss Anna "awfully."

Went to band practice last evening and it was great. In two weeks Mr. and Mrs. Bentley give a *swell* banquet for the band boys and their ladies. Nothing like being a friend of a band boy. Yes, I'm going. Think Anna will have a bid, too. Heaps of love, Ethel

February 5, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: At Bentley again and alone. Sometimes I think I can't exist without Anna, but will have to for just a few days longer. Am surely surprised when I hear how much work she has been doing out there when you think she is the only one to do things. Of course John does the heavy things and takes a good deal of care of Mabel. She is standing it fine . . . They will try to get someone else and Anna will come in town about Wednesday. The baby is good and sweet as can be.

Anna came to Bentley Friday afternoon and so we went to the box supper. Success? Well, I should say! \$72.25 clear. And we had a dandy time. The program was good. Band played . . . and duet by Anna and Mrs. Bentley which was fine. We had such good suppers . . . There is a certain rude element attending such affairs, though typical of the West, I believe. Not exactly rowdy — only rude. But in general the crowd was a very good one . . .

Oceans of love, Ethel

[Postmarked February 13, 1911]

Dear Mama and Papa: Friday evening the swell banquet came off — the one Mr. Bentley gave to the band boys and their lady friends. I got to go if I am no special friend of a band boy . . .

Had a nice church service last evening; C.E. and then preaching. The School house was packed full. Such a lovely evening and there were quite a few from the country. Honestly, I never enjoyed such weather for winter and the sky both day and night is something great. Mama, the sunsets are grander than ever.

John says, "Anna, your folks would never know it was you if they could see you work." Well, I did work for the two weeks I was at Mabel's and for some reason stood it and had no bad effects either. You see, right from the first I was there alone . . . Then for a week I took all the care of the baby —

she's so cute. Mama, I wasn't a bit afraid to handle her even though she weighed seven pounds . . . Yours ever, Anna

February 17, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: And still we have lovely weather, with no blizzards two weeks ago [as] you folks had. We had a little snow and it blew and drifted so badly that traveling was hard for one horse and buggy. It took me two good hours to come in from Mabel's, about seven miles, but it has thawed since then and traveling is better. It sure has been fine for us that there hasn't been so much snow this year. I forgot to tell you, I guess, how we had to shovel snow when we went to the homestead last week. The storm door was drifted shut but not such a large drift as in front of the barn door. It was half way up and frozen hard over the top. So, Ethel used the shovel and myself the hoe and finally made a path for Tom after half an hour's labor. He got rather impatient, but seemed to realize the situation fully and stood and looked on and approved, though I fear he felt like smiling! Love, Anna

Bentley, March 14, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: We know how anxious you are to hear from us concerning the play, etc. We sure were a couple [of] tired kids after the play for two nights and a dance after each. The play was *great* — only wish you could have seen it. It sure was a surprise to everyone. With baggage galore, the troupe and two or three extra went to New Leipzig Friday at 11 o'clock. Got down there a little after noon. First we had dinner, which, by the way, was bum. Then the boys had to see about getting the curtains and things up.

The hall, or opera house, was just finished and this was the opening event. It will seat about 150 or 175 people. Just as everything was ready and they were going over the play . . . the scenery came which had been sent for long ago, so the owner got to work and put it up. You don't know the difference the scenery made. It was a garden scene — just what they needed . . . Ethel and Mort [Little] certainly did fine and you would be surprised to see Ethel act . . . I was prompter although they didn't need much. It was such a job as I had to keep my eyes right on the book. Did it both nights so I really couldn't enjoy the play as I could if I had been one of the audience. But I had a good time. . . . went to the restaurant where they were serving a dandy oyster supper, then to the dance. And honest! What a good time we had . . . good music and a nice crowd and plenty of room . . . Then got ready for the evening here. I don't think they did quite as well here as at Leipzig . . . I didn't go to the dance here as I was nearly dead . . . Ethel didn't stay long.

