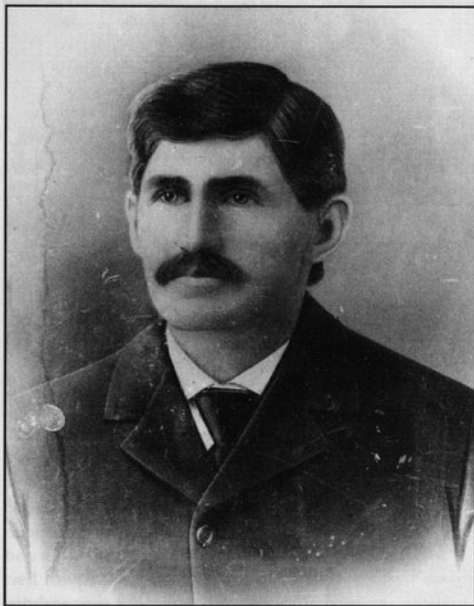


# Pioneer Experiences: The Memoir of Wilmot Benjamin Hull

edited by Jeffery Young



Wilmot Benjamin Hull (1851-1928?)



Anna Taylor Hull (1860-1901)

## Introduction

Shortly before his seventy-seventh birthday in 1928, Wilmot Benjamin Hull wrote a memoir of his life in Kansas, which he entitled "Pioneer Experiences." Hull, born on March 7, 1851, in New York state, regarded himself as a frontiersman and the life he led for most of his years as on the fringes of settlement.

Hull's father, Samuel, had supported his family as a tenant farmer in New York and Pennsylvania until his wife's inheritance of a parcel of property in New York. The family evidently was spurred in its move to

Kansas by economics and by the settlement of the family's oldest son, Norman, who headed for Kansas after his Civil War service.<sup>1</sup>

Wilmot Benjamin Hull dedicated his memoir "To the youngest and chummiest of my two sisters, Harriet Frances, two years my senior, and her family." The memoir, now in the possession of descendants, is

1. Norman Augustin Hull (1843-1918) served as a private in Company D, 76th New York Volunteer Infantry, and as a private in Company H, First New York Volunteer Cavalry. *Roll of Grand Army of the Republic Members, James Shields Post No. 57, Wellington, Ks., 1894.* Wilmot wrote that his brother enlisted and that "without tents, uniform or bedding, he and others were shipped in open cattle cars [in the dead of winter] to the stockyards of New York City, 'shoe-mouth deep' with manure and slush." Norman, debilitated by the war, received \$1,000 in bounty pay, and with what he had saved in wages, he headed west.

*This memoir was edited by Jeffery Young, a descendant of the Hull family; annotations are by Robert W. Richmond.*

inclusive of Wilmot's "frontier" life in Kansas, excluding his association in 1902-1903 with the Topeka newspaper, the *Kansas Prohibitionist*,<sup>2</sup> and only briefly mentioning his decision in 1904 to remove to Canada. Evidently one of Wilmot Hull's long held dreams was to settle in Canada. When his son, Urwin, emigrated to Saskatchewan and then invited Wilmot to take a homestead next to his, a new pioneer experience began.

In 1974, another of Wilmot's sons, Roy Wilmot Hull, completed the transcription of his father's memoir. As an epilogue Roy added material on his father's life after the move to Canada, calling it Wilmot's "second Pioneer Experience." Wilmot's Canadian experiences, as they had been in Kansas, were varied. He and Urwin raised sheep while making the improvements needed to "prove up their homesteads." In 1907 the sheep were sold and Wilmot moved to Winnipeg where he was involved in another prohibitionist newspaper. From there he wandered to the "Ranch Slough" which was described as a place with "few settlers that far up (35 miles each way to a railroad and 16 miles to his nearest post office)." After a failed attempt to persuade the government to drain the slough, Wilmot, according to his son, did a lot of "gadding around."

Concluding his detailed remembrances of his father, Roy added to the epilogue that upon his death, Wilmot Benjamin Hull ended "almost a whole life of pioneering, . . . [and that] He did say at one time he had the impression the Lord was directing him, but he then was not too sure the Devil didn't sometimes take a hand also."

The memoir of Wilmot Hull's Kansas experiences is presented here with some editorial changes in punctuation to aid readability; ellipses have been added to mark deletion of material relating to family or non-Kansas matters; and bracketed material has been added to aid in the continuity. The story, however, remains in the words of Hull who, by his own account, was used to hard work and had received regular schooling. Of his childhood, he recalled, "[I] went two miles to school until sugar-making time when I made the sugar, cutting the needful wood and carrying nine gallons of sap at a trip." His continued hard work in Kansas and his ability to express himself are apparent in his memoir of "Pioneer Experiences."

#### Hull's Memoir

Nearing my 77th birthday, I feel assured that God wants me to give my fellow man the benefit of my experiences along these lines. They will not be thrilling experiences, adventures, nor chronicle many

hairbreadth escapes, but will be a true story, which I hope may dispel some illusions and aid some to better success in life's battles. Some people are born, others are made, frontiersmen. I cannot claim the first, though my father told me many incidences of his frontier life in south-central New York, and my mother of hers in Connecticut; . . .<sup>3</sup>

About my 17th birthday, we had a conclave. They [my parents] had been offered \$100.00 an acre for the stony, worn-out place; should they sell and follow the worshipped son [Norman] to the Frontier? My sisters had little to say and my other brothers were too young,<sup>4</sup> but with all my power I advocated going. My chief reason came thus. About two years before, a noted Evangelist had closed a very successful "protracted meeting" in our church. I, among many others, was converted, but Satan had succeeded in convincing me that it was not genuine. I was not hypocrite enough to go through the "testimonies" that were expected, and I thought Kansas was an easy release, besides being a step towards my "Mecca," Saskatchewan, Canada. I had decided to become a hunter and trapper.

It was decided to "go West and grow up with the country" for the children's sake. Dad bought some fine eating apples and peddled them in the two villages and sometimes on the train. Our nearest market was Candor Center<sup>5</sup> with a saw mill, grist mill, sash and door factory, hotel, and depot, and a mill that was 1/4 of a mile farther on was its rival, with woolen mill and tannery which used the skins of thousands of hemlock trees yearly leaving their meat to rot. One evening I went into the hotel barroom with my apples; and the crowd must know the latest and discuss its merits. A big burley neighbor who had been to Illinois and been driven back by "ague and fever"<sup>6</sup> was loud in his prophecies of how quick we would be back. He said, with a shiver, "It seems like I could feel them (the chills) creeping up my back now." A little bit of a man spoke up, saying, "Maybe it's lice." While the roar was on I left.

We got started in early May [1868], taking with us enough home-cooked food to last the seven of us for the railway journey of over 1,200 miles to Kansas City,

3. Wilmot Benjamin Hull's father was Samuel (1818-1901), a descendant of George Hull who arrived in Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1630. Samuel married Harriet Amelia Barber (1824-1878) in 1842.

4. Besides Norman and Wilmot, the Hull children were Sabrina (1846-1888); Harriet Frances (1849-?); Edwin (1853-1859); Charles (1859-?); Orson (1863-1946).

5. Candor is in Tioga County, New York, approximately ten miles north of Oswego.

6. Ague is a malady which affects the person much like malaria with alternating periods of chills and fever. The term was commonly used on the frontier and also may have referred to some forms of influenza.

2. The name of W. B. Hull first appears on the *Kansas Prohibitionist* masthead on December 26, 1902, as editor and publisher. It last appears on June 26, 1903; shortly thereafter the newspaper was moved to Emporia.

Missouri; nor do I remember of one having a sleeper berth on the way. We were early taught the Yankee rule that when one could not increase their income, they should cut down their expenses till "both ends would meet." It is a rule all pioneers should follow. The railways were fairly speedy even in those early days. We found Norm, my worshipped older brother, there to meet us, with a hired team of horses which he had an option to buy (and father afterwards bought) and an ordinary farm wagon. The next day, we began the 160 mile trip from there to Chetopa, Labette County, Kansas,<sup>7</sup> which near to was to be my home for over two years. The most wonderful thing of our railway trip was having the coach we were in shoved onto a ferry boat to cross the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers without our even changing cars; and the most wonderful of the wagon trip was going for days the same direction the Neosho River ran, but always uphill. I finally spoke to my brother about it, and he said, "Look back." I had to admit that it looked uphill, also the land was so near level I could discern no slope. My sisters had raptures over the wildflowers. "Look at them." Verbenas actually growing wild that are much nicer than Mrs. Blummel's (the best flower-raiser near home with her best care), and the sensitive rose and many others were a marvel.

We camped out much, for bedclothes were part of our baggage, which was part of the outing to me, the men and boys sleeping under and the girls and Mother in the wagon box or bed as Kansans called it. We spent over two days of solid rainfall at a little country hotel where we got our first sorghum molasses and cornbread and bacon grease.

We arrived at Chetopa and the only thing like a house to rent was a 12 foot by 14 foot log shack with a clapboard roof that kept out part of the rain. Mother and the sisters were perforce instilled in it, but men and boys were in the wagon box set up on poles with a wagon-sheet over its bows while Norm, who was "picking up" the carpenter's trade, at once began a new home on lots newly bought. Before he began it, he and I went a couple of miles to see a man who had two yoke or a pair of oxen to hire and a prairie plow to break sod while he did it. Also he had Tom and Jerry, two two-year-olds, for leaders. He left me there to drive or be driven by the teams and get experience which I got very quickly, but the driving very slowly. I did learn to live on "hoe-cake" (cornbread), bacon and its fryings, very black sorghum molasses, and to drink coffee with no trimmings. I also got to read *The*

*Ante-diluvian History of the United States* and some other good books.

The new house was to be two stories in front and one back of it; one story was as wide as the other was long, 34 feet by 16 feet both of them, only the latter to be built that Summer. Norm got such a hustle on him that on July 3rd it was enclosed, part of the floor laid and most of the roof was on; and Mother said we must move in and well I knew I would be needed if we did.

