Kansas Frontierswomen Viewed Through Their Writings: The Memoir of Georgiana Packard

edited by Glenda Riley

This last installment of Kansas frontierswomen's documents differs greatly from the first three in that it is a reminiscence rather than an observation recorded at the time an event occurred. Written in 1914, many years after its author experienced life as a settler on the Kansas plains, this memoir lacks the immediacy of the letters, diary, and journal presented earlier. Titled "Leaves from the Life of a Kansas Pioneer," Georgiana Packard's recollections also cover a much longer span of time than any of the other documents. Yet, even though the condensation that is so often necessary in a memoir eliminates the rich historical details usually found in letters or a diary, it does offer insight into a lifetime rather than an episode.

This is particularly true of Packard's memoir for while it sometimes skips lightly over both minor and major events it provides a real sense of the long and full lifetime of a Kansas pioneer woman and her family. In her introductory remarks, not included below, Packard pointed out that her family had long been pioneers, beginning in 1637 when maternal ancestors left England for Salem, Massachusetts, and 1658 when paternal forebears sailed from England to Hingham, Massachusetts. Packard explained that her maternal grandfather, William Barrows, fought in the American Revolution and later pioneered in Hebron, Maine. Packard's parents, Cyrus Packard and Sarah Barrows, also settled a frontier region in Maine after their marriage in 1825.

While farming near Monson, Maine, Cyrus and Sarah Packard produced eleven children of their own and in addition adopted an orphaned boy. Four of their boys died in infancy but seven of the children survived and are mentioned in Georgiana Packard's memoir. Sarah Caroline born February 1, 1826; Hannah born July 11,
1827; Charlotte born November (no date given), 1829; Catherine born April 19, 1832; Olive Augusta born August 7, 1842; and Samuel Fessenden born July 24, 1849. Georgiana herself was born on July 11, 1845, the second youngest of all the Packard children. 1

Packard's childhood memories included her father "breaking" three farms for cultivation and delivering many antislavery tirades. Young Georgiana was living with her sister Hannah and her husband William Jordan in 1855 when the Jordans decided to migrate to Kansas with their three children and Sarah Packard, the eldest of the Packard children. Georgiana returned to her father's farm and it is at this point in time that the portion of her memoir presented below begins. Within two years, however, Packard's father Cyrus, mother Sarah, sisters Catherine and Olive, brother Samuel, a cousin named William Barrows, and herself departed for Kansas to join the Jordans and her sister Sarah in their fight to wrest a living from Kansas farmland while keeping the area free of black slavery. It was here that Georgiana met and married a distant cousin, George W. Packard, on April 19, 1866.

The reminiscence has been slightly altered in terms of punctuation and spelling to improve readability. Portions unrelated to the Kansas experience have been deleted. The original is held by the Manuscripts Department of the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka.

Wm. Jordan, his wife [Hannah Packard] and three small boys, with [Hannah's] sister Sarah left Maine for Kansas in Nov. 1855. They spent the first winter in Lawrence where they lived in a shack belonging to Gen. Deitzler. Becoming impressed with the idea that Topeka would be the capital of the State, they moved to Topeka, the following spring. Wm. Jordan bought a quarter section two miles south of Tenth St. which for many years was the southern boundary of the city. There was a log cabin on the claim which was ten feet square and Wm. put up a tent at one end. Hannah was almost bedridden for a year with a spinal trouble and Sarah had to be nurse and housekeeper.

During this time I was with my Father's [Cyrus Packard] family, and enjoyed the year and a half with all a child's enthusiasm. The farm where we lived [in Monson, Maine] was on a hill side sloping from the

---

Glenda Riley is a professor of history and director of the women's studies program at the University of Northern Iowa. This article is the last of a four-part series on Kansas frontierswomen viewed through their writings.

ledges of slate, down to cedar swamps. Father always used oxen to plow around the stumps and rocks, and we children picked up the loose stones on the fields and put them in piles to be carted away.

