

CLOTHING OF KANSAS WOMEN
1854 - 1870

by

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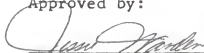
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INTRODUCTION AND PROCEDURE

Clothes have been an important part of women's lives from the time when Eve first adorned herself with leaves up to our current interest in disposable bathing suits. Today we are developing clothes that can be adapted to the environment of the moon and planets. The pioneer woman who came to Kansas when the territory opened in 1854 had a comparable problem of environmental adaptation. She was moving from a sophisticated Eastern or Southern society to a relatively primitive Western area of uncertain promise.

Clothing suitable for entertaining in a fashionable New York parlor was not appropriate for the simple social occasions of a one-room sod hut on the Kansas frontier. The pioneer woman had to adapt her clothing styles to fit both the rugged environment and the scant availability of materials. In spite of the scarcity of supplies she was able to make clothing that was appropriate for her strenuous life. As living conditions became more favorable the pioneer woman's clothing reflected the change by becoming more fashionable and feminine. The history of the settlement of Kansas may be outlined by studying the clothing of its early women settlers.

Previous studies of the Kansas pioneer woman have dealt with her life as a whole. Those investigations studied the personality of the pioneer woman and the living conditions in Kansas. Clothing was studied only incidentally as it applied to

other topics, but no one seems to have made it the major area of research.

This study deals with the clothing worn by the Kansas pioneer woman from 1854 until 1870. Types of clothing brought to Kansas and the changing styles of clothing that were obtained in Kansas were studied. By studying clothing worn by the pioneer woman it was possible to ascertain the type of life she led.

This study was made to show how clothing brought by the settlers from their former homes had to be adapted to conditions that existed on the Kansas prairie. Clothing peculiar to prairie life such as sunbonnets, calico, brogan shoes and flour sack clothing is discussed. Clothes worn for weddings, parties and other social events are included. Also it is shown how, as Kansas became more populated, styles of clothing changed.

Items pertaining to clothing in the collection of the Kansas State Historical Society Library were studied. Among those reviewed were the Kansas Historical Collections that contain reminiscences of Kansas women of the period. Many of the settlers published diaries and autobiographies that were inspected for information on clothing. Unpublished materials such as theses, collections from the Women's Kansas Day Club and personal remembrances were examined for information about clothing. Museum displays of clothing were scrutinized.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The territory of Kansas had a violent beginning in 1854 when both pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces attempted to settle the state. The history of the state and the background of the people who settled in Kansas gives one information on conditions in Kansas during territorial days.

There was little motivation to settle Kansas until slavery became an issue in the United States. Sandburg (20) found that after the territory of Kansas was organized on May 30, 1854, men with rifles from slave-soil Missouri rode over into Kansas to battle with abolitionists from New England for political control of Kansas. In 1856, on the Missouri and Kansas border, 200 men, women and children were shot, stabbed or burned to death in the fighting between free and slave state settlers and guerrillas. The money loss, in crops burned, cattle and horses stolen or killed, ran about \$2,000,000. Each side aimed to settle Kansas with voters for its cause. In May the town of Lawrence, Kansas, had been entered by riding and shooting men who burned the Free State Hotel, wrecked two printing offices and looted homes.

Billington (1) discovered that the pioneers who peopled America's frontiers differed from their stay-at-home neighbors in an exaggerated need for security or in an unusual urge for self-betterment. Those who craved security and acceptance were driven westward by a number of expelling forces: lack of

economic success, changing means of making a living in the homeland, catastrophes such as droughts or floods, overcrowding, an uncongenial social or political atmospheres, and just plain dislike of their neighbors.

Those with an unusual "abundancy motivation" were attracted to the frontiers by the hope of economic and social advancement, the quest for health, a desire for change, a thirst for adventure, and the mystical lure of the unknown, the call of the primitive, the dominance of the explorer impulse.

