Letter from
Uriah W. Oblinger
to Mattie V. Oblinger
& Ella Oblinger
April 18, 1873

April 18, 1873   Actual 4-page letter in Uriah’s handwriting

Transcript

Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society, RG1346-S01-L104
Friday, April 18th

Dear Wife & Baby

I thought my letter finished Sunday evening. I spoke about looking for rain in that dreaming a little, but now I can tell you of one of the most terrible storms I ever witnessed. Language fails to describe so that one may know just how it seemed to one in the storm. It struck us at sunset Sunday evening with wind & rain & rained nearly all night. The wind increasing all the time. Monday morning it turned to snow (very fine article) & snow & wind increasing all the time. All though it seemed as though the wind was doing its best, the storm lasted from sunset Sunday evening till near midnight Wednesday night, making near 80 hours storm. When we would go out to try to do anything for the stock we could not see other more than from 5 to 10 ft. to be heard we had to shout at the top of our voice.
the voice on account of the wind blowing a gale. one could hardly keep his feet at all and had to dig snow about to hide whenever we made a look to feel anything in order to get to the stable door, the snow streamed through every crevice so steam was through for it just almost blinded one to get to the corn pile we had to shovel in and was showed to almost of grace almost to do any thing or get anything, mr. wells and mr. elliot excepting eddy did not get any where was going to write in with them as jon & delia are caught there too but about 1 o'clock sunday night jon & mrs. ward came and here to stay all night on monday morning mr. elliot's store smoked this out on account of the stove fire being defective and we had to bring them all up here, 2 women go down & 3 men all here, mrs. st. jule's being gone to help extras 18 miles don't head here, & left all of the things for us to lend, 2 cows & calves, 2 heifers of oxen and chickens. by hard work we saved every thing for him but 4 pigs & 4 chickens & 2 calves the third calf probably will die, the calves were in a small stable in where for us to save them anymore then we are have perished in one of his cows had a young calf right on the nest of the airen in the stable. half fully snow where there were 2 girls of oxen and another cow i gathered it up & carried that in the cellar and put it. mr. elliot's lost their horses & your horses Monday and the storm was so fearful that we could not move them down to his stable to save them till tuesday evening although not more about them since tuesday evening and concluded to venture, and while we got there we found the entrance to the house door too wide and settled with the stable door bunging full to the top and his stable door being on the north part considerably open we found 2 calves cows & 31 head of horses all proved in as the storm came from a little to the south. the stable door full from one end to the other end only to the roof except right at the door where there was just room for 2 horses to stand by being literally crowded in the rest all down, well the next thing was to get them two of the men mr. wade & elliot commenced trying to get a house door open while the rest of us went to getting horses o took an open knife and went in to 2 of the horses and cut hales came near getting them as they were nearly on
to get out an got them in the house carpet full on the
floor, then commenced digging to get the rest out around
all but one of the boards & she died in 3 hours after we got
her out one day through the roof and found her pushed
in snow laying on her side with the snow so tight
around her she could only move her head a little by
the side of the stable from about half way and dug
her more out the side as there was 20 feet of snow
between her & the door, the next morning (Wednesday) we day
Mrs. Elliott came out & she was probably live but as not
able to get up, about 10 calves that were on the stable
perished, making 4 calves to 5 year old pretty large that
perished right there at 2 stables with us. The loss of stock
has been fearful & I am afraid human life as
there were numbers of immigrants on the land though I
have heard of more yet, there was a woman about a
mile from her with 6 children whose husband was away
from home and I know she had lost little wood of any
Wednesday afternoon I concluded to make the effort to
reach her and see how they were getting along & I had
go up against the storm, just as I was starting I saw
followed at me to come back that I would get lost
and perish but I did not come back nor perish or either,
I would proceed about 3 mile then turn and
get a little breath then they it again on this way &
succeeded in reaching the house & she was mighty
glad to see me no they were out of wood and the cabin
under the snow they had been in bed for 2 days only
as she would break up something on the house to burn to
cook something for the children to eat the oldest was
only 9 years old, I dug the snow from under the snow
hunted guy way to a dug then got a couple of poles
and cut enough to do till next day then
started home again but the storm had commenced
abating so that I could by sleds see nearly 3 miles
on the way back & I got a dinner chicken two pork
were as wey he could not go very fast & threw the snow
after him (I had taken one with me) and knocked
it over yesterday was beautiful & today also the snow
has been light and the snow banks. once the prairie is bare already
and good beginning. Barn lost this past Monday &
my 38 month old one. he started near out
over the prairie for Kansas, Storm seems some little
encouraged since awaiting the storm but there is no
news of that for it is the most terrible storm ever
witnessed here and may never occur again.
What made the storm so destructive to the life of stock was the time of year that it occurred. The staples or a great many of them have nothing but hay for food with little thrown on to hold them down and they had considerably blown to pieces and people thought there was no use to try them as summer was just here. I heard of one man had 20 head and another 60 head of cattle go off in the storm and 4 were found but few got and they were dead. Another had 16 and pushed in one hole and stock was turned loose to shift for themselves. They would just go with the storm.

