

WORK OF KANSAS FARM MEN

Goal: Introduce students to the work of farm men 100 years ago.

Objectives: When the lesson is completed, students will know that:

Farmers 100 years ago, like farmers today, are always interested in the weather.

Farmers grew a great deal of corn and, later on, wheat in the early days of Kansas.

Farming tools have changed a great deal.

A farmer's work often depended on what season it was.

Vocabulary:	Blizzard	Grasshopper	Plow
	Butcher	Harvest	Prairie Fire
	Diary	Husk	Thresh
	Drought	Tornado/Cyclone	Plant (noun & verb)

From the Trunk: Pictures #12 – 26
Corn Planter
Husking Peg
Corn Dryer
Corn Picking transparencies or power point CD
Hog Scraper

Introduction

From the Trunk: Picture #6 & 12

Samuel Hudson was a Kansas farmer who lived near Manhattan. He raised milk cows and several types of crops. In 1902 he kept a daily diary of what happened on his farm.

- What is a diary?
- Have you ever kept a diary? Why?
- Why do you think a farmer might keep a diary?

As you read excerpts from Mr. Hudson's diary, have the children listen carefully so that they can answer the following questions.

- What types of work did Mr. Hudson do?
- Why would a farmer be so interested in the weather?
- Did Mr. Hudson work by himself or with other people? (A man named "Harlow" also worked on the farm. He was probably Mr. Hudson's son. His daughter Bessie and his wife, who he often called "Mate", also worked.)
- What animals were on Mr. Hudson's farm?



From the Diary of a Farmer

Winter

Jan. 19, Sunday. Opened alfalfa stack. Harlow been fussing with Tread power -- guess we will soon have it fixed so it will churn.



(NOTE: A Tread-Power Churn is shown in **Picture #6.**)

Cutting
Wood

Jan. 22. Harlow gone with Bessie to College. Nice bright sunshine this morning. Will be mighty muddy before night. I must go and help churn. Roy Cox came and got his axe and settled up. 6 1/4 cord (of wood) cut in 30 days. Great wood cutter that Harlow and Myself. Cut the walnut post ... on Houstons and sawed off five post cuts and Harlow trimmed it up.

Sleighing

Jan. 31. Thawing and snow packing down. Good sleighing now. Mate and I hitched Coco to cutter, drove over to C. W. Kimball's. Harlow had fire built under kettles when we got back. Alex Howell came. About 1:30 o'clock we butchered

Butchering

the two hogs. Harlow pitched in like a good fellow. Saved my lame knee. Harlow went sleigh riding this eve and thus ends January, 1902.

Making
Sausage

Feb. 2, Sunday. Mercury 6 below zero. Cut up some meat and made sausage. 65 lbs. Harlow ground it. 3 p.m. H. K. H. took Dick and cutter gone somewhere. We wonder Oh! yes this is Columbus Day. Have half your corn and half your hay --- The sun has shone bright all day. Thawed a very little.

Weather

March. 9, Sunday. Bright and warm with high wind from south, dust flying. Hauled fodder and alfalfa. Had to find on (his way about) with a rope.... 4:20 p.m. Very warm, cloudy and acts like rain. Hope it will. The wheat is greening up very fast. Must go and hunt up the calves. The little rascals have run off.

