This photo reveals Elma L. Bamberg when she resided in Topeka sometime in the 1950s or 1960s. Her unpublished manuscript, "My Home on the Smoky," vividly documents memories of homesteading in southern Ellis County during the 1890s.

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"God created the earth, but he didn't finish things": Childhood Memories of Homesteading in Elma Bamberg's *My Home on the Smoky*

by James N. Leiker

With no pretentiousness or introduction, Elma L. Bamberg begins her memoir about homesteading in Ellis County, Kansas, as follows: "It was on an unusually warm day in March, that I insisted on going with my father to see what he was doing at his new timber claim."

Born in December 1887, Bamberg spent her formative years during the sunset decade of the nineteenth century and lived to see the advent of television, air travel, and nuclear proliferation. Her unpublished manuscript "My Home on the Smoky" has been familiar to scholars since its donation to the Kansas State Historical Society in 1974. Though the manuscript is undated, references to the War on Poverty in later chapters suggest that it was written between 1964 and 1968, and thus the events she lived as a child were distanced by some seventy years from the memories she recorded as an adult.[1]

All of us rewrite our childhoods as we age, yet the facts of time and revision do not necessarily diminish the historical value of Bamberg's memoir. Chronological distance differs from spatial distance, in which the starting point grows more remote with travel. Having carried their earliest memories the longest, people tend to recall them with more clarity and precision than recent events. Childhood pioneer narratives tend to undercut the romance of agrarian life, providing negative details about deprivation, accidents, deaths and other hardships often omitted from the nostalgic celebrations of adults. This is not to say that Bamberg's account should be taken entirely at face value. Rather, it provides an example of cultural memory, of the ways in which later generations tried to make sense of the homesteading experience and consequently of themselves. "My Home on the Smoky" conveys two overlapping evolutions, the first of which is a typical coming-of-age story about a young girl's transition to womanhood. This story may have been Bamberg's intent; apparently she wished to explain her early life to her children and grandchildren, rendering her document not exclusively private

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1. Elma L. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," unpublished manuscript, State Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, photocopy in author's possession, typed and digitized by Candace Chamberlain. The "unusually warm day" quotation appears on page 1 and the title quotation, "God created the earth," on page 14.

As Bamberg recalled, homesteading Kansans like her father dreamed of rich harvests of golden-grained wheat.

but also not intended for wide circulation. Simultaneously, Elma describes her family's efforts to establish homes, schools, churches—in short, human community—in what she perceives as raw, unfinished nature. Bamberg and her prairie home grow together and are "improved" within her pages. Though historians may disapprove of the casual dismissal of Native people and assumptions of untamed wilderness prior to white settlers' arrival, a careful reading illustrates the judgment of Plains children, from their perspective decades later, of the project known to scholars as settler colonialism.

Families, not soldiers and cowboys, became the true agents of Euro-American conquest, transforming the Great Plains into surveyed parcels in the service of commodity-based agriculture. This transformation forms the main dynamic of Bamberg's story: "Homesteaders all over the plains were breaking the sod, sowing and hoping and praying for rain and with it an abundant crop. My Father dreamed with hundreds of other homesteaders of more and more of the golden grain. All during the last decade of the Old Century, wheat was getting more and more popular as a crop, and there was a scramble to grow as much as possible. Ellis County won high honors in this wheat race."[2]

Whatever their revolutionary power, however, homesteading families were far from monolithic. Within the same household, men, women, and children perceived the world in different ways and pursued a variety of diverse interests. The separate spheres doctrine had little application for farm women whose private and public lives were closely intertwined. While farm life could be patriarchal, wives learned to mitigate their husbands' attempts at dominance through the crucial roles women

2. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 14.

played in production. Plains children, for their part, had none of their immigrant parents' memories of other places with wooded environments, plowed fields, and the trappings of Christian civilization. Unlike their mothers and fathers, who desperately tried to re-create the old world in the new, children such as Elma established their normative realities in the new landscape—exploring the prairies, forming friendships with neighbors miles away, and enduring hardships that would appear as such only from their later vantage point as grown-ups.[3] At a glance, "My Home on the Smoky" is a traditional pioneer reminiscence about white Americans "finishing God's work." A closer examination combined with context reveals more: a woman of the mid-twentieth century reflecting on her parents' choices; the disparity in household technology between 1895 and 1965 and the presumptions of progress that those changes entailed; and, as a nihilist might say of all memoirs, an attempt to derive meaning from life's apparent meaninglessness.

With no explanation, Bamberg refers to herself in the manuscript as "Susan", the eldest child of Dora "Dode" Barnes and Jennie Moore, who originated from eastern Indiana and northern Ohio, respectively. The holder of a patent on a window-latch design, Dode had a reputation as a local inventor, while Jennie's family traced its ancestry beyond Ohio to colonial Massachusetts. The Barneses homesteaded land in the southern part of Ellis County in north-central Kansas, specifically in Lookout Township along the Smoky Hill River. Biennial state records showed the area around "Lookout Station" as unorganized government land in 1875. Five years later, the records listed 252 people in a newly formed district. Lookout's population climbed to 353 in 1885 and increased steadily to 454 in 1900 and 569 in 1905, when Susan reached legal adulthood. Susan would ultimately be the eldest of five, with her brother Carl, born in 1889, closest in age.[4] Dode apparently followed his extended family to the area about eleven miles south of Hays, where, in the early 1890s, when Bamberg's story begins, his uncles Tom and "Pum" Fulghum employed him on their cattle ranch.

As one would expect from a childhood memoir, Bamberg offers no reflection on the great events of the day. The Populist Party, the Depression of 1893, and labor unrest—all the signature events that historians find notable for Kansas in the 1890s—are not as important to her child's eye as matters that outsiders would regard as mundane. "My Home on the Smoky" opens, appropriately for arid western Kansas, with the search for water. "No claim was better than its water supply," and Dode required an adequate well before achieving his goal of independence from his uncles' ranch.[5] Hand-dug wells, besides being unprotected pits into which animals and children could fall, provided dirty water and therefore were quickly replaced by drilled wells connected to pumps, which in turn dictated the location of dugouts or stone houses. Bamberg describes this first step of "finishing things for God" with obvious pride in her father's resourcefulness: "The well with its sparkling water was a testament to Father's faith and courage; the well was cool proof that God's blessings encircled those who take the necessary steps and made definite decisions to act. Then, and only then, comes happiness . . . even on an arid prairie . . . even at a dugout site."[6] That same practicality guided homesteaders in the building of permanent structures: "Land was free, rock was free, and so was sand, but it took brain and brawn to put them together to make a home."[7] Possibly, Bamberg is projecting her own resourcefulness onto her father, since children often demonstrate superior innovation and adaptability compared to adults.[8] Her early chapters evince a fascination with nature and a keen eye for detail, as in her curiosity about the pits where Dode cut rock for building material:

> When I became older I thought of that rock quarry as it had looked to me as a child. It seemed like the leaves of a huge book. . . . [original ellipses] Not the desk size book, but a great filing cabinet in God's natural world. Layers of rock like pages, beckoning to be useful and telling a history of eons before. Even the little imprints of shells and worms made me feel

3. Mary C. Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900–1940* (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 2–3; Elizabeth Hampsten, *Settlers' Children: Growing Up on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Pre ss, 1991), 6–8; Elliott West, "Children on the Plains Frontier," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950*, ed. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 26–41; and Liahna Babener, "Bitter Nostalgia: Recollections of Childhood on the Midwestern Frontier," in *Small Worlds*, 301–20.

4. Virgil W. Dean, editor, "'Give Us This Day Our Daily Bred': A Harvest Memoir," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 23 (Spring–Summer 2000): 6–11; and *Biennial Reports of the State Board of Agriculture*, 1875–1905.

5. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 3.

