

"A Genuine Western Man Never Drinks Tea": Gustavus French Merriam's Letters from Kansas in 1860

edited by Harriet Kimbro
letters transcribed by Ruth Gates Lindenmeyer

A FRAGMENT OF KANSAS HISTORY has turned up in the archives of the Merriam family in northern New York State as an inventory notation, "2 long letters to Clinton from Gardner, Kansas."¹ Gustavus French Merriam, who wrote those letters in 1860 when he was twenty-four, was the eighth of thirteen children of Ela and Lydia Merriam. A pioneer family, Ela's parents had settled on the western frontier in 1800 when that part of New York was "a wilderness, almost without roads, a wilderness of stumps, mud-holes, and corduroys."² Gustavus was raised on the family homestead, named Locust Grove for the fragrant trees that surrounded it.³

Lewis County, New York, is still mainly rural, and today it boasts of the annual two hundred inches of snow, dumped by moisture from nearby Lake Ontario, that attract skiers. But those winters may have been one impetus for Gustavus to head west to the new frontier in Kansas, in addition to the lure of land newly opened to settlement. As a young man, he showed considerable promise and obtained an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. After two years there, in 1858 he suffered a

broken eardrum that forced him to resign, and he moved to Kansas "to enter business."⁴ He quickly showed up as Gardner Township clerk in Johnson County,⁵ a position that his Annapolis background may have helped him to secure.

Gustavus' brother Clinton, eleven years older, was a mainstay in the Merriam family.⁶ About this same time, he built a large residence, named Homewood, on the hill above Locust Grove, New York. Clinton distinguished himself in the import business and later as a banker and stockbroker. He and Gustavus were especially close, and more than once Clinton bailed Gustavus out as the younger brother strived to make a living from the western soil.

So it was in keeping that while in Kansas Gustavus wrote at length to Clinton. With Clinton's fondness for his adventuresome sibling, it was also natural that he would save Gustavus' most interesting letters. Letters in fact were the source of many an evening's entertainment at Homewood. Often after supper Clinton's family would gather by the large living-room fireplace, his wife Carrie at her handwork and son Charles on the hearth with the big family dog, while Papa read from

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1. Collins-Merriam-Lyon Papers, courtesy of the New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, New York.

2. Charles Henry Pope, comp., *Merriam Genealogy in England and America* (Boston: Charles H. Pope, 1906), 187.

3. Locust Grove is just north of Talcottville and today is still "little more than a four corners." G. Byron Bowen, ed., *History of Lewis County, 1860-1965* (Lowville, N.Y.: Board of Legislators of Lewis County, 1970), 257.

4. Interview with Mrs. Sheldon G. Merriam by Ruth Gates Lindenmeyer, July 29, 1975, Archives, San Marcos Historical Society, San Marcos, California.

5. Spelled "Gardiner" in the commissions issued by Gov. James W. Denver, "Governor Denver's Administration," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1889-1896*, 5:491. Johnson County had been organized just five years before, and in 1860 its population included 4,513 residents, 3,020 cattle, 3,932 swine, 875 horses, 87 mules, and 88 sheep. Daniel W. Wilder, *Annals of Kansas* (Topeka: Geo. W. Martin, Kansas Publishing House, 1875), 247.



Clinton L. and Caroline Merriam with their daughter Florence (center) about 1884 by the fireplace at Homewood. Here the family read letters from absent members like Clinton's brother Gustavus.

major books of the day, including travelogues and works of history, unless there were letters from absent family members. These he would read and reread to his fascinated audience, and so letters took on the importance of history and geography lessons no less than the bound volumes in the Homewood library.

About 1900 Homewood burned down, and the library and many family papers were lost.⁷ A few years later Clinton's grandson had his own large residence in nearby Lyons Falls. After the attic leaked during a severe storm, he asked his daughter Sally to sort out the papers worth keeping. With an innate sense of history, she managed to save many valuable records from

a hasty disposal in the fireplace. Among them were the two letters transcribed below.

The Merriam family had a remarkable interest in the natural sciences, and several of them also studied the American Indians.⁸ So Gustavus came naturally by his interest in the Kansas landscape and Indians, and he knew that his brother's family wanted to share his new knowledge. While suggesting in the first letter that he would confine himself to his own affairs, he did just the opposite and told almost nothing of them. So most of his business in Kansas is largely unknown today.

What is known is that his patriotism was un-

6. Clinton may have encouraged his brother to go to Kansas. As an interested businessman and future U.S. congressman, Clinton would have known about and possibly attended the National Kansas Committee meeting held in Buffalo, New York, in 1856. Lawrence R. Murphy, *Frontier Crusader: William F. M. Arny* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), 45. The purpose of the meeting and the committee was to encourage "free state" advocates to move to Kansas and to raise money to help those who wanted to go. Even the eminent Ralph Waldo Emerson noted in a speech that he knew people who were paying their debts, "not with a view to new accumulations, but in preparation to save and earn for the benefit of

Kansas emigrants." Leverett W. Spring, *Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1885), 164.

Arny, mentioned by Gustavus in his letter, played an active role. "Published accounts such as Arny's filled every newspaper in the country. Heralding the glories of the Kansas farm country and promising substantial assistance for new settlers, they attracted people who might not otherwise have considered the move." Murphy, *Frontier Crusader*, 61; see also note 39.

7. Field hands, who valued mahogany more than books, dumped out the contents but saved the bookcases from the fire.

diminished from his days at the Naval Academy. The Merriam genealogy records that "on the breaking out of the Rebellion he volunteered and was assigned to the forts about Washington, D.C., and at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, where he served till the close of the war."⁹ Because of his academy background, he started with an officer's commission and moved up to the rank of major, the title by which he was known for the rest of his life.

While Gustavus was stationed as a guard in Washington, he met and courted Mary Elizabeth (Nina) Scott, daughter of a Virginia planter. They were married in 1863, and a son was born the next year. Nina's health was poor, and at the end of the war Gustavus



Maj. Gustavus French Merriam in his Civil War uniform. He enlisted after writing the letters transcribed in this article and then returned to Kansas after the war.

G. F. MERRIAM,
Wholesale and Retail dealer in

DRY GOODS!

BOOTS, SHOES, HATS, CAPS
AND NOTIONS.

TOPEKA, - - - - KANSAS.