- Prices Mar. 12. Windy from N.W. not very cold. Started for town at 11 a.m. with lumber wagon. Bought seed oats at 65 cts. for bu., seed potatoes at 1.65 for bu. Brought home Finy's drill. Bought 200 lbs. corn chopp @ \$1.35 for cwt. Lord what prices, all on account of a drouth and still tis drouthy. Mate [his wife] at C. W. Kimball's quilting....
- Spring Planting Mar. 13. Quite cool frosty morning but warming up fast. Wind in South. Southern Kansas got good rains the 11 inst. After dinner commenced sowing oats. Lord how the wind blew. I could hardly see the drill ... I thought it would blow my eyes out and my ears and hind end off. Hauled fodder and alfalfa. Sumner and Charley were here. Mate and Mrs. C. W. Kimball went over to S. S. Convention this evening.
- Hauling Wood Mar. 20 Days and nights should be of equal length now. It Rained. Just a little seems as though it was an impossibility to get a good rain. Hauled feed and wood, this forenoon. After dinner finished hauling the wood. I guess about 18 cords all told. Now 4:40 p.m., very cloudy and dark. I surely think it will rain. The robin is singing. Everything indicates Rain, Rain, Rain. That's what we want.
It did -----Rain.
- Calves and Colts Apr. 10. Cold this morning. Wind N.W. Hauled up wood all day. Star had a calf in afternoon and Princess had a colt before we got her over to the shed. Beat us just 3 minutes. Mrs. C. W. K. and Lois were over.
- May 13. Took Bessie to College, and the Butter to town. Got home 10:40 a.m. After dinner hitched to Lister got two rounds and then it rained at 4:30 p.m. took Dick went after Bessie got her at College. My Oh! My what a rain. 2 3/5 inches fell. Butter and Eggs for Hatchery brought in \$10.98 today.

Churning



May 22. Cloudy morning, mud ankle deep. Sol and myself churned, had 16 1/4 lbs. Butter. Mate and I printed it in 23 minutes. Mate took off 18 Gibson chicks more to hatch. Been mowing weeds. Raining a little at 3:30 P.M. Laid up Rock pile. (NOTE: Stone was used for a variety of things including foundations, houses, and fences like the one in **Picture #12**)

Visit to
Town,
Sears &
Roebuck

May 27. Verry, verry cool morning. Went down Town with 82 lbs. Butter. Took E.B.P. boys Butter Milk. Got S. & R. Catalogue. Bargained for Hay Rake. After Bessie got home we hitched to Lister. By gosh tis a hard job among old alfalfa roots. Got a lame hip....

Summer

June 16. Delightful morning, so cool and everything so fresh. Went to Manhattan, took 28 lbs. Butter. Paid last half of Taxes. Stopped at College on way back, got Churn Pulley and Shaft. Sol cultivating corn. Mate & Bessie washing. Been Hoeing Pop Corn, and it is mighty weedy, too. Mrs. C. W. Kimball called, and took Mate up to See Mrs. J. W. Harley's baby. Must get the cows.

Haying

July 16. Hard at it again. Early too. Had a nice cool breeze from South. We stackt. Eight loads, besides cocking four up. Finished at 5 o'clock P.M. Bessie went to town in forenoon. After Dinner went out and Mowed alfalfa on north piece. Well, we have up a nice ... of Hay. Mate was over to C. W. K. and Willard was here. Nice cool breeze from the South.

Crops
Grown

July 18, 1902 A nice shower of Rain last night with a great amount of Thunder and Lightning. Also considerable wind. Cool nice fresh morning. Have Sol started cultivating Kaffer Corn. I cut out a patch of SunFlowers. Went after the Mail. After dinner got Sol to raking alfalfa. I took Dick and old rake and raked Hay I cut yesterday. We put more on stack at Barn and stacked the rest up on the bench, ready for topping out the stack. Started ... Sol cultivated a few rounds in Kaffer corn. He rides Dick over to Basket Ball game to School house tonight.

Aug. 16. Went over and saw steam thresher work at C. W. K., then shaved cleaned up after dinner, took Coco down and had shoe sett. They fixed his foot up in good shape not much lame now.... H.K.H. went to town, got Ice for making Cream.

Horses &
Buggies

Aug. 19. A nice gentle rain last night, began on 11:30. Harlow Painted the Buggy, first coat. I got Mate some Sweet corn then got Mail. Mate and I went horseback to north end of farm to see the cropps. Got Elderberries and Grapes. Mate and Bessie went and called at Days. Just sun sett. A fine Rain last night.

