PEOPLE ON THE PLAINS

PAWNEE INDIANS

The Pawnee Indian Tribe was a powerful one on the Great Plains. In contrast to the nomadic tribes, the Pawnees lived in permanent villages. Their earthlodge villages were built on hills overlooking river valleys. In gardens the women grew corn, beans, and squash. Several times a year members of the tribe would go out on hunting trips, but they always returned to their earthlodges. These were round dome-shaped structures framed with timber and covered with sod. A record of Pawnee life and customs is preserved at the Pawnee Indian Village Museum, located near Belleville, Kansas. The museum is located on one of the earthlodge sites and shows the hearth and a storage pit where corn, squash, and dried meat could be stored for winter. Outside, a walkway takes visitors past surface features of the site: lodge floors, storage pits and the remains of a fortification wall. The Pawnee Indian tribe created a workable living system that allowed them to survive on the Great Plains and the museum affords visitors an interesting glimpse into Pawnee Indian life.

Brenda Street

DEVIL'S TOWER

The land inspires the imagination and we build our stories on the earth around us. In the Wyoming Black Hills the Kiowa Indians saw the Devil's Tower, a gigantic pillar of vertical fluted rock eight hundred feet high, and told how the Great Spirit made it grow from a small boulder to save seven children pursued by a bear. The bear, trying to climb the rock to reach them, scratched out with his claws the long columns that now cover the face of the monument. The children became the constellation we call the Pleidades. The bear became the Big Dipper. The Cheyenne have a similar legend of the Tower's origin. The Space Age, too, has developed its own story of the huge rock. It is the Devil's Tower that visitors from outer space choose as their point of rendezvous with man in the movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

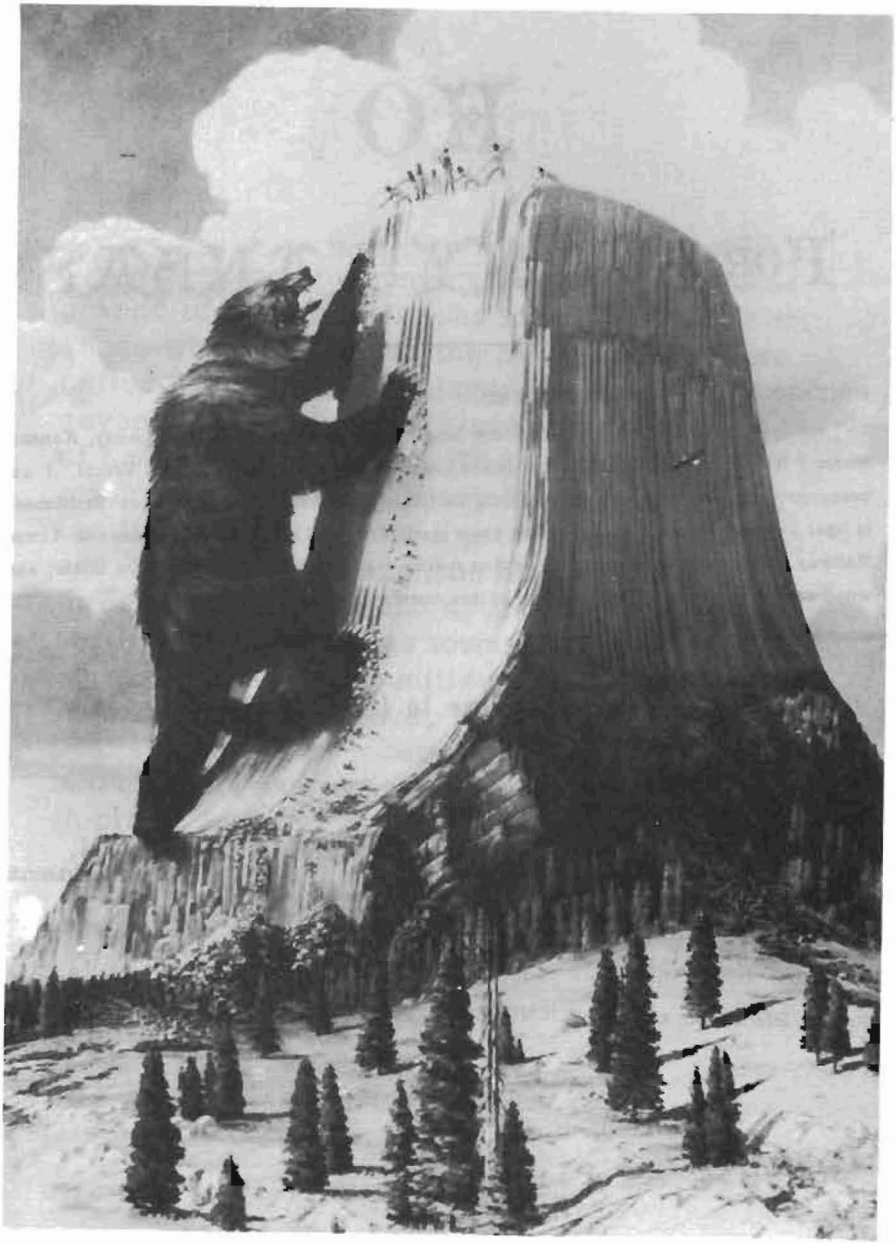


photo courtesy U.S. Park Service

HO

FOR SUNNY KANSAS

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS:

