

MY NAME IS NIBTHACKA

A HISTORY OF NEBRASKA IN RHYME

BY

LOUISE UDEN WITZENBURG

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INTRODUCTION

THREE GENTS VISIT NIBTHACKA

I thought I'd write my memoirs
about my history,
and tell you things about my life
and how I came to be.

Some years ago, a group of men
stopped by to get permission
to look for stones and dig for bones
while on an expedition.

They said that they could tell my age
by digging in my ground,
and when they finished, they'd return
to tell me what they found.

A woman living by herself
just can't be too careful.
I told the gents I'd have to see
their bona fide credentials.

They whipped out legal documents
which proved they'd been commissioned
by someone called a Governor
who'd authorized their mission.

I told those gents to go ahead
for I had long suspicioned
I might be older than I thought---
I sure was no Spring chicken.

Well, I suppose you ought to know
that my name is "Nibthacka",
which means "flat water" in Osage.
In English, it's "Nebraska".

I gave them tons of specimens
from all across my land---
water, fossils, silt and loess,
gravel, rocks and sand.

As years rolled by and seasons changed,
I lost all track of them.
Well, I'll confess I clean forgot
about that group of men.

When they returned the other day,
I surely was surprised.
I said to them, I thought you'd died.
I can't believe my eyes.

They said, Hi, Miss Nibthacka.
We'd like to hang around
and tell you how you came to be
and what it was we found.

For instance, Miss Nibthacka,
we can show you proof
you've been around since Earth was born,
and that's the Gospel truth!

And, furthermore, the pyramids
are babes compared to you.
They've just not been here all that long.
In fact, they're almost new.

Now this is gist of what we found
in layers of your earth.
We'll start right off by telling you
something of your birth.

We found that from the dawn of time
you were Cretaceous Sea,
wreathed and swirling in warm mists,
born in antiquity.

Your clime was almost tropical
and plants grew tall as trees,
but there were no shrubs or grass
or anything that breathed.

On your east were glaciers
where ice was thickly packed
with boulders, fine crushed rock and sand
inside its frozen mass.

Then two million years ago,
the ice began to slip,
and almost imperceptibly
it slowly lost its grip.

When the ice buckled and convulsed,
its heaving caused wide cracks
wherein lay sand and gravel
picked up along its path.

The melt began with one small drop
that trickled down your chin.
As melt continued, water gushed
and flooded everything.

The water got so deep that it
rose up in walls like sheets,
and then it made a headlong dash
out past the glacier's feet.

It dammed some rivers which flowed east,
made gulches and ravines,
gouged out valleys, leveled hills,
and cut the beds for streams.

Nibthacka, there were four more times
the glaciers came again,
and when they moved and melted,
they altered your terrain.

When the Age of Glaciers ended,
your mantlerock was formed.
That's just a fancy word for stuff
from which your soil was born.

In eras between glaciers,
the desert winds brought loess
that covered up your mantlerock
with rich, grey-yellow dust.

Then for umpteen thousand years,
it rained most of the time.
This left you with a lot of ponds
and caused a cooler clime.

Some of those ponds had crocodiles,
but when the climate cooled,
they up and died and disappeared
from all those shallow pools.

It seems that all that water,
because of its great weight,
flattened your topography,
and rearranged your face.

We've noticed, Miss Nibthacka,
that you've yawned a time or two.
We'll go bed down inside your barn,
and say Good Night to you.

I said, Now that you mention it,
it's been a real long day.
I do believe I'm plumb pooped out.
I'm gonna hit the hay.

Good morning, gents. It's half past six.
Land sakes, you've overslept.
Shake a leg, and come on in.
I've got the table set.

I've fixed some pancakes and fried eggs,
taters, bacon, ham,
and there are berries freshly picked
and several kinds of jam.

The last time I had company
was when the threshers came.
You know, it does my old heart good
to cook for men again.

And gents, it's only gonna take
one shake of a lamb's tail
to finish up my morning chores.
Then we can sit a spell.

I redded-up the kitchen
and fed Old Blue, my dog,
put scraps out for my pussy cats,
and also slopped the hogs.

When I returned, I found the men
waiting patiently.
I told them I could hardly wait
to hear more history.

The gents said, You'll just not believe
what has been discovered
about the Age of Mammals
from fossils we uncovered.

Now, you'll recall when you were sea,
it left salt lakes behind,
but the water was undrinkable
for it was filled with brine.

But when the Rocky Mountains rose,
the salt was then replaced
by fresh water which poured down
from off the mountain's face.

With fresh water in your lakes,
the animals then came---
warm blooded beasts called mammals---
weird critters with strange names.

You had what's called Titanotheres
that stood up fourteen feet.
They had flat horns like shovels
and were heavy-bodied beasts.

Now at this time there was no grass,
just plants as tall as trees.
Titanotheres, for all their size,
browsed only on green leaves.

You had some beasts called Oreodonts
that looked a lot like pigs.
They, too, ate plants, and had long snouts
so they could root and dig.

Also, at this point in time,
in case you didn't know,
were horses, smaller than a sheep,
and they all had three toes.

I said, Just one darn minute.
I scarcely can believe
you found a horse that had three toes.
You must be joshing me!

The gents said, Oh, it's true enough.
We cross our hearts and swear.
What's more, we found a beaver
as large as a black bear.

I said, Well, laws, don't that beat all.
A giant beaver, too.
But, gents, since beaver's kin to rats,
please say it isn't true.

The men all laughed but they declared,
That beaver is no spoof.
We've strung its bones together
so we have actual proof.

I said, Well, gents, if that's the case,
I suppose you'll tell me next
you found a gopher that had horns.
The men said, How'd you guess?

We found the fossils of a pig
that stood at least six feet,
and bearlike dogs and tigers, too,
With long, sharp saber teeth.

And we were very much surprised
to find some musk-ox bones.
Heretofore, they'd just been found
up in the Artic Zone.

In the Age of Mammals,
the biggest beasts around
were mammoths, and we're pleased to say
you were their stomping ground.

There were giraffes and camels
and the moropus
which was a shambling beast with claws
related to the horse.

A mastodon with shovel tusks
was unearthed in your ground
and in China, of all places,
the same kind of bones were found.

It's still a mystery today
for man's failed to uncover
how it made its way between
one continent to other.

The whole thing in a nutshell
and why this made the news
is that China's on the other side
of the world from you.

I said, Excuse me, gentlemen.
I have to milk the cows
and then I'm going to take a nap.
I've heard enough for now.

I bet you gents are tired, too.
Why don't you take a snooze.
I'll show you to the guest room
where I've made up beds for you.

I might not sleep a wink at all,
most likely I'll just doze.
I surely hope that I won't dream
of horses with three toes.

The gents were nowhere to be seen
when I awoke at Four.
I started supper, let Blue out,
and hustled through my chores.

