

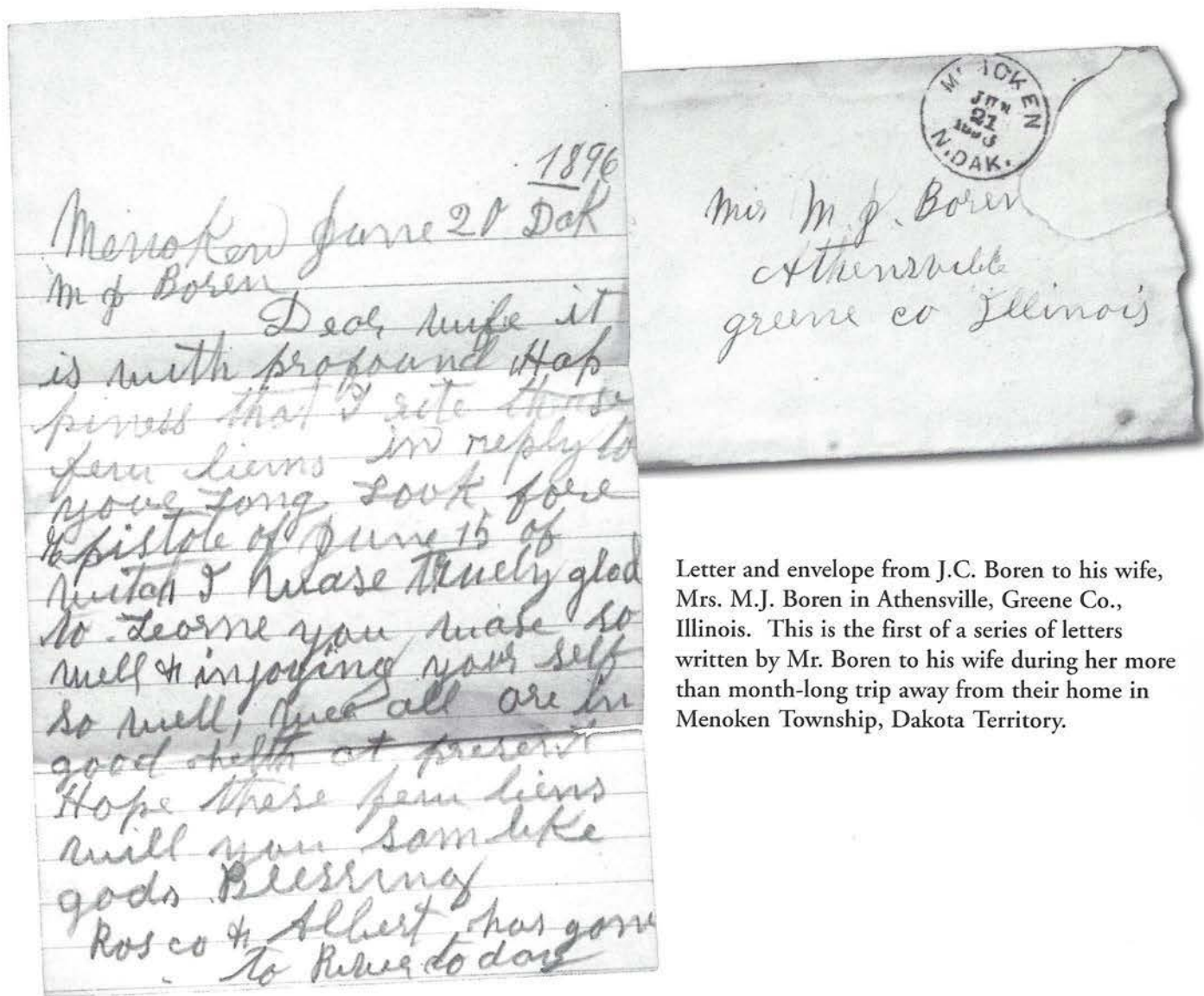
FROM THE COLLECTIONS:

Love Sickness is the worst sickness":

The Letters of John C. Boren to his wife,
Mary Jane Woods Pennell Boren

June - July, 1896

by Barbara Handy-Marchello, Ph.D.



Letter and envelope from J.C. Boren to his wife, Mrs. M.J. Boren in Athensville, Greene Co., Illinois. This is the first of a series of letters written by Mr. Boren to his wife during her more than month-long trip away from their home in Menoken Township, Dakota Territory.

SHSND MS 10755

Editor's Note: In early 1998 Wayne Hogue of Menoken, North Dakota, walked into the State Archives in the North Dakota Heritage Center carrying a small wood box. Inside the box were a number of letters, most written in the 1890s, and a few other miscellaneous documents. There were five letters written by John C. Boren, a Menoken farmer, to his wife, M.J. Boren, as well as a number of letters to John Pennell, M.J.'s son by her first marriage, written by relatives and friends. Mr. Hogue had come across the box of letters in an abandoned farmhouse on land he owned near Menoken. Knowing none of the people to whom the letters were written, he donated them to the State Historical Society of North Dakota. Janet Beltran, a volunteer in the archives, produced a transcript of the letters, which intrigued everyone who read them. However, for the next nine years, the story surrounding the letters—who the Borens and the other people mentioned in the letters were, and what happened to the family later—was unknown.

In 2007 Dr. Barbara Handy-Marchello, who had recently retired from her position as associate professor of history at the University of North Dakota, volunteered some of her time at the archives. We asked her if she was interested in exploring the cache of letters. This interpretive essay and the annotated letter transcriptions are the delightful result. They provide an intimate glimpse into a nineteenth-century marriage and a wider view of the community in which this couple lived.

The spelling of the letters is original, although occasional missing words, as well as corrected versions of some of the more creative spellings, are provided in brackets. Punctuation has been added to improve readability.

136

Township No.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TRACT.				CONTENTS.		RATE PER ACRE.		PURCHASE MONEY.		NAME OF THE PURCHASER.
PART OF SECTION.	Section.	Township.	Range.	Acres.	100ths.	Dollars.	Cents.	Dollars.	Cents.	
690	For temporary right of way Dec. 1 - 1882			Bismarck						
Home	NE ⁴	"	"	160	00	10	00	10	00	Henry M. Martin
Home	SE ⁴	"	"	160	00	10	00	10	00	Archibald Mc Donald
Home	SW ⁴	"	"	160	00	10	00	10	00	William Mc Gillis
Home	NE ⁴	"	"	160	00	10	00	10	00	John C Boren
Home	NW ⁴	"	"	160	00	10	00	10	00	Edvis Wood

General land Office records for John C. Boren's patent for the northeast quarter of Section 10, Menoken Township (139N, 78W) on July 14, 1882.

