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.