And then I went and woke the men.
Hey, gents, it's after Five.
I cooked steaks for our supper
and made an apple pie.

There's wine I made from rhubarb
and bread made from my wheat,
sweet corn with butter freshly churned.
Let's all sit down and eat.

When we were done, I said to them
Gents, I will be right back
It's time for me to feed Old Blue
and all my pussy cats.

The men replied, You take your time.
We're going for a walk.
We need to stretch our legs a bit
before we have our talk.

When they returned, the men told me
that they had families,
and thought they'd better head for home
tomorrow around Three.

With that in mind, Nibthacka,
we thought you'd like to hear
some recent things about yourself
and how you now appear.

You're part of a great nation
we call the U.S.A.,
and every year on July Fourth,
we celebrate its birthday.

Within this nation, you're a State
that's named for you, Nibthacka,
but white men didn't say it right,
so it came out Nebraska.

I smiled and said, You mean to say
they named it after me?
Why, Landagoshen, gentlemen.
I surely am right pleased.

The gents said, You are one big gal,
but that's a compliment.
We surely mean no disrespect
for you're magnificent!

We measured you in square miles---
you rank fifteenth in size---
with seventy-seven thousand
three hundred fifty-five.

Your surface mainly slopes southwest
with altitudes which vary.
Out west, you are five thousand feet
as you rise up from the prairie.

You mostly lie in the Great Plains,
and geographically
you're only just a little north
of the center of your country.

About half of you is made up
of dissected plains.
That's all the junk the glaciers left
in places called "moraines".

The rest is higher bedrock plains,
and this is where you grow
wheat and hay and sugar beets
and very nice potatoes.

The Sandhills in your western part
is one-fourth of your land.
Within the Western Hemisphere,
there's no place with more sand.

We brought along this map so you
can see just where you are.
There's Lincoln - that's your capital -
shown by that small red star.

You see this river on your east?
It's your only boundary
that's natural - not made by man -
its name is the Missouri.

You see these clocks up at the top?
If you'll follow that black line,
you'll see you have both Mountain
and Central Standard Time.

Your nickname is "Cornhusker"
and there's a common thread
that binds your State together---
it is called "Big Red".

"Big Red" is your football team
and when it plays a game,
there's folks who'll come five hundred miles
in their private planes.

We've just heard that "Cornhusker"
was chosen out of many
to be defined in "Webster's New
Collegiate Dictionary".

You know, Nibthacka, you edged out
many definitions.
The Mutant Ninja Turtles
were in the competition.

To have your nickname in that book
is really quite a coup.
it means you're known throughout the world.
We sure are proud of you.

I said, I hope you gentlemen
will not think me rude,
but how's this for some turtle talk -
"Cowabunga, dudes".

My sense of humor's kinda weird.
This really makes my day.
I've just been waiting for the chance
to use that silly phrase.

The gents said, Miss Nibthacka,
you really are a dilly.
There's no need to apologize.
We love it when you're silly.

Then gents said, Our next topic
will be about your weather.
Your Springs and Falls are wonderful.
No State has any better.

You're rather unpredictable
with sudden storms and such.
In Summer, you throw lightning bolts
and really whoop it up.

Though your mean annual temperature
is forty eight point seven,
in Winter, you're an icebox
and in Summer you're an oven.

I told the gents, My folks don't seem
to mind the heat or cold.
They say it keeps their blood stirred up.
That's why they get so old.

Oh, they are a hardy lot
for they were pioneers.
They're tough as an old leather boot
and live for years and years.

I've sure enjoyed our chat tonight
but gents, let's call it quits.
I haven't talked so much in years.
In fact, I'm out of spit!

I'll see you in the morning.
I'll just turn off the light.
Goodnight. I hope you all sleep tight.
Don't let the bedbugs bite!

I dressed and did my morning chores
and then I woke the men.
Hey, sleepy heads, get out of bed.
It's going on towards Ten.

And since it is already late,
I've fixed you a nice brunch
which includes the vittles
for breakfast and for lunch.

I've fried a mess of catfish
and made a chocolate cake.
There's scrambled eggs and sausages
and muffins freshly baked.

The men said, You are one swell cook.
That brunch was just delicious.
It seems the least that we can do
is wash and dry the dishes.

I said, While you are doing that,
I'll just feed Old Blue.
I'll take the scraps for him and cats
since they like catfish, too.

When I returned, the men declared
We're ready to begin.
Today, we'll skip around a bit
and speak of many things.

You've got limestone, soil and sand,
gravel, clay and chalk,
natural gas, and forests,
and also lots of salt.

When your State was two years old
in Eighteen sixty-nine,
it authorized a royalty
on salt that was refined.

Your businessmen had visions,
since salt was then so rare,
that two cents on each bushel
would make them millionaires.

And they had the audacity
to make the proposition
to move your nation's capitol
to Kearney or to Lincoln.

Congress laughed real hard at that
but it said, No, sirree.
We'll just leave it where it is
in Washington, D.C.

A man named Sterling Morton
made a fortune from your salt,
and it's still sold in grocery stores
in a round, blue box.

I told the gents, I buy that salt
when I go to the store.
It lives up to its motto:
"When it rains, it pours".

You know, gents, Mr. Morton lived
down in Nebraska City.
He called his place The Arbor Lodge
and it was downright pretty.

Of course, you know that Arbor Day
was started here on me.
I celebrate that date each year
by planting a new tree.

The gents said, Our next topic
is all about your trees,
flowers, fish and critters
found upon your prairie.

You're a hunter's paradise
with coyotes, antelope,
rabbits, coons and squirrels,
deer and mountain goats.

Common to your State throughout
are porcupines and badgers,
prairie dogs and woodrats
and the Prairie rattlers.

The prairie dog's a rodent
and not a dog at all.
It probably got that name because
of its bark like call.

You're full of prairie chickens,
pheasants and curlews,
wild turkeys, plovers, partridges---
just to name a few.

You've got more than three thousand lakes
with crappies, perch and bass.
Your streams have trout, and many creeks
have bullheads and big cats.

The tourists say your Pine Ridge
comes as a great surprise
when out of nowhere - so it seems -
white cliffs reach to the sky.

There are canyons and ravines,
and it is here you'll find
red cedar, birch and white spruce trees
and western yellow pine.

The Badlands start in your northwest
but it's a hostile place
where nature's unforgiving
of even small mistakes.

The land is useless, filled with rocks,
plus it's so hot and dry
that only varmints, snakes and birds
are able to survive.

Growing wild throughout your State
are larkspurs, phlox and mallows,
spiderworts and columbines,
poppies and sunflowers.

Goldenrod is your State flower
but, unfortunately,
some find its pollen stuffs them up
and makes them cough and sneeze.

The Meadowlark is your State bird.
You've hawks and wrens and doves,
robins, sparrows, orioles,
swallows, crows and gulls.