After approximately twenty years of marriage, Mary Jane Pennell Boren, known as M.J. or Janey, left the Menoken Township, Burleigh County, farm home she shared with her husband, John C. Boren, to visit family and friends in Illinois. She had been born in Mount Airy, Greene County, Illinois, in 1847, the third of four children of Isam and Mary Woods. On November 27, 1863, at the age of sixteen, she married John C. Pennell, also of Greene County.¹ This marriage produced at least two children, John William (1867) and Elfie (probably Alfa, birth date unknown).²

John Pennell probably died, or they may have divorced. M.J. married John C. Boren, probably in Iowa in the late 1870s. With John Boren, Mary Jane gave birth to three more children: Emma (born in Iowa in 1879), Roscoe (born in Iowa in 1881), and Dakota, who was born sometime after the special federal census of 1885 was taken. In June 1896 M.J. Boren had three living children: John William Pennell (age twenty-nine), Elfie/Alfa Pennell, and Roscoe Boren, who was about fourteen at the time of her trip. Only Roscoe still lived at home.

John C. Boren, born in 1839 in Tennessee, fought with the Union Army during the Civil War.³ After his discharge in 1865, he journeyed to Iowa. Between his discharge and his arrival in Dakota Territory in 1882, the record of John Boren's activities becomes thin. However, in 1882 Boren and his wife, M.J., along with their children and her two older children by John Pennell, moved to Menoken Township in central Burleigh County, Dakota Territory. Their farm was located approximately fifteen miles north and east of the ambitious town of Bismarck on the northeast

quarter of Section 10, Menoken Township (139-N, 78W).⁴

M.J. had planned her trip to Illinois for several months, and had been encouraged by friends to take the journey to improve her health.⁵ At home, John Boren and their son Roscoe, and another young man, Albert Graves, who was probably a hired laborer, were left to care for themselves. Occasionally Johnny Pennell, who was living and working in Bismarck at the time, came by to visit.⁶

In Illinois, Jane visited surviving members of her immediate family (Woods relatives), and members of her first husband's (John C. Pennell) family. She had a sister or an aunt, Mrs. W. S. Pierce, a cousin Flora Piper, and other relatives living in or near Jacksonville, Illinois, and in Greene County just to the south of the city. In addition, she might have visited Mathilda (Tilla) Pennell, her first husband's sister, who regularly corresponded with M.J.'s son Johnny.⁷ Illinois towns mentioned often in family letters include Whitehall, Jacksonville, and Athensville, where she was staying.

These letters, and some among those addressed to Johnny Pennell, indicate that Jane's health was poor. At least two letters mention that she is overweight, and she was inclined to take medicine for her health. In addition, she had suffered the deaths of two or three of her children to scarlet fever in the mid-1880s. However, her letters to her son and daughter in 1891 indicate a woman with a positive outlook on life. She was pleased to have a new kitchen added to her Menoken Township house in January 1891 and was delighted to have a granddaughter, for whom she was making a quilt.⁸

According to the 1885 census, John Boren was a good

1. John C. Pennell was born in 1844 to Bluford and Charlotte Pennell of Greene County, Illinois. 1860 U. S. Census, Greene County, Illinois, 599, accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com

2. Illinois Marriage Records 1851-1900 County Court Records Film # 1310037-1310038, accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com.

3. John C. Boren served the Union in Company H of the 13th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment. He states in one census survey that he enlisted in 1862; in another, he states the date was July 1863. Neither date coincides with the organization of the 13th Tennessee Cavalry in October 1863. He also states that he was involved in 100 engagements (more than twice the highest number reported by other veterans in the same census), but published records of the 13th indicate they engaged Confederate troops less than twenty times, including the pursuit of Jefferson Davis in 1865. Boren had a temporary spell of paralysis, but was not wounded and did not receive a pension, though he applied for one. 1885 North Dakota Census Burleigh County, Special Schedule No. 6 Ex-Soldiers of the Volunteer and Regular Army of the United States, 1; 1890 U.S. Census, Burleigh County, Special Schedule: Surviving Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, and widows, etc., 1, accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com; Civil War Pension Index, General Index to Pension Files 1861 - 1934 Claim application no. 971.110, accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com; Tennesseans in the Civil War: Federal Cavalry Units, 13th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment, USA, <http://www.tngenweb.org/civilwar/usacav/usa13cav.html>.

4. Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office records, Accession/Serial Number NDMTAA 033920. www.glorerecords.blm.gov.

5. Unidentified writer to Johnny Pennell, Kenosha, Wisconsin, March 1896. J.C. and M.S. Boren and John Pennell Letters (MS collection 10755) State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck (Hereafter Boren Letters).

6. Johnny Pennell lived in Bismarck and worked at the state penitentiary. He also lived for a time in Jamestown. Envelope in Boren Letters addressed to Johnny Pennell in Jamestown, January 1891; a letter from Birdie Lambert to Johnny (no date) refers to his work at the penitentiary. Boren Letters.

7. Mathilda Pennell was John Pennell's sister. She was born in 1852 or 1855 (records are unclear) to Bluford and Charlotte Pennell. As a child she lived in Greene County, Illinois with her parents and siblings. She became a dressmaker, and as a single woman, lived with her mother in Whitehall, Illinois. Letters from Tilla Pennell to Johnny Pennell are included in the Boren Letters. 1860 U.S. Census, Greene County, Illinois, 599; 1880 U.S. Census, Whitehall Township, Greene County, Illinois, 21, accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com.

8. M.J. Boren to John Pennell, January 28, 1891. Boren Letters. At the time of this letter, Johnny was visiting his sister Elfie, or Alfa, and her family in Wisconsin.

farmer. Though he had been on the farm only three years, the value of his crops and farm improvements exceeded that of most of his neighbors. Perhaps having teenaged Johnny Pennell's labor helped him accomplish the work of breaking land and constructing buildings more quickly. There is no reference to M.J. working in the fields, but her chickens produced 100 dozen eggs in 1884 and "got most" of their groceries. John Boren's 1896 letters to M.J. indicate the importance of her household labor to the success of the farm, especially during harvest.⁹

Sometime between 1885 and 1890, several of the Boren children came down with scarlet fever. Family reminiscences and cemetery records indicate that Dakota and Emma Boren, and Alfa Pennell, died on Christmas Day and were buried in a single coffin on the Boren farm. There are no death certificates to confirm this. Assuming that Alfa is Johnny's sister Elfie who was alive in 1896, these records may be mistaken. It is possible that there was a third child, other than Alfa/Elfie, too young to have been included in the 1885 census, who died on that Christmas day. In either case, the deaths of two or three of her children on Christmas was a devastating tragedy for M.J. and her family.¹⁰