Fall

Oct. 4. Saturday. A cloudy cold Rainy morning. Helped churn and Print Butter, took Coco and cart, started to town at 11 O'clock in a cold Misty rain. I think the worst Roads I ever saw. Down town just a Sea of Mud. Got Mable Stevens in Cart and hauled her across the muddy street. Bessie did not go to College. After got home took off Screen doors from Seperator room, H. K. H. took Seperator all apart and Keyed up Pully on shaft and it runs as it should. A good Job sure enough. Charley and Blanche ... called. Paid H. K. H. and self for helping thresh.

Rained more or less all day. Team drowned at the ... Wild Cat Creek crossing.

Husking

Oct. 22. Another nice morning. H. K. H. gone with Bessie to College. Took Shaft to Seperator to get it fixed. Finished husking the Pop Corn. Rode Princess over to west pasture to see what was the matter of Young Mary. Found a young calf.

A Late
Calf

Vashti was also looking for a place to drop a calf. It is quite windy and warm. Now just noon. After Dinner Put Seperator in (cost five cents) to get it fixed got up cows and young calves, milked them. H.K.H. going to Murphys this evening to play high five. Young Mary and Vashti presented us with a pair of red Heiffer calves today.

Winter	Dec. 14. Snowing this morning at 5:30. Kept it up until 1 O'clock P. M. After dinner H. K. H. and self hitched to Snow
Plowing Snow	plow. Done a good job. It works fine. Now 3:40 P.M. Acts like more snow. Just been fastening on cutter box. Guess I must hustle some chores.
	Used Snow Plow first time. Fully six inches of snow fell.
Sleighing	Dec. 15. A cold morning, wind N. W. We went to timber and got our sleigh runners. Worked all day making sleigh. H. K. H. hauled in alfalfa and cane and got mail. Will Whitney called. Mate and Bessie worked.
Making Sausage	Dec. 29. A frosty morning. Helped to do the churning, then cut up lard and sausage. After dinner helped H. K. H. get a load of wood and he got the second load. I ground and mixed sausage 50 lbs. H. K. H. hauled cane, caffer corn and alfalfa. Mrs. CWK, Willard and Dance Louis called. H. K. H. and Bessie go to a dance tonight at school house. Been a fine day.

--From the Samuel Emmons Hudson Diaries, 1902
diary, The Spencer Research Library, University of
Kansas.



Activities

Classroom Mural

Add some of Mr. Hudson's jobs to your classroom mural.

Seed Growth

Supplies:

Bean seeds, potting soil, clear plastic cups, water, sunlight

Learn about the importance of weather by experimenting with plants. After planting the seeds in the cups, give some normal water and sunlight; give others too much or too little. What happens?

Growing Corn

From the trunk: Picture #13, Corn Planter, Husking Peg, Corn Picking transparencies or power point CD

Other Supplies: 1 pint shelled corn (available at most grain elevators and feed stores or substitute unpopped popcorn) overhead or power point projector, and screen

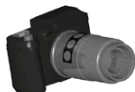
Europeans learned to grow corn from the Native Americans. They soon relied heavily on corn and it is still one of the world's most important crops

Planting



CORN PLANTER: Let the children examine the corn planter. Fill the metal canister with shelled corn. Then open and close the handles of the planter. This will cause the corn to drop out onto the floor. Some people call this machine a "chuck-a-luck" corn planter. Listen to it as it works: can you guess why they called it by this name?

Picture #13



This picture shows a farmer using a corn planter just like the one in the trunk.

This planter was an attempt to improve the equipment used by farmers who raised corn. Before it was available, corn had to be planted by making a hole in the ground with a pointed stick, dropping in several kernels of corn and then using your foot to move the dirt back over the hole. This particular style of corn planter never became very popular, though. Many farmers felt that it was no faster than using a pointed stick. Later planters, however, were based on this design and were widely used.

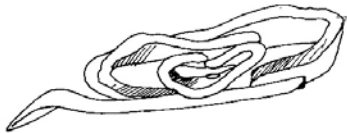
-How do farmers plant corn today?