The "town Fathers" had staged a war-dance and barbecue for the 4th and hired 30 or 40 Big Hill Osage Indians for the actors.<sup>8</sup> They bought a fat beef which the Indians were to kill with arrows from horseback, chasing it as they did a buffalo then skinning and dressing it and roasting it whole, all of which was done according to schedule. I pleaded with Mother with all my eloquence, but to no avail. She said she was not going to stay "in that old bedbug harbor" another day and stuck to it; and truly in my long life I never found but one other (a Texas one) to equal it. To say I wanted to see the whole show is to put it mildly and all I saw was the long single-file line of Indian horsemen riding into place while singing a song of 40 verses which, if they wanted to, they could double. It almost broke my heart and left it sore to this day. Mother never was such to be with me again.

Soon after, Norm got a job at the mill for himself and me; my job was to wheel the sawdust from its pit and get up logs from the river and other places. The head sawyer applied for and got board with us, also three to five others who were working at building a sash, door and furniture factory three blocks from us.<sup>9</sup> With my sisters, one grown and the other nearly so, and Mother feeling in her prime, they were soon keeping up the table. When a log was wanted from the river, which became often, I took the end of a three-inch rope, which was wound on the shaft of an eight foot "bull wheel," over my shoulder and pulled till it turned and unwound 80 to 100 feet, which I dragged down the river bank, placing the end with a big iron hook on it and enough rope to reach around the log lengthwise. Its end was on a railing which was atop of posts set to catch the logs when they floated against them, with enough rope sunk to the bottom to reach deep enough water and around the log. I took the

8. The Fourth of July celebration at Chetopa in 1869 was impressive according to the *Chetopa Advance*, July 14, 1869. There were speeches and a picnic, but the newspaper makes no mention of Indian dancing. The Big Hill Osage were one of the five organized divisions of the tribe. John Joseph Mathews, *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 694.

9. The *Chetopa Advance*, July 4, 1869, carried advertisements for three sawmills—McCreary and Burns, Hyatt's, and Martin's. The Chetopa Planing Mills of Taft, Brown and Co. also advertised as producers of sash, doors, blinds, and furniture.

7. The Chetopa Town Company was organized January 22, 1868; the town was laid out the following spring, and incorporated in 1870. A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1473-74.



leaky tub of a boat (skiff), ran up to the raft, loosened a log and guided it down over the rope against the posts. I hooked the rope around it properly, and if the sawyer was too busy to do it, I let the bull wheel down onto its pulley and dragged the log up the skidwayed river plank to the front of the head-blocks and lifted the bull wheel in time to stop the log at the right place. After the first log, the rope was so wet I was drenched from shoulder to toe; but I liked it. It was manly.

The Neosho River could be easily forded at low water; at the edge of town, it was "up" so often that a ferry was wanted. Two young men, Henry and Will Fry, and an old sailor, always called Yank, put it in and fished for the market at odd times. The boat and outfit was brought from upriver by Yank and one of the boys, and the other was to watch for and help land it. For some reason, it was near half a mile past before it was stopped, and the mill shut down and all hands went to help get it back. This was done by taking one end of their cable upstream with a boat where trees were in the way and on foot the rest of the way making it fast. Then the men on the ferry boat pulled on the cable till the ferry was brought to the point where it was wanted. The ferry was safe with only one team and wagon. If only one footman wanted over, a skiff was used; the fee was 25 cents.<sup>10</sup>

They got some big fish; one "cat" fish weighed 106 pounds. The Gar-fish tore their net badly. About August 15, the mill shut down for want of logs and Norm and I turned our efforts towards getting some. Among others we got a big black walnut one, of clear stuff, ten feet long, that had caved off with a bank and was hanging by its roots but lying in the water. The owner of the land where it adjoined came and claimed it after it was cut; but Norm claimed as it was a meandering river, he no longer owned it. They compromised by Norm giving him a skiff pattern. We towed it up to the ford and hauled it in. Norm said as it had lain in the water since it died, it would do to work soon. He made an excellent skiff while I hauled quite pure driftsand, of which I found quite a bit on the river bank, to the builders. The skiff was being put to use and service for it had turned wet weather and the river rose and we went to salvaging logs that were drifting past. We did fine; the best I ever saw.

Just before that my parents had bought a "claim," a first settler's right to complete title, to 1/4 Section by putting a "comfortable home to live in" on it, living not less than six months on it, breaking a given amount, and paying \$1.25 an acre which went to the

Osage Indians.<sup>11</sup> We tried to put up some hay, but the wetness spoiled it. The Indians stole one of our horses and one of the oldest and biggest oxen took sick and died (Texas Fever).<sup>12</sup> Though salvaging logs did not make us rich, we got along and it helped us to get lumber for the new house. We also worked some on shares for an old man by the name of Ruder whom we were told was an awful man, but we found him fine. He was murdered within a year. I believe he would have liked to adopt me. A Dutch prairie neighbor of ours had gotten out a lot of timber just across from us and wanted us to help him raft it down and across the river as the roads were very bad on that side. He insisted on loading 600 fence posts on his logs many of which would not float themselves and he put a single sweep car on one end and sat down to steer it like a boat that has headway. He ran it into the banks a few times then tried to stop it with a rotten rope, but it went past to the swift water, broke up, and was a total loss with several blue-black walnut logs in it. I made several trips with Norm and saw how he set the wagon and adjusted the skids, put the double of the loading chain around the log and rolled it on with the oxen; and soon I could go and get them by myself.

There was not three inches of ice on still water at any time all Winter, but rain and mud galore. In the Spring, I had been to a mill down the road, and nearing home after nine o'clock with a big load of lumber, I got "stuck" in a mudhole and left it till morning. Upon arriving home, I found Mother wild over the loss of my ten-year-old brother, Charles. She had looked in all the wells and everywhere but could not find him. I asked if Nix's boy was gone too, and finding he was too I headed for a pool in a nearby creek. As I peeped over the bank, I saw about a dozen boys in various stages of swimming and dressing, and my brother, dressed but vigorously rubbing his hair with his handkerchief, who said, "Boys, is my hair most

11. *Kansas Tract Books* [for federal public lands], microfilm, roll 15, vol. 44, Kansas State Historical Society, indicate that Samuel Hull purchased 34 acres of Osage Ceded Lands at \$1.25 per acre and 126 acres at \$2.00 under the provisions of the Cherokee Strip Act of 1872. The original date of entry was July 1, 1869, and the purchase date for the latter parcel was July 15, 1873. The land was in Sec. 5, T 35S, R 21E. The 1870 *Federal Census* for Richland Township, Labette County lists the Hull family as follows: Samuel, 52, farmer; Harriet, 46, keeping house; Norman, 27, farm laborer; Sabrina, 22, dressmaker; Frances, 21, teaching school (this was certainly Harriet Frances); Wilmot, 18, farm laborer; Charles, 11; and Orson, 6. All were born in New York except for Sabrina, who was born in Pennsylvania. By the time the 1875 *Kansas State Census* was taken, only the parents and the two younger children remained on the Labette County property.

12. Texas (or Spanish) Fever was caused by ticks carried by Texas longhorns. The longhorns were immune to the infectious fever but it severely affected other cattle with which the ticks came in contact. The Kansas quarantine laws which increasingly restricted the driving of Texas cattle through the state between 1865 and 1885 came as a result of Kansas farmers objecting to Texas Fever.

10. George Root, "Ferries in Kansas: Part VII—Neosho River," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 4 (May 1935): 271, states that C. W. Isbell and J. H. Frey were licensed in September 1868 to operate a ferry at Chetopa. Frank Frey, brother of J. H., also was a ferry employee.

dry?" I told him I would finish the job and started. I kept him ahead of me till we reached Mother, who said, when I told her of it, "I wondered how he got his handkerchief so dirty." She had forbidden him swimming till the water got warmer. . . .

In those days, horse stealing seemed almost a profession. No matter how earnest they may have been, the law officers made little headway at stopping it. Four brothers, whose names I forget, with a leader by the name of Nick Gillett were suspected of being a "gang." Eight "old-timers" formed a committee which Norm happened to find guarding Gillett, who was saying little. One of the four brothers was making light of it, laughing, and telling them "they could not prove a thing against him," when one of the men told him, "If you had seen what I saw this morning, you would not feel so funny." When he asked what that was, he told him, "I saw three of your brothers hanging by the neck from one limb of a tree." Then he broke down, completely, and made a mess of himself. Then Gillett spoke, saying, "My name is Hellroy Nick Gillett, and I wasn't born to be hung; shoot and be damned." Then he broke and ran. There was a fence 25 or 30 steps in front of him and not a shot was fired till he reached and began to climb it when the eight carbines spoke as one, putting eight bullets through him, any one of which would have killed him. They hung the other by his brothers and it broke up the gang. There were lots of hills around there and speaking to a resident about his few neighbors, he pointed to the hills and said, "These are the best friends a man ever had; they stay at home and mind their own business."<sup>13</sup>

During the Winter and Spring of 1868 and 1869, Norm had finished the "shell" of the house and rented the front part to a school teacher who had a big girl who took my eye. I was so bashful she never found out, for which I am now very thankful. Father took a mysterious sickness or weakness, not billious, which Norm thought came from hearing himself called "old man Hull." I thought the stealing of our horse and the dying of the ox had more to do with it. I don't think he ever got another but made the one do. They moved onto the claim and the sisters bached in the back room and worked at their dressmaking and tailoring. We got a cow and stable for her and lived more like [New] York State. After breaking season, in July, two other ox teamsters and I went down to Grand River, near where the Spring and Neosho unite to form it,<sup>14</sup>

to get lumber for the "factory." We knew the "green head"<sup>15</sup> flies were bad and we would have to drive much of the way in the night, but the road was plain and the night was moonlit. Going home I got within 12 miles of the line about two o'clock and thought I could take a nap, and let the oxen graze an hour, knowing that the last four miles were free of flies. I thought I could get to that before they stirred. I arose in the hour, but the oxen, instead of grazing, had struck for home. I could hear the bell five miles and it sounded very faint. I hustled after, overtook and got them back soon after sunrise, but soon the flies covered every hair and drove them almost mad. I passed back and forth around the team, mashing flies as fast as I could for which the team seemed grateful. They needed no urging forward. They seemed to realize I was doing my best and after the first few times paid no heed to my running across in front of them. I finally got home where I learned the driver of the four horse team hauling the mail had all four of his horses killed on his trip while I was gone, so I felt proud of getting through. When there is nothing to molest or make afraid on Earth, where will "green head flies" be?

