Kansas Frontierswomen Viewed Through Their Writings: The Diary of Chestina Bowker Allen

*edited by Glenda Riley*

The first installment in this series, the letters of Jane and Lucy Carruth, offered a view of pioneer life in early Kansas that was written for consumption by friends and relatives back home and was eventually published in the *New York Reformer*, a newspaper in the Carruths’ hometown of Watertown, New York. Here the same era and scene are portrayed in a much different type of document, a frontierswoman’s personal diary. Like the Carruths, in their letters, Chestina Bowker Allen interwove details of family living with snatches of the havoc created by the contest between antislave and proslave factions in Kansas of the mid-1850s.

But because Allen’s narrative was meant for her eyes alone it is a personal document that includes the daily trials of a frontierswoman trying to survive a demanding environment. Her entries reflect the difficulties endured by early Kansas settlers in general and the problems faced by female settlers in particular. Allen wrote of attending other women in childbirth, nursing ailing family members and neighbors, and serving in various capacities at the frequent funerals. She inadvertently noted her own financial contribution to her family’s economic survival by recording the goods that she produced and the many boarders for whom she provided food and lodging. And she revealed the slow process of establishing churches and Sunday schools in a newly settled land.

At the same time, Allen chronicled larger events in her erratic notations. Unfriendly American Indians, would-be claim jumpers, and Border Ruffians, those lawless men who stole, pillaged, and terrorized free-state supporters in Kansas, all contributed to the constant upheaval swirling about the Allens and their neighbors. Allen accepted the conflict, especially that associated with “Bleeding Kansas,” as part of her life as a frontier settler, for her family had come to Kansas not just for inexpensive land but to help Kansas become a free rather than a slave state.

Before making the decision to migrate to Kansas in 1854, Chestina Allen and her husband Asahel, always referred to in her diary as Mr. A. or Mr. Allen, had tried their hands at many pursuits. Both were New Englanders, she born in 1808 in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, and he in 1804 in Lyme, New Hampshire. Before their marriage in 1831 she had taught in a number of rural schools while he had tried factory labor and farming. As a married couple they lived in several New England towns where she became both an accomplished housekeeper and maker of men’s cravats and he tried his skills as a polisher of iron tools, worker in the infant India rubber industry, operator of a dye house, clothier, belmaker, and California gold miner in 1849. After Asahel Allen’s return from the gold fields to the family’s home in Roxbury, Massachusetts—due to his wife’s desire to remain in the East—he produced friction matches and then worked in a patent leather factory until, in Chestina’s words, “Kansas demanded help to keep slavery out and offered her rich and beautiful land to settlers at $1.25 per acre.”

By the time that the Allens chose to relocate in Kansas, their family numbered seven people. In addition to Chestina and Asahel, there were five children: William Francis born in March 1835 and referred to as William or Wm. throughout his mother’s diary; Charles Bowker born in October 1836 and called Charles or Chas. in the diary; Henrietta Chestina born in May 1839; John Adams born in June 1842; and Abbie Beulah born in November 1847. The family traveled in an emigration company, and of their trip to Kansas, Chestina Allen recorded each means of transportation used: trains to Chicago and then to Alton, Illinois; a steamboat across the Mississippi to St. Louis; and another steamboat to Kansas City, Missouri. At Kansas City the women and children waited while the men in their group went ahead to choose their land claims in Kansas.

It was with his two eldest sons, William and Charles, that Asahel met with a land selection committee in Lawrence, Kansas, in November 1854. After hearing the

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committee’s recommendation that land near Rock Creek would suit their needs, Ashbel and Charles went ahead to claim land and begin construction of a log house. William was charged with getting the household goods and the rest of the family to their new home. William joined a group of others moving goods on a flatboat up the Kansas River with the help of an Indian guide, while his mother and the three youngest children, Henrietta, John and Abbie, set off overland by wagon to Rock Creek.

The portion of Chestina Allen’s diary presented here begins on November 16, 1854, with the journey to their home on Rock Creek. The diary has been edited slightly in terms of punctuation and spelling in order to improve readability. The original is held by the Manuscripts Department of the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka.2

NOV. 16th. A party comprising five families started in two wagons, one Mr. Bisbee, wife and 4 children, Mr. Ryan, wife, mother and three children. Ours was a hired team driven by a Missourian, two miserable-looking mules took us along better than I expected for I was much discouraged with the prospect of accomplishing our journey thus. Our load consisted of Mr. Tabor, wife and one child, Cary, wife and three children, also myself and three children.

Each family had a trunk to sit on, Cary tried to get ours because it was low and our schooner cover was anything but high. We arrived at the Quaker Mission that night, nine miles from the city of Kansas [City]. Paid $1.50 for our entertainment [food and lodging]. The house seemed to be full of travellers & boarders besides quite a school of Indian boys and girls. They were kind and accommodating to us and seemed to have the Christian spirit.

NOV. 17th. While journeying by day met perhaps fifty Kaw Indians. They were the most savage men & women I ever saw; begged of us but got little. Mr. Bisbee and Cary had stopped at a bakery and were out of sight. The Indians surrounded Cary and frightened him by their savage gestures, got his wallet and took three half dollars all he had, as Bisbee came up he gave them ten cts. They began to follow him. He shook a stick

at them and the cowards retreated. Poor Cary was wofully [sic] scared. We continued to meet squads of them for some time, men loaded their guns, but our driver expressed much bravado. This night we camped out near an Indian hut in the Shawnee land; slept in the wagon.