We think perhaps four weeks more will find us thinking of the "homestead move."

The "boozing" hasn't been of much consequence since the drug store moved away. The new depot is fine and nearly completed. The old hotel is being remodeled for an "opera hall." . . . Yours ever, Anna

March 20, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: We had fine weather to drive this week, though quite windy. We found everything fine out here — the

well is all right now . . . Everything is all right at Chinns though Josephine has had a bad cold. The baby is growing so — ten pounds now and so white and sweet. Her eyes are so big and bright.

We are still talking strongly of giving our play at Mott, but no plans have been made yet. We each want \$5.00 and expenses out of it. Mr. Hiers wants to manage the thing and pay us so much, you see. We would be glad to go that way for the managing is the biggest part . . .

I think, Papa, it would be great if you could come to Dakota next spring.

Love, Ethel

Friday, March 24, [1911]

Dear Mama and Papa: . . . I have been making aprons this week; some for myself and then for the bazaar which the Aid Society will have here about Easter time. Each member makes an apron to give and then they sew for it at each meeting. We will also have a supper.

Oh! I mustn't forget to tell you about our new sidewalks! From the depot all along Main Street. All the "loafers" have been working for a couple days on them and the progress has been rapid. It is such an improvement. Property owners seem to think spring has come, as there has been a start made at cleaning up yards and painting. Now they are beginning to look for rain. There having been so little snow, Dakota must have lots of rain to get any crop at all . . .

A Mr. LaValley . . . is so funny that we can't get over laughing at him. He is French and real little and dark and has the tiniest feet you ever saw — has nice, white teeth and laughs all the time, and then his eyes nearly disappear . . . not much news. Love, Anna

Tuesday evening, March 28, [1911]

Dear Mama and Papa: Last evening we had our C.E. business meeting and social and most of the work fell upon Anna and me. However, we didn't have anything elaborate so the work

wasn't so much . . . We had it in the hall. Mr. Bentley is very generous in letting us use it. He does most anything for the C.E. Society . . .

I hope you are not planning too much on us getting home very early. I'm a little afraid of these proofs on homesteads. It takes some of them a good while to get through . . .

There is one case of measles in town and I'm looking for it to go through the school. It has been thick in the country around here . . .

I'm not writing letters any more at the rate I did at first. But honestly don't find the time. We'll be glad to get back to the homestead and have a rest. Loads of love, Ethel

Monday, April 3, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: I was surely going to write this yesterday but a crowd of us went to Littles to have some music and spend the afternoon and didn't get home 'til about ten o'clock. We had a nice time. We always enjoy going when we have music, especially the piano . . .

Well, I'll tell you one thing — if I had been the possessor of \$50.00 or had anything to pawn or sell I sure would have been home a week ago. I was so homesick I thought I couldn't possibly stand it another day. Had it for nearly two weeks. Got over it finally and guess I'll be able to stick it out now. We hope to get back to the homestead soon . . .

. . . We didn't go to the St. Patrick's dance . . . the last time I played with the orchestra part of the evening and then Ethel and I gave a couple numbers on mandolin and piano. They always have a couple extras. Mr. Bentley sang, also. We surely have nice times at the parties. I don't know as I ever enjoyed anything more than the one week ago Saturday. I wasn't in the least tired and felt good and everything seemed fine; also had a nice time Saturday last, but playing as I did gave me something else to think of than just a good time. Mrs. Bentley and I changed off during the evening, but I don't think I played more than two hours. Will probably get a dollar



Though homesteading required hard work and brought its hardships, survivors of that era recall its "simple pleasures" with great fondness. One of them was pets. Anna Erickson's new puppy had to be enticed to stand still for the camera.

—Courtesy Enid Bern

for it. The crowds are so nice — not one young man (or old either) that Ethel or I wouldn't have danced with, or I mean that we would have felt like turning down. At the last one there were about 25 couples all totalled with a few extra men.