6. Ibid., 5.

7. Ibid., 15.

8. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, "Growing Up in Kansas. Review Essay," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Spring 2003): 60–61.

> like an explorer, touching hands with the distant past. All this stony record of time was to be a shelter for my father and for his small family.[9]

What may have been an oppressive arena of hard, spine-bending work for Dode appears to his daughter as geology's library, a playground of history and imagination.

Historians are quick to dispute idyllic notions of happy children at play in nineteenth-century Kansas. John Ise's classic *Sod and Stubble*, set in Osborne County about the same time, describes the hazards of childbirth, disability and chronic illness that threatened infants and children in rural locales.[10] Bamberg too relates her share of disasters but also relates the child's joy of exploration, of ways in which distinctions between playtime and education (at least the outdoors version of it) could be shattered. At one point, she recalls Jennie's continual annoyance with her long nature hikes through a slight and uncharacteristic reference to her own adult experience: "Mother often said she hoped that someday I'd have a run-away child so I'd know how it felt. Her wish was granted."[11]

In addition to Dode and Jennie's 160 acres, Susan and Carl were surrounded by unclaimed government land, or "no man's land," with evidence all about them of human and nonhuman communities. Buffalo wallows held special interest: "Our favorite one was just west of our dugout home and after every quick rain we donned some soiled clothing and went wading. Ours must have been the bathing spot for a very large bull buffalo. And I am sure the old buffalo enjoyed his mud baths as much as we enjoyed our grass lined wading pool."[12] The search for buffalo wallows led to other discoveries: "We found a bigger than usual buffalo wallow close to the house. We explored a ravine to the east that cut across our claim from the northwest to the southeast. The grass closest to the bottom was all brushed toward the southeast, pointing toward the river, just as if it had been combed that way, so we knew it was going to be fun when it rained. Rain on the plains was no ordinary drizzle."[13]

The siblings concluded their first day at the new site with a meal of milk gravy (a mixture of flour, milk and animal fat ladled over bread), peeled and boiled potatoes, and homemade sauerkraut. As the hands who had helped them move departed, "Carl and I went out to wave them off," and a strange bonding experience with the homestead ensued:

> It was just after dusk. As they got several yards away from our new home, we called "Goodbye" and the Smoky Hill answered us back, almost as loud as did the auctioneer. We were so thrilled, we kept on calling and testing. From later experiences we found that the echo worked better at times than at others, but we didn't figure the why of it all. . . .
>
> Just before going to bed that night, we heard a coyote's howl. What an eerie thing that was. We were surely glad the chickens were not in the partly finished chicken house. Father said there weren't many coyotes, perhaps only one, but it sounded like a pack of wolves. I was considered to be brave, but I wasn't brave enough to go out to see or count them.[14]

For all the joys of nature, the howls reminded her that God's creation held dangers as well. Those dangers become particularly evident in Chapter 3, titled "April Fool Blizzard," in which Bamberg establishes the volatility and potential violence of Kansas weather. During the first spring at the claim, Susan was helping her mother with a vegetable list when suddenly the temperature dropped, and the northwest sky turned green-gray.

> Quicker than you could say "blizzard" it was on us—cold, roaring, savage. It wailed across Smoky River and all we could see was the racing snow driven straight across the kitchen window. . . . Mother set her lips. She tried hard to keep that worried look out of her eyes. "We must be thankful that this house is built of rock. . . ."
>
> "Will Father come home soon, Mother?" I wanted to know.
>
> Before Mother could answer, the loud roar grew louder, and louder. It tore and howled. It even screamed. It made the house shutter [*sic*], even though it was made of stone. Something struck the north wall of the lean-to. "Sounds like a horse's water truck had hit the house." Mother said. . . .
>
> Carl and I went to the window. All we could see was millions and billions of mad snow flakes that

9. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky,"18.

10. Riney-Kehrberg, "Growing Up in Kansas," 60–61; and John Ise, *Sod and Stubble: The Unabridged and Annotated Edition*, ed. Von Rothenberger (1936; repr., Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996 [1936]).

11. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 54.

12. Ibid., 127.

13. Ibid., 60.

14. Ibid., 62.

> never seemed to touch the ground. They hissed and howled and whistled as they hurried by.[15]

Probably to distract Susan and Carl from worrying about their father and the freezing animals, Jennie put them to work hauling cream inside to prevent it from freezing and told them a story about an eclipse to assuage little Carl's questions about why it was so dark outside. Dode appeared hours later with uncles Bird and Arthur: "And they stood there like three ice sculptured men from the Arctic. And the three of them staggered with the stiffening cold, like drunks. After sweeping each other off they came into the warm kitchen, all three looked like grizzly bears and snow had matted in their mustaches with icicle fingers. Crusts of ice were around their noses. Eye brows were matted, and so were their clothes. Only way to get that ice off was to let it melt."[16] Uncle Bird, Jennie's brother, had left his earmuffs behind due to the morning's balminess and almost lost his ear to frostbite. Susan believed all three would have suffocated in another half mile owing to the frozen ice in their nostrils.

"The April fool blizzard," a representative of the Plains weather that tricks even experienced residents, ended as quickly as it had begun, leaving the ground covered in white. For Bamberg, the story provides an ominous warning about the necessity of always being prepared and of learning from and about nature even while fulfilling the homesteader's mission of subduing it. Incapacitated during the freezing ride home, Dode, Bird and Arthur lay down in the wagon bed and allowed the horses, Fritz and Marge, to find their way back to the barn. Animals had an innate sense of pending doom, and the same instincts that brought the horses to a place of safety created in others, depending on the species, a proclivity to act strangely or mill about in lost confusion. An inventory the next day revealed a "shocking and sad" sight: "Some poor dumb animals were frozen standing. Ice froze around their nostrils and they inhaled snow until they suffocated." Cattle that survived did so through the tireless efforts of the four-legged hero of April 1, Shep, the family dog, who nipped and drove them to shelter: "The barn was full of bawling cows. Some of the sheds were also filled with restless, thirsty, hungry cattle. But too many of the animals did not heed Shep. . . . The storm's speed and power was too much for those caught farthest away. The ranch hands had endured the night in their hay insulated bunks." Assessing the damage, Uncle Tom explained that more stock might have survived had they been sold sooner to small farmers with adequate protection compared to the open pasture operated by Dode. "But such are Kansas storms."[17] While human knowledge and innovation carried great value, a homesteader's survival sometimes depended on substituting those traits for simple trust in nature, as in relying on horses or dogs to do their jobs.

In the early chapters, Bamberg focuses intently on the domestic realms of kitchen and garden, only gradually acknowledging larger social forces outside the home. Through the first spring, Dode's plan to build a rock fence and Jennie's to plant a garden were interrupted by lingering cold that sent adults and children alike inside to pour over catalogs. Again, this description shows the need for adaptability, the understanding that all plans are tentative depending on climatic vagaries. When Dode and his brother-in-law agreed to help one another with the building of structures, Bamberg notes the importance of reciprocity, of neighbors providing mutual assistance: "On new lands where land was free and there was no money for help, there were many agreements made to exchange work."[18]

Chapter 4, titled "The Sale," recalls a number of vivid details that tie human and nonhuman together in a larger network of capitalistic exchange. Following Tom's advice to sell off excess stock and lighten the final move of animals and belongings to the claim, the Barneses held an auction expected to draw dozens of people. Jennie and Tom prepared one hundred pounds of beans and coffee—Jennie by this time was known as "the Cucumber Queen" for her barrels of pickles. Muddiness from spring rains caused a near-last-minute relocation, and on the sale day, Susan and Carl were forced into their best homemade clothes and ordered to stay near Grandma Moore. As the crowd filled their plates at the bean pot, Jennie informed the children that they would be selling Dolly and Cyclone, the latter especially "so nettlesome and dangerous, always breaking ropes and jumping fences and kicking other horses. We need a wind-mill more than we need him." Dode dusted and polished his saddles to enhance the attractiveness of the horses. Shep served as the reception committee, running back and forth to welcome arriving bidders.[19]