By 1891 Elfie, M.J.'s oldest daughter was married, had a child named Lily, and was living in West Superior, Wisconsin. Elfie enjoyed visits from her brother, John Pennell, and apparently he considered moving to Wisconsin to be near her, a move their mother encouraged. Elfie visited the farm in Menoken Township in 1895. But she refused to return to the farm during her mother's absence to keep house for John Boren, citing reasons "that I can never tell to you."¹¹

It was early June 1896 when M.J. Boren set out for a visit in Illinois. While she was gone, she wrote to John Boren, and he wrote to her, but only his letters survive. The collection includes five letters from John Boren, one letter from Roscoe Boren to M.J., and one letter from Albert Graves to M.J. In the first letter, John refers to M.J.'s letter of June 15. If that was the first letter she wrote to him, then she probably left home around June 10, traveling by the Northern Pacific Railroad to Minneapolis where she changed to a train for Chicago, and then south by train to

Jacksonville.¹²

Boren's letters are affectionate, but gradually change in tone over the course of three weeks. The first three letters are full of love words and cautions she should take for her health and safety. However, his letter dated 11 July is full of bad news about heat, drought, dying crops, and his mental state. He was desperate for her company and for rain. He was planning to cut hay and needed a cook and housekeeper during those busy days. He also tells her that he can't pay doctor bills if she gets sick. He adds that the chickens (which were her responsibility) are getting into the hog pen and need her attention. He *orders* her to return home by July 20. His last letter, dated 14 July, is brief and focused on his loneliness. Though he claims that he is sick and has lost weight, both Albert Graves and Roscoe Boren write that they are all doing well.

John Boren occasionally refers to Roscoe in his letters. One interesting, and extremely rare, comment is that Roscoe no longer wants to be called "baby boy." In his mother's absence, he asserted his manhood. The transition from childhood to manhood on a farm usually involved assuming a man's labor and responsibility, which undoubtedly Roscoe had done, or would do as soon as they began to cut hay. However, Roscoe also made a direct request to his mother to acknowledge his maturity by dropping his childhood nickname. Tellingly, he signs his letter to her with an adult title: "Mr. R.C. Boren."¹³

These letters reveal the entanglement of affection with the farm economy that was common for agricultural families. John loved Jane, but he also needed her labor on the farm. Her absence did not diminish his love, but emphasized her importance to him in private and personal matters, as well as highlighting her role in keeping the farm and the family in good order. Private activities and emotions are seldom visible in the existing records of pioneer farm families' lives. The hard work and often grim living conditions typical for pioneer families cause modern readers to wonder if early Dakota residents experienced joy, recreation, affection, or fun. The Boren letters, however, indicate that farmers readily traveled many miles to visit, to attend the circus, and to enjoy holiday celebrations.

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9. 1885 North Dakota Census, Blaine Township, Burleigh County, Agricultural Schedule, 8; M. J. Pennell to Johnny Pennell, 28 January 1891, Boren Letters.
10. Dakota was not listed in the 1885 census and was probably born shortly after the enumeration. However, even though there are no official records of her life, there is no reason to dispute the birth and death of Dakota. Dorothy M. Clizbe, John and Jane Boren's granddaughter, recorded their family history, including the death of Dakota and two other children. The Burleigh County cemetery book notes that Dakota and Emma (no reference to Alfa) died during the 1880s. Beth Hughes Bauman and Dorothy J. Jackman, eds. and comps., *Burleigh County: Prairie Trails to Hi-Ways* (Bismarck-Mandan Geneological and Historical Society, 1978), 367; Beth Bauman, Gail Gorden, Dorothy Jackman, comps. and eds., *Burleigh County, North Dakota, Book of Remembrances* (Bismarck-Mandan Geneological and Historical Society, 1994), 97.
11. Elfie to Johnny Pennell June 18, 1896. Boren Letters.]
12. Ibid.
13. John Boren to M. J. Boren, Menoken, ND, July 18, 1896. Boren Letters.

John C. Boren Died Monday

Last Monday evening at the home of his son occurred the death of John C. Boren from the effect of a paralytic stroke. This was the second attack of this nature the first one, which occurred two years ago, depriving the aged gentleman of the power of speech and weakening his otherwise robust system to the extent that a second attack proved fatal.

Funeral services were conducted today by Rev. Hughes of Bismarck and interment made in the Menoken cemetery.

Deceased was a Civil War veteran and one of the pioneers of Burleigh county having resided here for over thirty years. A wide circle of friends and acquaintances join in extending their sympathy to the bereaved ones.

An extended obituary will be next week,

Obituary of John Boren published in the *McKenzie Gazette* on November 7, 1912. No extended obituary could be located.

region in which they were born, but with people they met as they or their families traveled west and north to the northern Great Plains. Neighbors were not isolated in their homes, but visited frequently, bringing news of rural neighbors and urban events as they traveled to nearby towns and returned home. John Boren's two trips noted in these letters, one to Sterling on July 4 and one to Bismarck on July 9, brought him into social contact with neighbors and acquaintances. The result of these visits were letters full of gossip meant to keep Jane informed of events and connected to her home community.

John's interactions with neighbors during Jane's trip

Between planting and harvesting, there was time for "snoozing" and bicycle riding. John Boren's letters suggest their marriage was a love match, and that he enjoyed their sexual relationship and believed that she did as well.

In addition, the letters reveal much about the community in which the Borens established their farm and home. Neighbors were both foreign-born and of old American stock. Many couples had formed their marriages not in the state or

left him acutely aware of her absence and his precarious social situation as a temporary bachelor. On June 30, he referred to the return of the community's "prodigal wives," which included M.J., and a hint that she might return, too. His letter of July 8 reveals his social isolation and some uncertainty about her freedom as she travels around Greene County. He notes with some relief that she has "come round" and worries that she might discover she was pregnant while in Illinois ("got caught down there"). He makes two references to his social status: friends have "twitted" him about her absence, and Mrs. Braten tells him that he has "got left." The only response he can make to the teasing is to tell them with certainty that M.J. will return on a specific date. But M.J. has not made travel arrangements, so he is defenseless in the face of public ridicule. Consequently, he begins to firmly demand her return by July 20.