. . . . Early in the Spring of 1869, a big rain put the river out of its banks and over the marshes to the East. After that, Norm said, "I'm going after buffalo." Visions of the broad plains 180 miles west spotted with buffalo flashed through my mind at once, and I replied, "What will Pa say?" He said, "I don't have to ask him." I said, "It will take at least a month, won't it?" Then he laughed and said, "I mean buffalo fish just across the river." Of course, I went with him to handle the oars of the new skiff, at which I had become expert, while he, with a spear, struck into the wriggling grass bunches that fish made to move. We got a nice catch.

One day, Will Fry and I were walking along the bank of the river and came to a bunch of driftwood that had lodged with the current. Setting loose to its outer parts, I spied a beautiful black walnut log coming, to pass close in, so I ran out on the drift, thinking I could reach one foot over it and land it just below; but I proved to be too far out. I had heard of sitting astride of a log and "rolling" it out of the current and to shore; I made a jump, landing in the right place if it had been a log, but it was a slab. I was about to yell for help (I could not swim) when I saw some low hanging twigs of an elm tree which I could reach and which I did. I swung myself back to the drift and so to shore, a wiser boy. Fry laughed so heartily he could do nothing else.

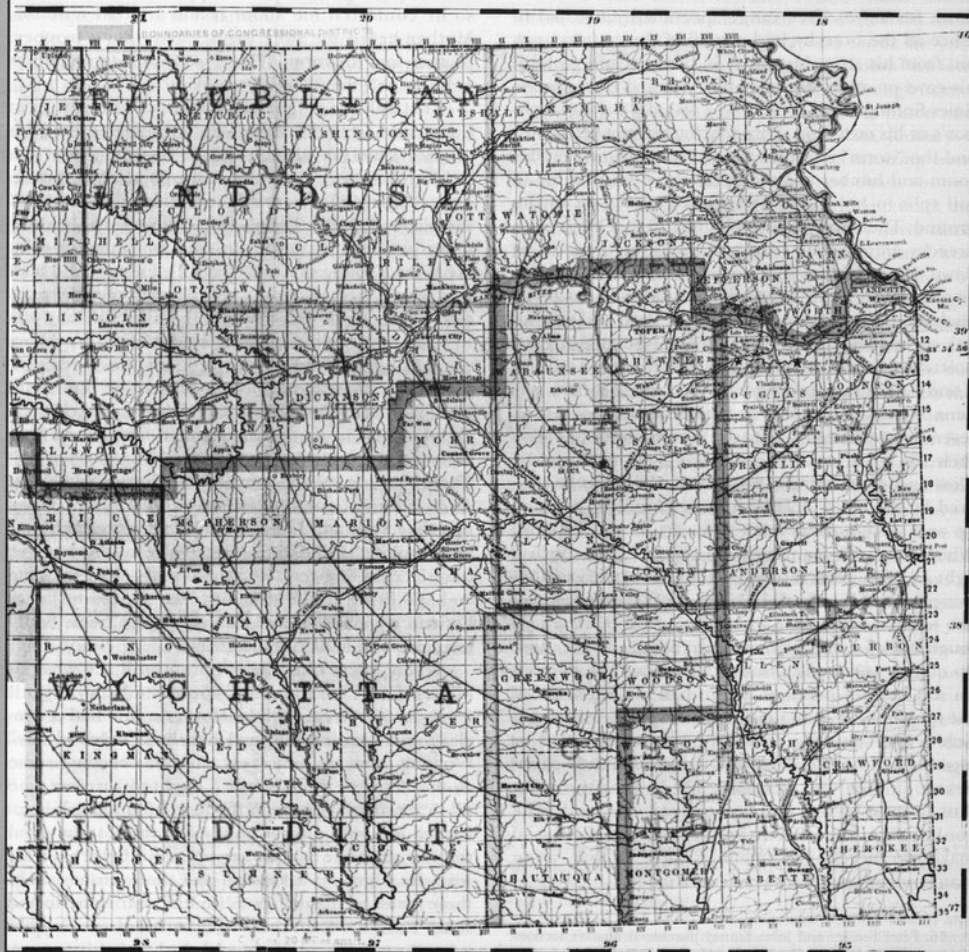
13: In February 1867, William P. Myers, James Myers, George Myers, a man named Edwards, and another named Gillett were lynched at Baxter Springs. Their crime was horse stealing. Genevieve Yost, "History of Lynchings in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 2 (May 1933): 214.

14. The confluence of the Spring and Neosho (Grand) is in Ottawa County, Oklahoma, at the north end of the present Lake of the Cherokees.

15. Green head flies are similar to horse flies or deer flies. The female feeds on the blood of both humans and animals. Dell E. Gates and Leroy L. Peters, eds., *Insects of Kansas* (Manhattan: Kansas State University Extension Division, 1962), 228-29.

# THE STATE OF KANSAS, 1875.

Res, and Centres of Population for the Years 1860, 1870 and 1875. [Centre of Population: 1860: Latitude, 38° 34' 54" Longitude, 98° 34' 54" 1870: Latitude, 38° 34' 54" Longitude, 98° 34' 54" 1875: Latitude, 38° 34' 54" Longitude, 98° 34' 54"]



*This congressional and land district map of eastern Kansas was produced a few years after Hull's arrival. The family settled near Chetopa, located in the southeast corner of Labette County.*



That Fall, Norm got his sorghum outfit over from Missouri and made sorghum at a Mr. Kinney's,<sup>16</sup> five miles north of our claim-home now deeded. My chum sister, Harriet Frances, also taught a school but I have forgotten where.

The Winter of 1869 and 1870 proved fairly "open" and we continued getting out fencing to fence the place we had broken on the claim which I will call the farm, for as yet "free range" prevailed. One had to fence all the breechy [*sic*] cattle<sup>17</sup> of the country away out from his crops instead of in pastures and go hunt his cows or other stock when he wanted them, sometimes finding them dead from a founder on his neighbor's or his own crop. Wire fencing was not yet known and the "worm" rail fence<sup>18</sup> took too much timber and room and lumber was too costly so we split "slabs" (a rail split in halves) to be nailed to posts set in the ground. These were mostly eight or 10 feet long, but a breechy animal soon learned to push or break them down. When barbed wire became cheap, it was hailed as a Godsend even though much stock was cut on it. Hickory, pecan or oak were best for slats, and walnut, oak or mulberry (of which there was quite a bit) for posts. We plowed the piece and built the fence around it and Father raised very good corn on it as well as gardens. We also built a very strong corral and Norm took seven pair of three-year-old steers to train for oxen for their use for a year. He also fixed a rig to follow the plow and drop corn in each third furrow to be covered by the next. Only about one kernel in 10 came up and though those made fair ears, it was a failure. When sorghum planting time came, I did it with a light ax, with good results (as there was neither sandstone or gravel), a small hole two short steps apart and two to four seeds in it and stepping on it. Having a tough back I could plant over an acre a day. It came up quickly and made a fine crop; melons also did well on sod but not potatoes. Norm had blasted some of the toughest logs using pistol or rifle powder; boring a hole a little past the center, he put in an ounce or more with a common fuse into it. He put a little paper next to it; then with a tamping bar he took the driest dust (it must be very dry) and tamped it as hard as he could strike, then fired the fuse, seldom failing to make two pieces and sometimes three or four, using maul and wedge to finish. I never tried it.

16. Peter Kinney and John Kinney purchased quarter sections of Osage Trust land in Sec. 28, T 34S, R 21E in 1870 and 1869 respectively. *Kansas Tract Books*, microfilm, roll 15, vol. 44, KSHS.

17. Breechy cattle were ones that could not be kept in a pasture by ordinary fencing. Ramon F. Adams, *Cowboy Lingo* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1936), 74.

18. A worm fence is a zig-zag fence with sections consisting of six to eight rails which interlock with the rails of adjacent sections and are supported by crossed poles. Worm fences commonly are associated with the country east of the Mississippi.

While Norm was with me, we got along with the steers very well, but the Chetopa Council wanted him to help their blacksmith drill a hole ostensibly for artesian water and they examined all the shist<sup>19</sup> pumped out for minerals of any kind. He took the job leaving the 18-year-old boy to do what he could and by that time I could swear like a pirate. One evening, just before quitting time, Norm happened to be at home so he could tell me about it and I a half mile off. Mother heard me swearing at them like a trooper. Mother said to Norm, "Those oxen do aggravate him awfully don't they?" and Norm said, "Yes."

That Fall Norm got his sorghum outfit set up at home, and I became expert at "stripping" the blades off with a hickory stick, much the size and shape of a lath but heavier. The cane was a good crop; but so many chinch bugs were hidden under the sheath of the blades, it spoiled most of it. After trying soda and other purifiers, we gave it up and got little out of it. We hired a young man, just from Tennessee, who had, that season, helped out the grain harvest of those parts with a reap hook (hand sickle), because the land was so steep one could not use a "cradle." Our neighbors were using "self-rakes" [to] cut off the seeds and hauled the cane and some wood. Some of the neighbors had been Cherokee Indians who had taken their "head rights" in that and the North Georgia country and were not coming to the "Nation" just South of us.<sup>20</sup> There was a fine hand named Will Farmer. My oldest sister [Sabrina] got a preacher to speak to me, but by that time I thought I was an infidel and am afraid I was very insulting. I think it was that Fall that the younger one [Harriet Frances], nearly two years older than me and still living at last accounts, was married to James Faurot, a Civil War veteran, who had been badly wounded and had poor health and a big pension.