The frontier attracted the adventuresome and the ambitious, leaving the others behind. The most compelling attraction of the frontier was the hope of economic betterment, the feeling that "I ought to do better." Most sought wealth that their old homes had denied them. The West to the pioneer was wealth and affluence. But the West was more. There better health could be found in nature's fresh air. But above all, the frontier was a land of rebirth, of beginning again, of exuberant hope.

In every pioneer there was a touch of the gambler. Those who did not respond to the lure of the frontier were the contented, the cautious and the secure. Wealth and poverty were not the deciding factors; however, the cost of migrating kept the very poor at home, whereas many with fortunes responded to the lure of the West. Whatever their status in life, those who migrated were a breed different from their fellows who stayed

behind. Lands peopled by this selective process developed societies somewhat altered from those of the East from which the migrants came.

Of the frontiersmen who entered Kansas territory between 1854 and 1860, Billington (1) wrote that only 35 per cent remained five years later, only 36 per cent ten years later, and only 20 per cent at the end of twenty-five years. Whether they lived in the humid East where agricultural conditions were excellent, or in the semihumid West where farming was more hazardous seemed to make no difference in the length of their residence.

Isely (8) found a factor that encouraged the migration of free state settlers was the formation of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. The company sent agents to find good locations for towns and farms, to guide home-seekers to the new country and to seek sites for flour mills, saw mills and hotels for the convenience of the new settlers.

Howes (35) concluded that the ultimate goal of the society was to put a cordon of free states from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, and stop the forming of slave states. After that they intended to colonize the Northern border slave states and exterminate slavery. The duty of the Emigrant Aid Society was to drive out the runners, slickers, and knaves from the emigration business and to organize emigration to the West and bring it into a system. The first party of settlers sponsored

by the New England Emigrant Aid Company arrived in Lawrence, Kansas Territory, on July 31, 1854.

The society proposed to send out its settlers in companies under adequate leadership and with a cooperative program whereby each man and woman knew beforehand what to expect and what would be expected of them in the new settlements. It proposed to get cut rates on the existing railroad and steamboat lines for the movement of twenty thousand persons. The Emigrant Aid Society, with large eastern funds, sent out thousands of antislavery settlers and the Kansas legislature was strongly antislavery.

Nichols (12) pointed out that The New England Emigrant Aid Society was not the only northern organization drumming for settlers. The Kansas Emigrant Aid Society of Oberlin, Ohio, was active as was the German Kansas Settlement Society of Cincinnati. Two upstate New York corporations had come and gone, leaving a light residue of squatters. A combination of ague and unkept promises had defeated both the anti-liquor Vegetarian Kansas Emigrant Company and the anti-liquor Octagon Kansas Settlement Company.

Howes (36) also found that the South was no less diligent in seeking settlers for Kansas. Several societies were organized in Georgia and Alabama with branches in other states, which raised considerable sums and aided in the movement of southern settlers into Kansas. The Alabama colony sent almost as many

southern settlers as did the New England Emigrant Aid Society. The temperamental Kansas climate broke up the southern movement since these settlers from a warmer climate could not stand the cutting winds and the biting cold of the winters nor the high, hot dry winds of the summer season. The northern folks did not mind the cold so much and they became acclimated to the high winds.

Aid for the Kansas settlers came from various sources. The December 27, 1856, issue of the Lawrence, Kansas, Weekly Herald of Freedom (72) reported that the Vermont legislature had set aside twenty thousand dollars for the suffering poor in Kansas. The money was to be used to purchase food and clothing for such of the inhabitants of Kansas as may be in a suffering condition. In the same edition, S. Cabot, Jr., of Boston reported that over 280 packages of clothing had gone to Kansas from New England.

The Wichita Eagle (68) quoted a pioneer woman concerning her gratitude to the eastern charitable societies. She commented that they were wonderfully generous in their gifts and in some instances were greatly imposed upon. One woman sold her own quilts and accepted blankets from the aid society, while another used all food provided her by the society and saved her money to buy a sewing machine.