This winter is surely an experience for us and I don't think we will ever regret it . . . Must close, Anna

Thursday, April 13, [1911]

Dear Folks: Tuesday Mrs. Davis and I went to Mott; started at eight o'clock and got home about seven. We had a nice trip. It was a regular April day; the sun shone, then it would cloud up and rain a few drops, then the sun would shine again. We went to the new hotel there. You remember, Mama, the big white hotel when you were there. That has been fixed up-to-date and is extremely Eastern — is run by a Chicago man.¹³ We had our dinner there — 50¢ apiece — but it was fine and served nice. Mrs. Davis paid the bill — was determined to as I had driven up. I got me a hat, a black turn down shape, not very large — a fine straw. Then got Persian ribbon to trim it in and will fix it myself . . .

Everyone liked ice cream, and making the delicacy was reason enough for a gathering of friends and neighbors at the John Chinn family farm.

—Courtesy Enid Bern



Mott certainly grows and is nice and quite up-to-date . . .

Ethel is planning to give the children Easter eggs, so last night we colored 15 and will color about a dozen more. It is a good thing they are cheap. What a time we had blowing them and then I had so many eggs to use that I didn't know what to do with them. Used some for breakfast and gave the rest to Mrs. D. to make cake of . . . We sure do find plenty to do! Love, Anna

Bentley, Sunday, April 16, [1911]

Dear Mama and Papa: We had such a perfect Easter Day — clear and warm and no wind. Our services this morning were lovely. We had them in the hall and decorated yesterday afternoon. We went to the river after evergreens and we got two buggy loads of them. The children performed first, just five numbers — then the regular church service with special

¹³William H. Brown (1861-1943) was a real estate dealer and publisher at Mandan whose land investments brought him a fortune during the early 20th Century. Credited as the founder of Mott and Flasher, he had a nationwide reputation as a land promoter. Obituary: *Mandan Pioneer*, March 19, 1943, 1.

music by the choir — eight voices . . . We sang three anthems which were quite difficult and I even had a short solo part — what do you think of that? . . . Mabel and John came in . . . John was here at the room with the baby. She cried so much today — either had colic or was afraid . . . The folks went home a little after three. Mabel was worrying about her chickens. We enjoyed having the folks here so much. Mabel hadn't seen our rooms before . . . Must close now. Ethel

[Postmarked April 23, 1911]

Dear Folks: . . . I am actually having a rest in school — only ten coming now. Others have the measles and a few of them are rather seriously sick . . .

We are anxious to tell you about the masquerade and how we wished you could have been here for I know you would have had a good laugh over it. It was a "howling success" — 30 masked, some of them skipping out before the picture was taken. Mrs. Davis, Anna and I went together, but I went in first all alone, while they waited awhile, looked in the window to watch the effect produced . . . Mort and I got a dollar for

being the best waltzers. I could hardly blame you if you don't believe it! And the biggest joke was that he didn't know who he was dancing with until we got the prize . . . There were so many that I didn't know at all and we laughed at them all 'til we were tired out. I'm going to let Anna tell the rest; she can fill in the details . . . Love, Ethel

Thursday, April 27, [1911]

Dear Mama and Papa: We have so many things to tell you about now. Located at the homestead once more and happy as two clams . . . We had quite a load, too. We got lunch for the men who brought the goods; then we began work in earnest. And work! Nobody will know just how much there really was to do.

Things are getting a little green here — the grass is. That is all there is to get green, and there isn't nearly all of that which changes color. I know you wonder how it can be pretty here for I wondered, too, before I came, but it is just beautiful . . .



“Rock Hollow” in the Fall of 1910.