Now then don’t get discouraged, discouraged because we have had a terrible storm here for I am not one thing about the storm it was not cold at any time only 75 or 80 degrees and it was only one out Tuesday a little while that it was cold enough to freeze between the 6 and 8 o’clock. There is 3 snow banks caused by the wind some and it is only some 5 or 8 feet distance and got the well all up on my house and the fences on and there is some we know on it but not many as bad as I expected as the doors were thin 8 windows it had a draft which strong and consequently kept muddy snow which was around the house heap about 1 foot at all round entirely clear of snow but outside of that and about my good pile it is from 3 to 5 feet deep but is solid and can be run over anywhere. Oh yes the Sheriff has just served notice on Giles to appear the 14th of next month as a guarantor this all about the storm till I see you when I hope will not be long. I wish you can read it I am certainly mixed up fighting the storm to save livestock that seem hardly worth. I wrote a letter to male neighbors Sunday evening and one to you brother and some now will not write them anything about the storm but you can send this sheet to them if you wish for the benefit of him & George you can tell the folks they never seen a storm in the last 10 years.

Love to all.

E. W. Zinger
Letter from Uriah Oblinger to Mattie V. Oblinger & Ella Oblinger, April 18, 1873  
(Edited slightly for grammar & sense)

Bachelors Hall Neb Fillmore Co  
Friday Apr’ 18th  
Dear Wife & Baby

I thought my letter finished Sunday evening. I spoke about looking for rain in that & raining a little, but now I can tell you of one of the most terrible storms I ever witnessed. Language fails to describe so that one may know just how it seemed to one in the storm.

It struck us at sunset Sunday evening with wind & rain & rained nearly all night, the wind increasing all the time. Monday morning it turned to snow (very fine article) & snow & wind increasing all the time all though it seemed as though the wind was doing it best. The storm lasted from sunset Sunday evening till near midnight Wednesday night making near 80 hours storm. When we would go out to try to do anything for the stock we could not see other more than from 5 to 10 ft & to be heard we had to shout at the top of the voice on account of the wind blowing such a gale. One could hardly keep his feet at all. We had to dig snow about 1/2 hour whenever we undertook to feed anything in order to get to the stable door.

The snow streamed through every crevice. I say streamed through, for it just almost blinded one to get to the corn pile. We had to shovel in short it was shovel to utmost of ones strength to do anything or get anything. Mr. Wards were at Mr. Elliot's visiting and did not get home. & Sam was going to ride home with them. So him & Giles were caught there to but about 9 o’clock Sunday night. Giles & Sam & Mr. Ward came up here to stay all night on Monday morning Mr. Elliotts stove smoked them out on account of the stove pipe being defective. And we had to bring them all up here, 2 women 4 children & 5 men all here. Mr DeWolfs being gone to his wives sisters 18 miles southeast of here, & left all of his things for us to tend, 2 cows 5 calves hogs & yoke of oxen and chickens. By hard work we saved every thing for him but 4 pigs 1 chicken & 2 calves the third calf probably will die. The calves were in a small stable very open where for us to have tried any more, than we would have perished us. One of his cows had a young calf right in the midst of the storm in the stable half full of snow where there were 2 yoke of oxen and another cow & I gathered it up & carried that in the cellar and saved it.