I have just returned from the Singleton Settlement, in Morris County, Kansas, where I left my people in one of the finest countries for a poor man in the World. I am prepared to answer any and all questions that may be asked. The Singleton Settlement is near Dunlap, Morris County, a new town just started on the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railway. The surrounding country is fine rolling prairie. Plenty of stone and water, and wood on the streams. Plenty of coal within twenty-five miles.

I have this to say to all:

Now is the Time to Go to Kansas.

Land is cheap, and it is being taken up very fast. There is plenty for all at present.

BENJAMIN SINGLETON,
President.

ALONZO D. DEFRANTZ, SECRETARY.
JOSEPH KEEBLE, AGENT, Real Estate and Homestead Association.

For full information, address COLUMBUS M. JOHNSON, Topeka, Kansas.
General Agent.

[illegible] KANSAS FARMER PRINTING HOUSE, TOPEKA, KAS.

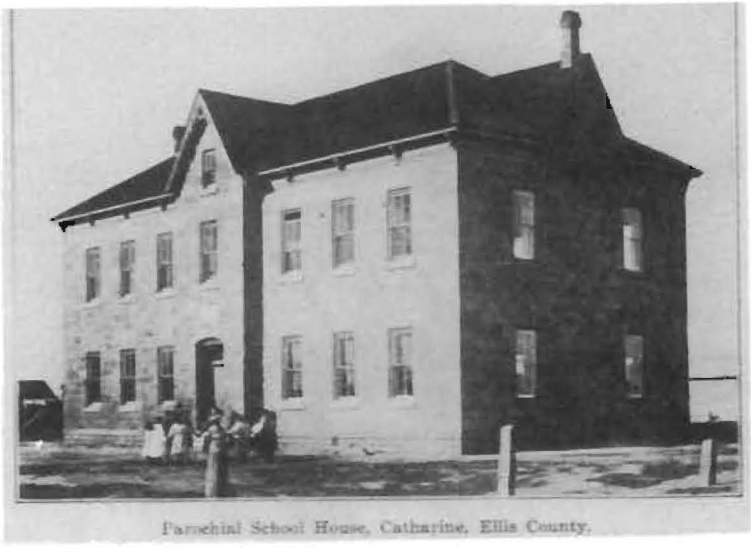
EXODUSTERS

Widespread discontent caused a large migration of blacks to Kansas after the Civil War. Those who were part of the Negro Exodus were called Exodusters. Benjamin Singleton, a seventy year old former slave, was the Father of Kansas Immigration. He encouraged the exodus by describing sunny Kansas as "one of the finest countries for a poor man in the World," and "a place with nine months of summer and three months of fall and spring." Exodusters settled in many Kansas towns and even started some all-black communities. Named for a legendary African slave, Nicodemus was the best known. It is located in Graham County and still attracts many visitors with an interest in plains history.

RUNNYMEDE

Runnymede in Harper County was one of two English colonies in Kansas. It was established by F. J. S. Turnly. He bought land and offered (for a $500 fee) to teach sons of British gentlemen the secrets of successful farming. Unfortunately, most of these young men were so rich that they found leisure more enjoyable than work. They raced their horses, partied, and "rode to hounds," substituting coyotes and prairie dogs for foxes. The party was over in 1892 when the families in England decided their sons weren't learning much about farming and ordered them home. Although Runnymede is still shown on the map, all that remains from the colony is a church building, which has been moved to Harper.

photo courtesy Kansas State Historical Society



Parochial School House, Catharine, Ellis County.

photo courtesy Kansas State Historical Society

VOLGA GERMANS

In the 1870s many German-speaking settlers from Russia arrived on the Great Plains. Poor and illiterate, these Volga Germans depended on their community and religious leaders for guidance during the early years in America. Because they distrusted education and encouraged their children to leave school at an early age, the Volga Germans remained close-knit and isolated for years. World War I changed that. After the war, their sons who served in the Army brought back new ideas and attitudes. Their schools grew in size and importance and English replaced German as the dominant language. Slowly the Volga Germans moved into the mainstream of American life.