There were boulders on each side of the house as large as a good sized room that we children had for playhouses. To go to school we had to cross a cedar swamp said to be the home of bears.

In the spring of 1857 we packed our necessary bedding and clothing and started for Kansas. Our family consisted of Father and Mother, Catherine, Olive, Georgiana & Samuel. We also had a cousin Wm. Lewis Barrows with us. Two neighbors took us with wagon boxes on runners to the nearest railroad station, Newport [Maine]; fifty miles distant. We spent the first night at Dexter [Maine] where we had our only experience of a New England tavern. The wide rooms were scrupulously clean and beds comfortable. We each had both hands full of articles to be used on the way. We carried Provisions for the journey, plates, knives and forks and drinking cups. It was in the latter part of March that we boarded the train that carried us to Boston, which we reached Sat. night. Sister Charlotte met us at the depot and I went with her to her boarding house. The others stayed over Sunday with cousins. In the morning the long tables in the great dining room were full of people and each was served with hot beans and brown bread just out of the brick oven. We spent the day with our cousins, the Dunhams, and the next day had our pictures taken, made some purchases, and took the train for Albany [New York]. We went to a hotel which had been recommended. A young lady named Sara Higgins was travelling with us to Chicago. We four girls were put into a room with two beds in it, which for dirt and rags beat anything I ever saw. We were so tired that we thought we would lie down on the outside of the beds with our wraps on, but someone came in and told us to go in the next room. There were no locks on the doors, and the next room had one bed which looked quite decent but soon some people came in and said that was their room and remanded us to the other room. We did not sleep much that night. The landlord was going to make us pay for our breakfast although he had been told that we carried our own provisions.

Some young men from Maine who were on the way to Kansas and who had to sit up all night in the hotel helped us to get away... The next stop of any length was at Chicago, where we had to stay a day and night waiting for our train. We had very good accommodations and here saw our first coal fires. There were no sidewalks on the way to the station and we walked over shoe in mud. We stayed in St. Louis over Sunday where we arrived late in the evening. When we boarded the ferry to cross the Mississippi River Mother wanted a drink and Father undertook to get it for her. She did not dream of his leaving the boat for it, but he did and we left him of course. Mother was sure he was drowned but we had the name of the Hotel we were to go to, and the men from Maine still being with us, they piloted us through miles of streets until we reached King's Hotel, where Father shortly joined us. Monday we went by rail to Jefferson City [Missouri], which was the end of the railroad, and we went on board one of the big river steamboats, which was crowded with passengers, mostly bound for Kansas, many of whom had their slaves with them. This was the most pleasant part of our journey. I think we were on the boat three days. A long table was set in the cabin and wild turkey was served every day. The captain and passengers ate at the first table and the waiters and crew at the second, and the negroes at the third. My brother and I had never seen any colored people, and it was a great sight to us to see so many eating, and being too polite to stare we went into our stateroom and climbed into the upper berth and looked through the transom. We... hired a man with a team to bring us to Topeka. The Delaware Indians occupied the land between Kansas City and Lawrence, and we ate our dinners and stayed all night at their houses. Some of them had good houses and white cooking. The second day we passed through Lawrence but I did not see much more than an unfinished hotel. We stopped that night at Big Springs [Kansas] where I was much impressed with the big whiskers which the men wore and was perfectly sure that our folks would not look that way. We rode west on the California road about seventeen miles looking for a "house with a brick chimney." When we came to it, Father inquired at the door if they could tell us where Wm. Jordan lived. They were so interested that they all came to the road to see us.