Today, farmers use tractors to pull large corn planters. Not only can these machines plant 24 rows of corn at once, they can also apply fertilizer, insecticides, and herbicides at the same time.

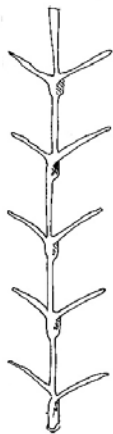
Harvesting

The first Kansas settlers harvested corn by hand. One way they did it was to walk down their rows of corn, ripping the ears off the stalks and throwing them into a wagon which was pulled alongside the row. The far edge of the wagon was quite tall so that an ear which was tossed too hard would hit it and fall back into the wagon. This board was called a "bang board" because the corn banged into it as the pickers worked.

Another way to harvest corn was to cut down the stalks and load them onto a wagon. Later the ears of corn were removed, and the stalks were used as food for animals.



HUSKING PEG: Ears of corn are surrounded by leaves called husks which must be removed before the corn is used. This can be done by hand, but with a husking peg and some practice, husking can be done much faster. If you have access to dried ears of corn with the husks still attached, you may wish to try your hand at husking.



CORN DRYER: Once the corn has been husked, the finest ears were chosen for the next year's seed. It was very important that the seed corn was properly dried so that it would sprout readily in the spring. It was best if the corn could dry completely on the stalk. If the corn had to be brought in to avoid rain or frost, it had to finish drying in an airy protected room. Some farmers built special racks to lay the ears on; others tied the ears together with a string and hung them up. Still others used corn dryers like the one in the trunk. Each prong held one ear of corn, and the dryers could be hooked together and hung up for the winter.

For more information about harvesting and husking corn please use the power point presentation, or the overhead transparencies of it, included at the end of this manual. For your convenience the presentation can also be found at the Kansas State Historical Society's web site, www.kshs.org/teachers/trunks/farm.htm#powerpoints

Sometimes neighbors and friends would work together to make their husking go more quickly. For more information on "Husking Bees" see page 77.

Raising Wheat

From the Trunk: Pictures #14 - 16

When settlers first came to Kansas they grew crops that they had raised successfully in the East. Early settlers grew mostly corn. Kansas, however, was better suited to growing wheat. By 1890, farmers were earning more money from their wheat than their corn.

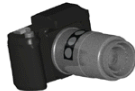
As more and more acres were planted with wheat, better farm machinery was needed. The first Kansas wheat growers did their work with simple hand and horse-powered tools.

Picture #14



The broadcast seeder shown in this picture was actually only a step above scattering the seed by hand.

Picture #15 & 16



By the 1880s some farmers were using grain drills to plant their wheat, binders to cut and tie the wheat bundles (see #15) and steam threshers to separate the grains of wheat from their stalks (see #16). Farmers were very interested in these technological changes. Raising wheat was still hard work, but these machines let a farmer grow and harvest more wheat than he could before.

Read Arthur Grube's account of growing wheat in Kansas.

-What jobs did the men do at threshing time? the women? the children?



Threshing Time

Threshing time was one of the big events on the farm. We would watch for the engine coming down the road, half a mile away, puffing its black smoke high in the air, and when it pulled into our place there was real excitement. We had to round up help from the neighbors. Sometimes, we traded work, we helped them, they helped us. If the wheat and oats was still in the field in shocks, it would take four or five wagons with hay racks to haul the grain to the separator. Two boys, one on each side, to cut the twine that held the bundles together. Then, it took one man to push the wheat into the machine. A movement which would do justice to a hula dancer. Another man to stack the straw and my father would do his part by scattering salt over the straw so it would be more edible for the stock. If the wheat was heavy and the yield good, it would take 2 wagons to haul the grain to the granary. It took two men to care for the engine. It had to have a supply of both water and coal. The engine was set about 50 feet away from the seperator to avoid fire. The engine runs the seperator by means of a long wide belt.