Some of your trees are Osage orange,
walnut, elm, hackberry,
boxelder, ash and cottonwood,
wild plum and the chokecherry.

Settlers planted Osage orange
as windbreaks for their fields,
and used its wood for railroad ties,
gunstocks and wagon wheels.

No city in the U.S.A. -
we're proud of you, Nibthacka -
has more trees per acre
than Omaha, Nebraska.

Your population's pretty close
to one-and-a-half million.
Most live in Omaha, G.I,
Hastings or in Lincoln.

There are hundreds of small towns
and thousands of church spires,
windmills, silos and red barns
and fences of barbed wire.

People flock to racetracks
and to the rodeos.
They love their quarter-horses,
thoroughbreds and broncos.

Your State has lots of industry
with farming your mainstay,
and for those who like such things,
there's opera and ballet.

I told the gents I used to dance -
I was a sight to see -
I jitterbugged and cut a rug -
but that's past history.

Since I've got some Indian blood,
I bet you gents all thought
I danced upon the plains for rain,
but I liked bop-de-bop.

The men said, Miss Nibthacka,
it's obvious to us
we don't know all your secrets.
You're quite mysterious.

For instance, not so long ago,
we found some Indian mounds.
In many ways, we've barely scratched
the surface of your ground.

You've Indian reservations
in the northeast part of you
for Winnebagos, Omahas,
and the Santee Sioux.

You've no impressive ruins
or monuments as such.
Still, many know of Chimney Rock,
the Badlands, and Scotts Bluff.

And then, of course, there's Boys Town
which back in Nineteen Eighty
opened its doors to homeless girls
and gave them sanctuary.

You probably know, Nibthacka,
since it was in the paper,
that Boys Town has already had
a female for its Mayor.

Some noted people from your State
are Brando, Johnny Carson,
General Pershing, Gerald Ford
and Father Flanagan.

We thank you, Miss Nibthacka,
for your hospitality.
You're the hostest with the mostest.
On that, we all agree.

Before we go, we want to ask
what one thing would you choose
as the most interesting
from all that we've told you?

They thought she'd mull it over,
but without hesitating
she said, I think that three-toed horse
was purely fascinating.

I don't know how to thank you gents
for paying me this visit.
Old Blue and I want you to know
we've enjoyed every minute.

As they drove off, she heard them shout:
We love you, Miss Nibthacka
So long, Old Blue, we'll see you soon.
There's no place like Nebraska.

NIBTHACKA READS HER DIARIES

Nibthacka said, Look here, Old Blue,
I've found my diary.
It starts when I was just a kid
in the Sixteenth Century.

Whenever I had visitors,
I'd make a note of it.
I'd write the date and who they were
and why they'd come to visit.

Men in search of different dreams
all came across my plains -
explorers, trappers, Mormons,
and folks from wagon trains.

Indian chiefs and drovers,
"soiled doves" and pioneers,
BIBLE thumpers, dancehall girls,
and U-P engineers.

Some who came were emigrants
from lands across the sea -
Bohemia and Norway,
Sweden and Germany.

Indians knows as Omahas,
Otoes and Pawnees
were just the first of many men
who'd set their feet on me.

Long before the Pilgrims sailed
to reach the New Worlds shore,
I met a group of Spanish men
known as "conquistadors".

A cavalcade of thirty men
came up from Mexico.
Their leader was a right nice gent -
Francisco Coronado.

The year was Fifteen forty-one.
I wrote it down real clear.
It's important. That was when
the first white men came here.

Coronado said they'd come
upon a two-fold mission:
to find Quivira and its gold
and convert heathen Indians.

He told me that "Quivira" meant
"the land yet to be found",
and Spanish legend had it placed
somewhere on my ground.

I told him I had always lived
right here upon these plains,
but I was sure I'd never heard
of a city with that name.

He looked so disappointed,
I wish I could have said,
Just take a left at that old tree
and then go straight ahead.

I see I wrote a P.S. here
which says he then proclaimed
that when he placed his flag on me
that I belonged to Spain.

The next date in my diary
is Sixteen ought and one.
Why mercy me, that's sixty years
since anyone had come.

A Don Juan de Oñate
came up from Mexico.
He said he'd found Quivira
but failed to find the gold.

I skip another sixty years
to Sixteen sixty-two.
That's when another Spanish gent
stopped to say "Howdy do".

His name was grandest one of all -
It had nine syllables -
Don Diego de Penalosa -
Wow! Ain't that a mouthful!

He claimed he'd found Quivira
and smoked the pipe of peace
when he had held a powwow
with all the city's chiefs.

You remember those three gents
who paid us that nice visit?
I'm sure that if I'd had some gold
they would have mentioned it.

Old Blue, in Sixteen-thirty-four,
in place known as "Mesconsin",
Frenchmen trapped and traded furs
in what is now Wisconsin.

Those trappers mainly stayed up north,
by then in Seventy-three,
some French guys came exploring
and they got close to me.

The leader of this band of men
was Louis Joliet,
and with him was a Catholic priest,
Father Jacques Marquette.

They came down the Mesconsin
to the mouth of Arkansa
and saw where Pekitanoui
met the Mississippi.

They wrote those rivers' names in French
but it was clear to me
they were Wisconsin, Arkansas,
and my own Missouri.

They made a map - the best so far -
which even showed the names
of "Pani", "Maha", "Oto"
as tribes upon my plains.

Their map showed the Missouri
and the Mississippi
with latitudes and longitudes
and all their tributaries.

Old Blue, that might not sound like much,
but what it did, you see,
was show me where folks could float their boats
so they could visit me.

I never met those Frenchmen
but they spoke with some braves.
I heard this from a Maha chief
who filled me in one day.

I thought I better write it down
because that chief told me
those guys ran up their country's flag
on one of my own trees.

He said they all saluted it
and did a little dance,
shot off their guns, and yelled real loud,
"We claim this land for France".

He said the man called Joliet
had used a magic glass
to look at me, but he declared,
There's nothing here but grass.

Old Blue, I can admit to you
it hurt my vanity
when those Frenchmen told their king
they weren't impressed with me.

Why I was downright beautiful.
My grass was like a sea.
It reached the belly of a horse
and rippled in the breeze.

In Eighty-two in name of France,
Sieur de la Salle laid claim
to the Mississippi River
and all land where it drained.

Old Blue, you've been real patient.
The time has just flown by
Let's call it quits, and get some chow,
and grab a little shut-eye.

Nibthacka rose at crack of dawn
and finished up her chores,
then called to Blue, Hey, dawg, come here.
I'm going to read some more.

Old Blue wagged his tail real hard
and plopped right at her feet.
He laid his head upon his paws
and promptly fell asleep.

Nibthacka said, Today I'll read
about activities
that took place upon my face
in the Eighteenth Century.

There was hardly anyone
who came to visit me.
That's because those French reports
were all so negative.

I always thought that Joliet
was one to blame for that
when he wrote in his diary,
"There's nothing there but grass".