The pioneers from the East made the first part of their journey to Kansas by railroad. The railroad ended in Missouri

where the settlers then took a steamboat down the Missouri River and made the last part of their journey by covered wagon. Due to space limitations it took a great deal of planning to decide what and how much should be taken to Kansas. The family's belongings were brought in trunks, which in many instances were only crude boxes that fit into a wagon. This type of trunk had no lining or compartments, and was used for a tool storage box once the family was located.

Colt (2) recounted the preparations her family made for their trip to Kansas.

We are making every necessary preparation for our journey and our home in Kansas. I am very busy in repairing all our clothing, looking over bags of pieces, tearing off and reducing down, bringing everything into as small a compass as possible, so that we shall have no unnecessary baggage. Am making a good many carpet rags for some of my friends that I leave here in Stockholm. We have been to Potsdam, the distance of 14 miles, purchased clothing sufficient to last us two to three years. Have had two sewing bees; one for the old ladies, and one for the young - 'united pleasure with business' - my friends have visited me for the last time - also have helped me along with my sewing. (2 Colt, 22, 23)

Mrs. Colt, a member of the Vegetarian Company that settled in the Neosho River region, enumerated the contents of their wagon as eight trunks, one valise, three carpet bags, boxes of soda crackers, two hundred pounds of flour, one hundred pounds of corn meal, a few pounds of sugar, rice, dried apples, one washtub of little trees, utensils for cooking, two provision boxes and the occupants themselves. Considine (49) also found that it took much planning to arrange advantageously, in the

sail-covered wagons, trunks, boxes of bedding, carpet-bags, baskets, shawls, cloaks, umbrellas, and other supplies that could not be purchased inland, as well as provide room for the occupants.

Goodrich (29) described how they came to Kansas by covered wagon, camping out at night as most emigrants of the early days did. The wagon was arranged so they could sleep across the bed and over the effects which were stored below. Everything, with the exception of what was actually used on the trip, was shipped by rail and water to Westport Landing, Missouri.

The lonely existence of the pioneer women who endured the isolation with an adventurous spirit was described by Webb (25). The woman who said that she could always tell by sunup whether she would have company during the day is an example. If in the early morning she could detect a cloud of dust she knew that visitors were coming. The early conditions on the plains precluded the little luxuries that women love and are so necessary to them. There were no trees or shrubbery or flowers, little water, plenty of sand and high wind. The wind alone drove some to the verge of insanity and caused others to migrate in time to avert the tragedy.

The life of the farm woman who settled in Kansas was utterably lonely. The wind, the sand, the drought, the sun, and the boundless expanse of a horizon on which danced fantastic

images conjured up by the mirages, seemed to overwhelm the women with a sense of desolation, insecurity, and futility, which they did not feel when surrounded with hills and green trees.

Most Kansas pioneers lived on isolated farms and opportunities for entertainment were rare. Hager (61) pointed out that parties were not frequent on the prairies. Few cabins were, at first, large enough to serve as houses for entertainment. When, however, such a gathering was decided on, there need not be any fear of "regrets." The invited guests would all be there. They rode twenty miles on horseback, if necessary, to attend. The long journey was forgotten in the keen zest with which they would enjoy the hours. A frequent sight was the entire furniture of the host's house piled on the grass outside, so that room could be made for the dancers. In the low ceilinged upper chambers the children were put to bed. The "orchestra" was usually a single violinist, grinding out with the most profound solemnity the ancient dance melodies.

Sackett (19) wrote that during the last half of the nineteenth century the most common folk dance on the Kansas frontier was the square dance. Typically, a dance would be held in someone's barn; it drew young men and women for miles around, and they would dress for the occasion as near the height of fashion as frontier conditions and their ingenuity would allow. A caller and a fiddler were the essentials for holding a dance: if there were performers on other instruments among the local

talent they were warmly welcomed, but a fiddler sufficed. Callers were in more plentiful supply than musicians and musical instruments. Square-dance tunes were fast and lively - they kept the dancers moving - and also tended to be intricate since the fiddlers prided themselves on their ability to play difficult music.