When Norm quit the sorghum mill, he went to Missouri and got a load of apples and shorts (mill feed) to take West. Father, Mother and I had a conclave and decided that as I had been a "good boy" bringing them my wages, etc., and was needing some clothes for myself pretty bad, I ought to have my time till I earned enough to get them; so I found a job helping cut logs with a crosscut saw as I was not very good with an axe. The mill owner wanted a helper for his teamster. I got off to do that and the teamster got in three times as many logs as he had ever done in the same time before. The owner offered me double wages to take his place; but I heard he was poor pay and I had made up my mind to go West and wanted to

19. Shist or schist is a form of crystalline rock.

20. Hull must be referring to the Cherokee Neutral Lands at this point although few if any Cherokee actually settled in Kansas. The "Nation" reference would be to the Cherokee lands in Indian Territory, later Oklahoma.

get off before Norm got back so I could learn to be more self-reliant. I refused. I put away \$10.00 for my expenses on my trip, but I could not find it till after Norm got back. I had put it in an inside vest pocket and forgotten where. Before I missed it, I had told my parents what I intended to do. They pleaded with me to go with Norman which I did and probably changed my whole life course to God's plans, for even atheists are subject to Him as I learned.

So, early in November 1870, Norm, who had divided the Labette County property with our parents, and I started for the "Promised" land that faith had told us of, using his two yoke of oxen and a heavy wagon, loaded in front with a 600 pound barrel of sorghum and the rest of the big box filled with apples packed in loose shorts—a very unloadable cargo. We had had nearly as much Winter as either of the two preceeding ones and hoped it was about over, but it proved the longest and froze the most ice of any of the 34 years I spent in Kansas. For four days the weather was fair, and we got to a ridge of high ground some 14 miles west of the big Cana [Caney] River. A short cut trail over this ridge saved many miles, but it was so steep the oxen could not do it nor could we lighten the load. After trying them several times, we started around. It was then night, with a very cold northwest wind blowing almost a blizzard. Norm insisted we must have something in our stomachs or we would freeze. I hunted up a few small sticks and brush and he fried a few slapjacks and we ate them and crawled into bed over the apples. Soon we heard the steady ting, ting, ting of the big oxen bell, which told us the oxen were breaking back. Norm said, "Let them go; they'll stop at the river and if it stays this cold, we will go there too." In the morning, we went to the river, taking a blanket a piece, and found the oxen there. When we got to it, we found the wagon all right and the apples not frozen. At Winfield, Norm sold the apples at fair prices, and they were glad to get them. We stayed a week, or more, and the folks [there] would not take a cent of pay. He also sold part of his sorghum. On getting back to the river, I found both of my big toes frozen; and they peeled and became very painful. I got some white lead, which healed them quickly. Norm soon got logs to haul. I went with him and froze them again, making them worse than before; so I sat by the fire a long time, then tried it again with my feet wrapped in untanned deer skin. After a time, I froze them a third time between then and New Year's. Sawyer, whose oldest daughter gossip had picked out for Norm, and Hutchins, the man I had helped saw, came out looking for claims. Having a good horse team and a farm wagon, we went with them. A few warm days had helped the current of the Arkansas River to thaw itself free and they would not put the

team into it; so, as it was narrow, Hutch and I crossed it on a footlog. We went on and took the four claims where the thriving town of Bell Plains was afterwards built<sup>21</sup> on one forty of each; but before we left, the others came. As there was no "timber or nothing" we left them and went on. Probably if we had not, no town would have been built there.

We crossed the divide and struck "Slate" Creek where an Indian town had been removed from three days before;<sup>22</sup> and Norm took that and I took the joining one on the west laying our "foundation" of four crooked poles and four rows of sod, though sometimes four sills of lumber. We hewed a place and wrote, with a pencil, our names and date, January 4, 1871.<sup>23</sup> So newly had the surveyor's sectionizing been done that the marks of their dragged chain showed plainly, and Norm followed them to find and mark the corners for us and the others, though they never came back. We were among the first to "take up" land west of the Arkansas River, much like a desert, made so by the close cropping of the buffalo or bison. That night we camped on an adjoining quarter and an Indian named Sore Heel, evidently hunting for his people who had moved away while he was gone, came to our camp. We gave him supper, after which he wanted me to sing for him. When I had done so, I asked him to sing, which he did for an hour, then laid by our fire till morning. His songs seemed much alike, as Dutch does, but I could tell a difference. We then went back to our log hauling on the Walnut River and Sawyer and Hutchins to Chetopa. On February 3, in time to hew off our old date and write it anew, we were back with part of our sorghum, as much of which as I was to sell and enough lumber for me to roof the dugout (much like a cellar, only, in this case, being dug in the bank of a creek, with a fireplace and chimney down to it). We also brought a spade, shovel, saw, axe, and hammer, the old shotgun, and ammunition with which I shot my prairie chickens, some off the big elm tree that stood over my door and some fell in the creek, which I learned were as well scalded as though the water was hot. We also left the bedding and a

21. The Belle Plaine Town Company was chartered February 22, 1871, platted October 20, 1873, and incorporated in 1884. *Belle Plaine: A Century of Memories, 1884-1984* (Belle Plaine, Kans.: Centennial Committee, 1984), 10.

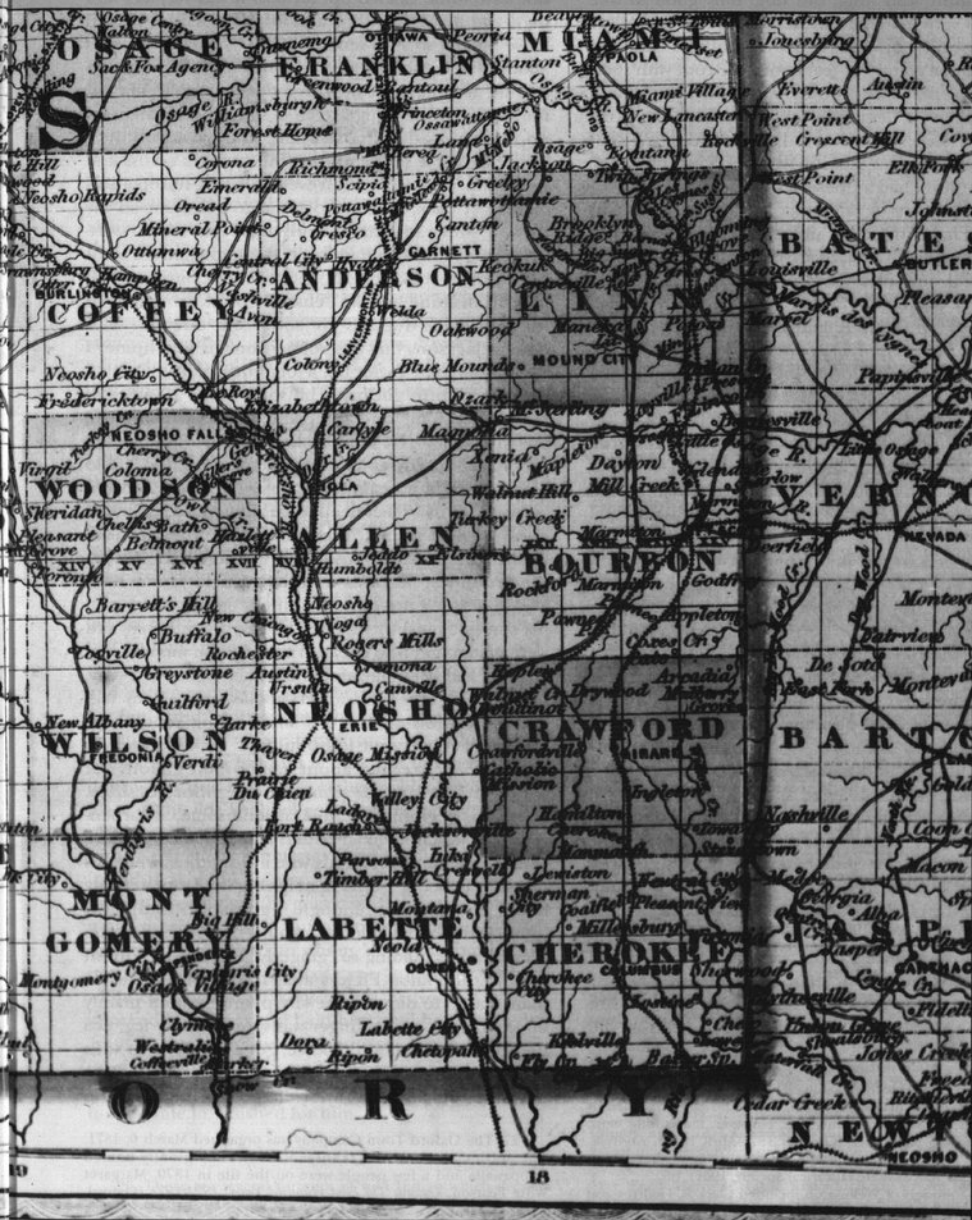
22. Slate Creek heads in northwestern Sumner County and flows southeasterly toward the Arkansas River. The Hull brothers moved south to Slate Creek from present Belle Plaine.