The engineer would come very early in the morning in order to get up steam. The water boy was necessary so everyone had good fresh water to drink. There was no ice but our water was pumped from a deep well and it was refreshing.

The women folks were busy too, preparing for a dozen hungry threshers. Cooks wanted to be at their best because they knew their cooking skill would be compared to the other neighbors. Fried chicken, cakes, pies and maybe a large beef roast if the traveling iced meat wagon happened to come along at the right time. Then there was the smoked hams and bacon, cured in our own smoke house with hickory wood smoke the winter before. This was country cooking at its best.

From Arthur Grub, *Live With Me: My First Twenty Years The '80s And '90s*, Kansas City, MO 1963

The following two pages in this packet illustrate how wheat was once raised and harvested using very simple tools.

Sowing wheat by hand, cutting it with a cradle, shocks of wheat, and threshing the wheat with a flail are each shown.

Copies of these pictures are in the back of this manual. Duplicate them for the children to color.



Sowing The Wheat



Cutting The Wheat



Shocks Of Wheat



Threshing The Wheat

Butchering

From the trunk:

Picture #17, Hog Scraper

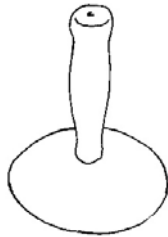
What types of things do you and your family do outdoors? Do you do different things in the summer than you do in the winter?

--How did the seasons affect Mr. Hudson's work?
(From spring to fall he could work in his fields.
In the winter he had time to fix machinery, hunt,
and butcher hogs.)

Picture #17



This photograph shows four men butchering hogs in the winter time.



HOG SCRAPER: Hogs have stiff hairs all over their bodies. These hairs must be removed when a hog is butchered. This tool was sharpened until its metal edge could be used to scrape the hog's bristles off after it had been scalded.

--Why do you think hogs were butchered in the winter?
(Without refrigeration there was no way to keep fresh pork during the warm months. Hogs were butchered in the winter, frozen outdoors, and preserved by smoking the meat over a fire.)



Activities

Drawing The Seasons

Draw a four-part picture showing the different activities you do depending on the season

Examples:

<u>Winter</u>	<u>Spring</u>	<u>Summer</u>	<u>Fall</u>
Sledding	Kite Flying	Swimming	Jumping in Leaves
Snowman	Gardening	Picnics	Football games

Weather Worries

From the trunk: Pictures #18-26

At this point you may wish to discuss the variety of natural problems which farm families encountered in Kansas. These include fires, pests and foul weather.

-Do you have any Kansas weather stories? (Blizzards, thunderstorms, tornadoes, droughts...)

-Have you ever had troubles with insects in your house or garden?

-Have you ever seen people burning their fields in the spring? Why do you think they are careful to watch the fire?

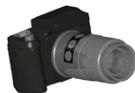
Blizzards

From the trunk: Pictures #18 & 19

-What is a blizzard?

-Have any of the students ever been in a blizzard?
How did the blizzard affect what their family could do?

**Pictures
#18 & 19**



Show the students these pictures and read to them about the blizzard of 1886 from the following account.



"Personal Recollections of the Terrible Blizzard of 1886"

by O. P. Byers

The autumn and early winter of 1885 were of the grandeur possible only to the western plains....The morning of December 31 dawned clear and mild, with a low barometer, and peculiar yellowish purple bordering the northern horizon. Early in the forenoon a single fleecy cloud from the northwest and a very rapidly rising (falling?) barometer foretold a coming storm. By noon a light rain was falling. The temperature in a few hours had fallen below zero. The storm, gaining force hourly, continued throughout the night, and by morning it might very truthfully be said that the state was frozen solid. This in itself was not unusual, nor was it seriously feared, but as the storm did not abate during the second day or the following night the situation became alarming.... Day after day the storm continued, each cessation quickly followed by another storm, making it practically continuous. The temperature did not rise to zero from the first night to the last, the latter part of the month, and generally ranged from fifteen to thirty below....