Nature was hegemonic in its proceedings, both in the personalities of individual animals and in the surrounding river bluffs. "Smoky Hill liked to mock loud noises," and

15. Ibid., 31–33.
16. Ibid., 35.
17. Ibid., 38.
18. Ibid., 26.
19. Ibid., 23–29, quotation on 47.

the crowd giggled at the sound of the auctioneer talking faster to get over the echo of his own voice: "Every time the auctioneer stopped talking, his echo mumbled on and on for some seconds. The crowd really enjoyed it. That echo really had the last word. One old farmer said, 'I bet that Old Smoky Hill is the only thing dares talk back to him like that.'"[20]

Dasher, one of the horses, had a habit of puffing himself to stretch the saddle girth and then escaping once it loosened. No such problem occurred with the gentler Dolly, whom Jennie rode so gracefully that the horse fetched $150 from a young couple. Cyclone, by contrast, refused to mind either Dode or the auctioneer—"He seemed to be jet-propelled and eager to run and run"—but his antics pleased prospective buyers, and he fetched $175 from the circus. Dasher and Splasher also made quite the scene, rearing up at one another on the platform and driving up the bidding between the circus buyer and a horse dealer. All the "barnyard cut-ups" sold to the circus man for $300 apiece. To alleviate Jennie's sadness at parting with Dolly, who nuzzled her one last time as though saying good-bye, Uncle Tom gave her a runt that she named Midget, a tiny, gentle animal with a notion to be both red and black.[21] The sale proved both a financial success and a turning point for the family in that it relieved Jennie of cooking for the ranch crew and freed her for spelling bees, literary societies, and other features of Victorian society that soon entered Susan's and the Lookout community's world.

The early stages of homesteading required the subordination of human comfort to more pressing needs. Since cattle, horses and chickens all needed immediate shelter, a new roof and efficient living space within the dugout had to wait. Chapter 6, "Love Improvements," elaborates on Dode's outdoor labors: the construction of an outhouse and wash bench from leftover lumber, additions to the chicken house, where Midget stayed until he was comfortable with other horses, and particularly the cultivation of a family garden. Dode preferred to plant watermelons and corn on the same ground, far from the road to discourage vandals who raided and destroyed the patches and stole roasting ears. "Lookouters" varied in their culinary tastes, most planting cantaloupes or muskmelons, others rhubarb, asparagus, different kinds of berries, and horse radish, the processing of which Susan described as "a tearful job. It was so bad for the eyes that we usually grated it outdoors, because grating it in the wind blew the stinging fragrance away. Horseradish put onions to shame, for making one weep."[22] Jennie's greatest concern, noted with perhaps a tinge of jealousy, was feeding Midget, who would not be fed by anyone else: "He was Mother's project and her great love." Finally, with the moving of furniture and bedding in two trips, the family's attention (and Bamberg's manuscript) turned to indoor matters. Jennie stitched together a carpet from discarded clothing scraps and tacked it to the dugout floor above two inches of straw padding. Bamberg describes the rooms and furniture in painstaking detail: dyed curtains made of flour sacks, an organ, stove, bureau, boxes of dishes, sacks of coal and cow chips, and each bedroom with a washstand, bowl, and pitcher.[23]

Houses reveal much about their occupants' values, and no better map of people's priorities can be found than in the choices they make with limited time and resources. Sod houses, or "soddies," were made of bricks interlaced with mud and roots. In areas where thin soil made bricks unfeasible, the dugout—the poorer cousin of the soddie—could be used, a structure partly supported by rock or wood walls with the rest leaning against a cave or other excavation. Bamberg employs the word "dugout" when identifying her home, but Lookout's ample supply of quarries, as well as her own descriptions of both the house and Dode's rock-cutting work, indicates that the Barneses lived in something more closely approximating a soddie. The confusion is understandable because the two blurred together in pioneer children's minds owing to their shared inconveniences. Residents of both complained of overcrowding in simple rectangular structures that shook and sometimes blew apart in the strong Kansas winds; leaky roofs that, besides dripping rain, contained mice and snakes; and constant dirtiness, a trait that beleaguered even log cabins or frame houses when the dust blew. Adults who had enjoyed less spartan surroundings during their own childhoods tended to find soddies and dugouts dark, gloomy, and depressing, especially in the nineteenth century, when architecture emphasized windows and light.[24] "My Home on the Smoky" reveals no such thoughts. For children of Susan's age, houses were less an expression

20. Ibid., 47.
21. Ibid., 48–54, quotation on 51.
22. Ibid., 64–67, quotation on 67.
23. Ibid., 55–61, quotation on 61.
24. Elliott West, *Growing Up with the Country: Childhood on the Far Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 51–61.

This photo of the "Last sod house used in Ellis Co." illustrates the type of initial housing that Bamberg probably lived in as a child.

of tastes already formed than the template for future expectations. Initially afraid, she came to prefer the new location over the ranch because she had closer access to the river, the company of tamer, more predictable animals, and especially more of her mother's attention: "At our new dugout she was having more time to make a home and to be a companion to Father and to us."[25]

While other rooms could be tidied in the morning and left undisturbed until bedtime, the kitchen became the center of constant activity; hence, "The Kansas Kozy Kitchen" plays an important role in the memoir. The stove, centrally located, provided not only heat for cooking but also general warmth through the house. An adjacent small cave stored coal, which was rarely used owing to the expense, and cow chips, or "prairie fuel," of which the job of collecting belonged to the children. The table, the most utilized item in the home, was used for meals, conferences, bookkeeping, Bible reading, and homework. Bamberg recalls the ill feeling generated when playful youngsters shook the table while Dode tried to write letters or draw up plans, resulting in loud, emphatic voices ordering them to bed. Lanterns could be placed on the table for light in the evening hours, but they created a fear of fire. Experienced settlers kept a neat table and washed dishes immediately after meals, eliminating clutter and reducing the chances of accidents. A particular innovation of the 1890s was indoor water in the form of a barrel tank attached to a two-inch pipe. Dode devised a system to direct water from the windmill into the house barrel, a technique he later adapted for irrigation ditches. Susan and Carl shared the responsibilities of keeping the tank stocked, toting water in pails from tank to stove for heating, and carrying wastewater outside. "We felt modern to have access to so much hot water."[26]

25. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 80.

26. Ibid., 80–84, quotation on 84.

Contemporary readers of "My Home on the Smoky" can quickly lose patience with Bamberg's obsession with the minutiae of kitchen geography and meal preparation. Written when the consumer culture, electronic appliances and changing gender norms had completely transformed domestic labor, her narrative strove to remind modern-day Americans of an earlier, protoindustrial time when cleaning, acquiring food, and obtaining suitable clothes were full-time occupations.