23. Norman Hull filed on the NE¼, Sec. 34, T. 32S, R. 1E and Wilmot Hull filed on the SE¼, Sec. 1, T. 33S, R. 1E. These were Osage Trust Lands and the purchase dates were May 18, 1872, and March 25, 1874, respectively. *Kansas Tract Books*, microfilm, roll 11, vol. 34, KSHS. The 1875 *Kansas State Census* for Avon Township shows Norman Hull living alone and farming. By 1880, when the federal census was taken, his two youngest brothers Charles and Orson were living with him.





Southeastern Kansas as depicted on A. J. Johnson's map of Kansas and Nebraska, published in 1870



cooking outfit, and Ring, our dog, only good to tree rabbits, to vary the chicken meat diet. The next day I finished my nine foot by 10 foot dugout and chimney, which I built a couple of feet above the roof with sods, and the fireplace and door. When I had the roof about half on it began to snow and kept it up for nearly two days; but I went ahead, though my toes were still sore and my feet still wrapped in stiff rawhide buckskin, until I had a house, a home on my claim.

There were lots of rabbits along the creek, and lots of hollow logs (drifted) and trees into which they would dodge when chased by the dog; then I would either cut a hole into them or smoke or twist them (run a stick against them and twist it into their wool until it took up the hide and they were easily pulled out). On such a trip, I happened to come to the surveyor's camp when Colonel Angell,<sup>24</sup> who had filled a contract to sectionize a county or more of the lands, came and did survey the entire site of a town that they named "Meridian" because it adjoined the sixth principal meridian; I think Section 7 Tp: 32 Rg.—east or perhaps it was N.W. of 19 to Tp. 32 R1 east. I think it was the latter.<sup>25</sup> They hoped to make it a county seat and got a man to build a store and put in a stock of goods. Colonel Angell had other fish to fry and went away and when a company from Oswego, Kansas, of which Dr. Godfrey and Mr. P. A. Wood came to buy them out, the others were so wild in their price that they went on and started Wellington, which shortly after, in an election with four other towns competing, was voted the county seat.<sup>26</sup> Some said they got a town lot for their vote, but I presume it was a fair election as most. I had been so foolish as to claim I was 21 years old, but I looked and many believed I was under 16 when my vote was challenged and I would not swear it in. It confirmed their belief and made me feel less secure about my claim.

My claim had very little creek and almost no driftwood on it, but Norm had nearly a mile of creek and several big drifts. My principal job was to cut and carry it up the bank on my shoulder, this driftwood, much of which I did before I could wear my shoes. In all, I took 40 cords, three foot lengths, and about 100 mulberry, oak or walnut fence posts from the water's surface up the bank, a 20 foot raise, and 10 cords that did

not have to be carried up. Most of it was very dry and hard and made fine sorghum wood. When we hauled it, we piled it so as to fence a corral. Norm came again about March 1st, bringing supplies to do me about a month, at which time he aimed to come again, but out found the river too high to cross so [he] took them up opposite a trader's post where Oxford was built.<sup>27</sup> There he got a skiff and took the supplies across and left them with him, then went on to Chetopa and didn't get back till May, so I had to get them on my back, a "Mexican dray." Before that I had taken a soft-wit young man who had to do the same and we went the 14 miles together. He had taken a claim one half mile from mine and we "changed work" so I helped him build his dugout. He soon sold out to a man named Jackson, but was robbed on his way home. I helped old man Taylor tan a lot of deer skins.

When Norm got back, he soon broke 20 acres of his best "bottom" land and planted it to corn and melons with an axe. He then broke 10 more that I planted to sorghum partly on mine and some more too late to plant. We had a beautiful season. The creek did not get more than 10 feet deep, even though we had a half to an inch of rainfall every week. The first corn we planted we made 10 bushels to the acre and sold on the ground at 50 cents a bushel. Uncle Jimmy Bain who had been appointed county commissioner and his son got most of it. They helped to gather it and were glad to get it so cheap. The sorghum was also big, and as I had been having the third day ague for a year, most of the time, and an erysipelas sore on my leg, and a felon on my finger,<sup>28</sup> and feeling pretty bad, Norm got Albert and John Still and Jack Gregson to help with it. We had about a thousand gallons [of sorghum] and made some for neighbors besides. Norm was beginning to work around some, at carpenter work, which he liked better; and Jack had "run the team" some and he and his wife lived with us while his house was being built. A neighbor had opened my felon, but not deep enough. I got Norm to open it again and Jack to hold so I would not work away too soon. He was holding so "gingerly" that I said, "Oh, sit on my arm; I know I'll jerk away if you don't do better than that." He did and the sharp knife grinded plainly on the bone, and the finger was soon well. My leg, two to eight inches below the knee, got as black as tar with a deep and painful running sore in the middle. When I went to see old man Taylor, he put his finger on the

24. This is undoubtedly A. J. Angell who surveyed Kansas lands.

25. Meridian was in Sec. 32, T 32S, R 21E and was envisioned by its locators as the Sumner County seat. However, it was little more than a short-lived post office (October 1871-April 1872). Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1495; Robert Baughman, *Kansas Post Offices* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1961), 83.

26. The founders of Wellington included Clark R. Godfrey and P. A. Wood who were members of the original Wellington Town Company, organized June 2, 1871, two months after the townsite was selected. Gwendoline and Paul Sanders, *The Sumner County Story* (North Newton, Kans.: 1966), 63.

27. The Oxford Town Company was organized March 6, 1871. The settlement on the Arkansas River was originally named Nappawalla and a few people were on the site in 1870. Margaret Witte Pearson, *Oxford: The First Hundred Years, 1871-1971* (Oxford, Kans.: 1988), 1.

28. Erysipelas is an inflammation of the skin and tissue caused by a streptococcus. A felon is a suppurative infection usually on the surface of the fingertip.



swelling and pressed. Finding it pitted and not changing color under pressure, he said, "It's bone erysipelas and will soon take your leg off if you don't get it cured, and I don't know of but one thing that will cure it." I asked what that was and he said it was the bark off the root of the wild indigo weed, boiled until they would peel, then peeled and made into a little poultice with a little cornmeal, and kept applied until it stopped running and got good color.<sup>29</sup> I was not sure I knew what it was, so I went and dug what I thought it was and brought it to him, top and root. He said, "Yes, that's it." Then I went and dug enough and used it as told, except that I used no cornmeal, but put the bruised root-bark next to the sore, keeping it wet with liquor in which it had been cooked. In two days it had stopped running, and in a few days it was well. The ague clung to me and refused to yield to remedies; and when a consumptive man, who was staying near, offered to furnish the ammunition and drive me from place to place for half the chickens (prairie) I could kill, it suited me fine. I was a poor wing shot; that and the cooking was all I cared to do. The man had brought a goat (milch) with him and when he went back Norm bought it from him for the fun it gave to see the neighbor's dogs try to whip it, for not one of them could do it.

As barrels were scarce and high-priced and hard to get, he had a galvanized iron lined tank, holding about 600 gallons, made to put sorghum in and he would roll a newly filled barrel up a couple of stout planks and onto a couple lying on the tank and then remove the bung and let it run into the tank. The first time he emptied the barrel, he forgot to remove the sloping planks. As it was hot and it does not do to shut it up tight while it is hot, he stretched a blanket over it in place of the lid. The fool goat, walking up the inclined plank and into the blanket, went down into the tank with five inches of molasses on the bottom. We soon found it as good as new and fed it to the hogs. So many stories about "the goat molasses" got started that it had much to do with our quitting the business. Then one of our neighbors to whom Norm was renting the outfit to make up his crop of cane "got on his ear" and while cursing and shaking his fist in Norm's face, he knocked him down and held him until he promised to "shut up and mind his own business." When he let him up, he stooped to pick up a rail, when Norm downed him again and as he was nearly done, made him go home while he finished for him.

29. There are several varieties of wild Indigo which grow in Kansas and probably most could have been found in Sumner County in the 1870s. They are described, with no mention of medicinal properties, in Janet E. Bare, *Wildflowers and Weeds of Kansas* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 169-70.

About that time, a man by the name of Charles Dashler<sup>30</sup> came to buy my claim. As the neighbors thought I was only 16 (though I was nearly 20) and I was very "blue" from the ague, I sold to him for \$170.00 and a silver watch, which I afterwards traded for a combination rifle-shotgun and that for a long rifle which I sold for \$10.00. With my money I bought two pair of three-year-old steers, wintering them in the stalk fields with some cane pumice. The small kind of rattlesnakes were very thick and we killed many while breaking prairie, getting eight while finishing one land and seldom less than two besides cutting many in holes with the plow. I once plowed out a nest of eggs, part of which was hatched and were about one and a half inches long with a button on the end of the tail as were the ones I let out of the eggs with my pocket knife, both of which would strike at a stick I put near them. They were in holes the mice or moles had made. We sometimes got a ground squirrel which was very thick, but not very often, and I once cut the hind legs off a jack rabbit with a mower. Norm had brought out a couple of sacks of "little may" seed wheat<sup>31</sup> and we sowed it that Fall. He sowed it on my claim and I reserved the crop. During the Winter, I made a trip to Chetopa, with a yoke of oxen and Norm's big ox wagon, taking a man and his grown-up sister as passengers. Father thought she and I must be married. I brought back a young sow and an Ohio improved Chester White thoroughbred boar for breeding purposes; but the sow died and I always thought from a bait of strychnine put out for coons. After only raising two pigs, but Norm got a hog from each litter from neighbors from the service of the boar, and as I soon had him trained to trot along ahead of me with slight guiding, we soon had a bunch of fine hogs from that source. After plowing the bottom land piece, Norm lent it to a man with horses who got 50 bushels of corn per acre and plowed it again for the next crop.

That Summer is much like a dream to me on account of the ague. I think it was the Spring of 1871 that I helped to tan the deerskins and Norm made me a pair of pants out of part of my share; and they wore a long time. Norm went to Chetopa again and was gone a long time. I think he was tearing down the house and moving and building it on the farm; but before he went, the wheat, which had made a fine crop, much better than Labette County, was harvested and hauled

30. A. C. H. Dashler is listed in Avon Township, Sumner County, in the 1875 *Kansas State Census*. Wilmot Hull's claim was just across the township line in Greene Township.