NOV. 18th. Arrived in Lawrence about 2 P.M. Wind blew hard and cold, one of the mules was sick,—our driver backed out and left us in Lawrence. We took up our lodge in the meeting house which was made of poles [sic] slanting from the ground to the ridgepole, covered with straw and turf, windows in the end—(guess the door was too,) floor of straw hay on the ground on which many slept.

NOV. 19th. There was Divine worship to day. Three Ministers were present, the pulpit was made of trunks set one upon another with a buffalo skin laid over them. Rev. Burgess of the Christian denomination preached in the evening an excellent discourse. This night Mr. Geo. Tilton came in, he had a wagon and two horses going back to Rock Creek. Mr. Tilton is from Maine, came out with us but I had not made his acquaintance. ... He readily agreed to take us along with him to my husband.

NOV. 20th. Expected to start but Mr. Tilton did not get ready.

NOV. 21st. Mr. Tilton went down the river several miles to see if he could discover the flat boat and crew, we started about noon said this night at Mr. Harper's, a log house without a floor or window. The family had moved in this house, were very kind.

NOV. 22nd. At night at the Baptist mission, met Elder Gilpatric whose acquaintance I first made in St. Louis, he introduced me to Mrs. Sanders, the Lady Superintendent, who invited me to tarry over night.

Was treated with much Christian Friendship, had a pleasant interview; slept on a good feather bed and bedstead for the first time since our auction in Roxbury [Massachusetts], where all my beds were sold at less than half price by the express advice of Mr. Caswell, a gold bowed spectacled man appointed to give advice to Kansas Immigrants, said prairie hay was good enough.

NOV. 23rd. Soon after starting came to the great crossing of the Kansas river, in fording broke the cross bar of the wagon,—were just now in company of Judge Flenakin or some other name and his party of four (who were going to a political meeting); two of them took a boat and rowed to us in the midst of the river and brought us safely ashore; the Judge tho' quite corpulent gallantly assisted us up and down the banks between the river and the road. I promised to reward him with my vote. Met a man (Mr. Rosa) who gave me a letter from my husband informing me he had located on Wildcat Cr. 23 mi. above Rock Cr. Passed the Catholic mission toward night, the wind blew fiercely, as we approached the Vermillion it became very dark. The fire was raging in the timber and grass near us. We descended the steep bank of the Creek and rode through the water, then we all got out and walked up the other bank. Henrietta [her eldest daughter] declared her eyes were full of dust and smoke and she could not see. Mr. Tilton walked at the horses heads it was so dark. Arrived at Mr. Wilson's Rock Cr. late at night, camped on the floor, a cold uncomfortable night.

NOV. 24th. Started late, called on Mr. and Mrs. Weeks of our party: arrived at Esq. Dyer's [sic] on the Blue [River] before dark, but staid over night.

NOV. 25th. Left this hospitable dwelling where all travellers find a good home. Arrived on the Wildcat [Creek] and learning Mr. A. had not got his house ready but was miles beyond, off the road. Paid Mr. Tilton ten dol. Boarded at Mr. Eubanks until Dec. 6. As we were preparing to leave to go to our own house,—Mr. [Lemuel] Knapp's family arrived, he had no kind of shelter for them so they occupied part of our one room, I had our small tent moved into one corner for a bath room [dressing room]. House not all chinked, no door, no window, no floor, some of our bed clothes were left at Mr. Eubanks and some with Wm. [her eldest son] on the flat boat. Mr. Knapp had wife and seven children and little bedding, their baggage had not all come, we lost one trunk. Mr. K. had a stove ours was on the way. Cold and windy, we slept, Mr. A. and Chas. [her second son] applied themselves to keeping out the wind and on the 9th. [of December] hung the door, having worked himself about sick and had a felon coming on the inside of right hand.

DEC. 11th. Mr. A. went to Mr. Dyer's to have his very bad hand opened and to find Wm.

DEC. 18th. Met Wm. just below the Catholic Mission; had left the goods at Lawrence. The boat could get no further, it was 16 days getting there. The Indian engaged to take them to Rock Creek in 8 days from Kansas City.

DEC. 18th. Wm. and Chas. went to Mr. Eubanks to a [house] raising and on the 21st to Esq. Dyer's to another

3. Dyer was described as a "six foot Virginian" who with his wife kept a "sort of free hotel...small store...[and] preaching-place for all denominations" in Isaac T. Goodnow "Personal Reminiscences and Kansas Emigration, 1855," "Kansas Historical Collections: 247, Goodnow's recollections cite many of the same persons mentioned in Allen's journal.
raising and returned on 22nd with Mr. Tilton. I was out of provision [food]. Bought a turkey of a squaw for twenty five cents and borrowed flour two half miles off.

DEC. 23rd. Mr. Tilton left but Messrs. Eubanks and Avy dine with us at their own request.

DEC. 25th. Mr. Knapp's family move to Pawnee joining Fort Riley to live in a tent.

DEC. 26th. A happy day because we are alone once more.


JAN. 1st. 1855. Was determined to write to Eastern friends, but was growing quite sick; a large boil on my neck, was very sick all the week.


Without a team we all felt too far off. Mr. Avy, seeing we had two looking glasses [mirrors] wanted to borrow one to shave by. Told him he could come here and shave. He was our nearest neighbor, professed to be a bachelor from Ken[ucky]. Got some of his board by courting Sally C—r. Heard he had a wife & three children in Ken[ucky].

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When the Allen family arrived in Kansas in 1854, Chestina and her three youngest children took an overland route from Kansas City to Rock Creek near Manhattan. Meanwhile, an older son struggled to bring the family's possessions upriver but could get no farther than Lawrence.
JAN. 10th. Mr. Allen went to [town of] Juniata, Esq. Dyer's place of residence, concludes to accept a City lot under the auspices of the Esq. who possessed about everything in that region, and take up a claim on the Blue near the Government bridge.