He made me feel inferior
when he was not impressed
with rockfree earth and fertile soil
In fact, I was depressed.

When Joliet "poo-pooed" my grass,
he made a big mistake,
because where livestock is concerned,
I'm now a leading State.

I've never been a braggart,
but I'll say this for me:
My name could well be synonym
for "fertility".

My country's very proud of me
for bumper crops I grow
of alfalfa, wheat and corn,
barley, oats and milo.

And I'm not bad at soybeans,
sorghum or potatoes.
I even grow nice vegetables
like cabbage and tomatoes.

You know, Old Blue, it's done me good
to get this off my chest.
I've never mentioned this before
for fear I'd sound immodest.

Now, you'll recall the Spanish
had claimed me for their king,
and after that those guys from France
did the same darned thing.

That means each country had its flag
planted on my earth.
Well, anyone with half a brain
knows that just won't work.

In Seventeen and twenty,
I had some visitors
when Spanish expedition came
led by de Villasur.

They marched here from New Mexico
from town called Santa Fe,
and followed route Valverde used
when he'd come out this way.

That afternoon de Villasur
and I had a nice chat.
His first name was Pedro.
He said to call him that.

His king was quite upset because
the French persistently
were in their zone and stirring up
the tribes of the Pawnee.

He said that he intended
to meet with my Pawnees
who lived where two large rivers met
somewhere on my prairie.

He called the rivers "Rios",
and when he showed me map
I recognized both of the forks
of my River Platte.

He asked if I could tell him
what lay ahead of them.
He wondered just how far each day
he could march his men.

I told him that those rivers
were still a long way off,
and that the sun would sap their strength
since it was so blamed hot

I told him this was time of year
when sudden storms arose,
that lightning could set grass afire,
and there might be tornadoes.

I warned him about rattlesnakes
whose venom could cause death.
I told him, "Keep your eyes peeled sharp
and watch out where you step".

Pedro told me they'd come back -
most likely in the Fall -
and if it'd be O.K. with me,
he'd pay another call.

I watched for Pedro all that Fall
and then when Winter came,
I figured he'd holed up somewhere
till Spring come round again.

An Otoe brave stopped in the Spring
and told me Pedro died
Oh, lawsy, Blue, I felt so bad
that I broke down and cried.

He said the Spaniards camped across
the Platte from the Pawnees,
but overtures that Pedro made
had not been well received.

The Pawnees sneaked up on the camp
of Pedro's cavalcade.
'twas dawn and they were sound asleep
when the attack was made.

He said that Pedro was unarmed
when Pawnees did him in.
That he was like a sitting duck
and never knew what hit him.

The crowning blow was when I heard
that France made peace with Spain
shortly before that massacre
took place upon my plains.

In Seventeen and thirty-nine,
French traders came my way.
They told me they were brothers -
Paul and Pierre Mallet.

They said they'd come from New Orleans
and that they'd spent the winter
with Missouris near the mouth
of the Niobrara River.

When summer came, they turned southwest
heading for Santa Fe,
and come to north fork of the Platte
at end of their fourth day.

They said the river had two forks -
that one was further south -
and where they met and became one,
the valley broadened out.

They could only speculate
about its length and width.
They'd tramped the valley twelve whole days
and not seen all of it.

They told me that the River Platte
was mainstream of my land,
that it flowed from West to East
and that its bed was sand.

Word "Platte" means "shallow water",
and, by gum, that's true.
Why sometimes it ain't deep enough
to even float canoes.

Tourists who don't know the Platte
are often quite surprised
to find that in the summertime
the river bed is dry.

It's not like in the olden days
when crops died due to drought.
Now farmers tap into the Platte
and pump the water out.

Blue, they've got a name for that,
it's called "irrigation",
and more than once it's proved to be
drought-stricken crop's salvation.

Farming is big business
and my main industry.
Mechanized, computerized,
high tech to Nth degree.

Today, my farmers have to be
plumbers, electricians,
engineers and financiers,
mechanics and technicians.

A late date in that century
which relates to me
was end of French and Indian War
in Seventeen sixty-three.

No battles of that war were fought
anywhere near me.
That happened way up north somewhere
in England's colonies.

Well, anyway, France lost that war
to England and to Spain
and had to give up all its land
where the Mississippi drained.

The land west of that river
now belonged to Spain.
My ground was there, so flag of Spain
flew over me again.

England got the eastern half,
except for just one thing.
France kept its port at river's mouth
in place called New Orleans.

Soon after that the war ended,
England's colonies
got real upset because their king
imposed a tax on tea.

They flipped their wigs – that's what they did –
they just went bonkers, Blue.
In despair, they pulled their hair,
and cried, What shall we do?

In essence, what they told the king
was "Go sit on a tack.
We'll fight – if need be, we will die –
but we'll not pay that tax".

In Seventeen and seventy-six
on the fourth day of July,
they proclaimed independence
and spit in their king's eye.

Old Blue, that king sent in his troops
but that was no solution.
The colonists got out their guns
to start a revolution.

That was^R went on till Eighty – three –
a most important date.
That's when those colonies became
the United States.

The countries signed a treaty
which fixed west boundary
of that new Republic
on the Mississippi.

So now Louisiana,
the land wherein I lay,
became a neighbor, so to speak,
of the U.S.A.

I may as well go on a bit
to the next century,
and tell you how the U.S.A.
got ahold of me.

Napoleon Bonaparte ruled France -
he was their "top banana",
and he demanded Spain give back
all of Louisiana.

Spain had lost its power -
I can't remember why -
but, anyway, it couldn't do
nothing but comply.

France kept that territory
till Eighteen ought and three.
That's when it asked the U.S.A.
if it would purchase me.

When France sold Louisiana
to the U.S.A.,
eight hundred thirty thousand
square miles were bought that day.

Just Fifteen Million Bucks were paid,
at that it was a steal -
it meant each acre cost three cents.
Oh, lordy, what a deal!

I never will forget the day
when men in Washington
signed the papers which made me
a U.S. citizen.

Old Blue, if France had kept me,
I'd not be "Miss Nibthacka".
It would have changed both of our lives
if I'd not been Nebraska.

Right off, they would have changed our names –
I'd probably be "Mamselle",
and, like as not, you'd be "Pierre"
and wear a little bell.

I'm glad I'm an American –
just call me "Yankee Doodle".
Old Blue, you ought to be glad, too.
you might have been a poodle.

I've finished with this diary.
Let's have some lunch, Old Blue,
and then we'll watch our favorite soap,
"The Edge of Night" at Two.

Old Blue, the Nineteenth Century
was absolutely grand.
I just had tons of visitors
who came across my land.

You will recall that I'd become
part of the U.S.A.
I told you how that came about
just the other day.

It seems my new republic
had only a faint notion
of what was in the land that it
had purchased from Napoleon.