Gustavus Merriam's advertisement appeared in the 1868-69 Topeka City Directory.

took her to Kansas, this time to Topeka. The city directories for the period list him as a dealer in dry goods (1868, 1870);¹⁰ a farmer (1871);¹¹ a coal dealer (1872);¹² and as a partner in a "coal, feed, and lime" dealership (1874).¹³ Three more children were born. Little Anna Theresa died at age three, and the family Bible was inscribed, "A sweet flower but she faded."¹⁴

Nina's health did not improve in Kansas, and in 1875 Gustavus reached the last western frontier, becoming one of the first American homesteaders in northern San Diego County, California.¹⁵ His family followed from Topeka the next year, but the move was not easy for Nina. Gustavus had sought to solve her poor health with a drier climate, which he found, but their daughter Virginia reminisced later that since her mother "grew up with servants and all the refinements of plantation life, it must have been doubly hard for

8. Clinton's younger son, Gustavus' nephew C. Hart Merriam, was renowned for his work in preserving the culture of the last of the northern California tribes. Hart's sister Florence, primarily a writer on birds; also published several articles on Indians of the Southwest, where she spent many years as a naturalist.

9. Pope, *Merriam Genealogy*, 324.

10. *Topeka City Directory and Business Mirror for 1868-69* (Topeka: Millison and Heil, 1868), 94; Samuel Rades, comp., *Biennial Directory of the City of Topeka* (Topeka: Kansas State Record Printing Co., 1870), 151.

11. *City Directory of the City of Topeka* (Topeka: Southwestern Publishing Co., 1871), 75.

12. Samuel Rades, comp., *Rades' Biennial Directory... 1872-1873* (Topeka: Samuel Rades, 1872), 108.

13. F. H. Woodbury, comp., *Topeka City Directory, 1874-5* (Topeka: Swayze, Printer, 1874), 88. See also *San Diego County Pioneer Families* (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1977), 169.

14. From the private collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon G. Merriam.

15. Although the area he named Twin Oaks had a post office for a few years, it was absorbed by nearby San Marcos; but its namesake remains. Mrs. Sheldon G. Merriam, wife of the Major's grandson, describes it as "a giant oak that had two separate trunks; it now measures 125 feet across; authorities on the age of trees are sure it is 750 years old." *Twin Oaks Valley—Then and Now* (Privately published, 1972).

her to come to a homesteader's shack in the brush of Southern California."¹⁶ Nina died in 1888. By then the Major had established a successful ranch. He later remarried and continued on the homestead until his death in 1914.¹⁷

The letters below are apparently all that remain of the ones Gustavus wrote from Kansas. They are quoted almost in their entirety, with only short omissions (indicated by ellipses) of obscure asides not germane to the general content. With modern usage as a guide when the handwriting is unclear, two specific policies are also followed: The word "and" is consistently spelled out, and the affectation of considerable underlining is omitted. Obvious corrections and addi-

tions are made in brackets. Since paragraphing was often eliminated to save paper, the text has been broken up occasionally for clarity. Gustavus sometimes used colloquial terms, probably as part of the romanticism of the West. They seem out of character with much of his writing and with his formal education. Even he recognized this, occasionally underlining the phrases or putting them in quotation marks, which are preserved.

Gardner, Kansas—June 5th 1860¹⁸

DEAR CLINTON,

... I know just how you feel in regard to letters from us boys and so I will confine myself to my own affairs, but give you a bleak picture of a trip I took two weeks ago down into Anderson Co. and back by

16. Interview with Virginia Merriam Jordan at age eighty-seven by Eloise Perkins, *Times-Advocate*, Escondido, California, June 29, 1966.

17. The fifth generation of Merriams still lives on the homestead. For more on the family in Twin Oaks, see the collections of the San Marcos Historical Society; "Early Perils and Romance of San Diego County Bared," *San Diego Union*, August 7, 1926; Harriet Kimbro, "The Birds and Bees in Twin Oaks: Visit of a Naturalist in 1889," *Journal of San Diego History* 31 (Spring 1985): 77-86; and Harriet Kimbro, *No Woman Tenderfoot* (working title of biography of Florence Merriam Bailey, in preparation).

18. The town of Gardner had been platted only the year before Gustavus arrived, and its first store opened in the spring of 1858. Later, in 1861, the town was sacked "by Up Hays' gang. No houses were burned and no murders committed, but about \$3,000 worth of goods were stolen from the stores. . . . O. B. Gardner, after whom the township and town were both named, was killed in the fall of 1864 by Jesse James. . . ." *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 642. Gustavus did not return to his business in Gardner after the Civil War.



Maj. Gustavus Merriam's homestead in Twin Oaks, north of present San Marcos, California, probably in 1894. He and his wife are seated. Between them stands his brother Clinton Merriam; the woman on the horse may be his niece, naturalist Florence Merriam.



*Perhaps the emigrants described by Gustavus Merriam looked something like this family portrayed in A.D. Richardson's *Beyond the Mississippi* (1867).*

Lawrence home—for this is the place I am necessitated to call home whether I will or no.

I started from here on Thursday morning about eight o'clock with the thermometer at 85° in the shade, but a brisk wind was blowing from the S.W. which made the weather feel quite comfortable. My route the first 18 miles lay along the line of the old Santa Fe road when I turned Southward.

This road . . . is literally alive with trains going to and coming from New Mexico, Pike's Peak,¹⁹ California, Oregon, Utah etc.—all that almost illimitable expanse of mountain and plain, desert and fertile valley, of which we have read and heard so much.

Now and then you overtake some weary emigrant who has been on his road since March coming from Ohio,²⁰ Indiana, Illinois or other state, accompanied by his wife and children, one or some of whom drive the cows and calves or lead and ride the horses, besides

the old man who usually contents himself by driving the oxen and seeing to things generally. These emigrants manage to get to wood and water every night, when they unyoke the oxen, cut a few sticks of wood and get—not cook really—their supper, which consists usually of a piece of bacon, a cup of molasses and one of coffee and a little wheat or corn bread baked in a Dutch oven on the coals.

They then either turn in in the wagon or on the ground under their little tent and lie unmolested till morning when, their breakfast over they trudge on till another night overtakes them. They continue on in this way until they get beyond the limits of the whites, which is about 120 miles west of us when they are compelled to stand guard to keep the Indians, wolves and buffalo off every night.

Although we have had no rain since last Septem-

19. Newly discovered gold in the Rocky Mountains made this a particular destination for disillusioned Jayhawkers, like those of Hyatt mentioned in note 39.