A number of people were found in their homes frozen to death, and the ones alive were in bed, where they had been for days, as their only means to escape freezing.... One of the most remarkable cases was a homesteader in northwestern Kansas. He and his team of two horses were found frozen to death within fifty feet of his dugout. Animal instinct had guided the horses home, but so impossible was it to see even a few feet, he either believed himself lost on the prairie and the animals unable to go further, or he perished on the road home.

Jack rabbits and birds of every description were found all over the prairie frozen to death. Almost every town was destitute of fuel. Corn soon became the substitute for coal, and toward the end of the storm even that was becoming exhausted.... Business was suspended and schools dismissed almost the entire month. Waterworks systems in the various cities and towns were frozen

and useless; newspapers published could not be delivered by carrier, and even the post offices were idle.

Every railroad in the state was completely paralyzed.... Engines were off the track and so disabled from snow service that the attempt to use them further in cleaning tracks was abandoned altogether, and the slower method of shoveling out the cuts resorted to....

Many farmers reversed positions of animals each day, where more than one stood in a stall, to prevent one side becoming frozen. With all the protection possible to give them, their eyes, noses, ears and hoofs were frozen. For days at a time it was impossible to get out to feed sheltered stock and watering them was not attempted.

The net result of this storm was the most unprecedented loss of livestock ever experienced on the plains. The history of the state tells us of no catastrophe that has ever cost the loss of life and suffering produced by that terrible January, 1886... A weird story and sad commentary upon a land heralded everywhere as one of mild winters of short duration.

--From "Weather Talk," by P. J. Wyatt in *Heritage of Kansas*, February, 1960, pp. 17-18.

-What problems did this blizzard cause? (Loss of human life and livestock, stopped trains, shortages of food and fuel.)

-How do you think blizzards affected the work of the farm family? Did it make more work, or less? Was their work more difficult?

-How do blizzards affect us today?

Tornadoes

From the trunk: Pictures #20 & 21

Picture #20



Discuss the picture of a real tornado. How do we know when a tornado is coming and what do we do?

Picture #21



Discuss the picture of a family hiding from a tornado. Imagine what each family member is thinking.

Though tornadoes are dangerous, people have made up funny stories about them to help themselves deal with their fears.



Tall Cyclone Stories

"I'll believe anything I am told about a cyclone," declared Allen. "A farmer I know very well -- in fact, he lived on the farm adjoining mine -- was struck by lightning while he was plowing. Both he and his team were killed. He left a widow and a large family of small children. None of the children was large enough to go ahead and put in the crops and the poor woman had no money to pay for a hired man or to buy a team.

"As we were coming home from the cemetery after burying her husband, a number of us talked over her situation and decided that we neighbors would get together and plow the land and put in a crop for her. We noticed a big funnel-shaped cloud, but did not think much about it until we got near the field where the man had been killed.

"Well, sir, you can believe this or not, just as you please, but it is a fact -- a whirlwind hit that plow, which was still standing in the furrow. The wind took that plow right straight down the furrow, just as straight as if a man was driving a team hitched to it. When the end of the furrow was reached the wind changed and turned that plow at right angles and plowed another furrow. When the

next corner was reached the same thing happened, and that whirlwind just kept doing that way, and right before the eyes of all the people coming from the funeral that whole field was plowed -- yes sir -- all in about a minute.

"Yep, and after that quarter section was plowed, the wind hit the granary where the seed wheat was stored, turned the building over and scattered that wheat all over the field and covered it up.

--from *Kansas Folklore*, edited by S. J. Sackett and William E. Koch, 1974, pg. 6 & 7

-Do you think that tornados really made less work for farmers?

-What do we do when we have tornados today?

Drought

--What is a drought? Do you remember a time when people said there was too little rain?

--What happens outside when it hasn't rained for a long time?

Kansas farmers have always worried about getting enough rain. Early farmers frequently lost their crops to droughts; 1860 was an especially hard year for farmers.