So Jefferson asked Congress
to give him its permission
to explore the land out west
and send an expedition.

Meriwether Lewis
was Captain of the band,
and he, in turn, picked William Clark
as second in command.

The first thing they were told to do
was go up the Missouri
and then prepare a detailed map
which showed its tributaries.

When they had crossed the Rockies,
they were told to keep on going
straight on West until they came
to the Pacific Ocean.

Jefferson told Lewis
it was Congress's intent
to find the rivers men could use
to cross the continent.

It's said the President opined
that maybe there would be
some prehistoric critters
still roaming round on me.

Old Blue, I bet if they had seen
beavers large as bears
or that horse that had three toes,
it would have curled their hair.

The President told Lewis
that on his expedition
they would be ambassadors
when they powwowed with the Indians.

He said, You tell the red men
their Old fathers are now gone,
and their new Chief is Jefferson
who lives in Washington.

Smoke the pipe of peace with them
and give them presents, too
I've heard that Indians like bright beads,
cloth, and white man's booze.

Before the journey started,
Lewis received lessons
from astronomers and botanists,
surveyors and physicians.

He took a course so he could make
celestial observations
because he'd use the stars and moon
and sun for navigation.

An eminent physician
taught him simple things.
You know - like how to lance a boil
and give some medicines.

He got together what they'd need
while on the expedition:
rifles, flints and tomahawks,
dried soup, and ammunition.

He bought huge bales of presents---
mirrors, scissors, bells,
scalping knives and brooches,
and calico as well.

It almost took a year, Old Blue,
to get this all set up,
and find unmarried men who were
real healthy and robust.

If I'd been holding interviews,
I would have said right off,
I hope you got good feet, young man.
you're in for a long walk.

You know, they went eight thousand miles,
and you can bet, Old Blue,
they had sore feet and probably got
big corns and bunions, too.

In Eighteen hundred ought and four
on the fourteenth day of May,
Jefferson's Discovery Corps
as last got underway.

At four o'clock that afternoon,
the fleet pulled out from pier---
two pirogues and one keelboat
were crammed with men and gear.

The keelboat named "Discovery"
was fifty-five feet long
and it got mighty crowded
when thirty-six got on.

Six soldiers rode in one pirogue,
the other held ten Frenchmen
who'd been engaged to carry stores
and repel hostile Indians.

Clark came aboard at Louisville
with York, his Negro slave.
you'll hear about him off and on
further down the way.

And Captain Lewis brought his dog.
He was a huge, black beast---
a Newfoundland named Scannon
who'd more than earn his keep.

Old Blue, he weren't no lazy bones
who lays around like you.
He'd hunt for geese and rabbits
that got put in a stew.

Well, anyway, they left in May,
that's when Big Muddy flows
full from rains and from the melt
of winter's ice and snow.

Military discipline
was kept throughout the trip.
The punishment was awful, Blue.
They'd get flogged with a whip.

The worst offense was when a guard
would take a little snooze,
but they'd get whipped for getting drunk
or if they stole some booze.

Summer on Big Muddy
weren't no picnic, Blue.
The heat was right unbearable
and the men were sunburned, too.

All suffered from the bites received
from skeeters and from ticks,
and some were felled by sunstroke
which made them mighty sick.

Many men got "tumers"
and some were bit by snakes.
They all had "colly wobbles",
which means a bellyache.

Now all that stuff was bad enough
but what was really hairy
was when they'd get diarrhea
from the dysentery.

The Captains kept joint diaries
and they wrote down each day
what they did and what they saw
all along the way.

There were no cameras back then
so there's no photographs
but Clark made many sketches
and Lewis drew the maps.

Clark thought my plains were "butiful"
with grass to eight feet high,
all interspersed with timber groves
and no end to the sky.

He wrote that game was plentiful
and they shot lots of deer,
beavers, geese and turkeys,
grouse, and elk and bear.

And Blue, they were real tickled
that fruit grew wild on me.
They loved my currants, grapes and plums
and my wild raspberries.

In late July, they reached my Platte
and the men let out loud cheers
when Captain Lewis said to them,
We'll stop and camp right here.

They made their camp up on the bluffs
so there was a nice breeze,
and there was lots of prairie grass
and shade from old oak trees.

It's good those guys were all young men
with lots of energy.
They set up camp and raised the flag,
killed deer and chopped down trees.

I was purely grieved to read
that Sergeant Floyd died.
He'd been sick for quite a while
with a sharp pain in his side.

It seems that Sergeant Floyd died
from Beliose Chorlick.
In olden days, that was the term
for an acute appendix.

A river ran below the bluff
where they had dug his grave.
Clark wrote they named the river "Floyd".
It's still called that today.

It's really quite amazing, Blue,
that there were no more deaths,
because they spent more than two years
out in the wilderness.

Let's see. It was the second day
when Lewis sent out scouts
to camps of Otoes and Pawnees
north of the river's mouth

The villages were empty
and it'd be more three weeks
before they would make contact
with any Indian chiefs.

The Indians were out on my plains
hunting for buffalo.
They ate its meat and used its hide
for teepees and for clothes.

The Council met on August third
when fourteen Chiefs showed up.
That place made history, Old Blue.
It's known as Council Bluffs.

When Chiefs agreed to keep the peace,
they all got presents, Blue---
medals, paint and garters,
and bottles filled with booze.

My nation's flag made a big hit---
they liked it best of all---
they loved its stars and all those stripes
and wore it like a shawl.

That's pretty much the format used
for later councils held
with Clatsops, Mandans, Omahas,
and the Sioux, as well.

When they struck camp at Council Bluffs,
they marched northwesterly.
September seventh was the date
of their last camp on me.

Remember that I told you
that I had met those men.
They spent twelve days upon my sod
near their journey's end.

One thing they did while they were here
was visit Floyd's grave.
They spoke of him most fondly
and heaped his name with praise.

They told me all about their trip
and wonders of new land,
and about Sacagawea
who'd given them a hand.

She was a young Indian girl---
I sure was proud of that---
who led them from Dakota
to the Pacific Coast and back.

Clark said that she created
good will where-ere she went.
That as horse trader and a guide,
she was "par excellence".

On September twenty-third
in Eighteen ought-and-six,
they finally reached St. Louis,
the end of their long trip.

My nation just went wild with joy.
They wined and dined that group
and had parades and fancy balls
and fireworks to boot!

Those Captains and that female
became celebrities.
Today you'd call them "Super Stars"
just like Elvis Presley.

This part that's coming next concerns
a special breed of men
who crossing me in search for furs
would also become legends.

I wish you could have seen me then,
You'd not believe your eyes.
Why, I just teemed with critters
of every kind and size.

Hunters and fur traders
were anxious to come here
to hung for elk and buffalo,
antelope and deer.

Their eyes filled up with dollar signs
when they heard I had mink,
beavers, muskrats, otters,
river seals and lynx.