JAN. 26th. Mr. A. and Chas. went to Fort Riley more than 12 m. west of us, for provisions.

JAN. 27th. It stormed, snow and wind; they almost perish with fatigue and cold on their way home.

FEB. 1st. They went to Esq. D's to board and work at building house on the lot. (It is well to observe there was no government survey done in this part of the Territory and nobody knew how the lines would run.)

FEB. 6th. Moved from Wildcat [Creek] with Esq. D's ox team driven by Enoch D[yer] and went into John Dyer's house, next claim to the city lots. Mr. D. and family were away.

FEB. 13th. [John] D[yer] returned and we moved to a tiny house near the Esq's.

FEB. 18th. Mrs. Dunkin. J. Dyer's wife's mother died at J.D.'s quite suddenly, I am called to assist and go.

FEB. 19th. Mr. A. and I attend the funeral. Rev. [Charles E.] Blood officiates at the grave, singing by Esq. Dyer; there are 28 persons present.

FEB. 27th. Mrs. Esq. Dyer and I go to Mr. Eubanks on horseback, Mrs. E. confined with a daughter the day before.

FEB. 28th. A fine day and pleasant ride home. Mrs. Eubanks is the strongest proslaveryite I have met with.

MARCH 1st. Mr. A. raised his log house of two rooms.

MARCH 3rd. Rev. Blood preached at the Esq's. Subject, Sympathy, good discourse.

MARCH 7 and 8th. Sew on Miss Lydia Dyer's dress and receive a letter from J. Stone of Boston, by the hand of S. Pomroy. I showed Mr. P. the first butter I had made in Kan. having been without all summer.

MARCH 12th. Wm. went to Mr. Hall's for flour and sugar, gets them, both articles are very scarce.

MARCH 14th. Cold and snows. Callers.

MARCH 15th. Mr. Brayton called. The snow falls upon my book while I write by the stove.

MARCH 16th. Storms.

MARCH 17th. Snow fell three in. deep, is quite cold.

MARCH 18th. Cold and clear, no meeting. More boils on my neck. Electioneer takes precedence of preaching, a caucus meeting is to be held at Mr. Childs to nominate one Councilman and two Representatives for the Territory, to be elected by this district. The family are all convened around the stove. We are baking boiled corn and pork to take the place usually assigned to pork and beans; there is quite a difference in the relish.

MARCH 19th. Piercing cold through the day and very uncomfortable.

Booth Fox with his slave woman passed by to day. The poor creature had no covering for her head but picked up a cast off cap while in the neighborhood and went off running after her master and his ox team.

MARCH 20th. Dr. Whitehorn was called and lanced my much afflicted neck. Think his lance was not very sharp.

MARCH 21st. Wash a little. Feel weak & spiritless.

MARCH 22nd. A little more washing; at night Mr. Morgan and son from Brooks, Me. [Maine] desired supper, lodging and breakfast, and two more to cook their own food and lodge in our little hut, to which I assented. Morgan wished to sell a bag of flour, as the scarcity of timber and the expense of moving conspired to make him conclude that he had better return to Maine and be content with his already good home. By us this flour is considered a God send for we were out and could buy none in Juniata, we lacked a dollar to make enough to pay for a bag of flour and the price of their entertainment [food and lodging] just made it.

Let me never forget to trust and serve my Heavenly Father.

MARCH 23rd. Accomplished the washing to day. Morgan and son returned from Fort Riley and stopped with us over night. Gave us seed corn and apple seeds, sold socks for their supplies, which seemed to be the very things we needed. I love to think and trust in an over-ruling Providence.

MARCH 24th. Health improved,—husband has our house so near fixed we are to move Monday.

MARCH 25th. Rev. C. Lovejoy preached to us to day. His text was 'Lovest thou me?' a truly good discourse. May it prove seed sown in good soil.

MARCH 26th. It was a cold blustering day, but we moved into our new house, it consists of two rooms on the lower floor and the attic, we nailed up quilts to

4. Ibid. The reverend was a Congregational church missionary.
5. Presumably her cousin Jesse Stone to whom she referred in a later diary entry.

6. March 1855 election to form first territorial legislature.
make it more comfortable, it has a puncheon floor and the roof is called extra good for this place.

MARCH 30th. The much talked of Election came off to day. I have not heard of any bloodshed though it was somewhat announced to be.

M. Conway, Councillor [Councilman] and S. D. H[uston], Representative, both Free State men were elected. Think they did not have material for the second Rep. Further I do not know. If the women had been there I might have known.

Mr. Park's City site at the mouth of the Blue has been taken possession of, by Mr. A. Martin by breaking into the house thereon. Congress has refused to grant any City Charters, by some this was not considered lawful.

Immigrants from Mass. pitched their tents and thought they had possession, but to day a party of Missourians went there armed, the Mo's shot a ball into the tent nearly hitting a yankee, and 'tis said the yankees agreed to decamp tomorrow. 7

APRIL 1st. The yankees did leave and took up their residence nearer the Blue at a site called Canton; expecting Esq. Parks up from Parkville, Mo. to decide the matter.

The weather is warm and dry, the season very backward, so that cattle suffer for the want of grass.


APRIL 5th. Wm. and Chas. went to work for Mr. Green digging wells at two dol. a day each and Mr. G. came to our house to board.

APRIL 14th. Park's city site is settled for. Mr. Martin gives up his right for $150.