—*Courtesy*
Enid Bern

Everybody is doing lots of work here. Some have finished putting in their crops . . . [unsigned]

May 11, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: We are over at Mabel’s this morning — came yesterday afternoon . . . We’ve been laughing at Josephine; she says such funny things. She has just been washing the “pink” (ink) off her hands. Last evening she was telling about the jack-o-lantern she had last fall — how the lid was burned and how her mama “put the ‘id in the s’op (slop).” Mildred is good and sweet as can be . . .

Mr. Morris plowed up the east fire break and Tuesday afternoon we planted the garden — onions, radishes and lettuce. It’s a good place for a garden. The soil is moist and soft. I cleaned out the spring, too. It was full of tumble weeds and also a few dead frogs. We made another discovery the other day. We have a whole bed of violets at “Rock Hollow.” They are so pretty . . . With love, Ethel

Friday, May 26, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: Today it is rainy and everyone is smiling. Thought we would have a storm last night as it lightened and thundered hard and got so black but it didn’t rain very much. It has to do so much thinking about it before it gets started to do anything.

Last evening we were invited with a party of 14 to a five course dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. Bentley at the new cafe (Mr. Vaughn’s) and it was surely nice. Then we went to their house to spend the evening and had such a pleasant time. They do enjoy to entertain and it’s nice for the rest of us that they do. I had intended to drive home this morning and come back after Ethel this evening, but as it is so rainy Corta won’t let me. We stayed with her last night. Hope the chickens won’t starve, and the cats . . .

I suppose, Mama, that you would be horrified at the state of our clothes, but we always manage to look decent and keep

things looking as slick as possible. We sure will be tickled when we get some things sewed . . . Much love, Anna

May 29, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: I guess you think we are “bumming” all right . . . But we are feeling so good that we surely enjoy it all. This climate is surely dandy — why, Thursday and Friday my tonsils were swollen quite badly and even had white spots on them, but I felt all right. Got something from the Dr. to gargle with and Saturday morning my throat didn’t hurt a bit. My tonsils were bad enough for tonsilitis but some way I didn’t get it . . .

. . . To be very serious for a few minutes — we do like Dakota and the people here. Could you ever think of such a thing as coming here? We have been talking about it so much and wondering if you wouldn’t like it as well as we do. And I just know it would do you a lot of good. Really, we have thought of it so much that we have been on the point of asking Alva Hiers if he didn’t want to sell out. He is so interested in Mott that we thought he might be thinking of some such transaction. People say he has lost much trade because he isn’t interested in his home town. Then we have the farm here and I think I would have no trouble in getting a job . . . But I’m afraid I’ll give you so much to think about that you will have a headache. Of course, if we have poor crops again this year the country won’t boom, but it is bound to make good sometime soon . . . Lovingly, Ethel

June 4, 1911

Dear Folks: We have decided that we don’t want to live in Dakota; it’s too much of a change. I want trees and flowers and fruit and it will sure be nice to get home. Of course we like it here. We won’t go back on that and I wouldn’t wonder but we would make a trip back once in a while . . . Papa, if we did come to Dakota we would have to prove up anyway, as we wouldn’t want to make continuous residence on the home-

stead for five years. Then you couldn't have business in town and live so far away. I guess Iowa will suit better all around. We just get to talking sometimes and thought we would suggest it to you just to see what you thought. Mama, stick to it and don't let Papa talk Dakota any more . . . Yours ever, Anna

[Same envelope — from Ethel]

June 4th nearly past! And that leaves me 24 years old! Your girls are getting old, aren't they? . . . I'm getting pretty tired of school and will be glad when it's out. Two weeks and two days left. Our opinion as to life in Dakota is always the same; that is, what one thinks, the other agrees with. Just now we think we prefer Iowa life . . . Love, Ethel

June 13, 1911

Dear Folks: We have had one awful rain, a downpour for sure, Friday afternoon. It had been showering for a week or more and then it poured. Everyone was pleased and smiling and the trees look fine. I don't think they were planted too late if we just have the rains . . . The weather is nice some days. Are quite warm in the middle of the day but is always cool towards evening and at night . . .