Back then, fur was real stylish
for collars, coats and cuffs.
Beavers made a right nice hat
and mink made pretty muffs.

Companies that dealt in furs
were frothing at the mouth
to establish trading posts
and send their agents out.

In Eighteen ought and seven,
I had a visitor---
A gent named Manuel Lisa
sent by Missouri Fur.

While we were eating supper,
he said, You know, Nibthacka.
I've started the first settlement
right here in Nebraska.

He said the town was on the bluffs
that fronted the Missouri.
He'd named it "Bellevue" since the view
from there was mighty pretty.

After we had talked a while,
I asked if he might be
related to that Mona gal
whose smile made history.

He said that people asked him that
time and time again,
but he was sure she weren't among
any of his kin.

He told me he was heading West
way out to Yellowstone
where he'd be setting up a post
at place he called Big Horn.

"Father of Old Nebraska".
He sure deserved that name.
I don't think no one, 'cept for me,
knew more about my plains.

That settlement called Bellevue
is now a famous place.
Strategic Air Command is there
at Offutt Air Force Base.

If I had my druthers,
I'd skip the part that's next
because this guy sure got my goat.
I'd like to wring his neck.

In Eighteen nineteen, Major Long
came here to poke around.
He weren't impressed with anything
he found upon my ground.

He wrote real nasty things of me,
and on his map he placed
"The Great American Desert"
smack dab across my face.

He said my soil was barren,
nor fit for cultivation,
and called me "the abode of
perpetual desolation".

Old Blue, I was plumb mortified
by his proclamation
that I was "inhospitable"
for human habitation.

It's good I never met that guy
I'd probably walloped him,
and called him a dumb nincompoop,
and kicked him in the shins.

A term's been coined for men like him.
I wish I'd thought it up.
They're called a "chauvinistic pig".
That suits him right enough!

Long's report was just so bad,
it scared folks off, Old Blue.
Of course, those guys who trapped on me
knew it wasn't true.

A rich guy, John J. Astor,
had dealt in furs for years.
He headed up Pacific Fur
and sent its agents here.

Robert Stuart and his men
made new discoveries
about my North Platte Valley
and its topography.

They came up the Missouri,
crossed valley of my Platte,
and entered Rocky Mountains
by means of the South Pass.

And with few variations,
the way they took would be
the famous Trail to Oregon
for settlers crossing me.

Remember what I told you
about my Platte, Old Blue?
That how sometimes it's so blame dry,
you can't float a canoe.

Stuart's party found my Platte
to be troublesome.
It seems they carried their canoes
more than the rode in them.

They hardly ever had a horse---
sometimes a nag or two---
they'd get from Indians on my plains
in trade for white man's booze.

They did a heap of walking
and suffered hardships, too,
but they were tough, with lots of grit.
You know, what's called "true blue".

Good grief, Old Blue. Get off of me.
What's got into you?
Oh, I guess I woke you up
when I said the word "blue".

Well since you're here, I'll scratch your ears.
You're such a silly hound.
You ain't no lap dog, that's for sure.
There now. You get on down.

In Eighteen hundred twenty-two,
you'd never guess what happened.
William Ashley made that trip
and brought along a wagon.

And now things got to moving
because shortly after that
Milton Sublette crossed my plains
and made a wagon path.

His bunch came up the valley
of my Little Blue,
proceeded West along the Platte
and up the North Platte, too.

They went on to Wyoming.
Oh, wow! Was I impressed.
That's because not many men
had made it that far West.

Except, of course, those trapper gents
would rondo-voo up there.
They had all sorts of contests
like wrestling with a bear.

There's lots of contests held on me
most any time of year
when towns have celebrations
or hold their county fairs.

Some contests are just purely strange,
by men say it's right fun
to throw, instead of Frisbees,
them cow chips of dried dung

There's gents who dress like Indians
and throw sharp tomahawks
or kill them big, old turkeys
with but a single shot.

And when they win, those grown-up men
jump up and down with joy.
Well shoot, that ain't surprising.
All mens just little boys!

In Eighteen hundred thirty-two,
Captain Bonneville
came up the North Platte Valley
and saw this great, big hill

I guess it's really not a hill.
It's more like a monument
of clay and sandstone that been shaped
by nature's elements.

Of course, that was my Chimney rock
which, on a real clear day,
is visible to travelers
some thirty miles away.

In that same year, Nat Wyeth
drove wagons up the Platte.
His wagon wheels deepened the ruts
yet seen at the South Pass.

In Eighteen hundred thirty-three,
a prince from Germany
booked passage on a steamboat
that came up the Missouri.

I'll say his name as best I can---
now don't you laugh, Old Blue---
Maximillian von Wied-Newweid.
That's the best that I can do.

From here on out, I'll call him "Max"---
that's short for Maximilliam.
My tongue just never got the hang
of speaking that there German.

Max brought along an artist,
Charles Bodmer was his name,
and Charlie painted pictures
that earned him world-wide fame.

He drew everything he saw---
Indians, tools and pipes,
teepees, scenes and costumes---
whatever was in sight.

When tourists go to Omaha,
they often stop to see
Bodmer's pictures on display
at Joslyn's Gallery.

Well, Max thought I was pretty swell,
and he spoke well of me
in book that he got published
back home in Germany.

Max's book was widely read,
both here and overseas,
and Charlie's pictures caused a lot
of curiosity.

When folks saw Charlie's pictures,
they scarced believed their eyes.
He'd made me look plum beautiful---
a pristine paradise.

I always thought that those two gents
were "Cornhuskers" at heart.
It seems they fell in love with me
right from the very start.

They helped erase the damage done
by that mean Major Long,
and showed that what he thought of me
was absolutely wrong.

You know just him and Joliet
put me down, Old Blue.
All the rest thought I was grand
and darn good-looking, too!

When Long called me a desert,
he's only glanced at me.
I guess he thought that he was right
since there weren't many trees.

Right here would be a good place
to bring you up to date
regarding new discoveries
about water in my State.

New-fangled instruments have proved
in the last century
that what appears to be dry earth
is floating on a sea.

It's taken over a hundred years
to set the record straight
that I've more water underground
than any other State.

And if that water were brought up
to surface of my ground,
it's be way over thirty feet.
Why shoot! We'd all be drowned!

There's one last great explorer
who made his way on me
before I got the title
of a Territory.

In Eighteen hundred forty-two,
the great "Pathfinder" came.
He's in all the history books.
John Fremont was his name.

Kit Carson came along as guide,
and later on he'll be
a name that pops up regular
in Wild West history.

They went from the Missouri
northwest in a beeline
to what was then Fort Laramie
in less than four months' time.

They also went from South to North
so they could make some maps
of how the land lay in-between
the Kansas and my Platte.

I've got a town called Fremont,
and, laws, you'd be surprised
how many cities have a street
or park named for that guy.

Old Blue, in Eighteen forty-four
my nation thought it'd be
really neat if I'd become
what called a "territory".