The letters cease on July 14, and in all probability, M.J. returned home in July, bringing the letters with her. We know little more about Mary Jane Boren after this trip. She died before 1900. Johnny Pennell died, too, leaving John Boren and Roscoe living and working together on the Boren farm.¹⁴ Roscoe married a neighbor girl, Murl Waid, in 1903, and moved to his own farm north of McKenzie in 1906. By 1910, they had four children. John Boren died November 4, 1912.¹⁵

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14. Mary Jane Boren's death date is given as 1896 in *Burleigh County, North Dakota Book of Remembrances* (78), but her birth date in that record is mistaken and her death date may have been mistaken as well. However, John Boren is listed as a widower in the 1900 census. 1900 U.S. Census, Burleigh County, Menoken Township, sheet 1, accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com; Johnny Pennell died January 8, 1898, while digging a well near Wilton.

15. 1910 U.S. Census, Burleigh County, McKenzie Township, sheet 4, accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com; *Burleigh County, North Dakota, Book of Remembrances*, 78; *Prairie Trails to Hi-Ways*.

Boren Letters, June 1896-July 1896

JC Boren to MJ Boren
Menoken June 20 1896 Dak

M J Boren

Dear wife, it is with profound Happiness that I rite these few liens in reply to your Long Look fore Epistole of June 15 of witch I wase truely glad to Learne you wase so well & injoying your self so well. Wee all are in good helth at present. Hope these few liens will [find] you Sam[e], like gods Blessing. Rosco¹ & Albert² has gone to Ribig today for Waud.³ It is so Hot it takes till After night to git back. Wee all went to thee tournement [on June] 18 witch wase Thursday.⁴ The 2 Boyes had a Splended time. Johnney has got his wheale.⁵ He red [the letter] he had got from you & he had wrater [written] to you. He haint Bin out since you of lifte [have left]. He is coming out Sunday to let me ride his wheale [wheel].

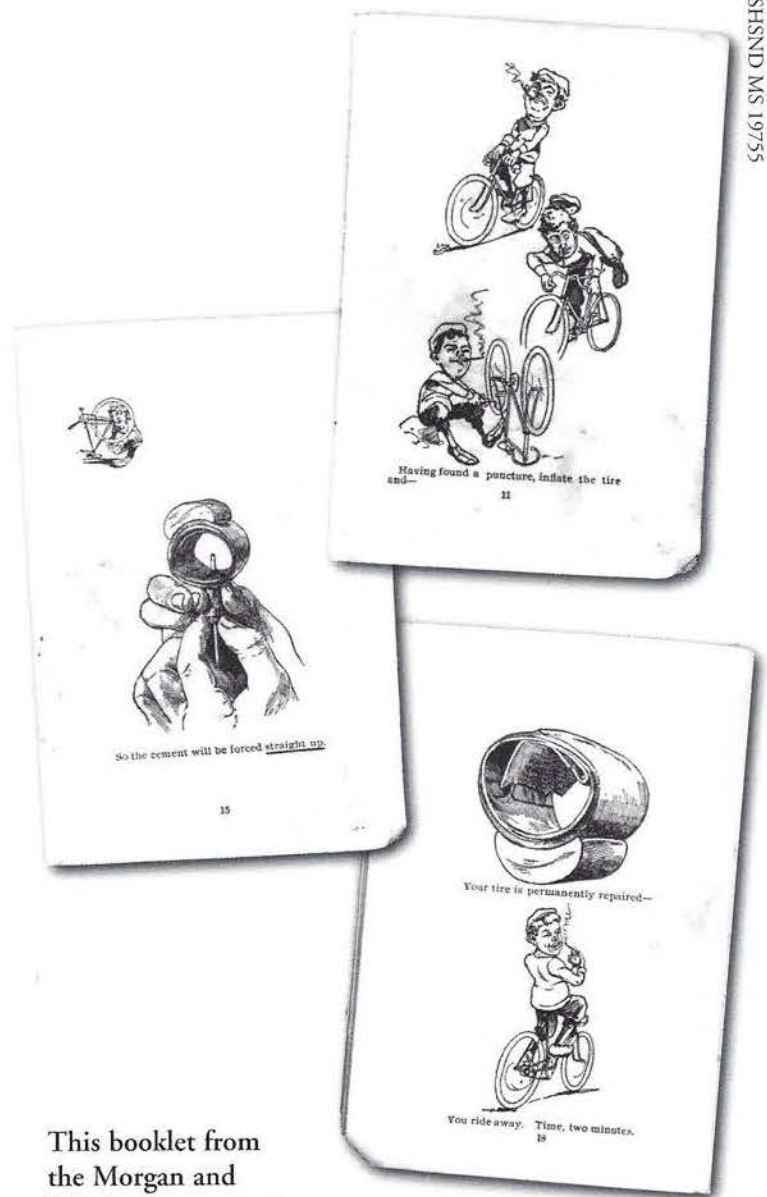
So good Bey Jane, dont dont stop long. Came Bak Soone to your one chick A Bidey for my heart beets so to drive a way the tears of moners [mourners].



Menoken June 30 Dak

M J Boren

Your wellcom letter [of the] 25th is now before me, it[s] contents corfuley perrouse[d]. Glad to learn you are Injoying you self so hugely. You want to remember what I tolde you before you left, visit some & then let some visit you then you wont belikely to make your self sick Riding thru the hot sun & changeing water so often.⁶ Bee affule carfule of your self. If you shude take



This booklet from the Morgan and Wright pneumatic tire company provides a step-by-step illustrated guide to repairing a tire puncture. Ten pages of instructions, several shown here, end with the promise that repairs could be completed in two minutes. This brochure probably came with the “wheal” Johnny Pennell received in July.

2.

1. In 1896 Roscoe Boren was the only surviving child of John C. Boren and M.J. Boren.
2. Albert Graves lived with and apparently worked for the Borens. He spent a lot of time with Roscoe and may have been a teenager himself.
3. Ribig” and “Waud” do not correspond directly to people or places in the Menoken Township area. However, Ribig may possibly refer to Alfred Ryberg, a Sweden-born farmer who lived in Naughton Township. Ryberg had a son named Walter, who at five years of age was a little young to be a companion of Roscoe and Albert. It may also refer to the town of Regan, which was twenty miles north of the Boren farm.
4. The dates and days in the letters correspond correctly to the calendars for June and July 1896.
5. John W. Pennell, M. J. Boren’s son by her first marriage, who worked in Bismarck. He received by mail an inner tube for a bicycle wheel and an instruction book for the inner tube dated 1896. Boren Letters.
6. This phrase likely refers to the possibility of becoming ill from drinking water contaminated with bacteria or parasites against which Jane may not have developed resistance.