20. More settlers arrived in Kansas that year from Ohio than from any other state. John Rydjord, *Kansas Place-Names* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 273. They left their mark in place-names like Ohio City, mentioned later; see note 33.

ber,²¹ the prairies were beautifully green and thousands on thousands of roses white and red and other flowers of all colors were on every side of me the first 30 miles. Along in the afternoon I became tired, hungry and thirsty and stopped at a good looking log cabin to see if I could not get some milk, but this was out of the question and I had to content myself with a partial drink of warm water—water that had been hauled from some slough hole and allowed to stand in the barrel two or three days. I knew though that a few miles beyond I would find good water at Ottawa Jones',²² a member of the Ottawa tribe of Indians, one who graduated at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y. and who is now the Domine of the tribe. He has a white woman for a wife—a woman who came out here years ago as a missionary.

I found them both well and enjoying themselves well. I had been there often before and was well acquainted with both and passed a tolerable pleasant hour with them, drinking good well water and eating some cake and pie that Mrs. J. insisted on my taking. Passing on I crossed Ottawa Creek and kept down on the west side to the Marais des Cygnes²³ or Osage river and crossed this.

The last time I was there was a year ago and then the water was so high I had to swim my horses and the buggy came near tipping over. Now there is scarcely water enough runs from one deep hole to another in a day to water 20 oxen.

All these streams are made up of deep holes or lit-

21. The drought was much worse farther south in Anderson County, where the hot, dry winds were so severe that "all vegetation was dried to a crisp. The earth became so dry that it cracked open. . . . By the first of June, the crops then being all destroyed, a panic seized the people, and more than half the population of the county left the Territory, the most of them never to return. Nearly all who had enough left to get away did so." *History of the State of Kansas*, 1325.

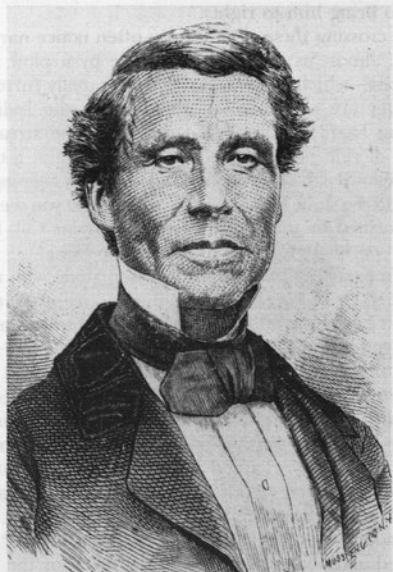
22. His formal name was Rev. John Tecumseh Jones. Born in Canada of an English father and a Chippewa Indian mother, he early left home on a sailing vessel and ended up in a Potawatomi mission school from which some boys were taken east for an education. He became a teacher and went to Kansas with the Potawatomi when they were "removed there." On invitation, he joined the related Ottawa tribe and built a house and store four miles northeast of the present city of Ottawa. Here he ran "the main country hotel in Eastern Kansas, and many of the pioneers of Kansas found temporary shelter under his hospitable roof." His wife, Jane Kelley, was from Maine and went to Kansas as a "teacher and missionary to the Indians." *History of the State of Kansas*, 304-5.

23. This French translation of an Indian name for a place "where white swans are plentiful" may also come from a story in Longfellow's poem "Evangeline." In it two Indian lovers disappeared in their canoe, and at that place two swans were seen every year, to which Evangeline said, "C'est le marais des cygnes" (it is the marsh of the swans). The legislature decreed that the French name should stand. Rydjord, *Kansas Place-Names*, 4, 112. Despite Gustavus' use of an alternate name, not until the river crosses into Missouri can the name "Osage" be legally applied.

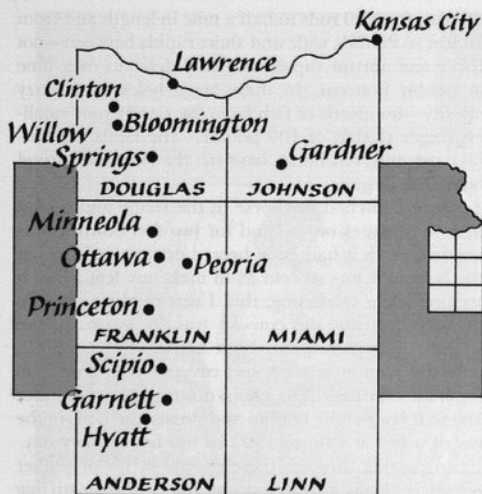
tle lakes from 20 rods to half a mile in length and from 20 feet to 20 rods wide and short rapids between—not rocky and abrupt rapids, but easy descents over lime or pebbly bottoms. In these large holes lie no lazy activity—hundreds of fish from the size of your smallest finger to that of 100 pounds—the kinds are buffalo, cat, sun, red horse, bass etc. the first and second being the largest.

Here I hitched my horse in the shade and took a bath. The water on top and for two feet down was as hot as though it had been heated on a stove, while at the bottom it was so cold as to make my feet ache. It seemed while swimming, that I was floating along in milk fresh from the cow—it was so warm. These streams lie between two high banks—like our gulf, only the bottom is wide and covered with trees. No fresh air ever deigns to sweep down to cool the water and so it rests at the bottom and sweats and boils in the ray of a sun at 140° to 150° for ten hours every day.

In passing through these narrow strips of timber one feels almost suffocated and the heat is so stifling that by the time one reaches the opposite bank his skin is parched, his throat dry and a general feeling of las-



During his travels, Gustavus Merriam met John Tecumseh "Ottawa" Jones and passed "a tolerable pleasant hour" with him and his wife, "drinking good well water and eating some pie and cake."



situde has so firm a hold of his system that it takes some moments for the fresh breeze of the opposite side to bring him to rights.

In crossing these reserves you often notice narrow paths, almost as straight as if made by a plow and compass—which you would think were really furrows, but they are old Indian trails made by the Indians passing from one pond to another of the streams. They all ride ponies and if more than one at a time they follow each other in Indian file—each keeping in one and the same track. On this reserve too you see old ruts formed by the trains of wagons under Col. Fremont²⁴ on his trip across to the Pacific coast.

After passing this stream I passed along with now and then an Indian's log house in the skirt of the timber, till I came up on to the divide between the Marais des Cygnes and one of its branches, when I saw the town of Peoria²⁵ in the distance and a beautiful expanse of prairie and bottom land, the latter covered in part with timber whose rich foliage looked as green as if there had been warm showers every day for months.

