

## Dreams of Dust

By Marleen Ehmann Bussma

### Foreword

Marleen remembers in this poem a clay brick house that her parents lived in on their farm southwest of Jud, N.D. in the 1940's until she was four years old. "German's from Russia" built this house around the turn of the century. She also combines memories from another late 1880's clay brick house she recently visited.

Clay bricks were hand made using clay, straw, water, manure and sometimes some gravel. The walls were constructed with two rows of bricks, which made a wall about 18 to 24 inches wide. Then the outside walls were plastered with the same mixture to protect the bricks from the elements. Each year the outer coating was renewed. The inner walls were plastered with a finer mixture of clay and water and then painted with a white wash called calcimine. Laundry bluing was added occasionally to give the walls a blue color, which Marleen refers to in the poem. Soot was also added to the white wash to make it gray and then painted as a boarder on the top edge of the walls. Cool in the summer and warm in the winter, these dwellings were made from the earth because there were no trees on the Dakota prairie at that time. - Tom Mueller

### Dreams of Dust

The weeds had over taken  
And the years had not been kind.  
A wall was separating.  
Better days were left behind.

A pole was used to hold it  
So it would not drop and fall.  
I saw a gaping fissure  
In the middle of the wall.

I stepped up to the mud bricks  
As I tried to get a view  
Of what it looked like inside;  
How it may have been when new.

I saw a plaster coating  
In a brightly colored hue  
Applied with hope and caring  
In a pleasant shade of blue.

The corners of the old house  
Had been rubbed and worn away  
By cattle scratching their hides  
On the straw mixed in the clay.

The corners now looked concave  
 Where the clay was rubbed and gone.  
 Another change brought to it  
 Like the others with the dawn.

How long has it been waiting  
 On the prairie like a ghost  
 With rooms now standing empty  
 And walls held up with a post?

Who were the ones that built it  
 Mixing hopes and dreams and fears?  
 What sights did this house witness  
 As it stood so many years?

Did it see prairie fires  
 As a wall of red orange flame  
 That ate its way to ruin  
 Making these folks sad they came?

Did it hear cries of despair  
 And the sorrow of those new  
 To land that was so different  
 With the hardships they went through?

Did it feel scouring pressure  
 From the restless wind that blew  
 While cold seeped through its thick walls  
 And the snow left banks that grew?

Did it see wavy curtains  
 Of the Northern Lights that shined;  
 Or prairie flowers blooming  
 Where the trees were hard to find?

Did it hear gushing water  
 In the spring from melting snow  
 That ran past in the gully  
 Loud like thunder with its flow?

Did it feel like a manor  
 When the family first moved in?  
 The dugout or the wagon  
 Gave up shelter rights by then.

Today it stands deserted,  
 A reminder of the past;

A ghost out on the prairie  
From a life that didn't last.

Although it is deserted  
There is interest once again;  
Concerning this adobe  
By the likes of modern men.

Now days we want to save what  
Is a relic from our past  
And hold on to our hist'ry.  
Things are disappearing fast.

But Mother Nature's busy  
Taking back what she once gave  
To those who built a country.  
They were head strong. They were brave.

The walls will keep on crumbling  
And we all know that they must.  
When last the fourth wall tumbles  
Someone's dream turns back to dust.