These people were Samuel Hall and his family from Maine. We were soon at the home of our dear brother and sister. The little boys were eating bread and milk with tin basins and clam shells. They were fully as wild looking as the people at Big Springs but they were so glad to see us that we could not be critical. They had no horses, just a yoke of oxen and a cow. They had to haul their wood several miles. Sister Sarah had filed on a claim east of Wm. Jordan's and adopted the oldest boy so that she could be the head of the family. They lived on the claim long enough to hold it but one only when she was cooking out of doors the fire got away from

2. The Pre-emption Act of 1841 required that a land claimant be head of a family, a widow, or a single man over the age of twenty-one. Sarah apparently fulfilled this stipulation by adopting a child and thus becoming head of a family.
When Georgiana and her family first arrived in Kansas, they lived in Rochester which was north of Topeka and the Kansas River. When the family traveled to Topeka, they had to ford the river or, during high water, take the ferry across.

her and burned out a family of campers, wagons, provisions, and all. They came and sat down by her cabin and told her she had to feed them. She cooked corn bread and bacon and fed them the best she could but they soon went away. I think this discouraged her for she gave up the claim and married a widower with six children from 2 yrs to 14 yrs. They certainly needed mothering. My sister Sarah was a saint and I never knew her to be partial to her own children, and the older children said they knew no difference between her and an own mother. Her husband was Jesse Stone, a gifted man from Massachusetts. Their children were George Melville Stone, the celebrated Artist,§ and Robert Stone, a very popular lawyer, at present Speaker of the House of the Kansas Legislature.

At the time of which I write they lived in a little cabin in the woods with beds built up with poles. They built a house the next summer on the Burlingame road where George Melville was born.

Wm. Bowker, son of squire Bowker, who died in Monson [Maine] came to see us and with him was Wm. Owen a man from Rhode Island who had settled in Rochester [Kansas] and was trying to make a town of it.

The town company had engaged Mr. Wendall to settle on a quarter section of land and give them half of the land for the townsite. They found that he was going to keep the whole so they wanted Father to go on to the land and try to keep it. They built a cabin and moved right onto it but Mr. Wendall moved in first so of course got the claim.

Then Father and Mother kept boarders in a large frame house built by Wm. Owen in the front room of which Mr. Owen kept a store. One morning when Wm. Jordan went to Rochester he found Mother sitting on a trunk marked G. W. Packard, and she was wondering whose it was. At the same time Dr. Josiah Jordan came to our house and told us he had come from Kansas City with George W. Packard [her future husband] who took turns riding a horse which he had bought in K. C. Yes! There he was coming across the fields too tired to go around it. We soon had him lying on the lounge to rest.

§. Stone, known for his portraits of the state's foremost citizens and for his representations of western farmers, studied in Paris and later cofounded the school which evolved into Washburn University's art department.

He was not as good a walker as Father or Mr. Owen who made nothing of walking from Leavenworth to Topeka. He was just from the Hebron Academy [Maine], and was elected the Superintendent of Instruction in Jackson Co. [Kansas]. He tried jumping a claim when a Missourian was trying to hold two claims. He got the claim. He taught the first school in Rochester. Wm.

4. Georgiana's grandfather, William Barrows, founded this school in 1804.
Bowker lived with Edward Plummer on claims five miles north of the river. Their sisters Maria Bowker and Phebe Plummer came to keep house for them in the summer of 1857. Some of my pleasantest remembrances are of visits to their cabin. How fine were those first years lit with the halo of youth and enthusiasm. The country was "raw prairie" but Father was delighted to find a place where he could plow straight without going round stumps and rocks.