The sky was unclouded and the air as pure as could be—so pure that Venus was distinctly visible at 4 o'clock and Jupiter at 5, so that with these and the sun and moon in full sight I had a glorious sunset.²⁶ My way led across another stream—a branch of the one

just passed which I reached just before sunset—just in time to see scores of gray and fox squirrels running and chattering from tree to tree, while hundreds of birds—several like the large red one you brought for Mother from New Orleans a few years ago²⁷—filled the air with their songs which seemed all the sweeter to me as I have not been accustomed to hear them in Gardner, because no timber is near the town. I could not hurry my horse through although I had two miles to go after getting out on the prairie on the other side.

The prairie reached I galloped along until I met an Indian and asked him if Judge Merritt²⁸ a person who had lived in the town of Chumming²⁹ for three years was at home. He told me he lived down by the timber two miles beyond the town—so I hurried along and passed through the city, which consisted of four log cabins and all deserted—the scene was anything but pleasant just then but it reminded me of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" or the village deserted on the Gaspé coast by Evangeline and Gabriel before taking their long and painful travels so finely described by Longfellow.

On I pushed and finally just at dark I came to a dead stop. The fence—the first for miles on miles—was in the way, so I got off and rode along a few rods till I came to a log cabin with a lot full of cows, oxen, calves, hogs, etc.—just by the side. I threw the bridle over the saddle horn and left old Dobbin to ruminate on the probability of a speedy supper or possibility of another tramp till he could find rest. I was fully confirmed in the belief that I should stop there overnight if I could and I know I am pretty good at coaxing a western man to keep me when he don't want to, but I did not need to coax, for this house was occupied by the Judge and family, besides them were two other young men staying there with whom I was acquainted.

26. Astronomy was of great interest to the Merriam family. Clinton's home had an observatory and telescope in a rooftop cupola, and his wife Carrie had studied the subject when she attended Rutgers College in New York City.

27. Probably a cardinal. Now abundant in the East, at that time they had not expanded their range and would have been a novelty in New York State. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1983), 382. Caged wild birds were quite popular, although the writings of Gustavus' niece Florence Merriam Bailey later helped to outlaw such abuses.

28. Probably Judge James S. Merritt, whose name appears in lists of political officeholders and who wrote a history of Pottawatomie County in 1879. *History of the State of Kansas*, 82.

29. As Gustavus notes that it was "all deserted," it is not surprising that the town does not show up on later maps. It is not even listed in "Extinct Geographical Locations," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1911–1912*, 12:475. The introduction to that article, "Some of the Lost Towns of Kansas," quotes Horace Greeley's explanation: "It takes three log houses to make a city in Kansas, but they begin calling it a city as soon as they have staked out the lots." But "three log houses" were enough in those days to make much history." *Ibid.*, 426.

24. Col. John Charles Fremont, who became known as the Pathfinder to the West, first crossed this area in 1842.

25. Some of the Peoria Indians from Illinois settled here. Ryd-jord, *Kansas Place-Names*, 429.

I now felt at home after feeding the horse and taking the same for myself of what biscuit, ice³⁰ water and milk with ice and coffee (for you must know that a genuine western man never drinks tea) plenty of bacon and potatoes etc. I went down to the creek close by for an evening bath. . . . Our path from the house down to the water was down the steep side of a hill covered on either side with trees and the light of the moon was as good as no light at all for I could not see my hand before me—'twas black as the "Black Hole" of Calcutta. Every now and then my toe would hit a stone or low stump and then my equilibrium would be deranged—sometimes so very badly that the derangement would bring the ground up as high as my hands or nose and then slide along down to see how far it could go without making me mad. However, the bath was taken and a few minutes afterwards found me on a feather bed on the floor in the same room abed with the Judge and his wife, three daughters, two boys and two men making ten of us sleeping in a room 16 x 18. Along in the night a rainstorm came up and the roof not being waterproof, my face caught a few drops of water, which were not in the bill of fare or lodging. This rain did not go as far as Gardner, from which I now was 40 miles.

The next morning was beautiful—not a cloud was to be seen in the sky and I got a start at 6 o'clock. A few moments after "a solitary horseman might have been seen" wending his way at a slow pace up the hill from the woods, which he had just left. To the ordinary passer by, he would have been taken for a—man, but on looking more closely one could discover the end of a revolver and the handle of a bowie knife protruding from their scabbards at either side, so that the first idea however good was quickly changed to that of a different one.

This horseman would have been taken for a "Border Ruffian"³¹ or, here now as an ordinary traveler going some distance on business. I wish you could have seen him, for he was no other than the writer and by the way the writer thinks this is getting to be a confounded long letter or else he is mistaken and not a quarter through yet—you'll say do for pity's [sake] stop if you want me to read it, but I won't yet. I'll give the spare moments of tomorrow to you and maybe get done.³²

Well, a mile and a half brought me to the town of

30. The word "ice" is clearly written twice, but one wonders how the fortunate judge obtained it.

31. Missourians had crossed the border into Kansas to vote for proslavery candidates. Later such "border ruffians" incited violence that culminated in 1856 when they "sacked the abolitionist stronghold of Lawrence and threatened to drive every Northerner out of the area." Murphy, *Frontier Crusader*, 38.

Ohio City³³—a live town with perhaps 20 houses and some little business. A short stop here and a talk with the merchants on affairs connected with my trip I inquire the way to Hyatt³⁴ and get put on the wrong road, but a half hour spent in crossing the prairie set me all right and on I trudged.

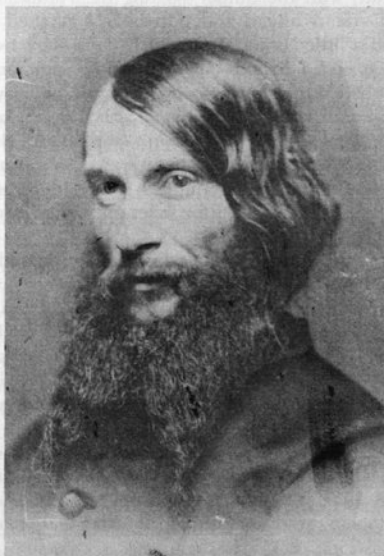
The day turned out dreadfully hot—very little wind blew to temper the heat and so I was obliged to go slow. . . . A long ride now over a rather smooth prairie, where the grass was very short and the land look[ed] as though the hard times of the past three years had ruined it, brought me to a 10 x 12 shanty with a shingle nailed to one corner with "Scipio Post Office"³⁵ printed on it. I drew rein to see what this

32. By then he had handwritten almost eight large sheets. The finished letter was nineteen pages long.

33. Three Kansas counties had an Ohio City. The one in Franklin County had originally been Bowling Green until its Ohio settlers changed it. "Then along came a man from Princeton, Illinois, who named it Princeton," the name it bears today. Rydjord, *Kansas Place-Names*, 273.