Mr Elliotts fed their horses & Mr. Ward's Monday morn and the storm was so fearful that we could not venture down to his stable to see after them till Tuesday evening although not more than 80 rd Tuesday evening we concluded to venture. And when we got there we found the entrance to the house door banked full to the top. And his stable door being in the north and considerably open we found 2 calves 1 cow & six head of horses all snowed in as the storm came from a little west of North. the stable full from one end to the other entirely to the roof except right at the door where there was just room for 2 horses to stand by being literally crammed together the rest all down, Well the next thing was to get them out. Two of the men, Mr. Ward & Ellott, commenced digging to get the house door open while the rest of us went to getting horses out. I took an open knife and went in to 2 of the horses and cut the halters & came near getting under as they were nearly crazy to get out. We got them in the house carpet & all on the floor. then commenced digging to get the rest out. We saved all but one of Mr. Wards & she died in 1/2 hour after we got her out. We dug through the roof and found her packed in snow laying on her side with the snow so tight around her she could only move her head a little. We dug the side of the stable down about half way and dragged the mare over the side as there was 20 feet of snow between her & the door.

The next morning (Wednesday) we dug Mr. Elliott's cow out. She will probably live but is not able to get up yet. But 2 calves that were in the stable perished making 4 calves, one 5-year-old
mare & 4 pigs that perished right here at 2 stables with us. The loss of stock has been fearful and, I am afraid, human life, as there were numbers of emigrants on the road though I have heard of none yet. There was a woman about a mile from here with 4 children whose husband was away from home and I knew she had but little wood, if any. So Wednesday afternoon I concluded to make the effort to reach her and see how they were getting along & I had to go right against the storm. Just as I was starting Sam hollowed at me to come back that I would get lost and perish, but I did not come back nor perish either. I would proceed about 5 rods, then turn and get a little breath, then try it again. In this way I succeeded in reaching the house & she was mighty glad to see me as they were out of wood and the ax buried under the snow. They had been in bed for 2 days only as she would break up something in the house to burn & cook something for the children to eat. The oldest was only 7 years old. I dug the ax from under the snow, hunted my way to a pig pen, got a couple of poles and cut wood enough to do till next day. Then I started home again, but the storm had commenced abating so that I could, by spells, see nearly 1/2 mile. On the way back I got a prairie chicken. His feathers were so icy he could not go very fast & I threw the shovel after him (I had taken one with me) and knocked it over.

Yesterday was beautiful & today also. The snow by night will be all gone except in the ravines and the snow banks. Over 1/2 the prairie is bare already and good walking. Sam lost his hat Monday morning so I willed him my old one. His started near cut over the prairies for Kansas. Sam seems some little discouraged since witnessing the storm but there is no use of that for it is the most terrible storm ever witnessed here and may never occur again.

What made the storm so destructive to the life of stock was the time of year that it occurred. The stables, or a great many of them, have nothing but hay for roof with poles thrown on to hold them down. And they had considerably blown to pieces and people thought there was no use to fix them as summer was just here. I heard of one man had 30 head and another 60 head of cattle go off in the storm and has not found but few yet and they were dead. Another had 15 head perish in one pile when stock was turned loose to shift for themselves. They would just go with the storm.

Now Ma don't get discouraged because we have had a terrible storm here, for I am not. One thing about the storm, it was not cold at any time only just enough to snow and very damp at that and fine. Only one on Tuesday a little while that it was cold enough to freeze. Between here & Giles stable there is 3 snow banks caused by the wood piles and pig pen and it is only some 5 or 6 rd distant. I had got the wall all up on my house and the rafters on and there is some snow in it but not near as bad as I expected as the door was open & window it had a draft clear through and consequently kept nearly clear. The whirl around the house kept about 15 ft space all round entirely clear of snow. But outside of that and about my wood pile it is from 3 to 5 ft deep but is solid and can be run over anywhere. One would be wet in a little in the storm. (Oh yes the Sheriff has just served notice on Giles to appear the 14th of Next moth as a jurymen. This all about the storm till I see you, which I hope will not be long. This is poor writing for me, but I guess you can read it. I am considerably used up fighting the storm to save stock, so that I can hardly write. I wrote a letter to Uncle Wheelers Sunday evening and one to you. Both are by me now. I will not write them anything about the storm but you can send this sheet to them if you wish for the benefit of him & George. You can tell the folks they never seen a storm in Indiana, only playthings.

Love to all Uriah W Oblinger

Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society, RG1346-S01-L104