> The tableware was the kind that rusted and stained easily. They had to be scoured often, in fact, nearly every meal. This was done by scraping on a brick and with a damped rag [and] each article had to be rubbed and secured on both sides with great pressure and exactness. And many a time I had this job handed back to me to "do it over, do it better." It was a perky chore and I detested it. I was glad when commercial scouring powders came out that did the job better and easier, and ever happier when stainless steel came along and no rust or corrosion had to be taken off.[27]

Tasks such as soap making and clothes washing proved especially hard on the hands. On windy days, the clothes could dry quickly, but a strong wind could also snap the line and dump clean clothes onto the ground, dirtying them all over again. Housewives in the Hays area sewed the "excellent" flour sacks of the Yost Milling Company into bed comforters or even converted them into underwear ("unmentionables"): "These personal possessions became prairie bill boards. Housewives were very conscious of hanging out these bits of advertising for the Milling Company, and they tried to hide these slogans under larger pieces of laundry. We had no bill boards out on the plains, but the lingerie was the closest thing to it." Wearers had to be careful about concealing the converted sacks under dark clothing lest the colorful printed slogans, signifying different grades of flour, bled through to onlookers.[28]

Similar to Depression-era children who succeeded her a generation later, Bamberg's preoccupation with food may have stemmed from childhood fears about the lack of it: "Mornings came early on the claim, and by noon everyone was starved. It took all the ingenuity a housewife could conjure up to prepare adequate meals and get any semblance of variety, especially in the Winter time without a garden. The hard work it took to produce a living really made some great appetites. It was a paradox for sure. You worked hard to produce food. That worked up more appetites to eat more so one could produce more. It was a vicious circle."[29]

Homesteaders' diet depended on the season. While certain vegetables such as tomatoes and cucumbers lent themselves to preservation, others such as peas and green beans were summertime luxuries. Plains winters meant a monotonous fare of cornmeal and gravy—both great food stretchers—and oatmeal. In addition, settlers did not always share food equally.[30] During the summer harvest, when men's energy was demanded in the fields, women and children ate last: "How the food did disappear. We, the cooks and the children wondered if we would have anything left for our hungry stomachs."[31] But Bamberg appears not to have considered this "hierarchy of eating" an injustice, recalling harvest as a huge celebratory community effort. Wives stored chickens and produce months in advance to feed the threshing crews, and friends and relatives arrived to help pile shocks before the unpredictable weather could intervene.

> All over Lookout Township and Ellis County wheat was waving its golden heads in the same rhythm as the silver waves of the sea. It was nearing the middle of the nineties, in the middle of a fairly new Country. To some it was the gay nineties, and to those who lost crops or bad crop failures it was the gray nineties. In Lookout it seemed that everyone had wheat, as it billowed and waved at the distant horizon. It looked like the earth was breathing and flexing her muscles, really working hard to bring forth a big crop.[32]

Befitting a narrative in which food production is key, Bamberg saves her most poetic prose for homesteaders' work in transforming grassland prairie into grain.

After establishing the presence of God's earth, "My Home on the Smoky" gradually expands Susan's worldview to include extended relatives and the larger Lookout community. Bamberg's characters pass through her internal lens of social Darwinism, though she never labels it as such, with each person assessed based on his or

27. Ibid., 85.
28. Ibid., 88–94, quotation on 91.
29. Ibid., 86.
30. Ibid., 87–89.
31. Ibid., 189.
32. Ibid., 184.

her ability to survive: "It must have been the wide-open spaces that gave Lookout its name. But Lookout was not for those who wanted an easy life, for it took great vision and hope to face up to the great demands of the rugged life, this new-born West. . . . Everyone had heard of the faint-hearted who had given up and gone back East, but such was not true of the Lookouters."[33]

A frequent visitor was Emma Moore, Jennie's baby sister, described as the leader and counselor of the family, who brought outfits for the children based on her awareness of the latest fashions. (Of Carl: "Oh, Jennie, he should have those curls cut off. He's too big for curls.")[34] After moving to Hays and working a year as a seamstress, Emma taught at a one-room school in Russell and then studied in Salina before departing for Chicago in May 1893. "So this young soul, my Aunt Emma dared to leave her quiet home on the lonesome prairie and carve out a future in the big city."[35] Emma's adventurous spirit seems to have inspired six-year-old Susan, who over the next year followed her aunt's letters about the World's Fair and her recent engagement to a young man with great enthusiasm. Emma even considered bringing Susan to Chicago to obtain a musical education until the mail brought heartbreaking news, first of Emma's unspecified illness and then of her sudden passing: "It was hard for the family to understand. For years they tried. All of Grandfather's children were upstanding and made him proud, but Emma was the flower of the family. And had to be buried away from family and old friends. The Chicago friends shipped her possessions to Mother . . . [who] sobbed as she unpacked this in the dugout kitchen."[36] Emma's prominent role as an educated female figure, knowledgeable about the outside world, anticipated the arrival of Belle Sutton, who was hired as Lookout's teacher in winter 1893. Since the Barnes claim was located only a mile and a half from the school, Belle boarded with the family and developed a friendship with Susan, her junior by twenty years, that lasted at least into the 1940s.[37]

An explanation of Belle's influence begins, naturally, within the confined space of the dugout. Squeezing five people into two rooms proved a challenge, but the Barneses installed wire partitions that allowed occasional privacy for their guest. Belle left each morning before 8 a.m. to build a fire in the schoolhouse and then commenced teaching her eight grades. Though Susan knew her as a roommate, her admiration was obvious.

> Miss Sutton was during her life, a real inspiration to all who knew her. She taught only a few short years in rural schools, then was hired as the permanent primary teacher in Hays where she taught till she retired. She even had second generation pupils. My three sisters who were unborn when she boarded with us at the dugout, were her pupils in later years.
>
> This distinguished teacher was one time voted the most outstanding Primary teacher. Her life perhaps influenced the lives of more young children than anyone in Early Ellis County.[38]

Belle's brother, William Sutton, lived in Hays and often stayed with the Barneses on weekends or escorted Belle and the children on outings to town. A sales representative for a gramophone company, William sometimes frightened people during his demonstrations of "this weird and spooky machine." The Suttons introduced Susan and Carl to stereopticon sets, allowing them to see unusual sights from faraway places, and William even produced a cylinder of Lookout's best vocalists singing religious hymns: "Though most Lookouters were so low on funds, that they couldn't buy talking machines."[39]

Significantly, only in recollections of Belle Sutton does Bamberg take notice of the larger context in which homesteading occurred. Belle regaled her and Carl with stories of Indians, Pilgrims, the first Thanksgiving, the Louisiana Purchase, and Fort Hays, which lay a dozen miles to the north. In the late 1880s, the U.S. Army deactivated Fort Hays after twenty-plus years as a garrison for cavalry and infantry units charged with protecting Union Pacific railroad crews and assisting civilian peace officers. Belle's stories caused Jennie to recall her own time as a single woman living in Hays (then Hays City), where she had worked for room and board. Missing her parents on the Smoky, she once walked the twelve miles at night, passing the soldiers' outpost that frightened her: "She didn't know which was worst, the fear of the dark, and the fear of the soldiers at the Fort, or the Indians. Mother had always been rather afraid of the dark, coyotes, and storms, so I know that spell of homesickness must have been

33. Ibid., 10.
34. Ibid., 76.
35. Ibid., 74–79, quotation on 106.
36. Ibid., 159.
37. Ibid., 113–16.
38. Ibid., 124.
39. Ibid., 118.

terrible. But she made the nocturnal twelve mile trip to her parents' home with no incident except her gnawing, nagging fears."