34. Named for philanthropist Thaddeus Hyatt, "a 'do-gooder' of the classic type." Murphy, *Frontier Crusader*, 45. With W. F. M. Army, he established a colony here. See also note 39.

35. A classical Roman name applied to four places in Indiana, it was promoted by settlers from one of them for the new Kansas town. Rydjord, *Kansas Place-Names*, 279.



Thaddeus Hyatt gave his name to the new colony he and his friend W.F.M. Army promoted during the late 1850s in present Anderson County.

city's prospects for the future were. I have found that the name of the City was Scipio, but further deponent saith not. This little shanty was post office, dry goods store, grocery and dram shop combined, so well combined and so well arranged in the interior that the inattentive observer would be puzzled to ascertain where the one began and the next ended. \$25 would have bought the whole concern. But what concerned me most was the intolerable thirst from which I had been suffering for four mortal hours and the way by which I was to get rid of it. Store-keeper hired a boy by promising him a glass of whiskey to go and bring a pail of water, so I not to be *small* had to buy five cents worth of musty crackers to eat on the road—or throw away—just as my appetite dictated—to pay him for his outlay for me.

The water here was anything but refreshing, for it had been hauled from the slough probably three days anterior to the flood—at any rate it was hot and burnt as it ran down the neck of the thirsty traveller. Well, my throat clear, I began to talk and ask where I was and I found that I was on the line between Franklin and Anderson Counties, with Garnett, the county seat of the latter in full view ten miles distant and Fairview³⁶—another city in the shell within a mile and one half to my right. Through this town, my way led to Hyatt, with the timber skirting the Pottawatomie ahead—dead ahead too. Onward I pushed and crossed a little “branch” on which there were two or three splendid bottom farms, but the high prairie along there for miles is not worth what will pay the taxes—compared with our home, although it is better than 9/10 of Lewis Co.³⁷ I would stop now at almost every log cabin to get water, but it was all so warm that I could drink it only under protest to save life. There is not a well or cold spring for miles and miles through them.

At noon I drove up to a cabin and anticipated getting dinner, but I found the family although looking neat and clean for this country, had just dined and eaten up all they had on the table, so I contented myself with asking for water again and kept going, laboring under the impression that when I did find a house where I could get a clean meal, to vamp in and demand the same either at the point of my tongue, bowie knife, or muzzle of my revolver not particular which so long as I got my dinner and was satisfied.

But I came to a house at last where there was a good looking young woman alone with a couple of ba-

bies, who agreed on condition that I would come in and wait, to get me something to eat and so I went in and waited, played with the baby or babies so as to get my dinner all the sooner.

After awhile the table was *set* and I *set* up on invitation and on being relieved of my new charges. Our dinner was good—fried potatoes, fried eggs, slap-jacks made of corn meal, bacon and coffee, so that between a tolerable good appetite sharpened by nine hours fasting I made out to eat a tolerable meal and paid for it well—50 cents being the smallest change I had around me and she was without “any red” so that I came away a creditor for another meal if I ever chance there again—and the Lord willing I never will be. I passed on and was soon in the sweltering bottom of Cedar Creek, a branch of the Pottawatomie. This creek is called Cedar because there is any quantity of cedar growing along its banks—large cedars too—a foot through and the finest evergreen tree I have seen since I left the Eastern States. The cedars were what are called Red Cedar and are used for making buckets, churns etc. I had by some hocus pocus got on the wrong road after leaving my dinner noon—whether through my thoughtlessness while the fair lady was directing me or attention to her personal charms more than the way I wanted to go, but I at last saw a house in the distance to which I quickly bent my steps or rather the steps of my horse and there found that a log cabin I could see some two miles ahead was in the City of Hyatt—the town to which I was going.

Just at the edge of the townsite, as I was afterwards told—for townsites in this country begin a long way before you get to the town and sometimes before the town is in sight, I crossed a deep ravine in which there was a steam saw mill which has never sawed enough boards to cover it, for it stands with its bones bleaching and drying in the sun. In this ravine I saw a little green thing about as large as a lizard which ran from me and stopped at the edge of a large stone. He stood looking at me a moment and all at once his color changed to scarlet and then he ran out of sight. It was a chameleon—the first I ever [saw]. This little animal is known there by the name of the swift.³⁸ In this same ravine I was told there were scorpions in quantities and it's a curious fact—if a fact it be—that this is the only place in the Territory where either one of these animals or reptiles are found. If I had had time, I should have been glad to have caught one of each to put with my collection of insects etc. that I am gathering.

36. A common name, this town was not shown on maps of the time, although it is listed as one of the extinct geographic locations in Anderson County. “Extinct Geographical Locations,” 478.

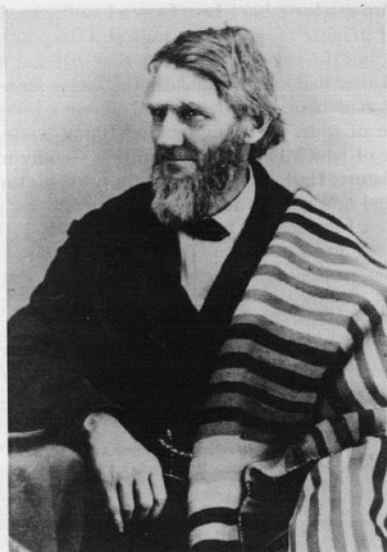
37. The New York area where Gustavus and Clinton grew up.

38. Not a true chameleon, a swift may look red underneath but does not change color. Chameleons are not known in Kansas, and even Gustavus questioned the identification.

The town of Hyatt is another gassy town consisting of one frame house as large as our milk house used for a hotel and two or three log cabins—some of which seemed to be occupied. This is the far found City of W.F.M. Army, Esq.³⁹—the great Rail-Road projector. Army's brain seems to have a half dozen rail-roads already built and in operation in it and more in prospective. When he gets a rail-road to that town, it will be built by a company of amateurs and visionary rail-road builders who had never any idea of ever seeing their money back and who never saw the town until the ties were laid on the site. Army needs a year at the Asylum at Attica⁴⁰ to get over his strange mono-mania.