Lots of folks had slaves back then
and there was much debate
when they heard Congress planned to make
Nebraska a "Free State".

Two territories were set up -
Kansas and Nebraska.
My northern border went up to
a place called Canada.

I stretched west to the Rockies
out to the Great Divide,
and the Missouri River
made up my eastern side.

Kansas was a "Slave State",
she was just south of me,
but since I was a "Free State",
I had no slavery.

A census followed after that.
They counted heads, Old Blue.
It showed I had Two Thousand
Seven Hundred Thirty-Two.

My Indians weren't included -
just men who had white skin -
which shows that racial prejudice
existed even then.

Women didn't vote back then
which leads me to believe
that they weren't part of census made
of folks who lived on me.

I don't know that for sure, Old Blue.
It's more like a suspicion.
I guess it's based on what is called
"women's intuition".

The reason for the census was
so they could hold elections
to choose male representatives
who'd enact legislation.

Franklin Pierce was President.
He chose a Southerner –
a gent whose name was Francis Burt
as my first Governor.

Mr. Burt got sick and died
soon after Pierce chose him,
so Mr. Pierce then picked a gent
whose name was Thomas Cuming.

On January sixteenth
in Eighteen fifty-five,
my first legislature sat
and thirty-nine arrived.

Right from the start, men disagreed
that Omaha should be
the place to build the Capitol
for my territory.

Some wanted it in Bellevue
or what's called "paper towns"
like "Douglas" or "Neapolis"
but those were all turned down.

Why laws, they fought like cats and dogs,
it was just scandalous.
South "Platters" threatened to secede
and become part of Kansas.

"Platters" were the gents who came
from regions of the Platte.
I always thought they were misnamed.
I'd have called them "Brats".

When they got down to business,
they made up lots of rules
regarding roads and selling booze
and setting up free schools.

In Eighteen Hundred sixty-four,
Congress passed an act
whereby I could become a State
if my folks wanted that.

I could scarce believe my ears
but they said "Nosirree,
we like it just the way it is.
You just leave us be".

Old Blue, it took about three years
before they changed their minds,
but, then, where government's concerned,
there's lots of wheels to grind.

My Constitution had to be
approved by Congress, Blue,
but those gents sent it back
"This simply will not do".

The problem was it had a clause -
which really got their goat -
that only men who had white skin
would have the right to vote.

My Legislature met again
and this time it did better
for it determined "white" to mean
"any color whatsoever".

From sixty-one to sixty-three,
I shrunk in size and shape.
By sixty-four, I was reduced
to what's my present State.

I felt real bad in sixty-one
when the Dakotas left.
When Colorado followed them,
I really felt bereft.

Sixty-three was terrible.
I lost dear Idaho.
Montana and Wyoming
were part of her, you know.

On March 1, Eighteen sixty-six,
the President proclaimed
I was the 37th State
and Nebraska was my name.

Nibthacka said, Good morning, Blue,
I've got my chores all done.
Let's sit a while on the front porch
and get a little sun.

And while I'm soaking up the sun,
I'll read my diary
which starts out in the early part
of the Nineteenth century.

Back in the eighteen thirties,
traders had followed the Platte
to reach the Rocky Mountains
by means of the South Pass.

When that Pass was discovered,
it solved the mystery
of how to get to the Northwest
by going through the Rockies.

Some missionaries made the trip
way out to Oregon.
What made their trip so special was
they took their wives along.

Men had the notion in those days
that womenfolk were weak,
susceptible to "vapors"
that knocked them off their feet.

Up to now men wondered
if the women could withstand
the hardships they'd encounter
to get to that new land.

Those missionaries sent back word
about the fertile land.
They raved about the rainbows
which they said were simply grand.

They also said their womenfolk
thought Oregon was swell,
and though the trip was mighty rough,
they had done right well.

I wrote their names upon this page
so I'd remember them---
see, here's Eliza Spaulding
and there's Narcissa Whitman.

I loved it when the "weaker sex"
proved to my doubting nation
that the route to Oregon
was fit for immigration.

Old Blue, I hope you'll stay awake
because it's be a shame
for you to miss the part that's next
about the wagon trains.

By now, my land had been explored
and men had drawn some maps
that showed the way out to the West
followed my own Platte.

The land along my Platte was flat
and broad as it could be.
It was a natural highway
across the breadth of me.

Three-hundred fifty-thousand souls
crossed my sea of grass.
I counted each and every head
as I watched them pass.

For a quarter of a century,
folks trudged across my face---
grown-ups, kids and babes in arms
came from every place.

There were many reasons why
people made that trek.
Some were good, and some were bad---
about what you'd expect.

Those missionaries wanted folks
to come to Oregon
but just those who were Protestants
and white Americans.

Some folks had lost everything
in Eighteen thirty-seven
when banks had failed and times were tough
and there was a depression.

Americans who made the trip
pretty much believed
their nation was entitled
to fulfill its destiny.

They thought they'd been divinely called
to subjugate the Indians
who were perceived inferior
because of their red skins.

Not all who went were "upright" folks.
Some were thieves and drunks,
and some were fleeing creditors
and some were mean as skunks.

In the first band were eighty souls
who went to Oregon.
They set out across my plains
in May of Forty-one.

The first large-scale migration
was in Eighteen forty-three.
Almost one thousand hardy souls
came tromping over me.

They trailed five thousand cattle
and, Blue, upon my word,
my plains vibrated with the sounds
acoming from that herd

The cows were usually in-between
which meant the folks in back
who walked in clouds of dust all day
would turn from white to black.

I bet when they reach Oregon,
they said a loud "Amen."
I never ever want to see
another cow's rear end!"

You know, besides the cattle herd
were mules and oxen, too,
spare riding stock, and dogs and cats
Why, it was like a zoo!

Those wagon trains had bylaws
and a Constitution, too.
Two things were forbidden---
gambling and drinking booze.

The Wagon Master was the chief
of every caravan.
He'd assign the daily tasks
right down to the last man.

Some drove the cattle, some were cooks,
and others hunted game,
and there were those who spent the night
guarding the wagon train.

The kids picked up dried buffalo chips
when they were crossing me.
They burned like wood, which was real good,
since there weren't any trees.

The wagons were of sturdy wood
with canvas tops and sides.
They had no springs, so what you got
was a gut-wrenching ride

They were loaded to the gills
with food, guns and bedrolls,
crates of chickens, tools and ropes,
pots and pans and clothes.

Two yokes of oxen, sometimes three,
pulled wagons of those trains.
Mules weren't all that popular---
they've got those pea-sized brains.

Most trains left Independence
which was some south of me.
it was a bustling river town
located in Missouri.

They had to wait till May to leave
so the grass upon my plains
was tall enough to provide food
for livestock in their trains.

The Rockies, Blues and the Cascades
were mountains they would cross.
They had to get through them before
it snowed or they'd get lost.