Jennie had good reason to be fearful. Though Bamberg does not provide the date of her nighttime journey, Hays City and Fort Hays had reputations for violence, often perpetrated by soldiers who drank and brawled in the town's saloons, that lasted into the 1880s. With the exception of the Northern Cheyenne raids in Decatur and Rawlins Counties during fall 1878, Indian violence had not occurred in northwest Kansas for almost two decades before Bamberg's birth. But fears about battles, gunfights, and other episodes that contemporary readers associate with "the Old West" certainly lingered in the minds of the Kansans of the 1890s, and probably underlay Bamberg's childhood perception of Ellis County as a place in need of homesteaders' civilizing presence.[40]

Like most prairie memoirists, Susan had little appreciation for education as an intellectual exercise, regarding the volumes in the Lookout school's bookcase—Shakespeare, *The Pilgrim's Progress*—as boring. Reading and rereading weekly local newspapers such as the *Hays Free Press* and the *Hays Republican* may have provided more practical information, but for the most part, the real value of the school lay in socialization, an opportunity to form friendships and contacts beyond the provincial setting of the claim. Well into the twentieth century, school for rural children meant escape from the drudgery of chores, and those who demonstrably lacked "book smarts" or proved especially proficient with tools and animals were often begrudged the experience and kept at home to assist parents.[41] Bamberg's recollections focus on her various teachers, the daily routines of exercises and prayers, the children's pranks on one another, and her own intolerance of bullying that led her to develop a reputation as a fighter after breaking a boy's ribs with a baseball bat. On Sundays, the Lookout school became a Methodist church and her teacher's desk the preacher's pulpit. One excerpt concludes with a recurring theme that becomes prominent in later chapters: "Sunday afternoon was a most welcome relief from the homestead cares. Pioneers could then go back to their mundane duties with cheerful hearts and renewed energy after communing with well-meaning neighbors. The older generation usually spoke to and about each other; as Brother Barnes, Brother Higgins or Sister Wilde or Sister Scott. But call them what you wish, Lookout was a bit of brotherhood of man. Has the race for progress and automation bull-dozed such brotherhood out of existence?"[42] The wistfulness for such lost fraternity appears again in her description of social life in Hays, where for a time Dode took a job as an engineer at the Yost mill. This change allows Bamberg to compare the convenience of her temporary town school, two blocks from home, with the one-room country building on the Smoky. She reserves a special fondness for the old settler annual picnics on Big Creek, south of Hays, where rival bands from within Ellis County competed for prizes; children enjoyed the entertainment of merry go-rounds, races and lemonade stands; and adults gathered for games of chance and to hear political candidates stump for votes.[43] One day from her school window, Susan caught a glimpse of Lookout's changing future:

> a load of hay piled especially high came from the west. In the middle of the highest spot of that load sat a very fat Russian woman with a babushka on her head and she was wrapped in a black shawl.
>
> The road had deep ruts which the driver apparently missed, causing the hay rack and its load and passenger to roll over. The children gasped and immediately jumped up but our teacher wouldn't dismiss any of the pupils to go help the poor couple. It was a very long time before Mrs. Russia and her babushka came crawling out of the upside-down-haystack.[44]

Volga Germans, the ethnic designation for Germans who had settled the Volga River region more than a century before at the invitation of Empress Catherine the Great, first arrived in Ellis County in 1876. Sequestered in Catholic villages such as Munjor and Schoenchen and regarded by English-speaking people as strange and clannish, the Volgadeutsche expanded their farms into Lookout by the mid-1890s and became neighbors of the Barneses and Moores: "Many Russian immigrants were coming into the country, attracted by the wheat growing, and maybe more

40. Ibid., 116–24, quotation on 120. See also James N. Leiker, "Black Soldiers at Fort Hays, Kansas, 1867–1869: A Study in Civilian and Military Violence," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1997): 3–17; and James N. Leiker and Ramon Powers, *The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).

41. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 148–51. See also Hampsten, *Settlers' Children*, 35–36.

42. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 137–47, quotation on 142.

43. Ibid., 134–37.

44. Ibid., 147–48.

the free country. They were Russian Catholics. America was a young Country trying out a democratic idea: Man's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Man's right to worship as he pleased. This democratic idea has been greater than any marble hall of monument, to give us the right to choose, the right to exercise initiative. These principles were practiced by Lookouters."[45] By 1905, German-Russians had increased their numbers to the point that they established a new settlement four miles north of the Smoky River—Antonino, which survives to this day. By the time Bamberg left the area and reached young adulthood, German Catholic immigrants had so displaced the previous population that the Methodist community she recalled with such affection had disappeared from local memory.[46] However, her narrative indicates that neither Bamberg nor her family showed signs of nativist resentment.

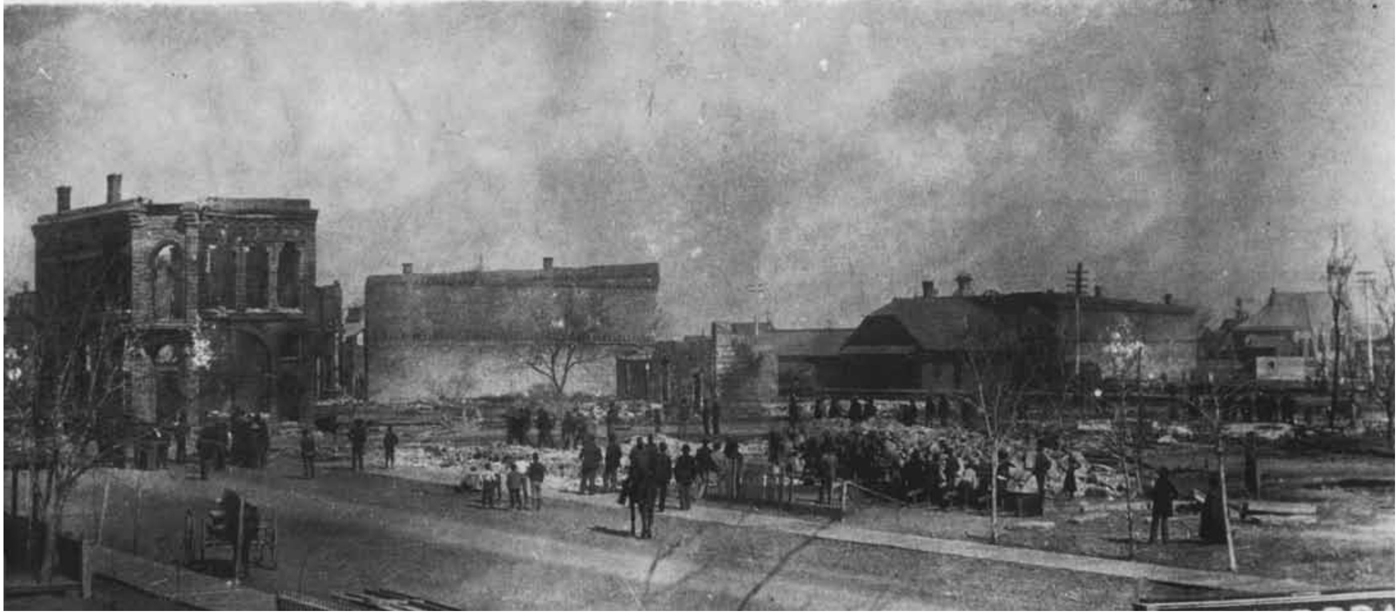
Bamberg emphasizes certain dangers and hardships, among them the prevalence of open pits. She and Carl hauled large bottles of potable water in their mile-and-a-half trek each day to avoid the foul-tasting stuff from the school's abandoned well, which was a known a repository for unfortunate small animals: "It was 90% water and 10% skunk."[47] A neighbor referred to only as Mr. Klink lived alone in his soddie following the death of his firstborn son, who had fallen into an uncovered well and drowned. After Mrs. Klink sickened and died, Dode kindly tended Mr. Klink's fence posts to reduce the chance of future disasters. Bamberg mentions the Klinks' misfortune with passing sadness, but after reflecting briefly on "this family and their failures," she reaffirms the belief that prairie life destroyed the unfit, clearly implying that her own family survived because of certain traits: "With ideas and good health, many things seemed possible. Without good health, all was lost, especially if one was without vision or good ideas."[48] Not even town dwellers were immune to catastrophe. One day, Dode and two companions arrived late from their jobs in Hays to report that a terrible fire had destroyed several blocks of the downtown area. Among the casualties was Dode's employer, the Yost mill.