I sent for my date last week and expect to hear what it is this week. Had to make out several papers and go through with lots of red tape. Alva Hiers did it for me. Two dollars was the price. The notice will run in the paper for 30 days. Then go to Mott to make proof before Judge Dewey, then a week to get something and see if it goes through all right. Takes about

¹⁴William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska was a three-time Democratic Party candidate for President who had a large following in rural America. Robert ("Fighting Bob") LaFollette of Wisconsin led the Progressive wing of the Republican Party in the U.S. Senate; he won North Dakota's Presidential Preference Primary, the nation's first, in 1912. William Howard Taft of Ohio was President of the United States from 1909-1913 and later was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; he was a man as huge of girth as he was conservative in politics.

six or seven months to get the patent, which, of course, I needn't wait here for . . . Yours ever, Anna

Thursday, June 15, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: Sunday afternoon we went to Mott with Bentleys. They have a nice new double rig, just one horse, but dandy. The wind blew terribly, but we couldn't stop for that. Started about three o'clock and got there at 5:30. It's 16 miles and we thought we drove at a moderate pace. Went to a nice cafe for supper and then in the evening we went to the Children's program and surprised Mr. Douglas. I stayed over night with Georgia and the others drove home. It was a grand moonlight night and I 'most envied them the ride. It was so cool they wore sweaters under their jackets . . . so you see we have cool weather. Ethel hasn't driven only one or two mornings without a wrap. But is nice to have it cool . . . I am feeling fine, though I am not very fat. I get so tired it seems that I will surely be laid up the next day, but the next day I feel as good as ever.

I am going to embroider something for Mrs. Bentley before I go home. They are so nice to us and I don't know how we can repay them. Mr. B. says they don't like Ethel very well, but have to be nice to her as she is the teacher and don't get paid enough, so they have to make it up some way, then they are nice to me because I'm a homesteader. He said he just found out why he liked us, when we told him you are a Democrat. He is, too, and talks politics to us a good deal. He thinks Bryan is the greatest ever — also LaFollette, but isn't very crazy about Taft¹⁴ . . . Must close, Anna

Sunday, June 18, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: Yesterday was the Old Settlers' picnic at Burt, eight miles northwest from here. It took an hour and half to drive over . . . That was my first experience in a big North Dakota picnic crowd and we had a fine time. We took our dinner with Bentleys and Davises and set our table in the shade of Mrs. Davis' sister's house, who lives there in Burt. There were 15 of us all together, and we had so much to eat

Anna and Ethel Erickson.
The photograph was taken in Iowa after the sisters ended their homesteading adventure in Hettinger County in August, 1911.

—Courtesy Enid Bern



and a jolly time. We also had supper there . . . It was the first time we were ever at a picnic with no trees in sight. There was a program in the morning — both the Bentley and Mott bands, several speeches, and the double male quartet from Mott, a band concert in the evening and a bowery dance later . . .

Well, Anna has her date for proving up — July 25. We are so glad it is in July. It is as early as it could be to get it in the paper in five issues. She makes proof before Judge Dewey of Mott. . . Lovingly, Ethel

June 26, 1911

Dear Folks: Monday — and wash day. There is so little water in the well that at first we were afraid we'd have to take our washing over to Mabel's but we managed it all right, so now everything is clean again . . . This afternoon we are going to town. The children are going to practice for their 4th of July song . . . Friday we were at Mabel's, the whole Chinn and Erickson bunch, and had such a fine time! We went a little early to help Mabel with the dinner. Had a good one . . . In the afternoon we all went over to the buttes, just south, you know. We climbed them. Some they said were 500 feet above the surrounding country, and such a view! We could see seven towns and buttes 40 miles away! We took some pictures up there, or rather Harry took some. Found lots of June berries which were fine to eat . . . We also found an old eagle's nest on top of "Rocky Butte" with lamb bones scattered about. Mabel climbed some, too, while John stayed with Mildred near the buggy . . .