The spring of 1860 opened auspiciously. Fields were planted and the hardy pioneer went to his work of opening up new farming ground and planting new sod-crop with confidence that the fertile prairie would repay him for his toil and privations. But he was to be disappointed. As the young crops came along the rain fell not...The sun shone upon beautiful Kansas with a generosity that would have given us the most beautiful harvest had not nature forgotten to turn on the water.... For four months consecutively there fell not a drop of rain. The country was blighted almost as if by a great prairie fire. The grass dried up; the leaves fell from the trees as from the autumnal frosts; the ground opened with great yawnings, by which horses and cattle were often stumbled and injured; running streams went dry; the rivers became so low that steamers of even the lightest draught could navigate with difficulty; the wells and cisterns were soon emptied, and people had to haul water for domestic purposes many miles in many instances; horses, cattle, and even the buffalo on the plains died from thirst, the blighting drought being destructive in the extreme upon every living thing....

It is impossible to depict the suffering and distress incident to the terrible drought and awful famine of 1860. So widespread were they that thousands of brave pioneers were compelled to return overland to their former homes in order to keep from starving....

--Some thoughts of a preacher about the hardships of the drought of 1860. From "Weather Talk", by P. J. Wyatt, *Heritage of Kansas*, February 1960, pp. 21 & 22.

--How have some farmers solved the problem of drought? (Irrigation, new plant hybrids which can survive on very little water, minimum tillage, etc.)

Prairie Fires

From the trunk: Picture #22

Prairie fires could destroy the farms and crops of almost any settler living on the prairie. Human carelessness or lightning could easily set the dry prairie grasses ablaze in the fall.

Picture #22



Look at this picture of people fighting a fire in 1874. Everyone in the area would come to fight a prairie fire. If he had enough warning, a farmer might have made a "fire break" by carefully burning the grass or plowing up the ground in a circle around his fields and home. This, it was hoped, would create a barrier which the flames could not "jump" across. If there was not time for this, everyone joined in trying to beat down the flames with wet cloths.

A vivid description of a prairie fire in the 1860s follows, as remembered by Adela E. Richards Orpen. You may wish to point out to the students that Adela was a very young girl when she helped to fight this fire.



Prairie Fire

With the advent of houses to the west arrived also our greatest danger -- namely, prairie fires. No one ever met a person who had started a prairie fire; it was always the other fellow who did it; but the fires came regularly all the same each autumn as soon as the grass turned brown and dry. A prairie fire always takes one by surprise. My father had planned to make his farm safe by a fifty-foot belt of ploughed land all around, which the fire would not jump...[However] our first fire came unexpectedly from the north, driven by a fierce gale.... My father took to his plough, and, with me riding Bess, started to run at least two or three furrows on the northern front of our quarter section -- a mile long it was. The fire began late in the afternoon half an hour before sunset. The horses were already tired, but answered to my voice as they always did, and pulled their best....we drove and ploughed and urged the horses desperately on, not even noticing that the sun had set, the glare of the oncoming fire was so great. At length the horses stopped dead, and would not stir another foot. "Get them on, Doaty, get them on!" he shouted to me, but no response came from me, though he could see me quite well perched on Bess, a little bundle, like a spider on a pumpkin. He left the plough, and came forward to speak to me. I was fast asleep, with my head on Bess's vast neck and my hands twined up in her mane. Nor could he wake me. I was dead asleep. So he laid me on the grass, unharnessed the horses, and leaving the tackling there on the ground, picked me up and carried me to the house...

...We lost nothing. The fire was put out just as it reached the corner of Nellie's pasture; not a fence-rail was burnt, nor was the harness -- which had been thrown down when the horses were turned loose -- even scorched.

(Mrs. Orpen's description of her feelings at the end of a prairie fire...)

You don't know where you are nor where the house is; everything is black. Your throat is full of ashes, and you can hardly breathe for the choking of the fluff in the air. If you call to your nearest pal on the back firing line, the chances are that he or she has moved away, and may be half a mile distant. You feel as if you were the last survivor in a horrible world of cinders and blackness. At length a welcome shout is heard -- in our case it was my father hailing us, and bidding us gather in. This we did most gladly, for he knew which way to go to reach home. And so once more the fire danger is over, and we may rest.