> The fire had left a terrible scar on Hays, which showed for years. Perhaps the whole town would have been burned had it not been for the bucket brigades. It took all the tin pails in two hardware stores, all the hand pumps and windmills to produce enough water to kill the fire. This all happened before a general water system was a part of the small town.
>
> After a few days things became normal again. The stories of the fire were told and retold and words seemed inadequate to tell all the horror of that night, which left people without food and water.[49]

The 1895 conflagration started in a livery stable and, driven by a stiff south wind, ultimately burned fifty-six structures and wiped out most of Hays's business district. Some residents later remembered the fire as a blessing in that it finally closed the illegal saloons and inspired a two-decade flurry of rebuilding with modern stone and brick.[50]

Susan herself witnessed a prairie fire near the Smoky that struck her family more personally. She and Carl had been playing outdoors when he suddenly disappeared. While all stopped to search for him, a cloud of very black smoke appeared northwest of the claim. "Prairie fires can outrun any team of horses, especially a slow team. . . . The heat from the blackened grass hit us in the face like the heat from a red hot stove in the kitchen."[51] The flames spared the Barneses' most important resources, such as the garden, windmill, horses, and livestock. Susan managed to save several baby rabbits, whose fur was singed, and Dode lost the sod roof of his barn, but most importantly, Carl—whose absence during the fire had terrified everyone—finally walked home through the blackened grass, blubbering. The aforementioned Mr. Klink apparently died in the fire, though Bamberg provides no details and mentions only that he had been dead for several days before he was discovered.[52] Though the cause of the fatal blaze was never determined, Bamberg later describes another fire that consumed thirty acres: "It took days to recover from the fire fighting experience. What a venture to participate in before one had reached the age of ten! I learned for all time the viciousness of fire; the unpredictability of it and how it could jump ditches, roads and run faster than you could run. Old timers always wondered why the wind always came up as soon as a prairie fire went wild, not thinking or

45. Ibid., 144–45.
46. James N. Leiker, *The Changing Village: A History of Antonino, Kansas* (Hays, KS: Northwestern Printers, 2005).
47. Bamberg, 151.
48. Ibid., 108–12, quotation on 112.
49. Ibid., 161–66, quotation on 165–66.
50. *At Home in Ellis County, Kansas, 1867–1992*, vol. 1 (Hays, KS: Ellis County Historical Society, 1991), 74–75.
51. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 108–09, quotation on 109.
52. Ibid., 108–12.



This photo shows the aftermath of the 1895 fire in Hays that destroyed fifty-six buildings. According to Bamberg, "The fire had left a terrible scar on Hays, which showed for years."

guessing that fire can move air and make its own draft." Little Carl started this second blaze after finding a match in his desk and lighting it on the prairie to see if the grass would burn. A group of classmates tried unsuccessfully to beat out the flames before they spread beyond the schoolyard.

> The coat he fought the fire with was a brand new coat that Mother had just made. The loss of the coat made her sick, but she was sicker to think her son would do such a thing. I don't think I ever saw a child with such a depressed, dejected expression all over his shamed face. . . . We told our story to our shocked Mother for she had been busy in the dugout and hadn't seen our prairie conflagration that afternoon. Father had been to Hays and when he got home it was another shocked parent we had to look at. Father announced that he was going to prayer meeting at the school house that night and would decide about the punishment after he had seen the damage.[53]

The revelation of her brother's pyromania left Susan ashamed and disgusted—she believed him responsible for the fire that had killed Klink—but also filled her with pity for the corporal punishment that awaited him. Susan assisted Carl in padding his backside with extra underclothes to cushion the inevitable spanking, but the beating that Dode issued after returning from prayer "got quite close to the real Carl and I wanted to scream while this punishment was being administered. The only consolation I could get from it was that surely he would never set grass and weeds afire again."[54]

Plains children lived daily not only with the threat of physical punishment but also with the reality of hard physical labor. Our contemporary understanding of childhood as a time of fun and learning, with children sheltered from responsibility but having the same rights as adults, reflects the values of nineteenth-century middle-class reformers. As Pamela Riney-Kehrberg points out, the concept of childhood not only had little relevance for the urban working class but also normalized a coastal view that was ignorant of how people lived in the nation's rural interior. Farm families could not afford idle children, and farm parents believed that it was damaging to raise children to be anything but productive and hardworking. For those who could not afford hired hands at a time

53. Ibid., 152–53.

54. Ibid., 152–54, "days to recover" quotation on 154, "consolation" quotation on 153.

when mechanized equipment did not yet exist, childbirth offered the easiest route to obtaining workers. In 1900, the average Kansas family consisted of 4.57 persons, a number skewed downward by urban counties such as Johnson and Sedgwick. The average ran higher on farms, where the cost of child rearing was seen as a good long-term investment. This situation does not mean that settler colonists did not love their children, but it does mean that youngsters such as Susan and Carl participated fully in the settler project, both in the cyclical kind of labor that drew revenue from the land on a seasonal basis and in the linear kind that fundamentally altered the landscape.[55] Bamberg's reflections seventy years later are those of a homesteader, not a homesteader's child:

> It is the usual thing for children in any decade to want to be helpful, for it makes them feel grown up. And every child wants to feel grown up. . . . Children spent more time out-side and perhaps the fresh air, the exercise brought on a lot of physical fitness. Anyway, doctor's calls were practically unheard of. Pioneer children learned to work at an early age. . . . To this day I wonder if I was tired, bored, or lazy. But children were an asset to pioneer parents and not a liability, really. Children paid their way and added to the family estate. Children had to work, in order to eat. The bigger the family, the bigger the farms. More acres could be cultivated, more cows could be milked, especially in a family with a lot of boys.[56]

Daughters, at least at a young age, often performed the same labor as sons. A study in 1916 of a western Kansas community showed that one-third of the girls had done household chores and one-half had worked outdoors, cutting wheat or herding livestock. Gender distinctions were sometimes associated with ethnic background. German, Scandinavian, and Eastern European families were more likely to send girls into the fields, whereas native-born parents tended to regard such tasks as unfeminine.[57]

"My Home on the Smoky" suggests that the Barneses shared the view of their immigrant neighbors regarding girls' labor. Susan milked cows, hauled water, tended livestock, and performed all manner of tasks typically regarded as "men's work." This situation changed after she entered adolescence, but until then, she, Carl, and other Lookout children found ways to amuse themselves. As Elliott West states, play was the one realm that children controlled the most and adults understood the least. Children paused from their barn duties to jump off roofs into haystacks or turned the movement of calves between pastures into a game of who could make the loudest cracking noise with a bullwhip.

> Call it play or call it sport, we had to mix play with work. There had to be some contest or competition going on, or boredom overtook you. You had to be a winner at least part of the time, get the most done, play the most pranks; or even to eat the most radishes for dinner.
>
> Homesteaders, old and young, had very little social life. There was no entertainment furnished, so we invented our own.[58]

Child psychologists identify four categories of play: exploration, the transformation of work into play, formal games, and the play encouraged by parents through gift-giving to instill values.[59] Bamberg's early chapters describe her explorations of the claim via rock collecting, memorizing bird music, and the like. She makes little or no mention of games such as tag, in which children learn rules and interact with peers, though she certainly would have encountered such play at the Lookout school. Nor does she mention receiving toys or books from her parents, which is unsurprising given their material condition. The second category of turning work into fun overwhelmingly dominates her memories: developing relationships with animals while feeding them or hiding in the wheat or garden while harvesting produce. By inventing new types of play to match their surroundings and circumstances, the children transformed the landscape in no less important ways than those of their serious-minded parents.