31. Little May is a variety of winter wheat similar to Flint, Red May, Early May, and Little Red which was grown in the eastern United States before 1850 and grown in Kansas widely in the late nineteenth century. B. B. Bayles and J. Allen Clark, *Classification of Wheat Varieties Grown in the United States in 1949*, Technical Bulletin 1083 (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1954), 64, 77.

to a high place. I managed to get it thrashed with a flail and a wagon sheet and cleaned by pouring it off a dry goods box through the wind that seemed to be blowing most of the time. It was the first wheat raised in Sumner County, Kansas. My ague continued all Winter. In early May I received a chance to hunt buffalo on shares with Billy Kern, two years my senior. He furnished the team, wagon and feed for the team, and we shared alike in the grub stuff. I took it hoping to get rid of the ague, which I soon did. The first trip we were gone 14 days and it rained more or less 12 of them, several all the time. We were trying to dry most of the meat but quit and filled a barrel with salted meat and took the other home and put it in Norm's house to finish drying while we went again. It became so moldy it was a total loss. The salted meat did not pay our expenses, but we took two barrels the next time and had better luck drying it.

I bought a big half-inch bore 14 pound muzzle loading rifle from Kern and he had a 16 shot "Henry" breech loading one, a new thing then. Neither of us had any trouble killing buffalo when we got where they were. We always aimed at the bulge of the lungs, which when hit would make . . . them run about 40 or 50 yards and stop, swaying and swinging their heads and scattering much blood and foam, which when others smelled they would bellow and paw and stand around the fallen one much like cattle. Sometimes they attracted others to the place from long distances. I called this "getting a stand" and when the hide hunting began, some of the professionals got hundreds this way. Sometimes they would lie down near the dead ones as if they thought their mates had lain down to rest. The most I ever got at one "stand" was five and the few that were left did so lie down. We kept a clean oil cloth to spread the meat on through the cool part of the night; and by scalding and skimming the brine early when we first put it out and cooling it till morning, we kept it sweet with only what salt about it that most people liked for eating. We had no trouble to sell a second time to a customer. I proved to be the best salesman, especially for the dried meat. Taking a basket of meat laid on a clean cloth or paper, and so covered, I would knock at the door. When the lady of the house came, I would ask, "Would you like to buy some dried buffalo meat?" usually getting about this answer, "No, I've had all the jerked buffalo meat I ever want, don't want to see any more." Then I would answer, "From what I have seen of jerked buffalo meat, I don't blame you, but this isn't jerked." "What do you mean?" she would say. Then I would speak my piece about thus: "In the first place we do not kill anything but cow or young stock meat and 'muscle it out' with a thin striphen around each piece, as you see for the first uncovering of the meat only; we cut the pieces

that are too big to take salt properly and we try to get salt on it as most people like; then when the sun gets hot the next morning we put it out and in a short time it is dry enough so dirt or sand will not stick to it." Then she would say, "It does look nice; what do you ask a pound for it?" "One or two pounds are eight cents or four for a quarter or more at six cents straight." "Well, I will try a quarter's worth." I never had to speak my piece again next time. She wanted all she could pay for and the meat from the barrels was much the same. We made six trips that Summer and Fall, once in company with neighbors when we "took up" four stray ponies that had gotten away from Texas cattlemen who made an early drive up over the Chisholm Trail; they had gone home and left them. My share of these was one which I called old Billy. He proved to be a race horse and needed no urging when beside something that would run with him, but I would never have found it out if I had not left him with Norm to keep for his use. By this time, hides were selling and we brought in of those we killed for meat and a few others, so we did pretty well. I took the wool off a couple of buffalo calf skins to tan them (they only brought fifty cents). A neighbor woman carded, spun and knitted me a pair of socks on shares from it, but it did not wear well because of the lack of oil in it. Those cattlemen pastured their cattle in the west part of our county to recuperate and get them fat enough when they shipped them east from Wichita to market.

That Winter, Kern and I went six or seven miles into the "Indian Territory" now Oklahoma, to trap; but not doing very well, I made some posts and slats and he hauled them to our claims (which we had taken on the Cherokee Strip,<sup>32</sup> three miles wide lying between Osage lands at the 6th Principal Meridian and the State line) on shares. It was being sold for the Cherokees and we could buy of it though we had sold claims on the other as he had also done. One of those trips, I think we were in sight of a million buffalo at one time. Standing on the "divide" south of the south fork of the Nenesca [Ninnescah] River, we could see the "divide" north of the north [fork], about 25 miles east and west and three miles north and south or 750 square miles or 480,000 acres all thick, black spotted with buffalo, surely an average of two to the acre or more. We called this "the main herd" and when we drove across the area we found it knawed [*sic*] more

32. The Cherokee Strip to which Hull refers is not the land commonly associated with the great land rush of 1893 into present Oklahoma. It was a strip 276 miles long running west from about the Labette-Cherokee County line. It lay between the Osage Reserve and the northern boundary of Indian Territory, and consisted of more than 434,000 acres. The land was sold between 1873 and 1885 for \$2.00 per acre east of the Arkansas River and \$1.50 west of the Arkansas. Paul W. Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1954), 225-28.

bare than sheep can do. Only buffalo grass can recover from such grazing, but with its strawberry-like vine, taking root and sending up blades at every joint, it quickly does so.

Another thing I observed about buffalo in those days, I have seen no writer mention, but it should be put on record viz., when a "mixed" bunch (of all ages) were feeding along, which they usually did going straight against the wind, not around like cattle, undisturbed or scared, there seemed enough bulls to keep up a continuous rumbling bub-bub bellow, one taking it up as soon as another stopped. I have lain and listened to it, behind a bank, while they fed past, some of them within 12 paces of me, but let them get scared, suspicious, or a wounded one among them, and it stopped at once. When a "professional" hide-hunter got after such a bunch, or even larger ones, he usually got a "stand" and got everyone killing for two or more outfits (of four men and a team to skin). They boasted they could skin one every three minutes if they lay close together, and it was usually 10 to 50 steps they meant. Their method was for one to drive down a stake and fasten the carcass to it by a rope, while the others "ripped" the hide and skinned the places that would otherwise "bind" while the others backed the wagon to the tailend and hitched the team to the neck of the hide, which the others had by that time loosened from the head; then they pulled the skin off with the horses, threw it in the wagon till he had a load or night fell when they picked a smooth place and spread them down and stretched them and pegged them with pegs before preparing them. I know one man who said, and I believe him, that he killed 200 in one day, and I heard of another who killed 400 and had four outfits skinning for him. If Uncle Sam had put an army at the job, and saved the meat, it would have been a much greater blessing; but it was one as it was, for cattle and buffalo could not be kept on the same range, for the latter's habits and stubbornness would stampede the cattle and then neither could be turned. I saw one cow brute following a bunch of buffalo (running) but evidently about "winded" while the others had not gotten into their best "stride" and there has been much more meat raised on the same range with cattle than could have been with buffalo, besides redeeming much of the Great American Desert.

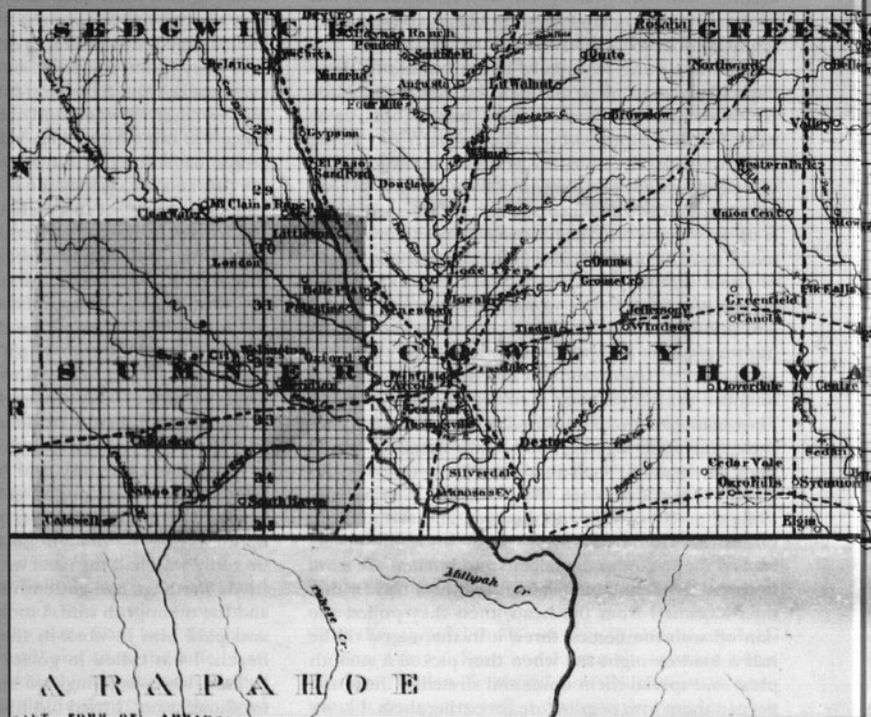
My strip claim had a beautiful spring of water from which many of the neighbors hauled water. It had some pretty steep hillside and some sandy land. In the early Spring of 1873, I built a dug-out near the spring and made a trade with Norm, by which he completed the improvements needed for both and paid all the monies, if I would deed a quarter he wanted near his other and work for him that Summer, which I did. He

borrowed a wagon and went down and did the needed breaking and while there a cyclone (tornado) passed over the dug-out and caught the [wagon] extra strong and smashed it to pieces, breaking the hind axle, one tire, every spoke and felloe out of it and the hub and every spoke from felloe and hub of the other, and the box to kindling wood and scattering it two or three miles. He came home with many of the running gear scraps loaded on the front wheels of the wagon. It was the first and last cyclone for 18 years to hit our county. One queer quirk of this cyclone was that it raised that wagon very high without hardly shaking it and then brought it down to a few feet above where it was and then did what it did to it in seconds.