Since warm weather began we use condensed milk, and always get some when we go to Mabel's. The other evening when we left there John was not at the house, so Mabel took our pail and milked Jersey for us — a pail full. She is so good and thinks nothing is too much trouble to do for us . . .

Today I have finished Ethel's black and white dress to wear tomorrow. She is on the program to read the "Declaration of Independence" so have to look kind of fussed up and stylish, you see. The program committee thought it best to have the Declaration on the program as they thought it had never been read west of the Missouri. I tell Ethel it will be terribly dry and I think I'll "hike" when it comes time to read it . . . I tease Ethel about dressing up and tell her she is sure to get her dress burned with fire crackers.

Love, Anna

July 1, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: We got our wheat taken to the elevator the other day. Mr. Morris took it in for us — six bushels for which we received \$4.30. We get the seed he used back in the fall — a bushel and a peck for every bushel. If we succeed in selling some of our goods we will have enough to get home on all right. Think John will take the buggy. It isn't worth much. The tires don't seem to stay "set," the springs are a little weak, and the seat and top pretty wiggly. It surely has seen better days but Mabel wants it on account of the top and it will do nicely for them with a little fixing up which John can do . . . Lovingly, Ethel

Friday, July 7, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: We hope you had as nice a day the Fourth as we had. Of course it was a little warm, but you know it could not have been very bad when we sat out in the prairie in the afternoon watching the ball game. We had umbrellas and were comfortable. The day was a success though the crowd was not as large as last year, Anna says. The band cleared \$150 from the stand, the game and the dance. The parade was dandy, about a dozen lady horseback riders, floats fixed up by different business men, and Homer Bentley, who has just moved here from Liberty neighborhood, had his covered wagon and oxen team — a regular pioneer outfit. He had one ox and a horse hitched to the wagon, and the other ox hitched to a cart driven by one of the boys, who was blacked up. Mr. Bentley had his rig fixed up quite swell. Then with a couple of clowns and the band it was quite a parade.

There was a frame work built near the stand with branches cut out from trees at the river to form the roof and benches under it, which made a fine shade and cool place to sit. Had the speaking there. There were 22 for dinner at Bentley's . . . Went to the dance a little while and then the three of us drove home in the moonlight. In the afternoon the ball game turned out rather unfortunately. Lloyd Little was hit with the bat on the back of his head, cutting it quite deeply. The doctor was there and he was taken care of — getting along pretty well the last we heard. Then Mr. Radke fainted from the sight of blood. So there was an excited crowd and the game was not finished. Must stop now . . . Much love, Ethel

July 13, 1911

Dear Folks: Had to take it [the washing] over to Mabel's as . . . we hadn't enough water to do it . . . John hauled a barrel of water for us; think he would haul up the whole spring if we asked him to — he is so good . . .

. . . Tomorrow will take a case of eggs to town for them and do some trading. It will save John a trip and then at Bentley we get one cent more a dozen. Even that pays in hard times and dry weather. John will be better fixed this year than most farmers around here as he has a piece of the best wheat for miles around, a good piece of corn, and his flax looks good, so far. Also has pigs and stock to sell in the fall. He says he hasn't come to the point of quitting this country yet. There are some, of course, who have nothing to kick about who are terribly blue — those who have about three quarters mostly broken and 150 acres of flax! Hettinger County is the best around here from what we hear . . . Yours ever, Anna

July 17, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: We need rain badly. Some say everything will be gone if we don't get rain in ten days. The flax looks good yet and some of the corn looks fine, but the prairie is beginning to look brown. A man came by the other day from near Lemmon — said things looked glorious here to him. Have only about ten inches of water in the well but get along nicely by watering Tom, whenever we drive him, away from home and yesterday we filled our whiskey keg over at Max's. Still tastes a little "tainted" but we can use that water for cooking, etc . . .