Bee affule carfule of your self. If you shude take summer complaint it would be likely to kill you—you are so fat you had better lay still and keep cole.

summer complaint it would be likely to kill you—you are so fat you had better lay still and keep cole.

If you have to run round go late—late in the Eaving er Erley in morning before the sun hit hey [high]. I drethe you would not [go] a tall if it is so hot down thare as it hear to day. It [is] 98

in shade. I rether you would go back some time to Illinois when it is colder. Do you hear me now? You had better [should have] tuck my advise & went down in winter time.

I misg you. We[']re going to Starling [on July] 4. Misr [Mrs.] Carson is a going to meet fred⁷ on 4 July at Sterling. One bey one the prodigill wifes ar returning back to thare hubezes.

Yes Kliff can git work hear enney time. If he was here now he could could get work half a dosen places. If the popel down thare dont think we can

rase eneny thing where do they think well git our money to visit on[?] I went home a few years a go now you ar visiting in Illinois. I [am] going to St poll minasato to the old sogers [soldier's] Reuion,⁸ than if god spar me to Live till winter I am going home [to] tenasee on a visit & if I do tell the faalks I will stop of & eat sosage with them.

The wheat is heading out. My pease hant ped [formed pods] it but I think they will bey the time you get home. Rosco & Albart is snosing this hot day a way & that ise what you had better do A good deale of your tim. Pakney⁹ was out yeser day to the primary. He got his man this time—M.D. King.¹⁰ He sed he got you lettre from cotvill.



One of the arches erected during the Grand Army of the Republic encampment at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, in September 1896. John Boren wrote in his June 30 letter that he hoped to attend this gathering.

7. Fred Carsons is listed in the 1885 census as Fred Corsons, born 1862. He was a young German immigrant working as a farm laborer for E. F. Borden in 1885. By 1900, Fred (listed as Carstens) had married Ella and they worked a stock farm. They had a four-year-old daughter named Anna. 1885 North Dakota Census, Burleigh County, Township 139, Range 78, 10; 1900 U.S. Census, Burleigh County, Francis Township, Sheet 3, accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com. (Hereafter, all census notations with the exception of the 1885 Dakota Territory census are accessed via Ancestrylibrary.com)
8. Boren is apparently planning to attend the reunion of Civil War Union veterans that was held in St. Paul, Minnesota in September 1896.
9. I have not been able to identify Pakney or Pinck as the name is later spelled.
10. Milton D. King was born in 1870 in New York. He was married in 1898 to Mable and was a Menoken school teacher. In 1900 they had a ten-month-old son. In 1896 King was elected delegate to the Burleigh County Democratic Party convention. King is most likely the son of Chester A. King (see footnote 35). 1885 Dakota Territory Census, Burleigh County, Blaine Township, 5; *Bismarck Tribune* June 30, 1896, 3; 1900 U.S. Census, Burleigh County, Menoken Township, no page.

Eer thing look fine, catel is so fat they are in misery. We will commence making hay after [July] 4. I tell you, there is plenty for Eebodey and to spare. Rite ever day you dont now glad I am to git a letter from you, morso then when wee wher sparking.

You want to no wheare you will git of[f]. Stop of[f] with Sister Milton¹¹ then you will have a chance to rest your self before starting. Johnny wase down thar Sundaneight all neight. Jim and Alex King¹² set up & chined [shined] Salley Wagener¹³ all neight. Mirs Milton want you ever so bad to stop of[f] thare. So [you] had bete stop thare & I will come down thare & sleep with you all neight & wee will have som fun. Your sweet J_____ until deth

J J C Boren

Write soon as thise comes to heand. Give my love to all inquiring friends & reserve a big lump for youe self.

J C Boren

PS Ruth Feagels¹⁴ is hear to see & close up david[']s business. She ses Dave dide trusting in the Lorde. Mothe,¹⁵ I am praying for youe safty till you get ham againe. God Bless.



Menoken July 8 1896 Dak

M.J. Boren

My Deare wife, it [is] with profound pleasure that I Seate my Self this evning to answer your [letter] of June 30 witch came duely [in] hand & found me under the weather---Biles sick, lomsum sick, Love sick, sick to see you once more. You dont have enney Ida how lonsum I am with out you, Love. Some tiems I dont think I can wate till the time you set to

come home. Rosco Ses I wish Mother would come home. He dont wish it half so Bad as I do. You can tell that I am pinen & and lost 30 pounds since you went a way. That is Beter than you did when you tuck antifat. I dont want to herry you but you see how it is. You dont need [to] believe Johnny what he ses a bout how wee are gitin a long for he dont now enney thing a bout it. He has only binn hear a bouth one hour since you left. It is to lonsom a place fore him to com to while you are a way. Thare is no bodey to get him something good to eat, so he wont bother [coming] round hear till you come home a gaine. I am going to Bismarck to morrow to the Show.¹⁶ I wish you whear heare to go with me.

I am lonsum to neight, Love, with out you. I siah for one glance of your eye. Dont think I am joking for you no I never joke. Write of tiems [often] ever day you have nothing els to do but take cetches [sketches] & rite ever day, ever day, ever day. Wee had a nice raine last nieght just in time. I just finished Seeting out 100 head of cabbig plants. I bought them in Bismark. Everthing Look fine now, I tell you. The catel is so fat they are too lazey to git up when down. I am Lozing Lots of Monney Ever day now bey not having catel to Eate all of [t]his grass that is going to wast.

It is a [good] thing you found out you hade come round before you left for I mite hav thought you got coat [caught] down thare.¹⁷ Rosco will rite some. He dont whant you to call him baby boy enney more he ses he haint no baby neney more.

Give love to inquiren friend but Keep a Larg part fore your self—a big lump.

Write Some. Give all of the news in jenerl.

11. It is difficult to identify Sister Milton. She may have been Rebecca Wilton (b 1839), wife of William Wilton. They lived in nearby Sibley Township with two grown sons, and a daughter. 1900 U.S. Census. She may also be Anna Miller (b 1870), wife of Elsworth Miller, a Menoken Township farmer. In 1896, they had been married for three years and had one son. 1900 U.S. Census, Burleigh County, Menoken Township, no page. Since Boren meets "Sister Milton" in Sterling, it is more likely that he is referring to Mrs. Wilton.

12. In 1896, Jim King was a twenty-four-year-old Canadian immigrant. He was working as a farm laborer and herder. By 1900 he was working as a herdsman for Mathew Obryen/O'Bryen in northern Burleigh County. 1900 US Census, Burleigh County, Township 144, Range 76, 178. I have not been able to identify Alex King, who presumably is Jim King's brother.