Norm built a rock-walled dug-out on his claim I was to deed and broke the sod, and I cultivated, after planting the "old ground" partly with "old Billy" and partly with a hired horse. Norm made another trip to Chetopa and on the way back one of my steers got sun-stroke and died. I made a trip after buffalo with Pete Bynum in August, and while crawling on a couple of buffalo we came very near being bit by a very large rattlesnake. While trying to get near a carcass of meat to load it, Bynum's mules ran quite a way and so shook up the wagon, we thought best to get home at once if we could with half the meat we wanted, so we did.

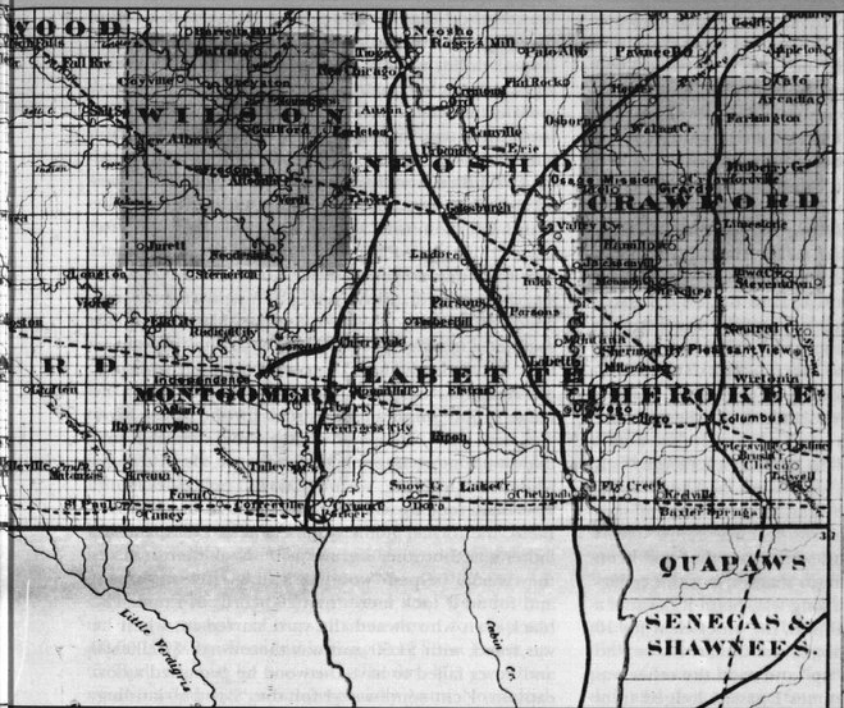
As the hogs had gotten out and eaten all my land and the other grub stuff, I took board with a neighbor and paid him in work in the hayfield. Before that began, I was called to go for a doctor for old man Jackson, who was thought to be poisoned, but the doctor thought not. I tried old Billy's wind. I then made a bargain with Frank Taylor and his father by which his father took us out for a long camp-hunt for hides. He came out and hauled the hides we got and what meat we wanted to camp. It worked pretty well, till one day, when we saw a couple of big bulls on some high ground, four or five miles from camp. I told Frank I would go and try to get them if he would come and help skin them, as I did not think I could roll them over by myself. He said that he would, agreeing on a sign that I had them. I got them both, and by kicking some old dry skulls under to catch what I raised, I managed to turn and skin them alone. It almost broke my back and each hide was about as hard to lift to get it on the pony; but no Frank yet, so by the time I got to camp, I was sore in two senses. When I found he had been chasing a band of elk when I made the sign, I felt some better. That night a man by the name of Wells, with a grown-up, single daughter and another married one and her husband, came to our camp wanting to skin for us for meat. The next day, Frank, who was a much better shot than I and who had a Winchester rifle, went ahead and killed and they followed and skinned them. They loaded their meat, but





evidently on the way back had a horse bitten by a big rattlesnake for its leg swelled as big as my body and it died that night. As we were expecting Taylor soon, Wells sent his son-in-law to come with him and bring him another horse, which he did. He and the women stayed, as they wanted some more meat, and it had left our parts. We decided to go 15 or 20 miles south, where we could see from the high ground. They were plentiful, so we traveled four or five miles to it. We saw a big rattlesnake apparently going down into a prairie dog hole. "Bill" Magwigin, or Maguigan, and I turned off and followed and he attempted to pull it out by the tail when I pushed him back, for I could see the hole was shallow. The snake had only gone far enough to coil for a spring, leaving his tail unhidden by the overhanging sod. Bill made a grab too quick for me, and his thumb touched the snake who struck him with both fangs between the nail and the knuckle. He was a big young Scotchman. Straightening up, he said, "By

God boy, I'm bit" and walked to the wagon, holding his right hand in his left. There was nearly half a teaspoon full of the green snake venom lying on his thumb. I had some very strong buckskin strings hanging to my belt, and without saying a word, knotted one as I went and slipped it below the knuckle and drew it as tight as I could pull it. We waited an hour or so and not seeing any change, I rode back to camp to get what proved to be an almost empty bottle of whiskey, which was the universal snake-bite remedy, that they had emptied the day before. Though I opposed taking the string off, the others out-voted me, and they did so. They killed the snake and put the cuts of it and a prairie dog on the wound. From his quietness and a look in his eyes, I always thought Taylor thought he had conjured it away, but in 10 minutes his arm was swelling to the elbow and in a half hour was as big near the shoulder as his thigh. He was getting flighty and staggering, so we put him to bed. His arm was as



*Johnson's Kansas  
and Nebraska, 1874*

black as could be. I told Taylor that his arm looked so much like my leg did that I thought the wild indigo weed would be good for it, and he said that blistering it with a lye poultice would too. I put on a pot of ashes to make lye and left them to blister while I dug the roots which were very plentiful. For a few days it looked like he must die, but I soon put on a new poultice as often as I could get one ready. At last he seemed out of danger and as soon as he did, the rest went down for more meat for Wells and left him and me alone. Taylor's mares only had one rope and a loose one could kick the other loose and both would go home. I let him have old Billy's rope, thinking he would stay near camp, if hobbled; but he did not, and the next day I tracked him to where some party had camped and led him off the next morning, so I lost him forever.

Taylor had made enough red cedar shaved shingles to cover a new house which he built the next

Summer, getting his logs on the Arkansas River. I came with him but the others stayed. Norm had furnished seed wheat to him on shares and it made a good crop and brought \$1.60 a bushel the next Summer in Wichita. Norm had left me to settle for the cyclone-smashed wagon, and to do so I had sold the sorghum mill; and he never made any more, but went into wheat. He and I made one trip. The buffalo were all gone, but he got three deer and some wild turkeys. He then rigged me up a cart and I went trapping. Finding no fur, I soon came back and helped him eat up a lot of back bones and ribs from the hogs he was butchering to cure the meat, so I weighed the most I ever did, 166 pounds.

In the Spring, he made me a small, but good, skiff and a tent which he painted and I started down the Arkansas River, after selling my fence posts. He also got me a splendid flannel blanket, but that is another chapter.

Loading my skiff and outfit on his big wagon, my brother, Norman, hauled them to the Arkansas River, near the mouth of the Slate Creek<sup>33</sup> which had too much drift in it to navigate. The first time I got in it after launching it "bucked" me out, yet I went 3,000 miles in it. That was to me both exploring and pioneering. I was never lonesome. My first stop was Arkansas City, Kansas. I afterwards found one in Arkansas, but I got a made-to-order coffee camp kettle, some unbolted cornmeal, and unground coffee which I stopped at a farm house near the bank of the river to sift and grind. Before night, April 9, 1874, after taking a very cool bath in the river, I was in the "lonereaches" of the Indian Territory, on a very shallow river. It was often hard to find the 8 inch water my skiff drew. I found no land marks and kept no record of time. Twice or more a day, I aimed to leave my skiff and go up on the "second bank" to look at the country. The first I did, so I went to the south "dividing range" of some two and a half miles. I could see that the river ran around a 40 mile bend and came back within five miles; shortly before the "Salt Fork" near a third of the river came in. The channel was so hard to find, I often ran around, with my skiff drawing but six inches. Some distance below that, I found red cedar bluffs and some men that had been trying to cut and raft them to market; but the cedars were lodged in drifts for a long way. Soon it became a double river, the south half red, the other clear for 10 miles when it gradually mixed; the Cimarron, or Red Fork, came in and it was "up" and soon the other was with water plenty.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes I passed lodged trees like a racehorse.

Some of the American Indians were not "found wanting" when weighed in the balance, but most of them were. God did not make the Earth for its eternal use to be such as they gave it. At first sign of farming, I went out and found some Creek Indians tilling a small patch. Only one would, or could speak English and I learned he was a preacher, but all he wanted was tobacco. The previous Winter, two men had been hung for murdering trappers for their money, by which they only got two dollars.

