Bypaths of Kansas History

A KANSAS BELLE OF 1857

Appreciation of the delicately-turned ankles of womankind, no matter where or in what generation, evidently has been universal. Prof. James C. Carey of Kansas State College, Manhattan, a twentieth-century connoisseur, sends in the following article which he found in Harper's Weekly, New York, November 7, 1857.

HOW THE LADIES DRESS IN KANSAS.—A Kansas letter-writer, who recently came down the Missouri on the steamer Omaha, says: "At Atchison we took on a young Kansas belle, whose only attendant was a young Missouri blood. The young lady was apparently dressed in the latest agony and style of fashion; the chaste straw hat, the innumerable flounces and wide-spread hoops of her gay striped silk dress, set off her commanding figure very gracefully. Her stature tall—as Byron says, I hate a dumpy woman. But the richest scene in relation to this young belle was behind the curtain, and is to come yet. At Leavenworth our fair one left us, and, as she was standing on the bank, 'casting a last, long, lingering look' back, we were tempted to admire her delicately-turned ankles—'who can resist a nicely laced gaiter or a peeping ankle?'—when, behold! she hadn't any stockings on! I am unable to say what the fashion is in Kansas—whether it is fashionable for ladies to go without hose or not; but certain I am that the finest dressed one whom I saw in the territory didn't use the article."

WHEN BUFFALO WERE PLENTIFUL

From the Newton Kansan, December 26, 1872.

It is estimated that there are about two thousand buffalo hunters now pursuing game in western Kansas, and that they average bringing down about fifteen buffalo daily. One man near Dodge City killed 100 in a day. The hides and meat bringing him a handsome sum of $300. At Dodge City the hams are worth 1½ to 2 cents a pound, and the hides from $1.50 to $2.50 a piece. Notwithstanding the immense business which is being done, there seem to be no diminution in their number, and trains are frequently stopped by them.

FASTIDIOUS EARLY-DAY DODGE CITY

From the Dodge City Times, July 27, 1878.

A good story is told of a well known citizen of this city, whose name we suppress. The story runs in this wise. He went into ———'s saloon, took a seat, threw his feet on the table, and called for a glass of beer, a sandwich and some Limberger cheese, which was promptly placed upon the table beside his feet. He called to ——— and told him that the cheese was of no account, as he could not smell it, whereupon the proprietor replied: "Damn it, take your feet down and give the cheese a chance."

(204)
THE GREATEST RACE OF THE CENTURY

Although Oklahoma has only this year arrived at its 50th anniversary of statehood, Kansas has looked down on her (from across the border, that is) for many more years than that.

Most of the Indian tribes formerly residing in Kansas were resettled in Oklahoma, and a considerable number of Kansans also migrated to the Sooner state, many in the celebrated opening of the Cherokee Outlet on September 16, 1893. This strip of land 150 by 59 miles, bounded on the north by the southern Kansas line, was literally peopled within two hours. For days prospective settlers lined the borders of the Promised Land awaiting the noon-day signal for the start. The crush was perhaps heaviest along the southern Kansas boundary, particularly in the Arkansas City and Caldwell areas.

The story of the Cherokee run has been told many times. Few eye-witness accounts are more vivid than that written from Caldwell by L. R. Elliott and printed in the Manhattan Nationalist, September 22, 1893. It is republished here in recognition of Oklahoma’s birthday anniversary and the part Kansans had in the settlement of that state.

The culmination of the long-looked-for event of the year—perhaps the event of the century—came at noon of the 16th of September, 1893. It was like that of a decisive battle. The hosts had gathered awaiting the command that should start the contestants, and the crack of a carbine repeated along the line was the sign that the contest was on. The great army moved, many miles long as it was, horsemen and infantry and supply trains, at the instant. Never a great army was more prompt for the charge. But all the seemings of an army, moving to the battle-shock, ended at the moment of starting. The line was broken on the instant, and speed and endurance were the test. The swiftest horse took his man to the front, and the next and the next and the next in speed, took positions relatively as far as the eye could reach, and clouds of dust obscured the lesser objects completely, and must have greatly annoyed the active participants in the early part of the race. Later, as the mass became a scattered multitude, the dust was less dense. In two hours that bald and parched plain—the Famous Cherokee Outlet—“The Strip”—which has for many months been the cynosure of the ten thousands, was punctured with claim stakes and peopled by many more thousands than will occupy it six months hence. It was our privilege to witness this great race for land and lots, and we wish to let our readers see it, if possible, as we saw it.