APRIL 21st. Messrs. Glenn and Wykoff came to board. Mr. Green finished the well and paid each boy $10 wages.

Heard Rev. Lovejoy preach at Esq. Dyer's. The value and preciousness of the word of God was strongly enforced.

Had the pleasure of paying Mr. Tilton the last $10 for a cow we had bought of him, the first animal we had in Kan., except a worthless dog.

APRIL 27th. Was sent for to go to Mr. Power's at Old Kaw town about four miles from here. So husband borrowed a pony and a little before sunset I started when about half way the sun set.—I urged pony on until I was obliged to turn off the road into a not much used path for one mile and quarter, this I was obliged to travel by moonlight. I never had been here and was uncertain whether [sic] I was in the right direction as I could not distinguish the house from a tree, but the light from the window cheered. It was not a steady light and I was not sure but it was a fire bug yet pony seemed to understand it and brought me safe to the lone house; to my joy Mrs. Powers had a daughter one hour old, dressed by the kind hands of Mrs. Debois. I returned next day.

The Mo's. [Missourians] through excitement on Freeoism took Esq. Parks' printing press at Parkville, Mo. and threw it into the river and threatened the life of Parks. He immediately went home and left for the east.

MAY 17th. Mr. Brayton who had spent some time with us left for his home in Fall river, Mass. We much regretted to part with so kind a friend. Mr. Allen sold his improvements on the Wildcat to Mr. Merris for $40.

MAY 20th. Rev. Lovejoy visited us and staid over night. Mr. H. Hall in a drunk came and staid to[o], greatly disturbing our rest and insulting us particularly Mr. Lovejoy.

MAY 25th. A tremendous rain, with thunder and lightning. It struck a tree near here. Our rains are most invariably accompanied with the latter.

MAY 27th. Our family attend meeting at Esq. Dyer's. Preaching by Rev. Chas. Blood. A Sabbath school was organised [sic]. Six classes, three male and three female teachers, Rev. Lovejoy, Mr. Neal and Mr. Allen, Mrs. Lovejoy, Mrs. Child and Mrs. Allen. Librarian, Dr. Whitehorn.

MAY 28th. Henrietta's birthday day is celebrated by the arrival of the first steam boat. Financier No. 26 of the year up the Kansas [River] as far as Bluemont [soon to be named Manhattan], a city laid out at the mouth of the Blue. It can go no further until the river rises.

JUNE 3rd. This pleasant Sabbath the northern Methodist held their first quarterly meeting at the new log house of Esq. Dyer. Ministers present. Presiding Elder Good, Elder Lovejoy who is to have charge of the circuit including this place; also Trafton, Denison, Griffin and Blood. A full house increasing Sabbath School and good preaching were characteristic of the day. 18 individuals dined at our house on baked beans, plum pudding, bread & butter.

The city of many names last called Bluemont is now permanently named Manhattan. My husband went to M. asked to be permitted a share in the lots. Mr. Thurston, who had management of the business.

7. Goodnow, "Personal Reminiscences," 248. Also included this incident because it was his tent and the "yankee" almost hit was Luke P. Lincoln, superintendent of that emigration company.
refused him and Mr. A. is too modest and sensitive to press his claim.

JUNE 5th. Went to Mr. Powers. Mrs. P. is very badly poisoned with ivy that grew near the house, poisoned mostly in her face.

JUNE 10th. My class in S. S. [Sabbath School] consists of 6 young ladies.—A soldier of the U.S. Army while traveling to Fort Riley died near here of Cholera. He was from Vt.

JULY 4th. Independence Day passed away quietly. A picnic at Manhattan and a dinner at Mrs. Dyer’s, to which we were all invited.

Three more soldiers died in this vicinity of Cholera; one of our settlers, Mr. Frazier died of the same while travelling at Grasshopper Falls8 and left a wife and children. Mr. A. had 10 acres of corn in and fenced. The Esq’s cattle tore down and leaped over until they destroyed the whole of it. This seems hard for Mr. A. has done his best.

JULY 24th. Mr. Allen, Wm. and Chas. have gone to Fort Riley to work for U.S. [government]. Mr. Tilton is here sick of Typhoid fever, is quite low.

JULY 28th. Received a letter from husband saying, he and the boys were at work at the sawmill for $1.25 per day and rations.

JULY 30th. Dr. Jacobs called to see Tilton this morn and called him better. Four travelers stayed over night.

AUG. 5th. Before daylight Mr. A., Wm., and Chas., arrived home from the Fort. The Cholera was raging there alarmingly, they walked and very much tired out. Wm. was sick when he started and was nearly exhausted. I gave him medicine and all retired, was sick through the day, better at night.

AUG. 6th. Dr. Jacob came, a dangerous case of Cholera. He was very sick through the day. About 4 P.M. Charles got Pain Killer at Dr. Hunting’s and Wm. began to be better to our great joy and relief. To make Wm. think he was better let Henrietta go with a party and gather wild grapes.

AUG. 12th. Much thunder and lightning with copious
showers is our daily lot. Mr. Weeks died at the Fort to day. There has lately been near 40 deaths by Cholera there.


AUG. 23rd. Most of the family go to the Esq.'s, to a dinner party, an infare or wedding feast of William Dyer and Miss Jane Hanna.

AUG. 27th. Am busy making a coat, elderberry wine and preserving plums.

SEPT. 9th. Helped eat a watermelon we raised. Weighed 25 lb. Very good. Three old boarders are back. The people at Pawnee have had orders from U.S. government to vacate the place, it is included in the Reserve which is 9 mi. square.9

OCT. [no day given]. Our family are invited and go to the wedding of Miss Lydia Dyer and Mr. Jamerson. Rev. Wisner officiates, a supper, an agreeable time.