There were few houses in Topeka and those very small. The schoolhouse built by the Emigrant Aid Society was a brick building 20 ft. Square. It cracked and was held together with iron rods. We had union services there and Dr. Martin's wife had her melodeon brought over the Dea. Farnsworth was Supt. of Sunday School church [during the] summer of 1857. We always forded the river when it was not high. I have forded it when I had to put my feet on the horses back to keep them out of the water. When the river was high we crossed at the ferry kept by Kaw Indians. Foot passengers crossed in a skiff for ten cents and teams in a scow for fifty cents. The land for two miles north of the river was owned by Kaw Indians. All the building I ever saw on it was one cabin with a grave near it and a pole from which hung a scalp lock. It was an Indian's scalp, black, coarse and shiny. A prairie is a hard place to make a home, as there is nothing but the land. Every thing has to be made by hand or brought in long ways. The washpan we used for a long time was made of a knot cut from a log. We had no shade trees for many years, which is the reason that the Old Settlers hate to cut a tree. All the wood was hauled a long way. We had to carry water from 1/4 to 1/2 mile or more. Men dug wells as soon as possible but it was years before they had good water. Our home life was very plain and simple. We lived mostly on what we raised and had plenty of milk, butter, eggs and meat. Fruit was our greatest lack. Rabbits destroyed all fruit trees in spite of all the wrappings. For twenty years nearly all our fruit was brought from Missouri in wagons. We had crab apples, wild grapes, plums, gooseberries and strawberries, and if we had an abundance there was no way to keep it but to dry it. Tomatoes were our great resource. We made preserves and pickles of them. The town [Topeka] had a steady growth, with the country filling up all the time. The building was mostly of concrete which was new then, but cheaper than frame, and it was cooler in summer and warmer in winter. We had epidemics of malaria, which sometimes took the form of typhoid or malarial fever. Cousin WM. Lewis Barrows died with a congestive chill. I have known many times when there were not enough well to take care of the sick. The day Albert Jordan was born, every one in the house had a chill, except one of the little boys. Sister Sarah came to help us and she had a chill. My chill came on before I got up in the morning and continued till late at night. We heard that Helen Hall, aged ten, had died. I was the only one who could go there, so I got on a horse and went. I found them in a sad plight. Mrs. Hall was so weak that she could just walk by holding on to things. She had dressed the little girl by wrapping her in a sheet. One neighbor, an old bachelor, had gone to town for a coffin, and when he came in he lay right down on the floor, because he could not stay up any longer. The neighbors buried her without a funeral. The Old Settlers are like comrades who have been through a war together.

The summer of 1858 Olive taught a subscription School. She was to "board round." There was one family of colored people, children of "Black Ann" and Chouteau [Chouteau], the Frenchman who belonged to the family who owned nearly the whole of St. Louis. Olive did not wish to board there but did want to neglect them. They had a new room, built expressly for a best room, and they gave her this for her own use. The room had a white bed with every thing very fine about it, and Mrs. Chouteau brought her meals and stood behind her chair to wait upon her. Mrs. Chouteau had been a cook on one of the great Mississippi steamers and had earned enough to buy her freedom and that of her oldest children.

Her house used to be quite a resort for young people who wanted an extra nice meal. She could make the most delicious dishes of rabbits, wild onions, wild grapes and such things. Mr. Chouteau always kept the table supplied with game and fish.

There was a wooden bridge built across the river in 1858, and Olive crossed it on the stringers [beams] before the floor was laid. The bridge was swept away by high water late in the summer.

Olive was married to Wm. Owen in the fall of 1858. I joined the Congregational Church when there was no church building in town. Some business blocks were built with halls over them, and here they held services.

The Early Settlers had no knowledge of the treasures of Kansas, hidden deep beneath the green and smiling surface. The vast beds of coal, salt, gypsum, zinc &c and the reservoirs of oil and gas were as unknown to them as to the inhabitants of China. All they thought of was how to raise enough grain and vegetables to keep their families and stock.

The year 1860 opened dry. No rain fell in the spring. The crops were planted but did not grow. We looked with longing eyes at the floating clouds. The long hot
summers dragged on. Nothing grew but a little prairie grass. Beans planted in the spring were dug up in the fall and grew the next year. The sun’s heat was tremendous. One could cook an egg on the hot stones. The streams were all dried up and the stock had to be driven to the river. Kansas looked as though it would be resolved back into the Great American Desert. In August Father took to his bed with typhoid fever. He thought he could recover if it would only rain, but the elements were against us. He died Sep. 3, 1860 aged 65 yrs. He was a soldier of the war of 1812, was one of the first Temperance and Anti-slavery advocates, always public spirited and generous. He was buried in Rochester Cemetery.