I expected to pass the mouth of the Cana and Verdigris Rivers, but found they emptied into the Grand, and it into the Arkansas.<sup>35</sup> No steamboat has been up the river since the railroad arrived here, I was told. Between the mouth of the Salt and Red Forks, I

saw an immense flock of wild turkeys thickly covering a long wide sand bar and far into the woods. I got all I wanted then caught a 30 pound catfish and killed a deer. I got to Fort Smith [Arkansas] and sold it before it spoiled, but most of the fish and turkey did. Six or eight miles below Smith, I left my skiff, tent, guns, and most of my camp outfit and struck south "light" to look up a trapping ground for next Winter, but landed at what was supposed to be a mine and stayed till Fall. I then went back and found my skiff and guns all right, but tent and much camp stuff was gone. The man I left them with wanted to buy the long rifle for target practice as he had won well at several shoots with it. He had to get money out of cotton to pay with, so I helped him till he did, at 75 cents a cwt., and board, which was the "board" more than other paid; so when I got the \$10.00, I skipped. The first steamboat I passed was stuck on a sand bar and "sparring" off. At Little Rock [Arkansas], I took a partner by the name of Jim Smith and we struck for the White River and went up it 60 miles,<sup>36</sup> when we met men that said there were more trappers than pelts, so, after fishing a while, and hunting, we went down, near Vicksburg, where Jim took up something else. I went on to Davis's Bend, the former home of Jefferson C. Davis, and his father's and brother's graveyard.<sup>37</sup> Near there (across the river) I helped "wood up" a big river steamboat and found it took more than 200 cords of wood. The black man who owned the yard started in, when he was freed, with \$1.50 and was then worth \$50,000.00 and never failed to have the wood he promised a boat captain. I cut some wood for the "Bend's" landing, then owned by a black, said to be a brother of "Jeff" Davis to whom he deeded it when he became President of the Confederacy, and who would not deed it back when he got out. I think I could have done well at fishing and clearing land or hunting alligators (for which my gun was just right), but was afraid of the swamp fever, so [I] sold my skiff, calfskins and most of my camp things and went on by steamboat about half way to the Red River, where I got off and walked across to Shreveport, Louisiana, and from there by rail to Fort Worth, Texas, where I worked a while at the customary wage of 50 cents a day, then went on to Wethersfield<sup>38</sup> and was hired for \$10.00 a month to a man by the name of Black for two months from April 1st. That was the common farm wage,

33. Slate Creek enters the Arkansas River just east of the Sumner County line a short distance north of Geuda Springs.

34. The Salt Fork enters the Arkansas south of present Ponca City, Oklahoma, and the Cimarron joins it west of Tulsa.

35. The Caney joins the Verdigris near Claremore, Oklahoma; the Verdigris, the Grand (Neosho), and the Arkansas all come together between Muskogee and Fort Gibson, Oklahoma.

36. Hull would have been some distance northeast of Little Rock.

37. Jefferson Davis had a plantation on Palmyra Island south of Vicksburg in Warren County, Mississippi. Federal Writers Project, *Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State* (New York: Hastings House, 1949), 294, 325.

38. Hull must have been referring to Weatherford, Texas. No record of a Wethersfield has been found.



though cowboys got more. He sent us across the Brazos River to plow with oxen and we came near getting fast in its quicksands. A bull that was being driven past gored one of the oxen, but it soon healed. Black then sent his other men and his boy and a horse team, and we planted the piece to cotton. We then went to the bottom lands to tend corn he had planted earlier; it had been bitten to the ground by frost four times, but was knee high. I cleaned his landlord's lady's sewing machine so it would run much better. When done with Black, I struck for Kansas, walking to Denison [Texas] where I worked while a letter went to Kansas and back; then I went by rail to Chetopa,<sup>39</sup> where I helped Father with the harvest and Faurot with the hay; then Will Hook came for me. I stayed with him till March 1st, shucking corn three or more months at the same wage, when he quit farming and moved to Oswego. While at Father's harvest, Finlay, who was cutting for him, being a "vigilante," was called to go, leaving us to drive his mules and run his self-rake machine. He said they finally made the thief tell just as straight a story as anybody could, but he would not tell what they did with him.

On March 2, 1876, it began to freeze and snow and kept it up till we had six inches. The peach trees were in almost full bloom; but they made a good crop. I did not start west till April, and got to Norm's the 9th, with very sore feet, just two years after I left. After resting my feet a couple of days, I went down to strip my place. It was in wheat and looking fine. Soon I went up to Taylor's, but he was not at home. His girls had made a wonderful growth, especially Anna. Norm had sold the rest of my steers to pay taxes, etc., and I worked around for Gregson in harvest, on the new ride-and-bind Marsh harvesting machine<sup>40</sup> and for anyone in thrashing. Everyone seemed to have wheat.

I then rented Norm's place for two years; he was to furnish the seed, tools, team and wagon for himself and me and pay blacksmith bills and two-thirds of machine bills. I was to board myself and do the work. The next Spring, I planted 20 acres of corn which did well, but black rust struck everybody's wheat. Though I got a man to cut mine and paid him partly in binding and shocking, I had to go and make fence posts and haul them to him square up, as the wheat did not bring enough to do so. I let a man cut and thrash my strip wheat for a third and with what was left we just

made bread. On March 7th, I had married the youngest, Anna,<sup>41</sup> 17 years old, of the daughters of Samuel Columbus Taylor,<sup>42</sup> whom he had kept with him since their Mother died. He had paid her as he had promised, a cow, sow shoat, stove, some dishes, and household goods, all of which I bought on long time, including some chickens. I had a big white but stubborn cow, which soon threw herself in a mud hole and smothered. The other did well so that when Anna's oldest brother came to us from Philadelphia and her oldest sister wanted to stay with us and go to school, we had enough; but when Norm was there, the 10 x 14 foot, one and a half story house, with five grown persons in it, seemed full. I think all were fairly happy. Their brother, Hugh, went to the mill with me, after posts. With part of my six month's wages, I had built a hog shed and divided it into four "Macgee" sow shoats. One proved to be barren, another died and another brought only two pigs. When I finally got hogs to sell, I hauled them 30 miles to Wichita and sold them for \$1.90 a cwt.

That Fall I sowed all of Norm's ground to wheat, but not my own on the strip, including seven acres across the creek. It all made a good crop, but high water wasted much of the seven acre piece. I bought a yoke of his five-year-old oxen for \$85.00 and in the Spring a pair of leaders. By borrowing \$100.00, I built a house, 12 feet square and eight feet high, and we moved to our own in the Spring of 1879. I planted my old ground into corn and got a good crop. I left a nice pen of young hogs for Norm to finish off, which he did, and they got me four cents a pound. I had had good luck budding some peach trees. Leaving Norm to bring my part [of the peach trees] down after I got my ground ready, he, by mistake, brought me all early and he kept the late kind, but all were nice for many years. Several years before, many people had taken pigs down (and hogs) a few miles into the [Indian] territory and turned them loose. I succeeded in getting a big sow with four small pigs, and with the ones I had, I got tax money out of them. By that time, we had raised two heifers, and butter brought fair prices at Hunnewell. I had sold the steer calves. That Fall, my

41. Wilmot Hull married Anna Belle Taylor on Wilmot's twenty-sixth birthday in 1877.

42. S. C. Taylor filed on a quarter section of Osage Trust lands in 1874 (in Sec. 6, T 33S, R 1E) according to the *Kansas Tract Books*, microfilm, roll 34, vol. 11, KSHS; he is shown in the 1875 *Kansas State Census* for Greene Township, Sumner County, and among his children is a daughter (A. B.) age 15. Wilmot and Anna do not appear in the 1880 *Federal Census* but are listed in the 1885 *Kansas State Census*, in Greene Township, with three male children: U. S., 6; M. E., 3; and Arthur, 1. The children were: Urwin Samuel (1878-?); Melvin Ernest (1881-1888); Arthur (1884-1960); Mabel (1886-?); Roy Wilmot (1891-?); and Roscoe Lawrence Edwin (1896-?). Another child, Edwin was born between 1878 and 1881, but lived only a few hours.

39. Hull would have ridden the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (Katy) Railroad from Denison, Texas, to Chetopa.

40. Charles W. and William W. Marsh (brothers) were farmers from DeKalb County, Illinois, who patented a reaper in 1858. Following the Civil War the harvester became extremely popular and it was improved upon throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. John F. Steward, *The Reaper* (New York: Greenberg Publisher, 1931), 237-56.

brother Charlie and I went to the next county east to try to get a job on the railway building, but they would not have our oxen on the job, so I took a job gathering corn on shares till Winter, bringing my share home each week. I cut wood to pay for some hedge plants, also some carpenter tools, for the same man, part of which I sold to Norm. Towards the Spring, I traded my oxen for a big wind-broken mare that proved to be in foal and a smaller and older one that did not live a year. I broke some prairie with them and raised corn on my old ground and went after peaches to sell again. In the Fall, the old mare died. Our second boy was born in mid-summer, but seemed to have slime or mucus oozing up in its throat that choked it to death in a couple of hours. A neighbor, Mr. Henry Brown, made a coffin for it, and we buried it on the place. That Fall our house caught fire; and though easily and quickly put out, it gave Anna such a scare that she hated to live in it, so we hired to go up and work for Norm that season.

Father Taylor, who had married again soon after Anna and I had mortgaged his land, made no payments or interest and was now married again, and wrote to me to "straighten it up" and sell the place for him. The only buyer I could find was Hi Hackney and

he would not without a quit claim deed from "Mary Jane" the Illinois wife and a "warranty" one from Minerva the Kansas one, and told neighbors he was going to have it for \$600.00. Anna was contented to live there, near her sister, so I wrote Father Taylor that if he would give us time on the balance, I would mortgage it for \$700.00, pay Stewart and the others, and send him what was left. He wrote back: "satisfy Stewart and the place is yours." The loan had been \$250.00, but he had promised 12 per cent interest and paid nothing, not even taxes, and Stewart would not settle for less, so I paid, giving the two women \$80.00 each for their rights. Having just the same left, telling him I considered we were owing \$300.00, I told him if he needed it at any time to let me know and I would get it for him. He never did, so after his death, I divided it among his heirs. I traded for a small black mare, "Blackie," gathered my rent then due, which came with the place, and gave a cow and hog besides. I then traded the big mare for a mate to the latter and \$15.00 and bought a yearling heifer with it, and from that time on can hardly call my life pioneering, until three years after Anna's death when I came to Canada, too old (past 53) to be a success at anything. **[KH]**