13. I have not been able to identify Sally Wagner. The context suggests that she was Mrs. Milton's hired girl. If so, the transient nature of that work, plus the possibility that she married and changed her name, makes it nearly impossible to locate her in historical records. "Chined" or "shined" refers to courting.

14. The 1885 census lists David Feagles as the son of Robert Feagles. He was fourteen in 1885, making him just 25 at the time of his death in 1896. He was a friend of Johnny Pennell, as well as the Borens. Robert Feagles was the Menoken postmaster in 1885. 1885 Dakota Territory Census, Burleigh County, Blaine Township, 6. The sequence of events surrounding David Feagles's death is not clear. Though John states in this letter, dated June 30, that Ruth Feagles has arrived to close his estate and that David has died "trusting in the Lorde," he states in the subsequent letter that he heard of David Feagles's death on July 8, more than a week after this letter is dated.

15. "Mother" was a term commonly used by husbands to address their wives, especially if they had children.

16. The "Show" was The Great Wallace Show, a circus with three rings, two stages, a one-half-mile race track, and one hundred acts. It included an aquarium and Ralston, a high diver. The company offered "cheap excursions" on "every line of travel" in order to bring more rural people to Bismarck. On July 8, the circus paraded through town before the performance. John Boren attended, according to a newspaper article which referred to him as "Capt. Boren of Menoken." Advertisement, *Bismarck Tribune* July 2, 1896; "Farmers Out In Force," *Bismarck Tribune* July 9, 1896, p. 3.

17. This sentence is a reference to her menstrual periods ("come round"). He also teased her about the possibility of discovering she was pregnant while visiting in Illinois. M.J. was forty-nine at the time of her trip, so she was probably entering menopause and experiencing irregular menstrual cycles.

Just as soon as you git this letter I want you to pack your grip & start fore home. ... I need you the worst way & cant git a longe with out ou enney longer.

An advertisement for the Great Wallace Show appeared in the July 2, 1896, Bismarck Tribune.



JC Boren to MJ Boren
Athensville Ill

I heard this morning David feegals was ded. I dont heardly believe it. Corray¹⁸ toled Joste¹⁹ so.

JC Boren

Mis Egnew & Meve²⁰ Has bin making hay fore a week er more, so you see time flies fast out in Decoto. Mr. Pinck and Lady went up to Ansson cole Mine²¹ to Celabrate the forth of July. They are coming Back bey way of Bismark to take in the Show. Charley Rogers²² has got him a new Spring wagon. They wore at Starling the 4[th]. They wase as frenley as a basket [of] chips. Ever Bodey wanted to no when you was coming home. I suppose when you answer thise Letter you can tell me So I can tell them when they twit me about it.

John Hoffman²³ wase down heare yeserday to git cultivater, to plow tators. They are well. Jiney hant tolde them when she is coming it [out]. Fred carson[']s wife did not come home on the 4 as they expected.²⁴ I dont [know] when she will. I Seene will Braten and Lady²⁵ at Starling he came home for the 4. She ses I got left; I gess I did. When you write I want to no when you are coming. If [I] git much crseyer then I am, you my wake up som moring & find me out Side at the doore. When this you see Remember me & your Dear husband as will. Untill deth, J C Boren to my Deare bleoved wife mirs M, J, Boren

COMING TO BISMARCK
On Wednesday, July 8th
The Greatest, Grandest, The Largest and the Best of America's Big Amusement Enterprises.

The Great Wallace Shows.

Little to mention in connection with this exhibition - Grand in equipment - Grand in entertainment - Grand in variety - Grand in the most perfect and most successful exhibition ever held in the Northwest Territory.

The Eighth Wonder of the World !!
Finest Horses of any Show on Earth
\$5,000,000 Invested Capital.

THE BEST SHOW ON EARTH.

See Walker, the High Diver, whose feat of leaping from the Washington Monument, 555 feet, is unparalleled, given a free exhibition daily.

Our Street Parade Given at 10 o'clock, a.m.

Cheap excursions will be run on every line of travel. Remember the date. Never divides. Never disappoints. No gambling devices tolerated.

Delegates to Grand Forks:

Minister, John Orville, P. P. Hanson, J. B. Zeman, Wm. Kowalski, W. P. ...

18. Corray may have been Judge E.M. Corey (b. 1858 Ohio) who was an early settler and storekeeper in Menoken. The 1900 census listed him as a carpenter married to Lucretia Tooker Corey. Another possibility is Floren C. Corey who was postmaster at Menoken in 1882. Marlys Neugebauer Frandson, ed., *Menoken, 1883-1983* (Menoken, N.D.: Menoken Centennial History Committee, 1983), 6, 21; 1900 U.S. Census, Burleigh County, Menoken Township, no page.
19. I have not been able to identify Joste.
20. John and Ellen Egnew (b. 1860) were Boren's near neighbors in Menoken Township in 1885. They had a son named Melvin who was born in 1883, making him thirteen at the time of this letter. Ellen Egnew was widowed by the time of this letter, but continued to live on and operate her farm. In addition to Melvin, she also had sons Lawrence (b. 1888) and Markus (b. 1891). Their name is spelled variously as Egnew and Agnew. 1885 North Dakota Census, Burleigh County, Blaine Township, 5; 1900 U.S. Census. Melvin's daughter, Lillian, kept diaries which are the source of a book about her life edited by her daughter. Lillian Agnew Foell, *Lil's Courage*, edited by Bonnie Foell Olson (Fargo: Institute for Regional Studies, 1997).
21. There were a number of coal mines in the northwest corner of Burleigh County, and in nearby McLean County.
22. Charles Rogers was born in Iowa in 1860. He farmed in McKenzie Township with his wife Tirzah (b. 1859 in Ohio). Among their four children, their two-year old daughter was born in Iowa, suggesting that they came to Dakota Territory about the same time as the Borens and that they may have known one another in Iowa. 1885 Dakota Territory Census, Township 139, Range 77, 12.
23. John Hoffman was a forty-nine-year-old farmer and carpenter, born in Ohio. He and his wife Mary (b. 1845), had two sons, Wilbur (10) and Earl (7). They lived on a farm in Frances Township west of Menoken. 1900 U.S. Census, Frances Township, no page.
24. See footnote 6.
25. Will Braten (or Braaten) was probably William H. Braten (b. 1839, Pennsylvania) who lived south of Sterling. He was married to Kathi (b. 1849) with whom he had six children. It is possible that their son, Willie, who was twenty-two in 1896, was the man to whom Boren refers. The elder Will Braten served in the 2nd Pennsylvania Artillery from 1861 - 1865 as a private. He was wounded during the Civil War and received a pension. He came to Dakota Territory in 1883 from Pennsylvania. 1885 Dakota Territory Census, Burleigh County, Township 138 Range 76, 13; Special Schedule No. 6 Soldiers of the Volunteer and Regular Army of the U.S., 2.