Susan's transition to adolescence and more traditionally feminine responsibilities occurred gradually. While Jennie's domain of the kitchen and household receives its due, Bamberg's memories of Dode take center stage in discussions of "the pioneer spirit." Early in the memoir, he opened a blacksmith's shop where local men sharpened their own

55. Riney-Kehrberg, "Growing Up in Kansas," 57–63; and West, *Growing Up with the Country*, 73–79.
56. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 167–68.
57. Riney-Kehrberg, "Growing Up in Kansas," 59–63.
58. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 134.
59. West, *Growing Up with the Country*, 101–17.

implements, shod horses, and repaired harnesses. "So the blacksmith shop made quite a social center bringing the neighbors together into a better relationship."[60] A similar venture, an ice house, turned out equally well, providing Lookouters with access to refrigeration and ice cream and Susan with a source of damp, snake-infested dread. Successful homesteaders helped build community but also knew when to act individually, as when Dode ignored his neighbors' scoffing at his idea of building two ponds driven by irrigation. In time, the fish population in both ponds exploded to the point that he placed ads in the Hays newspapers inviting crowds to help themselves to free fish. Bamberg offers such examples as testimony of her father's "prairie preparedness." "Father always preached that the time to get ready for Winter was in the Summer, and the time to plan for summer was in the winter."[61] Though her praise of Dode seemed idolatrous at times, giving away food produced by one's own hands during times of scarcity perhaps betokens greater generosity than such giving in a later age of mass-produced abundance. Indeed, the disparity between the 1890s and 1960s encompassed more than material change. Bamberg's point as she approaches her conclusion is to demonstrate changes in values and how character traits such as generosity and innovation are magnified under conditions of hardship.

Susan turned eight years old in 1895, by which time the Lookout community seemed to have reached maturity: "The days, weeks, months and years of the gay nineties were slipping away. No one in Lookout had become rich, yet all were rich in life, health and achievements completed. Many had proved up on their claims."[62] One afternoon, Dode drove Susan and Carl to an aunt's house with no explanation and retrieved them hours later. Upon returning to the claim, they found Jennie in bed with a newborn daughter, Rebecca, nicknamed Reba. Appropriately titling the relevant chapter "Facts of Life," Bamberg recalls feeling happy and confused but also angry that she had not been informed of her mother's pregnancy. "But that's the way secrets were kept in former days."[63] Reba became a studious and quiet child, finding more entertainment in books—the fourth category of play—than in her sister's rough-and-tumble outdoor world. However, on one occasion, Reba climbed to the top of a windmill and had to be rescued by Susan, prompting Dode to install chicken-wire fencing as a barricade. By the time the next child, Laura, nicknamed Lura, arrived, Susan already knew her mother's secret, having discovered new baby clothes in the dugout. The Barneses' growing family both increased Susan's workload and changed the nature of that work. As Jennie tended to the new arrivals, Susan did more of the cooking and cleaning and spent more time with the smaller children, bathing them and keeping them out of mischief. Supervision of younger siblings was considered a girl's best preparation for motherhood, and many a daughter had to relinquish "tomboy" status as she approached marriageable age and found gender expectations growing more rigid and distinct.[64]

A reader who finds "My Home on the Smoky" plodding and tiresome, especially in the later chapters, may be realizing Bamberg's intent. The story arc of the family leaving the claim comes late; meanwhile, Bamberg continues to elaborate on the minutiae of household chores with an increasingly weary tone and little of the exploratory joy she knew as a younger child. She and Carl rose before dawn to milk cows and perform other tasks and repeated the whole cycle after returning from school. Constant stoking of the stove with cow chips meant washing hands before handling food or food containers several times a day: "Pioneer housekeeping was terrible for the appearance of the hands." For the second time, she describes the hated work of scraping knives and forks prior to the availability of commercial scouring powders. Caring for the garden became the whole family's full-time responsibility each spring and summer, by which time all were starved for fresh vegetables following the long winter. When black clouds appeared on the horizon during storm season, Susan's job was to secure loose items and protect baby chicks and calves from the strong Kansas wind. In Chapter 16, Bamberg describes a contentious vote by the Lookout school board on lengthening the academic year to seven months, which was opposed by families who needed their children's labor. During the brief interval of Dode's job at the Yost mill, Susan and Carl attended the nine-month session of the Hays school district. Accustomed to the accelerated pace of the shorter country session, they had no trouble staying in the top 10 percent of their respective classes.[65]

60. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 68–72, quotation on 72.

61. Ibid., 95–103, 190–93, quotation on 98.

62. Ibid., 190.

63. Ibid., 158.

64. Ibid., 156–66; and Riney-Kehrberg, "Growing Up in Kansas," 67–71.

65. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 169–83, quotation on 175.

Only once does Bamberg reveal a hint of her possible political persuasion with the comment "Pioneers had their own war on poverty. And they fought it every waking hour of every day."[66] Conservative Plains residents, especially in Republican Kansas, regarded Lyndon Johnson's Great Society with suspicion, seeing it as government redistribution of wealth to the undeserving. Bamberg's small jab might indicate displeasure with the modern welfare state of her senior years, yet that sentiment coexists with appreciation of the technological advances brought by modernity: "They say that necessity is the mother of invention. Though I had nothing to do with the invention of our present day electric refrigerators, I felt the necessity."[67] Lacking deep freezes and food lockers, the Barneses either gave away copious amounts of an oversupply of spoilable produce, such as peas, or fed it to their animals. Her closing chapter, "The New Century," describes the change of thought that swept Lookout and made new time-saving methods more acceptable:

> Prairie homesteaders were close enough to the last of the Old century to know what the future would bring. They had seen coal oil lamps replace candles; they had seen the horse replace the oxen; the windmill replace the bucket; the modern thresher replace the binder and the flail. Shipped-in-coal replaced the prairie fuel; they had heard rumors of telephones; of electric lights, of sewers; of running water, and gasoline engines. They just knew there had to be better things coming and a New Century was just the time to think of them.
>
> They had proved up on homesteads and claims and made tax payers out of whomever tilled these pioneer farms. Attention was turning to questions like, How could they produce more wheat and corn per acre; how could they accomplish more in less time. How could they have more time for some things they just wanted to do and didn't have to do. Leisure? That was a word the pioneers didn't know the meaning of.[68]

"Leisure" is the only word Bamberg emphasizes with underlining—twice, in fact—in her more than two-hundred-page manuscript. In the previous chapter, "The Old Calendar," she writes, "Near the end of the last decade of the Nineteenth Century there was an unexplainable restlessness in Lookout. Maybe it came with the end of a Century, or maybe homesteaders needed new worlds to conquer, or new problems to solve. They had become accustomed to hard work and didn't know the meaning of the word leisure. They didn't want less to do, they only wanted the means to get more done."[69] The changes that Bamberg describes and Lookouters welcomed came gradually in the decades after her family departed. By 1923, when she was in her midthirties, 62 percent of Kansas farm families owned automobiles, but only 10 percent had electricity. Rural electrification happened rapidly after 1945, just as the size of gardens and the numbers of chickens and milk cows declined. The post–World War II era shifted agriculture toward large-scale mechanized production and away from the subsistence-based, diversified operations of Bamberg's youth. By the late twentieth century, farm women spent less time or no time at all gardening and more running errands, keeping books, or commuting to jobs in town.[70]

"The age of leisure," as Bamberg might have labeled the twentieth century, began in Lookout with great fanfare, leaving a strong impression on the thirteen-year-old girl's mind that resonated six decades later:

> On our Church wall hung the new calendar for the year of 1901; the year 1900, the 100th year of the Nineteenth Century the last year of the old Century was dying. The year 1901 was spreading its young wings to soar to unknown heights. The calendars were gifts from Yost Milling Company. Everyone knew Yost; either sold him wheat, worked for him, bought his flour and chicken feed from him, or he wore underwear made of Yost's flour sacks.
>
> At the stroke of midnight as the Russian Catholics saluted the new Century and expel[led] the evil spirits by firing their shot guns, we knelt at the altar to pray that less evil and more good could come to our plains country and in fact all over the world. Our aims were the same, only the approach was different. They shot evil with guns; we with prayers.[71]