Caldwell was probably as good a point of observation as could be found, for it was a central one along the line; and, because of its accessibility, was the rallying point of multitudes.

We were early on the ground, and had a chance to observe the many “outfits” that were moving from their camps of weary waiting to the borders of the promised land. Only a kodak in skillful hands could depict them
faithfully. A noticeable thing in almost every vehicle was the barrel or keg of water, and every man had his canteen slung on his back, and his sharpened stick with a flag attached, by which he was to show location. The demand for canteens was enormous here, and all the neighboring towns were drawn on. The most common and convenient canteen was made by soldering together at the edges two small pressed tin pans or basins, and providing the aperture for filling, and loops for the strap or cord. Sometimes a basin and a pie-tin were thus joined and made to do service. Those who could, filled their canteens with coffee, and this was very palatable even after exposure to the hot sun for hours.

The town of Caldwell was a densely populated city, and every department was over-taxed. The lines of men at the postoffice, getting their last batch of mail, stretched far out into the street. We tried in vain for a conveyance to take us to the registering booths in the 100-foot border, so took to our never-failing resource, "shank's horses."

The booth was two miles away when we started, but it took fully four miles of dusty travel to reach it. The woods were, as had been the streets of the city, full of outfits, or of the debris of the broken camps, and the ankle deep dust was being early stirred, where once was vegetation. The ranch men on this border will have paid dearly for their proximity to the Strip. It was no use for them to complain, the horde was here, and it came to stay, like an army of grasshoppers till ready to move on.

Fortunately for all concerned, a merciful Providence had given, for this last morning of the struggle, the lowest temperature of the month, and thus saved from suffering, and no doubt from death, not a few of the worn and anxious people and their poor beasts.

The multitudes seemed moving without purpose, so various were their directions, but the rallying point was just at the line, where, on the 100 feet allotted inside the border, all who could find standing room for team or horse or self, stood.

The booth was a couple of white square tents standing at right-angles to each other, under the fly of which were rough counters. Behind these stood several clerks, two at a time on actual duty, while a line of hundreds of applicants stretched out in the dust from this attractive corner. We fell in line, at the rear where a man was giving to each, as he came, a number, supposed to indicate his place in the ranks. Ours read "6-39." There were four persons at this time in "our" squad, each received a consecutive number, the "6" being common to all. "It will never do for us to stand in that line," we said; so three stood and one took the four numbers, and soon, with a fee, and a little strategy, the squad was put through and the line relieved by just so much. Our certificate read:

F. Certificate that must be held by party desiring to occupy or enter upon the lands opened to settlement by the President's Proclamation of August 16, 1893, for the purpose of settling upon a TOWN LOT.

No. 11,577.
General Land Office, Sept. 16, 1893,
Booth in T. 29 N., R. 4 W.

This certifies that L. R. Elliott has this day made the declaration before me required by the President's proclamation of August 19, 1893,
and he is, therefore, permitted to go in upon the lands open to settlement
by said proclamation at the time named therein for the purpose of
settling upon a town lot. MELL H. HULL,
Officer in charge.

This certificate is not transferable. The holder will display the certifi-
cate, if demanded, after locating on claim.

Officially certified so we could get aboard the cars at the proper time, we
were at liberty to move about among the masses. From the elevated posi-
tion occupied by the booth we could see the city of Caldwell in the distance,
and the space between, alive with moving objects, and canopied with dust.
Several traveled roads led across the Strip from Kansas to Oklahoma diverging
here; and, necessarily, the teams must keep [to] these roads. This caused a
massing of vehicles at the points where these roads cross the line, and insured
a jam and no doubt some trouble at the start. But horsemen, and lighter
vehicles disregard the roads and stretch along for miles and miles, as far
as the eye can see. It is reasonable to suppose that this line of invaders was
more or less dense on the entire length of the Strip. Think then, of a line
of eager men and women stretched out for 150 miles due east and west,
fronting south, all waiting for the hour of noon. On the south, fifty-nine miles
away, is another such line, ready to advance northward at the moment when
these about us move southward, and you may get some idea of the situation.