OCT. 24th. Chas. is home from the Fort having jammed his finger at work.

OCT. 25th. Mr. J. G. Long comes to see Mr. Lincoln and stays over night; he is afflicted, had his house burned on Rock Cr., been distressingly sick, his wife left him, suspects she poisoned him, Dr. Adams of St. George cares for him and he gets well. Mr. Lincoln left his shot gun to pay board and goes to Massachusetts.


NOV. 17th. Wm. and Charles send there [sic] Father $175. of their Fort money. May God bless the boys and keep them from all harm.

Mr. Allen signed a protest against the Wyandots taking our claim. They are trying to hold it as part of a float.10

NOV. 22nd. Called to the death bed of Elmira, wife of J. Dyer, a rather sudden death. Prepared her remains for the grave, watched through the night, all others retired.

NOV. 25th. Attended the funeral.

NOV. 27th. Sent for to visit Mr. J. Stewarts child, walked a mile and nursed it through the day, it got better. Walked home.

NOV. 29th. I walked three miles to visit Mrs. Wisner, spent the day and walk back. Mr. Allen bought a pair of oxen of Mr. Adkins of McIntire Cr. for eighty five dollars in gold.

DEC. 2nd. Before sunrise was called to go 4 1/2 m. to Mr. Main's. About noon Mrs. M. was mother of a still born child, deformed, its hands where its elbows should have been, minus a thumb, hands ill formed and small. Rode there horse back, but walked back. Overtook Mr. H. Martin with an ox team, heard him say "go long d---n you," did not think he was talking to me for he had not seen me, so I asked for a ride, rode 1/2 mi.

Heard that Mr. Colman formerly of our party of Lawrence shot and killed a man who was driving him from a claim he had jumped. The proslavery party got him, but the Free-soilers got him away. Strife appears to be rife.

DEC. 8th. A circular was received from Lawrence asking aid from our Free-soilers to protect them in their rights as citizens of K. T. [Kansas Territory] signed by Dr. Roberson and others. A collision is expected at Lawrence.11

Mr. Choudet, a Frenchman and mountaineer is an occasional boarder. Archie Safely is another. The cold weather increases.

JAN. 1st. 1856. The birth of another year, how momentous to us as it unfolds its events. Thermometer some of the time 20° below zero.

Have had a house full of travellers so cold they had to stop two nights and four more regular boarders.

JAN. 6th. Rev. Blood preached, during service Willie [William] returned from the Fort on a visit. He has earned an hundred dollars in forty five days.

JAN. 18th. A co. of 12 men have bought an Indian float and are making an effort to lay it on the south side of the bridge here and to take our claim away, they have surveyed it. Wrote to Hon. A. H. Reeder at the general land Office to intercede for us.

JAN. 24th. A snow storm.

JAN. 25th. Storm increased.

JAN. 26th. Storm worse, three boarders return to spend the Sabbath.

JAN. 27th. Storm abates, From 12 to 15 in. of snow has fallen.

9. Kansas' first territorial legislature had met in the town of Pawnee. Improperly located within the military reservation of Fort Riley, the legislature was ordered to vacate the site.
10. Under the Treaty of 1802 the U. S. government granted each of thirty-five Wyandot Indians, and their heirs, a section of land from any land set apart for Indian use, still unoccupied, and west of the Missouri River. These reserves took precedence over any white claims. Several free-state towns were located upon these reserves orfloats, and since no government surveys had been done, there was little claim to true title of land except for the floats.
11. On the date of this diary entry, the end of the siege of Lawrence was being negotiated.
JAN. 28th. Sent a remonstrance to the General Land Office against the Wyandotte float being laid on our claim. Put my last week's washing out to dry.

FEB. 9th. Wm. and others came from the Fort to work on the bridge to prevent it from going off when the ice breaks up, there is an unusual quantity of ice this winter. In piloting the men from the Fort he strained his eyes with the dazzling snow, they were terribly inflamed a few days.

FEB. 26th. The bridge was destroyed by the ice today; a great inconvenience to us as our claim is on the other side of the river from our house.

MARCH 7th. Wm. is 21 to day, his friends spend the jubilant eve—with us. Elderberry wine, candy and nuts constitute refreshments.

MARCH 14th. Rode to see Mrs. Powers on a three year old Indian pony, pony saw a log, jumped one side and threw me off. Had a good visit, staid over night in the morning wished to come home, pony would not go. Borrowed Mr. Hinton's pony to take me home. The little boy who took the animal there walk[ed] beside it on our return. Asked me how I came to fall off? I replied, "I lost my balance." "Did you find it again?" I replied "yes, when I got on."

MARCH 17th. Mr. A. and Chas. commenced to dig a cellar on his claim. Mr. Tilton came to stop awhile having cut his ankle [sic] chopping. A warning to Sabbath breakers and to all careless persons.

MARCH 18th. Mr. A. and Chas. went to Hackberry grove to make rails.

I am severely lame, suppose it is the effect of falling from a wild pony. The new ferry boat was launched and commenced service.

APRIL 6th. Two travelers stay overnight and bought Elderberry wine.

APRIL 7th. Mr. A. desirous of peace and a good neighborhood found a claim for sale joining Friend Powers. 10 or more acres broken and a poor fence, bargained for it for $50.

APRIL 18th. The ground is putting on its beautiful attire of green.

APRIL 19th. Wm. decided to take a claim next the one just bought.