Well, my business completed here I galloped over to the town of Garnett,⁴¹ the county seat of Anderson County and found it quite a place—perhaps 200 houses and wearing an aspect of business and prosperity. I was surprised to see so large a town in such a place, for it has never created any noise—one of the essentials to prosperity in this country.

At this place I saw a company of fishermen just returned from a creek close by the town loaded down with fish from the length of your finger to that of your arm. Some were really fine looking fellows. They capture the larger ones the easiest by shooting. The fish-



Following his promotional and political activities in Kansas, W.F.M. Army, shown here in 1856, served as an Indian agent and as secretary of New Mexico Territory during the 1860s and early 1870s.

39. W. F. M. Army was a promoter, and "for a man like Army, always seeking a cause for which to do battle, the opportunities during the 1850s were almost unlimited." He enlisted the aid of Thaddeus Hyatt (see note 34) and together in 1857 they formed a new colony to be named Hyatt in a new county to be named Army (later renamed Anderson). The colonizers were a band of territorial militiamen recently released from capture during raids on proslavery camps.

Army and Hyatt also moved to the new colony, which was planned to be the county seat. A steam sawmill was built, a store opened, and a post office established with Army as postmaster. He realized also the need for transportation for the farmers. When neither water travel (between Kansas City and Lawrence) nor stage line was adequate, "Army and others realized that railroads would be much more valuable." But several trips to Washington failed to produce the necessary federal funds, and no local capital was available.

Meanwhile, the new colony suffered "much sickness and many deaths." Army did what he could, and the town—labeled "hand-some" by a visiting newspaperman in 1858—grew slowly. But that soon reversed. Army and Hyatt were both in Washington, trying to obtain aid for Kansas, including money for a railroad. "The town soon began to go down, and in 1859 many of its citizens went to Pike's Peak, and the county-seat being permanently located at Garnett, the town was soon after abandoned." The severe drought of 1860 helped to complete its demise. In Washington the two crusaders mounted a massive relief effort, and Army was placed in charge of the campaign for southern Kansas. He was far more successful at this task, reporting "by June 1861 that more than 14 million pounds of supplies had passed through his hands." Murphy, *Frontier Crusader*, 60-97 passim; *History of the State of Kansas*, 1324.

40. A New York State institution for the insane. His comment is equivalent to "send him to the funny farm."

41. The 1860 census showed Garnett had a population of 1,509, out of the Anderson County population of 2,398 (466 families). *History of the State of Kansas*, 1325.

erman will go early in the morning and when the sun's rays come out warm, the largest ones come to the top of the water to sun themselves—the finest are then drawn on and shot. In this way, scores of families get almost their only meat during the summer months. All these seem to be alive with fish, but few comparatively are caught. In times of very high water, fish weighing 15 or 20 lbs. are often found running up little ravines when perhaps in three hours after the rain stops there will not be water enough running for them to get back. They manage to get into slough holes of a few feet in circumference and there they lie till the next rain or are caught or the sun dries up the water and leaves them to be eaten by buzzards, crows or hawks, of which we have an abundance.

A ride of four miles from Garnett, down an easy slope brought me to the Pottawatomie and I entered the timber on the bottom just as the sun was going down. Through this piece of timber, which was a mile wide, or at least the road through its various windings was a mile long, I walked my horse, stopping every now and then to draw a bead on a rabbit, quail or squirrel with my revolver, only to miss him or at most to make the fur fly. I reached the opposite side just dark and

drew up at a log cabin where I saw a lot of cows, determined to make my supper of milk and sleep as best I could, but the owner was Dutchy as sour kraut and I found after making my usual excuse (asking for water) that I had better go ahead, and ahead I did go a couple of miles to a fair looking frame house, the owner of which had represented that County in the Legislature. Here I stopped, gave the horse his supper, lariatied him out and went to bed. My sleep was good here, for I had a clean bed and in the morning a good breakfast and a long chat with "mine host" on territorial matters and started. However I offered to pay for my lodging and he, to my exceeding surprise would take nothing—the first instance of disinterested philanthropy I had met in this God-forsaken country.

My trip to-day was Lawrence-ward and after a ride of a few hours with a morning bath in Middle Creek and coming to where the road was fenced up I let down the bars and went through, allowing at this stage of the proceedings, nothing pertaining to this mundane sphere to stop my progress. I continued on uninterrupted to the Marais des Cygnes, where another bath and a lunch of crackers for myself and a feed for old Dobbin found me again on my way to the famed City of Minneola⁴²—the Skulduggery Capital of Kansas and now the county seat of Franklin Co. under protest—another town disputing the honors with it in the courts and at the elections. My way here led along up the East side of the stream, passing the house of an Ottawa Indian every now and then, where I usually stopped for water and to chat with the best looking squaw. I have learned a few Indian phrases—just enough, so that by using them I ingratiate myself into their favor immediately.

Minneola was at last seen in the distance and I assure you—distance lent enchantment to the view—for on reaching the City I found it like others—on its last legs. It was about four o'clock when I got into the heart of the city and drew up at the store to see what I could

see. I staid half an hour when a terrible hail came up, so I concluded to stay over night. I crossed the street to the hotel built at a cost of \$8,000 in four weeks from its conception in the busy brain of the "Free State" Legislature of '58.⁴³ Here I was met at the door by the wife of "mine host," and on arranging the preliminaries I was soon installed in a large shell of a house—capable of accomodating several hundred hungry politicians or wire workers, but I, with the exception of a solitary boarder was the only guest of the house. I found the landlady was a native of New York City—a right pleasant woman she was too—for I had a long and very agreeable chat with her all the evening.

Sunday morning I started for Lawrence 20 miles N.E. but 25 by the way I had to go. A ride of 9 miles over beautifully rolling prairie and crossing one or two small streams, or what would be streams if they were favored with water enough to permit them to keep their fair names untarnished—the holes along looking thirsty and from one puddle of water to the other there would be several bars on which no person however good at overcoming the Maine laws⁴⁴ could get "any anything" to drink, smoke or chew, brought me to the City of Willow Springs,⁴⁵ a town on the Santa Fe road with three or four houses and a grog shop for the sake of a name. Here I took a path leading Northward toward Bloomington⁴⁶ and not wishing to visit the last named city, I took out my map and by the aid of that and the stones at the corners of sections, I got on the right line and went ahead on a beeline, turning neither to the right nor the left till I came to a stream, where I found myself in a fix—for I could not cross and the brush made up of blackberry bushes, green briars and such things were so thick that every now and then my toe would get caught and down would come the sharp

43. The first free-state territorial legislature had convened in December of 1857. So happy were those in attendance that the day was recorded "as one of general rejoicing. . . . So they came with music and banners and shouts of joy up to the old stronghold of Proslavery Democracy, partly to uphold the hands of their chosen rulers, but more to have for once a good time." *History of the State of Kansas*, 165. The legislature reconvened in January 1858; see also note 42.