Hay bucker and overshot, 1905. Haymaking, as shown in this photograph, required a number of workers. It was important to have a cook to feed the workforce.



Menoken July the 11 1896 Dak

My Dear Wife, it is with regret that I have to write you these few lines.

I receive bouthe of your letters to day wich is Sateday. [The] 4 July one [was] from greenfield.²⁶ Was glad to learn you wase on your pinnes. Sorry to laene of you cold, but was expecting you would befall Some Bad cole. Maybay, you want to now how everthing looks. I hate to tell you everthing is drying of up up. Hant had no raine for 3 weeks, bin having hot winds, themonitor stand[s at] 98 to 100 & 2 in shade ever day. Ever thing is dry as a paden house.²⁷

Joust as sone as you git this letter I want you to pack your grip & start fore home. Dont spend enney more monney afoleing a round, for I cant stand it another day longer with out you. So come rite a long Er I may not be a live when you git hear.

You now how despert the men is out hear when they think thare isen going to be a crop. I need you the worst way & cant git a longe with out ou enney longer. I shall Look fore you bey 20 July with out foile. The wheat has been heded headed out for 3 weeks, the Erly wheat. I dont think the late wheat will head out atall.

It is dry & hot. Garden Looks fare for the time it has ben planted. Wee are a going to commence haying Thursday 9 July,²⁸ then will will neede a cook Purty sone. I think you are making a foole of your self Runing Round all

26. Greenfield, a village in Greene County, Illinois, was about six miles south of Athensville where Jane Boren was visiting relatives.

27. I have not been able to identify the meaning of the phrase "paden house."

28. July 9 was a Thursday, but this letter is dated July 11 (Saturday), so the ninth has passed. He may be thinking that he would begin haying on July 16, the subsequent Thursday. Or possibly, since he tells her that she must return home by July 20, that he plans to begin cutting hay on Thursday, July 23.

over the country. If you wheare out hear whear there is no excitement, do half quartee as much Runig a Round, you would be sick in bed and if you dont mind, you will have to feale you or [are] giting excited. You had beter come to [a] halt [in your visiting]. I hent got no monney to Dackters Bills, never, I dont think. You have, I meane, they all in good parte.

Sherm com out from Bismark July the 2 and helt down the Longe till the morning, then him and Albert Rosco [and] myself all go in the Spring Wagon and whent to Stalling [Sterling] to Selabrate the forth [of] July. Had a very nice time. They had fireworks at neight but we did not stay. Sherm did. He is working for Billy Watson²⁹ [for] 100 [and] 50 cts per day running [the] mowing machne. Sam Hoods³⁰ have gone down to Berier crick on outing. His Brother and sister in law are out from Wisonsent for thear helth. All so, another Lady Daeker an hear son from New York³¹ is with them.

Tators is in bloome, but I dont think thare [they] will be enney good un less it rained sone. Ever thing is at a stand stille now except time. It goes rite a longe jest the same. Wee can't hey & make enney head way cooking & hey-ing all [at] the som time. Wee need a cook & wee have got to have one ritee away er do worse. The chicken is doing fare. I cant hardly keep them out of the hog penn. I gess if you dont git home sone to Look after them & other thing they wil come up Slim while wee are haying. So you see it imposabel for us to gitalong with out you longer then [July] 20. I gess they make connections at St poll. There isen but one pasger trane Run on the Npcifice R/Road.

I think you are making a foole of your self Runig Round all over the country. ... I never can stand it enny longer, peches rip er no ripe. I want you to come beack

Love Sickness is the worst sickness that I ever had. I cant sleep, never eat, never nothing els but think of you all the time.

That[']s the one that gits to starting in morning, so you will have to git to St poll by 2 & 3 oclock [the] evening before. When you get your ticket, have your trunk cheked thrure to Starling, then you wont have enny bother [or have to] look afer enney thing but you selfe. You will have your ticket all rite, remember the 20 is the longes time I give you to git home.

I never can stand it enny longer, peches rip er no ripe.³² I want you to come beack then to your black lage.

You sed in yur last letter no more from you intill deth, so I say the same thing: no more from me till deth.

j.c. Boren

to M J Boren Athensville, Ill

It is 100 & six in shade now how is that for hot?

Rosco caught [bought] him a nice young mare from Chally Reese³³ for 15 dalars. Charley was hear to day [and] broat the mar. She is a doseey. I tell yu he is proud of hear. She is a sarl [sorrel, a] good mach for nelly. He has bin Rideing her all Readey. She can beat Albert mare going. Rosco got a letter from you the same day I got mene. Him & Albert has gone done to King paster [King's pasture] to take Johns mare. Then they are a going to tak a Sherm. It is giting so dark I will have to quit er lite a lamp. I gess I will lite the lamp.

Mirs Milton³⁴ seame vorry proud of having Rosco and I with her on [July] 4. She sed she promest you to take good care of me, And she did. She had a nice Dinner -- wise a nuff for a King -- all spechly. Cora and Chester King³⁵ are at home now. It 9 Oclock now. I am all a lone; the Boyes havt got back from thare swim it [yet]. This is thee way it is all

29. This was probably William L. Watson, born 1875 in Wisconsin. He was married to Rosa May Kershaw in 1895. They lived in Lyman Township. *Prairie Trails to Hi-Ways*, 381.

30. Samuel Hood was born December 1859 in Wisconsin. He was married in 1882 to Frances (b. 1857, Wisconsin). They moved to North Dakota sometime before the births of their daughter Ruth (1884) and son George (1886). They farmed in Frances Township west of Menoken Township. The colloquialism "Sam Hoods" refers to the entire family. 1900 US Census, Burleigh County, Frances Township, 155, Sheet 3.

31. The lady doctor and her son cannot be identified.

32. Athensville is located in Greene County slightly north of the heart of Illinois peach-growing region.

33. I have not been able to identify Charles (Charley) Reese.

34. See footnote 11.

35. Chester A. King was born in New York in 1841. He served as a second sergeant in the 8th New York Cavalry during the Civil War. He was married to Orpha (b. 1842, New York) and together they had six children. They moved to Bismarck in 1878 and later farmed in Sibley Township, Burleigh County. One of their daughters was named Cora (b. 1878, Dakota Territory), and one son was named Chester (b. 1873, New York). The reference to Chester and Cora may be to the younger generation of Kings. 1885 Dakota Territory Census, Burleigh County, Blaine Township, 5; Special Schedule No. 6, Soldiers of the Volunteer and Regular Army of the U.S., 1.