--from *Memories of Old Emigrant Days in Kansas, 1862-1865*, by Adela Elizabeth Richards Orpen, 1926, pp. 67-69, 73.

Grasshoppers

From the trunk: Pictures #23 - 25

--How do your parents protect your outdoor plants from insects?

--How do modern farmers protect their crops from insects?

Spraying plants with insecticides is a modern technique of pest control not available to farmers one hundred years ago. The corn, wheat, and other plants they grew tasted good to insects. In 1874 there were so many grasshoppers that they destroyed fields and gardens.

Picture #23



You can see the results of so many grasshoppers in this picture of a garden.

You can also read Mrs. A. E. Bingham's account of the day a flock of grasshoppers came to her home. Photos #24 and #25 can be used as illustrations for this account.



The year 1874 we had a good wheat crop. Our peach trees had come to their first bearing and hung full of fruit. One afternoon in August as I sat sewing I heard a noise on the roof like hailstones. Stepping out I saw the air full of grasshoppers....The sides of the house and the walks were covered with them. They flew up like a swarm of bees at one's step. They had the most voracious appetites of any living thing. One or two would begin on a melon; as the place grew larger others came, and the melon would soon be eaten down to a shell. Onions and beets were a luxury to them, but my husband saved ours by turning a furrow over them. The corn was destroyed down to the stalk and the farmers began cutting it to save as fodder.

--Mrs. A. E. Bingham, *Sixteen Years on a Kansas Farm*, Kansas Historical Collections, V. 15, pp. 515-516

Picture #24



Even trains were stopped by the grasshoppers. If a swarm gathered on a railroad track they would be crushed by the train's wheels. This made the tracks so slippery that the train's wheels would spin around and around, unable to move the train forward.

Picture #25



In this picture you see a farm family clearing a field of dead grasshoppers. Several methods of killing these insects were tried. They ranged from forcing them to hop into kerosene to igniting buried charges of gun powder, supposedly crushing the grasshopper eggs. Despite these efforts, there were simply too many grasshoppers for the people to deal with.

-What happened to farm families' crops when so many grasshoppers came?

-How do you think it felt to lose your entire crop to grasshoppers?

Tall Tales About Kansas

From the trunk: Picture #26

Picture #26



DROUGHTY KANSAS: Henry Worrall, a well-known Kansas artist, won fame with this painting. The Kansas drought of 1860 created the impression in the East that Kansas was a place where nothing could ever grow. Henry Worrall stretched the truth a bit to get across the point that it was not always dry in Kansas.

--What is unusual about this painting?

--Why do you think the artist painted the fruits and vegetables so large?

People have also told tall tales about Kansas and how well its crops grow. This one was written in 1866.



There is no doubt... that Missouri is a great country, but it will not compare for a moment with Kansas.

Think of the Kansas pumpkins! Gentlemen, when I was on a farm in that glorious country I once lost three valuable cows. For three weeks I searched for them in vain and was returning home in disgust when I suddenly heard the tinkle of a cowbell.

Investigation showed that the cows were inside of a pumpkin, eating calmly and enjoying their commodious quarters. How did they get in, you say? Well, the pumpkin vines grow rapidly there, and dragged a pumpkin over the rough ground until a hole was worn in the side, through which the cows entered. I afterwards had it cured and used it for a wagon shed.

Big farms there? I should say so. Why, when I started one spring to plow a furrow the entire length of the farm, I had a boy follow me to plant the corn, and when I got to the end of the furrow and started for home, I found that the corn the boy had planted was ripe, so I just husked my way home and got there just in time to spend New Years.

--Reprinted from Coolidge *Border Ruffian*, 10 July, 1886.

-Think about when you might stretch the truth about something. Why do you think you might do this?