The Rock Island track enters the promised land through a deep cut, and is
fenced on both sides the whole distance with a five-wire fence. The company
sent out a caboose and a force of men and sold tickets at the line. This was a
great convenience. Those who wanted to ride had a chance to fall in line and
procure tickets. Somebody from the top of the caboose called out so no one
could fail to understand. "Pond Creek 75 cents, Enid $1.25" and so on. "Get
your tickets, or you can't get on the train." From a good position we looked
on; and J. C. Bonnell, who always has just the right equipment at hand, caught
Kodak views of the crowds for the next Western Trail and the Settler.

As tickets were procured the purchasers passed on from the east to west
side of the track, received successive numbers, were put into companies under
captains, and placed in position along the track ready, each company to board
a car when the train came along. The train was made up of Montgomery
Palace Cattle Cars—55 cars—and it was loaded with 5,200 persons who bought
tickets, and several hundreds of marshals and others, and officers of the road.
A Palace Cattle Car will hold a host, when necessary. The second car in
this train held 300 persons. These cars proved to be just the thing. The tops
afforded good seats for sight-seeing, and the side doors gave easy egress to
claim-takers. We held a standing place on one of the upper decks, and com-
manded a wide range of vision.

The train was propelled by two engines in front and two pushers up the
grade. All was at high pressure in the way of excitement as the hour of
twelve approached, and comparison of watches was frequent. The crowds
in and on the cars were not less excited than those on the ground. There was
a hull in the conversation and a pause, a silence as high noon came, broken by
the sound of a carbine, and instantly supplemented by several shots along the
line. The flash was the signal, and before the sound came the trained horses
were several leaps on their way, and before the engineers could communicate
the starting signal to each other, and get the train under way, the miles of strippers were stripping through the Strip.

It was a sight never to be forgotten that spread out over the miles of landscape east and west and south. North was Kansas, and clouds of dust, and vacated camps.

Two of the wagon roads mentioned heretofore, ran for some miles nearly parallel with the railroad, one on either side of the track not far away, and along these many vehicles kept, so we from the train could cheer them, and yell comments on their speed and endurance. For a few miles there was a chaos of vehicles and horsemen, but the best horses were soon far ahead, and looking like pignies in the distance. A double spring wagon with a man and woman, at our left, did some marvelous driving, and a similar rig at the right, with two men, distanced the train for fully fifteen miles, and then collapsed in a chuck-hole, and we left them trying to repair their rig.

Every five miles the train slowed up or stopped, and many took to the prairie for claims. It was not necessary for the train to stop. Strippers would pitch out the bundle and roll after it in the sand, hastily rush for the wire fence and for the land on the other side of it. It was a very amusing sight. The wire fence, built by the Railroad Company, is new, and has five well stretched wires; and not every one is good at scaling a wire fence, even when not excited. Many a bundle was lacerated by the barbs, and many a garment rent. The stripper could not stop to unhook lest the other fellow should get ahead, so he would yank it loose, and the appearance of some whose coats caught was that of "strippers" for sure. The satchels and bundles would sometimes burst open as they were tumbled from the train, and as the owner somersaulted after them he would find lunch and supplies scattered in the sand. Generally the victim would stop and gather up the contents, some of which were not intended for public view, but sometimes he would rush on with his sharp stick, and let his grub take the chance of the future. Not a few left their hats in this way, and one man went through the fence minus one shoe, but he didn't stop for such a trifle. It was what the boys call "dead loads of fun,"—for those that looked on. How the poor mortals fared who went into camp for the night with such a reduced equipment was not so easy to see. If it was fun for us, it was to them, as it was to the frogs when the boys stoned them.

Not a few women, young and old, were among the claim-seekers, and as a rule they scaled the wire fences very well. One woman in black, with black vail and fan and parasol, and leading a small boy, scaled the fence with all her drapery intact, and the crowd became interested. A man who was more active began to stick his stake, apparently not seeing the woman, when the crowd on the train set up a yell to him to leave that claim, and he yielded it to the woman, who stuck her parasol into the ground, and so made her claim. It was all right for the man to give it up, but what in the world could that woman do as the train pulled away and left her on the bald prairie with apparently only her fan and parasol, and a possible bite of lunch in her hand bag. No water for miles, and no trains to take her away to water, and a ten year old boy to suffer with her?

As we have said, nearly every one who wanted a claim had supplies of water and grub, but a few who left the train, seemingly had nothing but the flag
stick, with which to show location. Such men will have claims to sell in an hour or two.