The last days of September were scathing hot. When the coffee pot was put away hot in the morning it was hot at night, with no fire in the house. When I speak of coffee, I do not mean that we had coffee. Roasted rye, ground and sweetened with sorghum molasses, for coffee and the dried leaves of “Red Root” for tea were used by our elders. We children drank water. We were obliged to shut the doors and windows to keep out the hot winds.

Many went East, but those who had resources stuck to it. But when winter came and the snow piled up and the fierce winds blew, the men had to spend their time on the road hauling supplies from the river towns. Mr. Mossman, a sturdy farmer from Mission Creek stayed with us one night on his way to Atchison. His clothes were patched past belief. He said “they put all the patches on him, and the others would have to go without.” His wife used to ravel out muslin and twist it up to make thread. The men wore clothes made of sacks that held goods, and they said that “when they were worn to shreds, there still in bold relief were the words ‘S. C. Pomeroy, Beans.’” The next year was very prolific, but there was no market. We paid a high price for what we bought which was very little. Shoddy began to be made, which would drop to pieces if worn a little.

Then came the great struggle between Freedom and slavery. The hanging of John Brown took place in the last part of 1860 [actually December 2, 1859]. Kansas had no part in the first election of Abraham Lincoln. Then followed the fall of [Fort] Sumter and the forming of the Confederacy. Nearly half the men of Kansas sprang to

5. This drought was so severe that a relief organization was instituted to distribute supplies and alleviate suffering.

6. Kansas was not yet a state. It was admitted into the Union as a free state in January 1861.
arms. [Colonel James H.] Lane and others travelled over the territory all the time raising one regiment after another until it looked as though all of Kansas were hurrying to the front. When Congress convened Kansas was admitted at once [1861]. G. W. Packard left all his chances for wealth and joined the 9th Kansas and lived in the saddle for three years and a half. His time was spent escorting trains and hunting out bushwhackers. Many left their families and joined the army. Harrison Hannans, an enterprising farmer from Vermont, left his wife and two little ones with friends in Topeka and hurried away to the army. She was sick at the time but as soon as she could travel went east with her brother, but was taken worse on the way and died before reaching home.

Mr. Hannans was one of the founders of Washburn College [in Topeka]. During the last years of the war, the Rev. Samuel D. Bowker traveled extensively in the service of the trustees. He lectured and collected money. He visited Lincoln, and he gave him a contribution. The trustees erected a large stone building at Tenth and Jackson. Rev. Bowker hired and furnished a large house to board the students from abroad. The College was started with many pupils in the winter of ’63 and ’66. Rev. Samuel Drake Bowker was the first Principal and Wm. E. Bowker was the first President.

Wm. Jordan always kept quite a dairy. We made butter and cheese for sale and begun about this time to sell milk. The Lawrence raid was in 1863 when more than 120 were butchered in cold blood. The Price raid was in the last part of the summer of 1864.7 The militia were called out. All men between 18 and 45 were hurried away to the front and those between 14 and 18 and between 45 and 60 were ordered to guard the towns. They patrolled every road with gun and sabre.

We had just discovered a harvest of ground cherries and were so hungry for fruit that we gathered them in great quantities and made preserves with sorghum molasses [sic]. Mrs. Wm. Bowker and I went to Rochester with a horse and buggy which had been left with us for safe keeping.