The calendar change coincided with Susan's expanding awareness of the larger world to which she had been introduced by Belle Sutton and Emma Moore. Evidently

66. Ibid., 183.
67. Ibid., 174–75.
68. Ibid., 199–200.
69. Ibid., 194.
70. Riney-Kehrberg, "Growing Up in Kansas," 67–71.
71. Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," 201.

she spent part of 1898 with Dode's sister Laura in Indiana, traveling for the first time by train and finishing the academic year there in a one-room school. Despite her homesickness, the trees and green grass of the Midwest appealed to her. Late that year, from her aunt's nine-room house in Richmond, Indiana, Susan watched a parade of soldiers returning from the Spanish American War. After several months, "when school was out I was to go see my grandparents at Lynn, Indiana. I was at the station ready to board the train when my whole family from Kansas walked off the train. It was such a shock, I guess I became hysterical. The 'surprise' was my Father's idea of a joke."[72] Dode's visit home was more than personal; apparently he tried factory work for a while before deciding to bring his family back to the claim. The interval away gave Susan a new perspective on her Kansas home: "At last the time came and Mother and the four children boarded the train for Kansas. The closer we got to our old home the flatter it looked. The distances seemed so great and the sun so bright it hurt one's eyes till we got used to it."[73]

Other Lookouters had similar experiences. Bamberg's closing pages tell of neighbors who, having acquired full title under the rules of the Homestead Act, moved away for other opportunities, retired and moved to town, or, as in the case of her aunt and uncle, bought a two-story house from the old fort and moved it to a vacant lot in Hays, where they continued to raise cows and chickens since no city ordinances were then in place. Lookout settlers sold most of their farmsteads to Volga Germans, who tended to prefer the country and the isolation of their Catholic villages to Hays, though this group too would begin to migrate to jobs and houses in town in the 1930s and 1940s.[74]

Several changes within the Barnes family signaled Susan's passage into young womanhood. By 1901, when she turned fourteen, her chief interests lay in social activities—school, church, choir—and especially the fulfillment of her goal of becoming the congregation's organist. That year, Jennie gave birth to her fifth and last child, a daughter, Arlene, and this time she and Dode took Susan into their confidence and "promoted" her to head housekeeper during the delivery and recovery. Rather than a child from whom sexual reproduction had to be concealed, she had gained new status as a junior partner in managing the household and holding authority over younger siblings. Significantly, Arlene's birth occurred in Hays. Dode had become a part-time farmer, earning most of his living as a building contractor and supervising the claim from a twelve-mile distance. Susan returned there often to assist her grandparents. "Each time I went back to the claim I always had to call to Smoky Hill and hear that call come back to me. I called 'hello' I called, 'Goodbye'."[75]

Bamberg reflects on the forces that prompted the Barneses and others to relocate: "Though all Lookouters had more nostalgic feelings for that one primitive spot they felt an urge to move to more up-to-date homes and conveniences. And many an Ex-Lookouter chose to be a Summer-time farmer and the balance of the year to live in town, either in retirement or with a city job, or go to school. But they felt closer to nature, closer to God, closer to neighbors and families were closer."[76] Bamberg jokes that her parents really had two families: she and Carl, who carried lifelong memories of the homestead, and the three younger girls, who began their education in Hays and for whom tales about the claim were simply family lore. Lura, during her life as a successful music teacher, impressed her coastal and international friends with her story of "being born in a dugout." Bamberg's final pages provide an overview of her and her siblings' lives and their adult careers as well as a list of what terms such as "air conditioning" and "computator" meant in the 1890s. Of herself, she says in conclusion,

> And I have been a Jack of all trades and master of none. But always too busy to be bored.
>
> The New Century seemed as hazy and mysterious as the haze and mist along Smoky River and Smoky Hill. And as Smoky Hill answered loud and clear may the Century ahead call us all to go on and on and meet new challenges. Would anything or anyone ever be able to explain the mysterious future?[77]

Of course, her true goal is to explain the mysterious past, to convey to her heirs the knowledge of an earlier time that, on some level, she fears future generations will either forget or dismiss as primitive and irrelevant.

In 1910, nine years after leaving the claim, Dode Barnes suffered a fatal fall from a roof during a work-related accident in Hays. By then, Bamberg, aged twenty-three, was married to Albert E. Bamberg and living in Topeka, where the couple raised three children: Laverne, Jack, and

72. Ibid., 194–96, quotation on 196.
73. Ibid., 197.
74. Ibid., 194–98.
75. Ibid., 201–08, quotation on 204.
76. Ibid., 198.
77. Ibid., 209.

Rhea. A homemaker, like Jennie, Bamberg supplemented Albert's income as a postal worker through part-time work as a photographer, taking advertisement and portrait pictures in her house. Her descendants remember her as stern, strong-willed, and appreciating music but having no tolerance for dancing or drinking. These attitudes may have been the legacy of her strict Methodist upbringing, although as an adult, Bamberg seems not to have been an active churchgoer. Albert died of a heart attack in 1944. Shortly before her own death in July 1968, Bamberg moved into her son's home in Dearborn, Michigan. Her granddaughter Terry Mroczek speculates that the rushed ending of "My Home on the Smoky" is a result of Bamberg's knowledge of her terminal cancer and thus a hurried attempt to finish the memoir at the end of her life. Her and Albert's remains, along with those of their son, Jack, and daughter-in-law, Mildred, are interred at Mount Hope cemetery in Topeka.[78]

In *Settlers' Children: Growing Up on the Great Plains*, Elizabeth Hampsten writes, "Those who come after the first generation deeply want to praise and honor and memorialize their past. . . . On the other hand, memories of deprivations will not leave them, and when they look around, many see little more than ugliness. They speak and write as though they are sad and angry, wanting at the same time to be proud and progressive-minded."[79] We do not know if sadness and anger guided the writing of Bamberg's memoir—no obvious indication of either appears—but the tension between a proud present and an ugly past is clear and vivid. Child homesteaders who recorded their accounts as adults demonstrate a common thread, praising the experience and cherishing their memories but also "breezing through" the details of empty stomachs, smelly outhouses, and dirt floors with combinations of pride and embarrassment. Bamberg's "My Home on the Smoky," while closely following that formula, departs uniquely by providing honest and extraordinary detail, but always within a proud context of hardy pioneers such as her father improving nature's handiwork. During the decade following her death, U.S. bicentennial celebrations sparked an outpouring of similar narratives. "Being a pioneer" or a pioneer's descendant became marks of honor, yet, as with all memorialization, romantic denial obscures certain ironies. The 1970s also saw a vast farm crisis, with family-based agriculture on the decline and thousands more rural people like the Barneses leaving their ancestral homes to make awkward adjustments in an urbanizing nation.

The first generation of settler colonists carried within their own success the seeds of obsolescence. Mechanized agriculture eliminated the need for reciprocal labor. Paved roads and automobiles made it easier to bypass neighbors a mile away for those living at greater distances. The drive to provide "a better life for one's children" via formal education meant those children would as adults seek opportunities far from home, undermining the long-term viability of the community that had nurtured them. Meanwhile, the rise of labor-saving household devices, while welcome, replaced the homesteaders' values of work, thrift, and collective sacrifice with individualistic goals of leisure and self-fulfillment. As the Great Plains today faces serious challenges of depopulation, we might do well to ponder, as does Bamberg, the efforts of those who finished things for God and, in the process, consigned her home on the Smoky Hill River to the realms of memory and memoir. KH

78. Ibid., preface; and interviews with granddaughter Terry Mroczek, January 21, 2019, and grandson Jack Bamberg Jr., January 23, 2019.

79. Hampsten, *Settlers' Children*, 3–4, 193, 227–29, quotation on 240.