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FRIGID DAKOTA WINTER WARMS FRONTIER WOMAN TO MISSOURI (Inside Columbia, Feb. 2006) - 2/1/2006

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COLUMBIA, Mo. – In June 1886 a small-town Missouri woman left the state with her six children, including a nursing one-year-old, following her husband's dream of a cattle ranch in the Dakota Territory. Although hardly romantic, her story sure looks like true married love.

The just-released *My Ever Dear Charlie: Letters Home from the Dakota Territory* tells the story of Fannie McClurg Draper, who traveled hundreds of miles in summer heat by mule and wagon to Walworth County, located in what is now north-central South Dakota. The journey took a month.

Upon arrival, they made their home in a cramped sod house, where they battled summer mosquitoes and the coldest, snowiest winter in memory. Her family endured terrible blizzards that trapped them in their one-room shanty with snowdrifts measured in several feet and temperatures that regularly stayed in the minus-40-degree range for weeks between November and March 1887. The following summer, railroads that had shipped 27,000 head of cattle to the area the previous year could find only 250, a 99 percent loss, and local newspapers reported the deaths of people who got lost and froze to death between their house and barn.

"I want to stay here as long as you think best, but it is simply dreadful," Fannie writes her

husband in July 1886, explaining that there is no water and nothing to eat but small onions.

Edited by Arthur Gibbs Draper, with assistance from Doris King Draper and Carolyn Draper Joslyn Doyle, the book tells Fannie's story through letters between her and her husband, who had planned to join his wife for the winter as soon as he could get away from his bank job in Lebanon but wound up having to remain in Missouri for business reasons.

Fannie and the Kids endured the North Dakota winter on their own. When she complained, Fannie's brother suggested she didn't have grit. By springtime, the family returned to Lebanon from their adventure on the Dakota prairie, thankful that nobody died.