APRIL 21st. Myron Clark and Frank Weston arrived from Roxbury, Mass. The first old acquaintance we had seen since our residence in the Territory. Rested, footsore. Went to the Fort Riley to see Wm. and Chas. and get work. Wm. engaged Tilton to move his house logs to his new claim on the 21st, but Tilton did not get ready until the 23rd, and when they got there, Mr. A. who was with Tilton was informed that Tom Huey had just arrived in the Territory wanted the claim and if he put the logs on it Huey would be apt to jump the one he had bought. So the logs were left on the bought claim. Mr. Huey did not take the claim.

In surveying it was found an east and west line of qr. sections run between our house and the Esq.'s. The two houses stand perhaps 40 rods apart and the line halfway between. The conclusion all around is if Government survey agrees with this survey we can hold a claim where our house stands, with wood and timber on the river, a spring just back of the house. It will also include about a hundred acres on the other side of the river with every house there and Mr. Alonso Garrett's store and Mr. Comston's. It also covers part of Mr. Allen's breaking where he had commenced a claim. Decided to stay here awhile longer and have Charles take a claim including the rest of the breaking.

MAY 1st. Archie] Safely called and settled for board and staid over night also three others, slept on floor beds ate bread and milk in tin dishes for breakfast so as to get started early. Wm. left the Fort to work on his claim. Mr. A. breaks up a garden patch near the house, Wm. and I clear up the yard.

MAY 4th. Preaching as usual, by Rev. Denison today, quite a large audience though an unpleasant day.

Wm. bought a pair of young oxen for which he paid $70.

MAY 7th. I have been sick to day. At eve, a gent to appearance, weary and dusty, came in and took a seat. He rolled his large and beautiful eyes heavenward, they probably rested on the children's bed in the open attic, he asked leave to stay overnight,—he was from Indiana, had thought of the ministry, was not decided, talked of bleeding stock, &c.

I vacated my bed and he slept with Mr. A. who said he was the most uneasy man to sleep with he ever had in bed with him.

After breakfast his bill was fifty cents. As we were in the habit of doing our own praying we did not ask him to pray it out as did the good lady at the Catholic Mission; we just now needed material support. He did take out his money and pay.

MAY 10th. A rattlesnake jumped at the oxen while plowing and Wm. killed it, it had five rattles.

MAY 11th. Rev. Blood preached, twenty present. Mr. Tilton paid me five dol. to day for boarding and nursing him in sickness last summer.

MAY 13th. Just at bed time French Jo and four other travelers came, called for supper, lodging and breakfast,
so I dressed and got them supper. Roasted coffee for breakfast & retired.

MAY 14th. At eve as Abbie [her youngest daughter] was going after the cows that were in sight, she stepped on a snake, hit her leg and run off, we were much frightened as we did not know what kind it was. I sucked the bites it had bit twice, washed it in saleratus [sodium bicarbonate], put sweet oil and gave her whiskey. No signs of poison appeared.

MAY 16th. It is reported that a lot of Missourians and Georgians have besieged Lawrence with intent to destroy the place. That Gen. Pomeroy started for Osawatomie and it is not known what has become of him. That Gov. Roberson had been arrested while traveling.

MAY 18th. Preaching by Rev. Trafton. Heard the President [Franklin Pierce] had ordered the U.S. Cavalry from Fort to Lawrence to fire on the first one that commences hostilities. Wm. has gone to Mrs. Power's as her husband and three nephews have gone to the rescue to Lawrence. We have paid four dol. per bu. for potatoes to plant. No collision at Lawrence, folks came home.

MAY 31st. Heard the hotel at Lawrence had been blown up by the proslaveryites, the printing presses were destroyed. The inhabitants made to leave the place, money and goods stolen, that a man who was moving into the Territory was robbed of $400. and his provision taken.

O! President Pierce of Granite State Wo! Wo! Wo!!! be unto thee.

This professedly in consequence of an unknown person shooting Jones who had been acting Sheriff of Lawrence and had made himself obnoxious by violating the ballot box, threatening to slaughter the Free State men, &c.

JUNE 16th. A U.S. surveyor has surveyed the so called

On May 31, ten days after the event, Chestina Allen wrote of the burning of Lawrence's Free State Hotel.
Indian float and thereby taken away most of our claim. We cannot think of going to law about it while there is so much good land not taken.

JUNE 27th. Went with Mr. A. to Manhattan in ox team to mill to see the country. Came home over Manhattan ferry and called to see Mrs. Powers who is still sick of chills and fever. Also passed through a claim we had in view [were interested in].

JULY 4th. A picnic at Manhattan.


JULY 7th. Mrs. Tilton and son Arthur arrive here from Me. [Maine] and remain 'til the 12th then go to housekeeping up the Blue.


JULY 15th. Mr. A. and Chas. pitched on the new claim one and a half miles from the mouth of the Blue. commenced a cellar and laid poles around it. I spent an anxious day least John [her youngest son] whom we expected home early would be overtaken by the Georgians. A large party passed up by our house to camp and hunt the Free State men. Was thrown into consternation having lost my wallet, but Henrietta found it safe where I put it, made a sage cheese and took tea with Mrs. Wilhite.

JULY 20th. Hear that Col. [James H.] Lane had come into the Territory with some say 800 and some say 2200 men, that he has destroyed the town of Franklin and gone to Lecompton, it seems a mighty strife for freedom has commenced.

JULY 22nd. Our folks went plumming up Cedar Cr. got perhaps two bushels.

JULY 23rd. Heard of the death of Mrs. Carrol of Wildcat, the only woman who visited me in my lone two months residence and sickness there. This dear woman walked three miles to comfort in my affliction. A Mormon by profession and feared hard. Mr. Green was killed in a well by a stone falling on him.