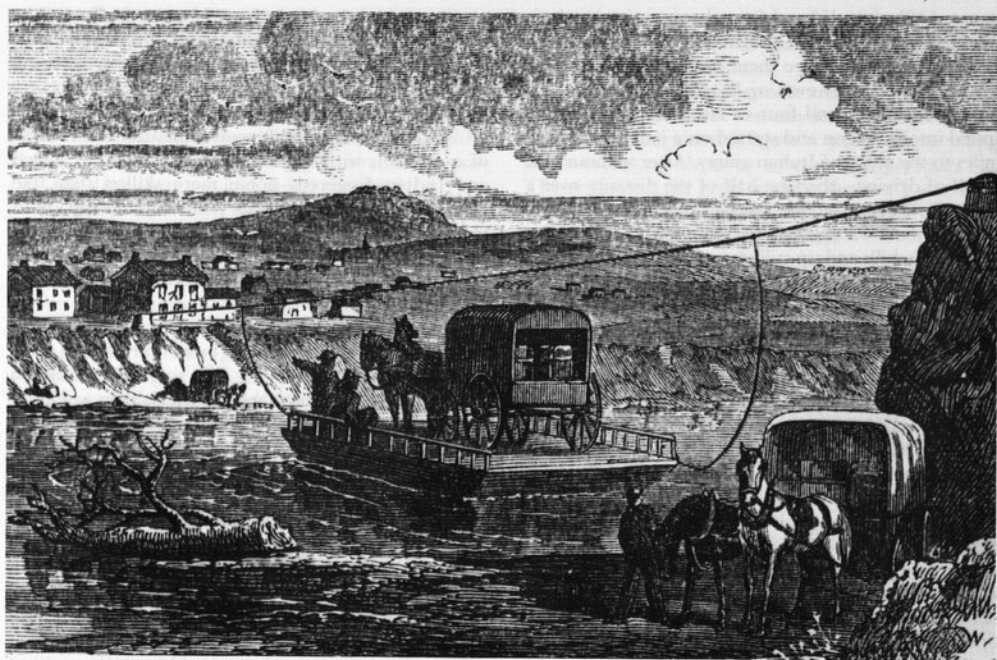
44. Maine attorney Edward F. Dana reports that "Chapter 33 of the Laws passed by the Maine Legislature in 1858 prohibited the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors. . . . This remained in force until the repeal of National Prohibition! . . . As far as I know there never was a Maine law pertaining to tobacco." Letter, November 15, 1984.

45. The population in 1860 was 931. *History of the State of Kansas*, 310.

46. Although the 1883 map in *History of the State of Kansas* shows Bloomington east of Clinton, no information is given about it (*ibid.*). "Extinct Geographical Locations," 473, indicates that the name of Bloomington was changed to Clinton in 1858. No doubt locals like Gustavus still used the old name, or perhaps by 1860 each had "three log houses" and qualified as towns by Greeley's definition (see note 29).

42. The previous year the territorial legislature had passed a bill moving the capital away from proslavery Lecompton and out into "a stretch of untouched prairie" at Minneola (not at its present location, but as Gustavus notes later, some twenty miles southwest of Lawrence). "Nothing was there except prairie grass, bugle-brush, and weeds," but a few buildings were "hastily and rudely flung together." Spring, *Kansas*, 259. Land was purchased by prominent free-state leaders, with assessments and mortgages to raise money. "Inside of six weeks a hotel costing \$8,000 had been completed, as well as a large hall to be used for legislative purposes." "Some of the Lost Towns of Kansas," 433.

Since the majority of those voting on the move had some interest in Minneola, the move "was subject to the suspicion of being a speculative movement" and was subsequently declared illegal. *History of the State of Kansas*, 167. Spring completes the story: "This adverse decision remanded the ambitious town-site of Minneola into common prairie." *Kansas*, 259.



Lawrence in 1857, as depicted in Richardson's *Beyond the Mississippi*.

points of my spurs into the flanks of old Dobbin very much to his discomfort and mine too for that matter, because the harder he went, the tighter the vine would draw on my foot and of course the deeper the spur would go so that necessity compelled me to unbuckle Mr. Spur and after that I went along quite cozily.

In winding along the creek to find a place I could cross at I saw three wild brown ducks swimming along, so I got off and crept up to the ducks and bang, bang went my revolver until I banged out all the charges and killed "nary" duck. My sole consolation was that I frightened the little fellow[s] most dreadfully, for they would dive under the water and come up at half pistol shot off, so that I soon had to shoot to a disadvantage both in distance and will. At last I got across and took up my "line of march" for my destination. This I reached after a long tramp over logs, stones, through brush, fences and what not till I got tired of it and wished I had kept the road instead of going cross lots. Here I rested a couple of hours, in the shade, drank cool water, and again set out for Lawrence—far-famed Lawrence, which I reached after sundry little haps and mishaps, about sunset.

My entré into the City was made after dark, for I

stopped at the outskirts of the town to see a friend and his kind family. My stay in the City was until 3 P.M. of the next day, for I had a dozen little jobs of business to attend to, besides any quantity of folks to call on—none of whom I had seen since Christmas. After sundry tearful partings with the fair damsels of my acquaintance there, I set out for home and reached it and was safely in bed by ten at night—and thus endeth ye travels of ye Merriam into ye County of Anderson and back. . . .

Gardner, Kansas—June 17th 1860

MY DEAR CLINTON,

I wrote you a long letter ten days ago on a trip to the South and now I have the exquisite pleasure of being able to inflict almost as foolish, flimsy and nonsensical piece of jargon on you again. My text this time is taken away from home—away down in the dark, mysterious abode of the Shawnee Indians.⁴⁷

The early part of last week I learned from some of the Shawnees with whom we trade, that a great dance was to come off near the house of an Indian by the

47. By this time the Shawnee Indians had been confined to a two-hundred-thousand-acre reservation, most of it in Johnson County where Gustavus lived. *History of the State of Kansas*, 308.

name of "Black Wolf," and from them received an invitation, if invitation it can be called the telling them that I *wuz* going down to see them dance.

