

# UNWRITTEN HISTORY

Stanton County, Kansas

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About 1893, many people had a crop failure. One man told of needing fuel, so he would hitch up his wagon and team and gather a load of cow chips. That was what they burned in the early days and his family did it for over twenty years. He never once bought any coal. The wind helped pump the windmill for water.

A novel, yet treacherous feature in our area is Bear Creek. It may remain dry for months and then, in a few minutes be completely full. The source is the mountains in Colorado. When there is heavy rain to the far west, we may receive a quick flood in our section. The decline in elevation is so rapid that people's wagons have crossed the creek on dry ground and before they could get completely across, the creek filled with water and nearly washed them away.

With the water coming down like a wall with such speed and shifting quicksand, a great hole could appear where there was once a constructed crossing.

This creek travels east to Devil's Hole and spreads over the flat area of Grant County. It then disappears in a sinkhole before it reaches the Lakin and Ulysses roads. Several lost their lives in this creek and property destroyed.

Neighbors were very important back then. One woman told that her neighbors were a vast source of information. The early settlers came from nearly every state in the union and many countries. Her exact words were... "I learned more geography from visiting with my neighbors than I ever did from books and I learned the customs of many different places". They had time to spend the day with their neighbors and help them when there was extra work to be done. When a party was given, it was a large affair. The people came from far and near and all joined in the merriment. These were occasions not soon forgotten.

One constant danger in the early days was the prairie fires. A family might leave home for a few hours and return to find a prairie fire had passed over and their home was a pile of ashes. Once a man and his wife, plus their neighbors, went to town. While there, a prairie fire started that was heading their way. They attempted to beat it home. The wife remarked several times, "Lem... we will have to hurry or we will have roasted pig when we get home". Once they reached the neighbor's home and saw that the fire was very close, they realized they might not have a home when they got there. When they arrived, not only did they find a roasted pig, but they also found roast chicken. Everything was destroyed, except their house.

In another fire, a woman lost her life. On discovering a prairie fire, she went out to turn the milk cow loose so it could graze. The fire caught her before she got back to the shelter. If noticed in time, the settlers would plow a guard around their home to save their property from the fires. Yet these were not always sufficient. A sudden gust of wind might carry the fire over the fireguard. Therefore, they were never safe from the fires.

Another story is about Jane, who at the age of fifteen married John who was twenty, so that they might come west and take up a claim. They came in a covered wagon and located on a quarter of land, built a dugout, and then, started building a home. The urge to travel further seized John and he left Jane with a four-month-old baby. She had to hold down the claim while he went to search for work. He returned a few times at long intervals before it was time to 'prove up' their claim. Jane took up the long lonely life of holding down the claim and making a home with her new tiny baby.

One evening Jane took her baby with her to tend to their cow. On returning to their dugout, she discovered a skunk had entered the home. She and her baby spent the night out of doors waiting for the skunk to leave. After this experience, she built herself a sod house. The neighbors helped her add a door and window, and they helped by adding a roof. She painted beautiful pictures, planted and cared for trees, raised a wonderful garden, and continued to live a full courageous life. When they finally proved up on a claim, she with her two children went with John to live near Denver. John soon went on another trip and after a time she went to him. But, he liked to be free and left his hat floating on a stream as though he had drowned, but he had actually left again. After several years he wished to return. But she had had enough and her answer was... "I will leave you as free as you have wanted to be". Her old neighbors have named her "The Prairie Bride" and cherish her memory.

Farming was much the same then as now. Before, if you turned the ground when it was dry it would blow, cover up, and kill the grass. Small tracts were affected by the dust storms then, but less intense than they are today.

Very few buffalo were here fifty years ago, but antelope were plentiful and quite tame until man began to kill them. They soon disappeared.