A man in Leavenworth asked another where he was from? He replied Lawrence the former shot the latter dead. They proved to be both proslaveryites.

John cut his foot with an ax. Abbie fell down the ladder.

JULY 31st. Mrs. W. Dyer has just been presented with a fine daughter this week. The wolves are becoming troublesome, they bite calves so that they die, we have lost one, wild animals catch the poultry. Mrs. Arnold, who lives near the mouth of the Blue, has been bitten by a Copper head snake, it was under her pillow and as she put up her hand it bit. It was exceedingly painful, but she recovered. Here [sic] that [Col. James H.] Lane with 2000 men is opposing the Missourians who are coming into the Territory in great numbers and it is more than the Militia can do to keep them from fighting.

SEPT. 1st. Mrs. Stewart was taken sick, watched and nursed her much of the time 5 or 6 days once thought her dying. Their oldest daughter was also quite sick.

SEPT. 6th. James Powers was brought to our house quite low with fever and ague, been sick 16 days.

SEPT. 7th. This morning was called to be with Mrs. Childs, a bouncing daughter made her debut into this world to breath [sic] for herself.

SEPT. 8th. I was taken sick of chills.

SEPT. 14th. I have third day chills, Am sick. Rev. Blood preaches, dines and so do others.

SEPT. 15th. Gen. A. Hall called and said I had Billious fever. Mr. A. commenced to harvest his corn.

SEPT. 22nd. Dr. Adams visits me, called my disease Intermittent fever. Charged two dol.

OCT. 1st. Our three boys are all sick of ague, I am getting better.

OCT. 5th. Rev. Blood preached and dined. Mrs. Blood sent me a present of two linen handkerchiefs, paper of hooks and eyes, spool of cotton, cord and two hairpins. Dr. A. came to see boys. Wm. and John are doing well. Chas. is pretty sick with Billious fever thinks he will have to see him [doctor] again.

OCT. 12th. John has hard chills and fever, takes lobelia emetic [potion to induce vomiting] under the direction of M. Nealy.

OCT. 26th. None of the family well but Henrietta and Abbie. Boys all take quinine.

NOV. 2nd. No preaching, think the Ministers must have found a place where their services were better appreciated. I am not certain about the dinners. Kansas needs the dear souls. Mr. Allen went for Dr. Stillman who has lately come here. He gave medicine to Chas., John, and self.

NOV. 6th. A storm commenced.

NOV. 7th. Grows colder.

NOV. 8th. Chas. has dumb ague. Dr. leaves more medicine as Chas. broke the bottle and the [?] split.

NOV. 28th. Wm. went to the Fort with corn for his father, camped out, a snowstorm.

13. Allen was obviously concerned that she had lost her regular dinners.
NOV. 27th. Returned late and very cold.

DEC. 5th. Mr. Allen went to Manhattan and by the help of A. Powers drew logs on the new claim. Henrietta and I attend an infare [wedding celebration] at Esq. Dyer’s. Abraham Dyer and Minerva Randolph married the day before. Mr. A. has help from his friends and lays up the logs for the cabin as other cabins are looking toward the same place for a claim and they had just got to work when a man came to take it.

DEC. 8th. Mr. A. went after the grist and carried shingles to the claim and brought flour Boys haul corn to the Fort. Cold, sick and suffering, its very slippery. Henrietta went out to gather sumac berries, slipped down.

JAN. 1st. 1857. A new year has commenced—How solemn the thought that the wheels of time have so rapidly brought us hither.

Let us be thankful that we are yet an unbroken circle since our sojourn in Kansas, with health improving and prospects brightening. We will ever trust in and praise the Great Ruler of all things.

Boys have done hauling the corn to the Fort. Had very cold weather and bad road. Had three prairie chickens and mince pie for dinner.

JAN. 2nd. A stormy morning. Mr. A. started for the Fort about noon. I went to bed tired out. Henrietta fried cakes. Snow blew into the fat, fat exploded and burned her on her face and arm. I hopped up and went to work.

JAN. 3rd. Mr. A. from the Fort lame in his knee from walking, having received $273. for corn. Did that money look good?

JAN. 14th. Mr. Stephen Williams, our bogus sheriff, called and chatted away the evening very pleasantly,—he lives close by, but has never asked us for taxes assessed by the bogus laws.14

JAN. 17th. The coldest day yet, the night more so.

JAN. 18th. A cold quiet Sabbath all to ourselves.

JAN. 24th. Finished husking corn, had 455 bu. of good corn. Had we lost none by cattle, would probably had 600 bushels.

FEB. 11th. Mr. A. got his cane out of the ice. A neighbor presented me with a large wild turkey, the second one thus received this winter.

FEB. 16th. Bought butter, 60 cts. lb.

FEB. 17th. Mr. Allen & Wm. go up the Blue to look out a place to make rails. They return having passed the

night with only buffalo robe and overcoat for bed; weather quite cold. Wm. sold his corn to Mr. Tailor at 75 cts. bu. at the crib.

FEB. 20th. John went after the cattle, run home saying, our young cow was mired, men folks run to help, but when found she was dead. She had rolled down the bank of a ravine into the water, her head under. A loss of not less than thirty doz.

MARCH 3rd. Mr. McIntire and Mrs. Cutting his daughter spent day and night with us. Mrs. Cutting said, while she was living on Grasshopper Cr. last summer, the border ruffians came in the house in great numbers,15 drunken and vile, one staggered up to her while sitting with her child and with a weapon, a threat and a thrust, attempted to gouge our child’s eyes, she dodged, he fell and she run with her child and hid. She said they actually did gouge one child’s eyes and threw it out to the hogs, it was two yrs. old and drove the mother to unknown parts [mad].