Well, Wednesday evening last, after the day's work was over, Church and four or five others and myself "piled into" a wagon and started on a journey of eight miles to the scene of Indian gaiety. After an hour and a half of driving—the first half of the distance over a fine prairie road, and the last half over a not very fine road in the woods—through ravines, across creeks, down steep hills and up still steeper ones, we arrived at the "scene of action." Here we saw the light of several large fires casting their shades and shadows up into the branches of the trees, hundreds of ponies tied to saplings, and any quantity of Indians, squaws and whites going about in all directions, making the woods ring with their continual whooping. As soon as I conveniently could, I got into the region of the "sing."

The first thing that struck me as peculiar was the fact that the dancing hall was on the ground—a place cleared out in the woods with nothing but tall trees and the sky for a cover. It looked somewhat like a circus ring, only this was of an oval shape, its longest diameter being about 100 feet and shortest about 60—with hewn logs laid around the outside for seats for the fair sex and whoever else wished to occupy them. Inside of the "ring" were three bright fires, equi-distant from each other and the ends—being on the line of the longer diameter.

An old squaw—the oldest person there—was continually carrying old pieces of dry wood and rails to keep the fires going, while now and then she would use a long poker to advantage. These fires were kept burning with a bright light from before dark till after daylight the next morning. Fire making being "squaw's work" of course a squaw had to make the fires.

The next thing peculiar—although I have heard the same before, was the "music by the band." Only think, Clint—Indians having a native band of musicians! Isn't it wonderful!

Well, the band was as followeth:—1st A base [*sic*] drum—made by drawing a piece of well tanned buckskin over the top of a wooden churn—a common wooden churn—larger at the bottom than at the top and fastened tightly down by means of strings and sticks and the top kept damp to make the greater strain.

Now that you have the base drum, or more properly the snare drum we will tell you that the drum stick was made of a piece of pine a foot in length and weighing perhaps an ounce. It was whittled out evidently in a hurry—having a nub on each end to do the pounding with. When the drum was used, it was used to ac-

company the human, or I might more easily say the Indian voice, by striking the aforesaid buckskin with ye drumstick at stated intervals—each interval being exactly of the same length and about twice every second.

2d. A something built somewhat after the fashion of a clarinet, with holes along down the side, which one Indian fingered—some more skilled than the others—at intervals all night. With this flute, he would roll out very low notes for half a minute and then out would come some high ones. "Click-it-to-split" as Charlie would say.⁴⁸ These two instruments comprised the entire band.

The dance would commence (that in which both male and female participated) by four or five big Indians jumping up and falling into single file, taking a single fire as the center around which they would go on a kind of half trot, singing a song, consisting I should think of a few short words, repeated often. The chorus would come in with a clapping of hands, pointing down toward the ground, holding up their hands as if catching rain or other sign and invariably ended with a whoop by all engaged. As these few would be on their trip around the fire, others would join—the males singly and the females sometimes one and sometimes two arm in arm would come up and place themselves in the ranks between those already there. In the course of five minutes there would be perhaps 30 at once and when there were too many to go around one fire conveniently, the leader would strike off and take another of the fires into their ring and soon after as more came up they would take up the third fire, when there would be perhaps 200 Indians dancing at once.

At each dance there was one who led and commenced each of the songs, he being for that particular dance the leader. When the whole were dancing the sight was perfectly grand—if such words can express the looks of a lot of wild Indians dressed up with large sashes of bead worked on silk, feathers in their heads, bright moccasins on their feet, their faces painted all kinds of colors and all manner of fixings about their dress.

When the squaws dance alone—for they have dances in which no males are allowed to participate—they waited 'til the drum and fife were ready, when four or five would walk up in front of them and commence dancing close to them; these would soon be joined by others until the whole of the squaws would be on the ground at once—and packed as closely together as they could stand—the dancing being a kind

48. Clinton's son was Charles Collins Merriam. He was nine at the time, but Gustavus had not seen him for two years or more.

of "lift one foot and then the other"—swaying their bodies sidewise to their own music. I forgot to say that the music was seated at one side of the sing and the squaws instead of dancing around one of the fires danced at one side for as much as fifteen minutes, when the oldest squaw would file out and taking the rest in her train commence going around the fires—one fire, then two and at last the third.

In these dances they would have what are called "Queens of the Night" three or four squaws dressed to kill with "stove pipe hats" on their heads—the outside of the top being covered with silver bands, looking for all the world like the bottom rim of a silver carton—being filled with holes cut in all imaginable shapes. They were for the most part the largest and best looking of the squaws.

A few of the squaws had dresses made entirely of silk ribbons—fastened loosely together and when used to dance in, fluttered and whirled most bewitchingly. At the end of each dance, nearly all the squaws adjourned to their wagon or the bushes and donned another dress—one different from any worn before that night. Some of the squaws changed their dresses at least ten times. Gaudy colors, fancy gewgaws seemed to be all the rage. Some wore any quantity of cheap jewelry and others of the finest kind.

At about eleven o'clock at night they all had supper—taken sitting at any convenient place. The supper consisted of fresh beef boiled without salt or other seasoning and hominy.

Old Black Wolf had killed an ox and had the whole carcass cut up into pieces weighing from half a pound to three or four pounds—these pieces were laid into a

wagon box, from which the squaws took it in pails full and handed it around. No plates, knives or forks were seen, but honest old Adams.

I tasted of some of the meat and hominy but could only taste as the flavor was anything but agreeable.

After supper the chief gave a speech to the young ones—exhorting them to sobriety, temperance, etc. The nephew of the great warrior Tecumseh was there dressed in buckskin and fancifully fixed out with beads, sashes, feathers and jewelry.

On the whole the sight was a noble one and worth the trouble of going to see.

The only thing that marred the straight forwardness of the dance, was the getting drunk of some dozen white men—showing themselves below the Indian in that respect if not others.

I received your letter a few days ago—am much obliged for your kind offers of assistance in the proposed amalgamation of the Merriam with the Jackson family.⁴⁹ I am right in the midst of my wheat harvest⁵⁰—cutting it at the rate of over 6 acres a day. Our weather is awful warm. . . . I wish I were going to be with you at home this summer. KH

49. The Jackson woman apparently did not become his bride, and nothing more is mentioned of her in the family records. As noted, Gustavus married a Virginia plantation belle three years later.

50. Johnson County obviously fared much better from the effects of the long drought than did areas of Kansas to the south and west. Anderson County conditions were described as even worse than those in a western township where "254 persons had harvested only ten bushels of wheat and fifteen of potatoes." Murphy, *Frontier Crusader*, 89; see also note 21.