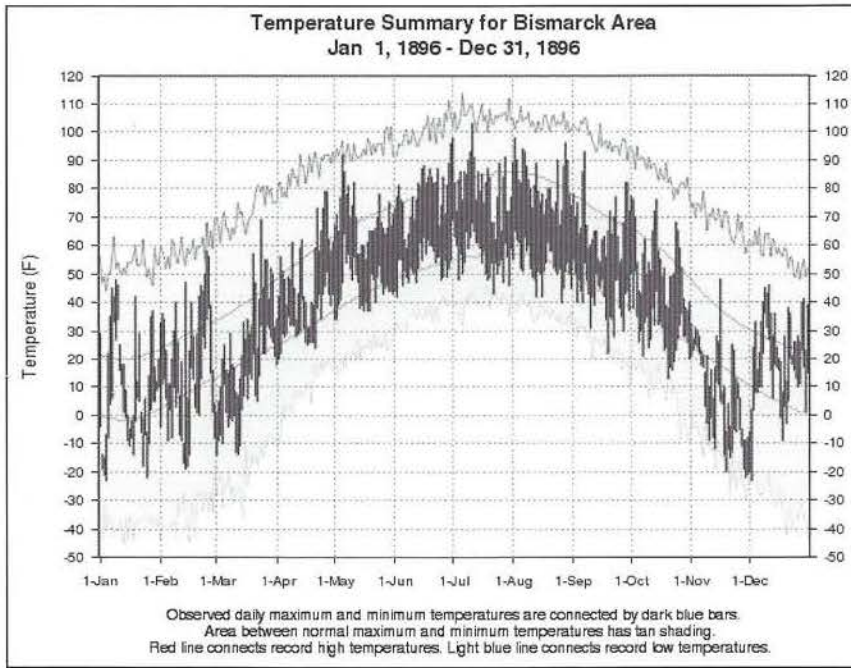


Chart of daily temperatures in Bismarck, North Dakota, for the month of July 1896. Data for this chart came from the records of the National Weather Service office that opened at Fort Hancock, in Bismarck in 1896. The chart indicates temperatures were hot, but within the normal temperature range for July.

the time, all the company I have is the Bible & meditating about where you are to night & what you are doing. Then I offer up a Supplication to god to keep you from all harme and all danger & sone to returne you to the one that Love you dearer then enney. I pray god that he will keep you from all sickness & all accidence that may befall you while you are one your visit, & all so that he will giv you a spedey returne to me for thare is no comferter that can fill your place. If you wase to die to neight & I node when you died, I wuld not want to Live till to to see the sun of another morning. I would want to die. If you wase to rite to me to tell me you wase not coming back I would not stay heare twenty fore hours.

I dont want you to laught at mee for thise thing is giting seres & I cant helpe it. If I had a nod [known how] it wuld sorry me I would per swaed you to [not] go.

Love Sickness is the worst sickness that I ever had. I cant sleep, never eat, never nothing els but think of you all the time. The last thoughts when I go to sleep and first when I wake. It seames to me all the time that [I want you to] git back. I loose you in my thoughts---how you Look---then I have to look at your pickture on the wale before I come to [my]self a gaine.

Write sone. Giv my lov to all inquiren friens & reserve a big lump for you self.

I Remaine yours as ever,
J C Boren to M J Boren
Athensvill Illinois

Albert is doing all the cooking and he is getting so tired of it that he cant hardly wash a dish.



Menoken July 14 1896 Dak

My Dear wife, come home. I am sick. I want you to come quick as you git thise letter. I want to see you so bad I cant heardely wait till you come. You dont hav enny ida how lonsum I am with out you. Wee had a big Raine last Sunday neight. It revived things up some.

Rosco is well. He wants you to come home rite a way--- he is sick to see his Mother.

Your Deare beloved husband,
John C Boren

PS Come home quick. I am sick, not abell to do enney thing.



Albert Graves to MJ Boren
Menoken N Dak July 11 96

Mr[s] J C Boren

Aas Rosco is going to write to you, I though that I would do the same. I suppose that you are enjoying yourself in Ill. I got back the fifth of June and had as good a time as could be expected for a hobo. I put in 3 week in the red river valley working on a 1300 acre farm. I liked it first rate. I, however, did not like Minesota so well as I expected though it is a nice country. I went to the Home the first thing it had changed considerable. Miss Jenison³⁶ was the only one of the persons that I news there—most of the children had left.

My Sister did not know me at first. I did not stop long in any place, so I hardly had time to enjoy my self.

I suppose you will be comming home before long. I have got to do the cooking. I wont milk and Rosco wont cook unless [I] milk, so I have go to do the cooking. Well I must close.

I Remain

Albert Graves

RC Boren to MJ Boren

My deare mother,

I tought I would write you a few lines to day to let you kow that we were awl well. Well, it is auffol hot. It is one o clock [and it] is 100 and 6 in the shad. Ever thing is burning up. If it dont rain purty soon we wont have no crop. Well, we are having a great time baching. Pa ses that if you dont come back prety soon that he will skip the the crunty. Well, i was at town show [to]day. Seen the show. It was prety good show.

Well, I guse its going [to] rost us—it is 106 in the shade. You say the girls are so thick in Ill—as [thick as] hopps. I wish you would bring one back one or two, As they are very scarce in Dak. We have got all the mustard pulled. I am glad of it. Albert is doing all the cooking and he is getting so tired of it that he cant hardly wash a dish.

From your sone

Mr R. C. Boren

Menoken July 14 1896 Dak
my dear wife come home I
am sick I want you to come
quick as you get this letter
I want to see you so bad I
cant wait hardly till you come
you dont know how I do have
consum I am with out you
wee had a big Kaine last
Sunday night it ruined
things up some
Rosco is well he wants you
to come home vite a way he is
sick to see his mother
Your Deare beloved husband
R.C. Boren
P.S. come home
not able

July 14 letter
from John
Boren to his
wife, Mary
Jane, urging
her to come
home.

My deare mother
I tought i would
write yo a few lines
to day to let you know
that we were awl
well well its
auffol hot it is one o
clock i is one 100 and 6
in the shad ever
thing is burning up
if it dont rain purty
soon we wont have
no crop well we are
having a great time
baching pa ses that
if you dont come back
prety soon that he

Undated letter

from Roscoe Boren to his mother. According to Roscoe, "We are having a great time baching."

36. I have not been able to identify Miss Jenison, or the home town of Albert Graves.