Jack rabbits, and coyotes, and no end of prairie dogs, were startled by the unusual visit to their realm. The rabbits made good time, as did the coyotes, hastened by the puffs of dust raised near them by the balls that didn’t hit them. But the prairie dogs, amid the crack of pistol shots, took no further notice than to give their short tails an extra shake. It takes a chance shot to strike these little fellows from the moving train.

A most interesting sight, was that of an antelope, which, roused by the intruders, vainly ran hither and thither only to be met by strippers which ever way it turned. This was at the point where the fleet horsemen from the south met those from the north; and one of the horsemen took after the weary and frightened antelope, and actually lassoed it in plain view of the thousands of interested ones on the train. A shout went up that rolled across the prairie in a great volume. It was a rare and remarkable sight, and one probably never before observed by such a large audience, if, indeed, such an act was ever before performed.

The exit of strippers from the train all along the line, had seemingly not reduced the number on board, and when the train reached Pond Creek station, twenty-two miles from the north line of the “strip,” the people went out of it like flies out of a sugar cask, and in five minutes a square mile of the prairie was dotted with squatters looking like flies on a sticky paper. Oh! it was fun to see that swarm go through that wire fence! The fleet horses, and possibly some “sooners” from the brush, were ahead, but could not take all the lots. A large number of women were among the company, and among these we noticed one who hobbled on a crutch. A friend helped her through the fence, and soon she was leaning on her crutch with a satisfied air near the stake of a corner lot. And it was noticeable that the expression of satisfaction on the faces of the women was much more marked than on those of the men. To the women it was, evidently, the event of a lifetime.

Three miles south of Pond Creek is the rival town established by the government for the Land Office, and here a similar exodus of town-lotters took place, and then the cars looked as a man feels at noon without having had breakfast.

At Wild Horse, twelve miles south of Pond Creek, (and about midway in the Strip north and south) our train met the corresponding train from Hennessey. Passengers on that train recited a similar experience with ours, except that in the scramble two women had got broken bones and one man was killed in leaping from the cars. Our train moved southward and developed, as it moved, a most interesting panorama. At first were the scattered settlers, here and there in the distance just simply holding down their claims and resting; then came those who had begun to look up their lines and corners; and farther on, even some attempt at improvement had begun. Besides these fixtures in the landscape, there was a continuous line of vehicles, like the supply train of an army, moving northward. The lightest loads and best teams were in the lead, and the less favored and more heavily burdened came on as they could, but the line was continuous for many miles, and the dust rolled over them, and all were of one color of grime. The white and the black had all become bronzed. This motley train, whose makeup was indiscernible, whose
burdens were varied and miscellaneous, was the rearward of the runners bringing on the supplies and the household goods that were to be set up in cabin or cot or city palace in this Beulah land.

And it was well that these were so faithfully coming on, for supplies are needed at the front, and shelter for the night is only to be found as these burdened vehicles reach the lot or the land which the runner for the family has chosen. There is the lumber for the cabin, the house on wheels complete, the “knocked-down” structure, ready to be erected on the claim; the tent that will do service till something better can be provided. These “outfits” are quite a contrast to those that stood at the northern border, and are now following their swift runners from the north, as are these from the south border. In this train are the unmistakable rigs from the southland. That wagon top shirred in the middle with a puckering string, is from Arkansas; and that strange load of appliances with Uncle Tom for a driver, rigged with rope harness and lines, came from lower Texas, and the gate of the skeleton team indicates that Dinah will wait a long time for the supplies on the claim she has taken.

Passing the town-sites of Enid and its duplicate three miles away, the prairie was even more populous with town-lotters than were those we left behind. A big run had been made from the south line, and the restive multitude is said to have broken away from the duress of the military, and made the start eleven minutes before the set time. But it was just as well, since all on the south line had an equal chance.

The Enid townsites had a large percentage of colored squatters, and among them a preponderance of women. Indeed the colored people got in their work mostly from the south line.

From Hennessey, where we could find no accommodation for the night, we took the first train northward and passed the populous towns, built in an hour, whose thousands must have had a distressful night on the bare earth, then only to spend the Sabbath following in hardly less discomfort because of President Cleveland’s ill-timed proclamation. Sundry lights, gleaming from the prairie, were the only indication in the darkness that a large city was at hand.

It was our good fortune that we got a seat. That train of four cars carried four hundred people out of the Strip. To say that we were tired was only to hint at the fact. But we had seen the run for location in the Strip, the sight of the century—the last, it is to be hoped, of its kind.

L. R. E.

[Manhattan.]