They'd go through Kansas, then turn north
at my Little Blue
which was a river in my south
No, it wasn't named for you.

They followed that one hundred miles,
then struck off overland
to reach the Coasts of Nebraska
which were rolling hills of sand.

That's what they called the hills that lay
along my River Platte.
In fact, they even had that name
written on their maps.

This was where most people saw
for the first time in their lives
a valley that went on and on
beyond sight of their eyes

It runs three hundred fifteen miles
as it goes East to West,
and spreads from fifteen miles up to
thirty miles in breadth.

I must admit I always thought
it should have made the list
as the Eight Wonder of the World,
but then I'm prejudiced.

For the next two hundred fifty miles,
they followed Platte's south fork,
then later they'd cross over that
to take fork going north.

Some times their wagons would break down
or their oxen would get sick,
so folks would lighten up their loads
and throw stuff out right quick.

By the time they reached Fort Kearney,
they'd tossed out crockery,
dressers, and pianos,
clothing and settees.

The trail was a big treasure trove
of stuff they'd throw away.
Those folks would be called "litter bugs"
if they did that today.

My Indians loved it when they found
frock coats and ladies' hats,
curtains, ribbons, bolts of silk,
mirrors and bric-a-brac.

Buck-naked braves wore ladies' hats
and galloped on the plains
trailing ribbons and bright cloth
left by the wagon trains.

One out of twenty pioneers
would die along the way.
More than ten thousand folks were laid
to rest in trail-side graves.

There were no doctors on those trains
so if those folks got sick,
they'd use "home remedies" they had
and hoped they'd do the trick.

Some folks drowned in rivers
and some drank tainted water,
and many died from smallpox,
measles and cholera.

Many babies died at birth,
and sometimes kids fell down
and the wagons rolled right over them
and crushed them in the ground.

I'm going to back up just a bit
and talk about Fort Kearney
which was an outpost on my plains
for the U.S. Cavalry.

It was here the pioneers
got their first news from home.
They treasured every letter, Blue,
just like you do your bones.

The fort was made from my own sod
which men cut up like bricks.
They'd patch it with adobe mud
and lay it up in strips.

If you think you got troubles, Blue,
when you have fleas or ticks,
you'd have gone ape with bedbugs
that thrived in those sod bricks.

The sod walls kept the rooms real cool
if it was summertime,
and in the winter, they'd hold heat
and be warm from the sunshine.

Gee whiz, Old Blue, today that's known
as "solar energy".
Why, who'd have dreamed that was in use
so long ago on me.

They usually stayed there several days
so they could rest their stock,
and in the evenings folks would dance
or sit around and talk.

When they left Fort Kearney,
they headed for Ash Creek.
They weren't prepared for Windlass Hill
which they found might steep.

They had to lock their wagon wheels
and then with ropes they held
they'd haul the wagons down the face
of that hill from hell.

They'd heard about my landmarks,
but still most were surprised
by Courthouse Block and Jail Rock –
how large they were in size.

When they ^{saw} say my Chimney Rock
some thirty miles away,
they'd toss their hats into the air
and shout "Hip Hip Hooray!"

Every time I've seen that rock
it's boggled my old brain.
It just seems to sprout straight up
to dominate my plains

It's almost like a pyramid
with a spire at the top.
One traveler wrote, "It's worth the trip
just to see that rock".

Scotts Bluff was my last landmark.
It's in my Wildcat Range.
You know, Old blue, it's often called
"The Lighthouse of the Plains".

"The hill that's hard to go around"
was name used by the Indians,
and since it rose eight hundred feet,
that's an apt description.

This area was often called
"The Oasis of the Plains".
It's there that they found firewood,
water and big game.

From there, they'd head for the South Pass
to cross the Rocky Mountains.
Most settlers took the northern branch
that led to Oregon.

Men known as "Forty-Niners"
went south on trail to go
to California when they heard
a farmer had found gold.

Perhaps the most astonishing
of all the groups I saw
were Mormons going overland
on their way to Utah.

I watched as women, four-abreast,
pulled heavy wooden carts
piled to the brim with everything
they'd need for a new start.

They walked some thirteen-hundred miles
to reach the Promised Land
where they were greeted by Saints *the Saints*
and Zion's City Band.

Old Blue, I've talked your ears off.
Let's get a bite to eat.
Carnsarnit all, I've sat so long
my feet have gone to sleep.

NIBTHACKA GOES TO TOWN

What say we go to town today?
I've got gas in the truck.
Just don't you sit on me, Old Blue,
because I'm all dressed up.

As Nibthacka drove across
the gently-rolling plains,
she said, It's true. I'm beautiful.
I hope I don't sound vain.

It didn't take no time at all
before they got to town.
Nibthacka parked beneath a tree
and rolled the windows down.

Everywhere Nibthacka went,
she was recognized.
Folks said, How do, Nibthacka.
Gee, what a nice surprise.

They told her of their children,
and goings-on at church,
who got married or divorced
of deaths and the new births.

And then they showed her photographs
of family gatherings,
baptisms, graduations,
grandchildren, pets, and weddings.

When asked, Nibthacka, how you been?
she said I can't complain
Why shoot, for someone old as me
I'm really right as rain.

Nibthacka said, It's sure been great
to see you all today,
but Old Blue's waiting in the truck.
I'd best be on my way.

When Blue saw Miss Nibthacka,
he upped and licked her face.
She said, Calm down, you silly hound.
Quit that for goodness sake.

She told Old Blue about her day
and said, You'd not believe
how many folks said "Howdy do".
They sure made over me.

They showered me with praises
and said, We love Nebraska.
We're proud to be from your great State.
you're perfect, Miss Nibthacka.

They pumped up my old ego
with compliments and such.
They got right tickled when they saw
that they had made me blush.

I'm very proud of all my towns
and all my industry,
but first and foremost are the folks
who make their life on me.

Without them, I'd be nothing---
just so much real estate---
I owe them debt of gratitude
for making me so great.

I've noticed something different
while on this trip, Old Blue.
Folks don't seem to litter me
like they used to do.

I never liked it very much
when folks dumped trash on me.
It made me look so tacky
and hurt my vanity.

Looksee there. You see that sign?
It looks like it is new.
ADOPT-A-ROAD. Will, I declare
I sure like that, Old Blue.

Maybe folks are waking up
and starting now to see
I'm kinds old and fragile
and need some TLC.

Hey dawg. We're home. You jump out now.
I'll put the truck away.
I'm all pooped out! I'm going to bed.
I've had a busy day.

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Louise Uden Witzgenbug was born in 1928 in Omaha, Nebraska. She was baptized, educated and married in Hastings, Nebraska. She and husband Paul owned homes in Grand Island and Omaha. Her husband's work took them to Iowa, Kentucky, New Jersey and Florida where she has lived for the past 32 years in Lake Mary.

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