We went to Rochester and on to Mr. Plummer’s to see how the women were faring. They were keeping up their courage well. Our men came home all right, but 16 of the men from Shawnee Co. were left on the battlefield of the Blue.8 Rev. Mr. Steeles, the first Presbyterian

Preacher died while the men were all away, and his son-in-law had to come home to bury him. It was six miles to Rochester from where we lived and we did not go very often, but one morning when I was fifteen years old Wm. and Hannah took all the children and went over there, leaving me to keep house. We were out of candles and they were to get some when they came home. There were some tiny pigs to be fed every two hours besides all the other stock. At night the cows came up and I milked them and fed the calves and hogs but no one came and I went to bed in the dark. Next day I had to go to the field to gather corn for the hogs. I cared for everything, and at night was in the dark again. I went to feed the little pigs and took up one and it was cold and dead. This made me feel gloomy, but I just knew they would come soon, so I sat down on a bench to wait for them, but a great meteor shown out. It was like the light of the full moon and kept coming round the corner of the house, and while I looked in terror to see what was coming it vanished and I went to bed. Rain came in the night and the cows rubbed down the fence and went away. I had to go quite a distance to borrow a horse to go after them and when I had them tended the corn brought from the field was noo and my clothes were wet to my waist. They arrived that day, and did not seem to have worried about me.

The cause of the delay was this. There was a man named Hughes living in Rochester who had raised quite a crib of wheat. He found some one was stealing it. A man named Ham filled a sack at the crib and carried it home. There was a little hole in the sack, and a trail of wheat led to Ham’s house. Mr. Hughes followed the trail and also followed Mr. Ham with an ax. Ham ran into Mr. Owens house and Hughes was going in when Olive seized an old revolver and told him “if he came a step further she would shoot him.” He backed out and this all made such a commotion that a jury was impanelled then and there. Wm. Jordan was put on the jury so that was the reason of the delay. If I had only had candles I should not thought of mentioning it. I went to school one year in all after I came to Kansas. Brother Samuel was a very hard working boy and when he was sixteen had earned a team of horses. They were very handsome black colts.

Sister Charlotte came from Boston with her husband and son in 1865. G. W. Packard enlisted for a year in Hancock’s Veteran Corp but when he got to Washington the war was ended. The veterans were employed as guards while the thousands of the Army were brought in and mustered out. He went home for his last visit to his Mother, Brothers and Sisters. He arrived at home in March 1866, and we were married April 19 of the same year. We lived with Mother the first year, and one morn-

---

7. The “Lawrence raid” was the infamous attack led by Confederate guerrilla leader William Quantrill. The “Price raid” actually occurred in the fall of 1864 when Confederate general Sterling Price threatened Kansas City and Fort Leavenworth.

8. When General Price’s Confederate forces prepared for an all-out attack along the Kansas-Missouri border, the Kansas militia was called out to support federal troops. The force met Price’s army near the Big Blue River on October 22, 1861.
ing when my husband and brother went out to work the horses were gone and they never saw them again. Our oldest daughter was born at Rochester in the spring of 1867. G. M. Adwers bought a store in Lawrence and my husband went to work in the store, which was dry goods. We remained in Lawrence several years.

He [her husband] served in the army 4 years and 3 months and when mustered out his health was so broken that he never was well again. We moved to Butler Co. in 1870 and went through the old job of making a home on the raw prairie. We lived in a log cabin for years where the water and wood had to be carried some distance. Our children numbered five when we moved into a frame house near a large spring. Mother, Brother Samuel and wife and Sister Catherine went to Butler Co. when we did. . . . Our children walked 1 3/4 miles to school besides crossing the Little Walnut which is a treacherous stream on stones. I have often wondered why they were not drowned. Mother died of bilious [sic] fever in Aug. 1877. Brother Samuel died of congestion of the brain in 1880. Catherine [her sister] died at our house in 1885. These are all buried at Quito, Butler Co.

Georgiana and George Packard's two eldest children, Edith and Florence, were born in Topeka. Frederick was born in Lawrence, and Ida, Raymond, Mabel, Arthur, Maude, and Muriel were born on a farm in Butler County, Kansas. When George could no longer perform heavy farm labor, the family moved to Topeka in 1892. The following year they moved into a comfortable home on Harrison Street where George died in 1912 and Georgiana wrote her memoir in 1914.  