COWBOYS

Brenda Street

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Everybody knows what a cowboy looks like, but how did he come to look that way? One major influence was the Mexican vaquero. With some help from John B. Stetson, the vaquero's sombrero became the cowboy's 10-gallon hat. The cowboy's rope was the Mexican reata, his spurs a smaller version of the large-rowelled Mexican spur, his chaps an adaptation of the leather leggings of the vaquero. The western saddle can trace its evolution to the pelican-horned Mexican saddle and on back to the war saddle of the Spanish conquistador. Another major influence on the development of the cowboy was the northern European horseman, as he passed through the eastern and southern United States. The cowboy boot, as we know it, probably developed through this source, as did some of the herding customs of early Texas cowmen. Together these two influences, along with the exigencies of trailing cattle to the Kansas railhead, resulted in America's best-known folk figure--the cowboy.

KANSAS MEN

The Texas cattle drives to the railroad towns in Kansas required a special kind of worker. These men who traveled all the way with the cattle herds were first called "Kansas Men" and, later, drovers. The drover was a fine horseman, could rope wild cattle larger than his own horse, and use a Colt revolver to fight off Indians and bandits. He could sit in the saddle all day and half the night and sleep on the ground in all kinds of weather. And when the drovers reached their destination? They got paid and headed for the nearest saloon to blow their money on cheap whiskey and other diversions. A few days later, broke and sober, they climbed into the saddle for the ride back to Texas and another cattle drive up the long trail.

John Crawford

BARBED WIRE

In 1876 a young man named John Warner Gates arrived in the wild cowtown of San Antonio. Gates, who later earned the nickname "Bet a Million," was a traveling salesman with a gift of gab. He had come to Texas from Illinois to sell a new kind of fencing, barbed wire. So right in the middle of town, he built a barbed wire pen and drove a herd of tough, ornery steers into the pen and shut them up. At first the longhorns didn't seem to see the wire. Then they pushed into it and backed off. They pushed harder and backed off again. After a while, the cattle started avoiding the wire. That convinced the ranchers and soon John Gates was a busy salesman.

Brenda Street

CATTLE GUARDS

The Great Plains is renowned for its technological innovations and adaptations: the six-shooter, barbed wire, the windmill, dryland farming, the sod house--the list goes on and on. One of the greatest labor-saving devices to come from the plains is the cattle guard. This grid of pipe bars placed over a pit in the roadway lets cars pass freely but stops animals. It originated around 1905 and has since that time saved countless drivers untold frustration from the bane of opening and closing gates in barbed wire fences. Today cattle guards are found throughout the world, but they had their start in the Great Plains.

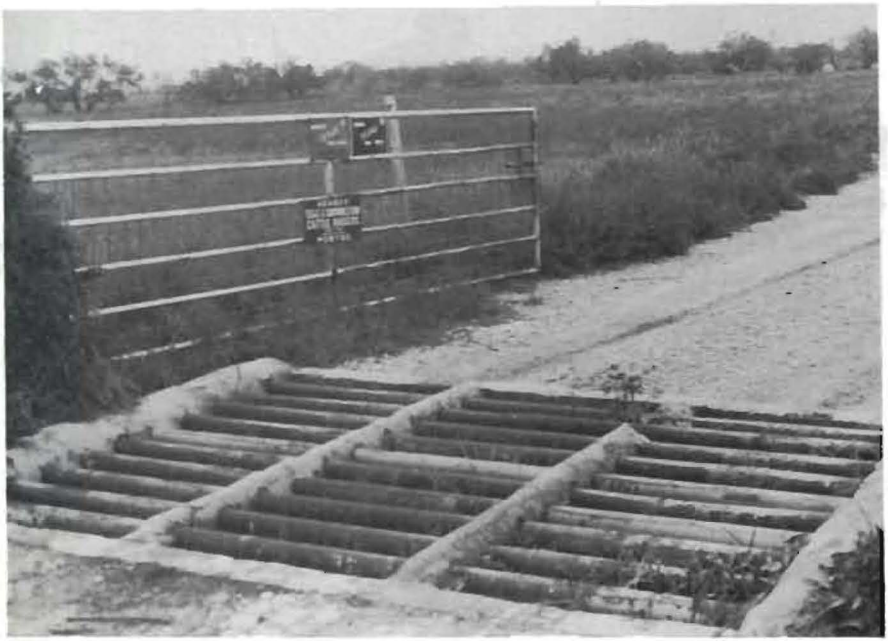


photo courtesy James Hoy

photo courtesy Beulah Veatch

RODEO

The Great Plains gave America its one unique sport--rodeo. Five elements led to the development of rodeo. The most important were the working skills of roping and riding, the two most exciting aspects of a cowboy's dirty, monotonous work. The second was competition--the top rider of one ranch pitted against the worst bronc of another, or two ropers matching skills. Two additional elements were flamboyance (a touch of the sensational) and celebration (a holiday atmosphere)--many early rodeos were held on July 4, or at the end of roundup work. Add to these the final element, paying spectators, and rodeo changed from range country folk entertainment to a professional sport enjoyed nationwide.