MARCH 12th. Mr. I. Goodnow16 call to see if I would go and nurse Mrs. Houston, of Wildcat, as she was very sick, he plead so eloquently I agreed to go and leave Henrietta with her very sore finger to do the work and nursing at home.

MARCH 13th. Hon. Mr. Houston came after me so I hurried off, found Mrs. H. very low.

MARCH 16th. Mrs. Bicnoll died having lately been confined and lost her babe, her husband died last year soon after they came here, so a whole family have passed away.

MARCH 18th. Mrs. H[oustun] not so well, refused to take medicine, had a sore mouth, is very firm. Mr. H. brought me home, felt I must go. He gave me $5. for my poor services. Found Mr. A. setting by the fire sick, he immediately got well.

APRIL 4th. Henrietta came from Manhattan, had a fall from a runaway pony and hurt her elbow quite bad. So my three oldest children cannot use their right hands and Abbie has today hurt a finger. We send for Dr. Whitehorn to open Wm’s hand [which was blistered], he did not come. His father tries to open it, but did not go deep enough, he is in terrible agony.

APRIL 6th. Early we get the Dr. to come and he opened it to the very great relief of the great sufferer.

APRIL 8th. By the kindness of Mr. Nealy, who has just arrived from N. H. [New Hampshire] with his new

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14. “Bogus Laws” was the free-state name given to the laws, which included a slave code, passed by the proslavery legislature.

15. Presumably refers to the 1850 raid on Grasshopper Falls.

16. Presumably refers to Isaac Goodnow, 1855 representative to Free State Convention in Lawrence.
wife—we received from benevolent ladies there 20 yds. of calico.

APRIL 9th. As Mr. J. Dyer and Miss Drusilla Hanna were married yesterday, according to custom here our family were invited to the infare at the Esq’s.

MAY 5th. One of our yearling calves was drowned in the Blue.

MAY 11th. Mr. A., Wm., Chas., John and I went to Wm.’s little, nice looking, log cabin and commenced to keep house.

MAY 16th. Chas. and I return to Juniata.

MAY 18th. H[enrietta] went with C[harles] to keep house at Wm’s claim.

MAY 26th. Abbie and I attend the wedding of Preacher Williams and Martha Dyer at her father’s.

MAY 51st. A large drove perhaps 3000 sheep passed by for California.

News came that when 40 miles beyond here on the Republican [River] the Comanches and other Indians had killed four of the men, wounded one, taken women and children prisoners and got the sheep. Some people are alarmed of course.

JULY 1st. Moved from Juniata into Wm’s. cabin and our men commence to take down the cabin to raft [it] down the Blue.

JULY 4th. All our family in company with the Williston family, old acquaintances, who had just arrived from Mass. go to a picnic just beyond Manhattan. Spent the day pleasantly, had a good dinner, about 300 people present. Speeches, sentiments, singing, renewing old acquaintances and forming new were the features of the day.

JULY 12th. Attended meeting in Manhattan where all denominations worship together. Stopped at the S. S. [Sabbath School], was chosen Assistant Missionary.

JULY 22nd. Moved into our cabin on our own claim.

AUG. 2nd. Heard an express had come to Manhattan for citizens to go and protect the Fort for the Cheyenne Indians were killing the settlers within 8 mi. of the Fort and but few soldiers were there. Consternation prevailed, we attended meeting—The men were mostly gone, women and children the audience but Of! how they did watch the bluffs to see the first pop of an Indian!

In the night a report came that Fort Riley was burned, 25 more men, Chas. included prepared to start for the scene of action when a true report came that the alarm was false, that the warring tribe was not so near the Fort, a few Pottawatomies had been killed and Pottawatomies had gone to reward their enemies.

AUG. 3rd. 25 Pottawatomies passed up by here this morning. Many had gone before. The Indian scare is said to originate from Mr. Rosa.

AUG. 5th. We have good weather, corn and vines are growing, but potatoes are cut off first by worms then by bugs.

AUG. 13th. Ten of us go grazing over the river, with ox team, oxen stop in the middle of the river and the boys had to jump into the water to make them go.

OCT. 5th. Mr. Allen, Wm. and Charles went to Esq. Dyer’s to Election and each cast a Free state vote. In getting the praise for those three votes all to myself, I will just say, if I had not come to Kan. they would not. Can a woman do any better bound by the wretched laws men make?

DEC. 28th. John commenced to go to school in Manhattan.

JAN. 1st. 1858. The year 1857 is dead! Gone, yes, gone! We spend the day at Mr. T. Nicelman’s.

JAN. 10th. A rainy day, the first since Dec. We have had remarkable warm and agreeable weather, more like a pleasant fall.

JAN. 11th. Mr. A. exchanged 5 1/4 bu. corn for three bu potatoes. Surely things are getting reversed! New England,—where are you?

Although this segment of the diary ends with Chestina’s plaintive cry for her homeland of New England, the Alens’ Kansas adventure, and the diary itself, continued. A tragic prairie fire, Asahel’s tenure as justice of the peace, and the Civil War 17 were among the many events that enlivened the history of the Allen family and, consequently, the pages of Chestina’s personal diary.

17. In February 1858 Asahel Allen became a justice of the peace. Of the children, Henrietta died while still at home, the diary does not give her date of death; Abbie married and became Mrs. Garrett and the mother of two children; during the Civil War, William and Charles served in the Second Regiment, Kansas Volunteers, and John served in the Eleventh Regiment.