Just think! Prove up a week from tomorrow! The time is flying. John and Chas. Crary are going to Mott as witnesses . . .

We don't say much about selling things 'til after the 25th. Then we begin. Everybody is hard up so things won't sell well. We'll just store them and sell later if necessary. We're looking forward to packing as the "time of our lives." Guess that will be some fun . . .

When you mention *jelly* that does make me hungry. We'll let you know when we are coming home and then Anna says you can have anything to eat for us you want except dried fruit and canned meat. Provided, of course, that you have something green. Now, don't think we aren't getting enough to eat, for we are faring well and Dakota atmosphere still makes dried fruit and canned meat taste *delicious* . . . Loads of love from us both, Ethel

Monday, July 24, 1911

Dear Folks: Wednesday we had Bentleys here for supper — cooked chicken, potatoes, tomatoes, pineapple gelatin, coffee and canned peaches and cake. Everything really was good. There were five of us. Thursday we went to Littles and to the "Tepee Buttes." Mrs. Little, Eva and Ezra and Ethel and I. We had such a good time. Went to Burt, too, on our way home . . .

We want to start home about two weeks tomorrow. Have to wait and see how proof goes through and also wait for my receipt which I am advised to have recorded. They get back in a week to two weeks. If it comes sooner than we can leave sooner. Hard times makes little demand for anything, only the necessities, so what we don't ship home we will pack and leave in the house or let Mable use. Hope we can sell Tom. If we can't, will have to pay John some to keep him over winter unless someone could board him for the use they would have for him. Shall we keep the harness? Bring it home, I mean? . . . Must close now, With love, Anna

Bentley, July 30, 1911

Dear Mama and Papa: It seems nothing of much interest has happened, only the "proving up". Of course that was important. The judge said I should receive my receipt about Monday — that's tomorrow, but of course it may be delayed. I paid him \$13.25 and then he would pay the \$6.50 for the advertising out of that; then I paid \$1.50 for land office fees and that was all. John wouldn't charge for the witnessing . . . Mr. Crary, I know, expects some pay but I haven't paid him yet . . .

We are planning to start home Tuesday, August 8th. Just think how soon that will be! Don't plan too much on it, though, as we might have to change our plans . . . then we will pack up what we want to take home so you see we will be busy from now on . . . With much love, Anna
[P.S.] There is no chance of selling anything this fall, so shall we leave things for you to sell in the spring? Shall we pack the oil stove in a box with other things and send home? I kind of hate to leave it . . . Anna

[Post card mailed at McLaughlin August 9, 1911]

Dear Folks: Arrived at McLaughlin at 5:30 and leave in an hour or so. There was a large crowd at Bentley to see us off . . . Love, Ethel

Anna, who was educated in the Iowa Business College, resumed her association with her father in the general store and post office at Lamaille, Iowa. Later she was employed by the Iowa Railway and Light Company at Toledo. Then, returning to Marshalltown, she was a kindergarten musician in the schools there. She died in 1944.

Ethel graduated from Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa, and was teacher for more than 40 years in Marshalltown, Ames and Toledo. A Marshalltown paper noted that, "Many of those who live to advanced age spend their retirement years so quietly that younger generations are unaware of their earlier contributions to community betterment. But Ethel Erickson was an exception, for many who knew her well were somewhat surprised she was 89 at death, so active had she remained in community affairs a quarter century after ending a 40-year teaching career . . .

"Her 25 years of service in the Marshalltown system were varied — she even was a stern, but considerate, truant officer for a time — but her greatest contribution was as an associate of the late I.G. Terry who headed the first vocational-technical education program established in MHS in 1937. And she lived to see vo-tech courses among the most popular in Iowa's public school system, later even invading college curricula. — PGN."

The Erickson sisters represent a cross section of homesteaders, varied in background, culture and skills but similar to many in their love of adventure. Like others, they eventually went on to fulfill higher ambitions.