The play party came into being because of the scarcity of musical instruments on the frontier and because many parents had a moral objection to dancing. It differed from the barn dance in three respects. In the first place, the play-party game was danced (or "played") to songs sung by the dancers themselves, whereas instruments provided music for the dance. It was proverbial on the frontier that "the fiddle was the devil's instrument," and when a fiddle joined in, girls who were dancing play-party games would stop short at the first note. Another difference between the play-party game and the dance was that the former was most commonly a round game and the dance was almost always a square dance. The third difference was that the play-party game employed a one-hand clasp as compared to the two-hand or waist clasp of the dance; however, again this was not invariable. There were girls on the frontier who would consent to dance only if a one-hand clasp was used; and there were a few play-party games in which the dancers utilized the two-hand clasp, or even the waist clasp.

CLOTHING OF KANSAS WOMEN 1854 - 1870

Usually the settlers that emigrated to Kansas brought with them an amount of clothing that they expected to last approximately two years. (Colt 2 and Roenigk 18) The primitive living conditions on the prairie soon reduced this clothing to rags. Clothing was replaced by using whatever materials were available. Because of lack of ready money and cloth, the settlers were forced to keep in mind that the clothes must suit the environment. On the new frontiers rich and poor lived, dressed and acted much more alike than people in the East. Most dressed in homespun clothes and travelers frequently complained that it was impossible to distinguish the well born from the lowly by the garments they wore. Billington (1)

Several innovations in dress were adopted by Kansas pioneer women. Bloomers were worn for ease in movement. Coarse homespun fabrics were inexpensive and often made in the home. Calico was an all-purpose fabric used for women's and children's clothes. Sunbonnets were worn religiously to keep one's complexion white.

Orpen (13) disclosed that on the plains the very first thing to do was to bring a woman into some sort of proper relationship to her surroundings when taking her out to Kansas. The most convenient way to do this was to get her into the reform dress, that is the so-called bloomer.

The bloomer was an innovation in dress that was adopted by many Kansas pioneer women. McClellan (10) described the bloomer dress as a skirt reaching to about half-way between the knees and ankles and not very full. Moderately full trousers were worn under the skirt and in fair weather came down to the ankle and were gathered in with an elastic band. The shoes or slippers were chosen to suit the occasion. For winter or wet weather the trousers would be fastened under the top of a boot reaching three or four inches above the ankle. The upper part of this costume was left to be determined by the individual fancy of the wearer. (Plate I)

The costume was devised by Mrs. Amelia Jenks Bloomer, editor of a temperance journal, who went about the United States in 1851-1852 giving lectures on woman's suffrage. By way of manifesting the independence of her sex she advised the women to adopt a part at least of the customary costume of men. This was her idea of a reform in woman's dress.

To be the first bloomer to enter a town or a village required a great deal of courage or a very obviously strong man as an escort. Adams (58) wrote that one of the first women to settle in Topeka, Mrs. Timothy McIntire of New Hampshire, wore a bloomer costume as did her little daughter, Bettie J. She was less handicapped in her work than were the other more conventional women.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE I

• The bloomer was a reform dress designed and introduced by Mrs. Amelia Jenks Bloomer. The costume featured a short dress worn with full trousers gathered in at the ankle. Shoes or boots were worn according to the weather.

PLATE I



Mrs. Colt (2) pointed out that while living in Kansas she wore the bloomer dresses and found them well suited to a wild life like hers. She could bound over the prairies like an antelope, and was not in so much danger of setting her clothes on fire, while cooking when the prairie winds blew.

Colt recounted her experiences in wearing the bloomer dress. ,

I should think the good people of this little town never saw a woman dressed in the short dress before; I seem to attract much notice when I go for water. I have heard words from a shop near by, that from their low tone I knew were not intended for my ear; say, 'Oh God, look at her!' I would say to myself, 'O, have I become the occasion for by-words among the people?'

One lady, in a friendly manner, has advised me to lay off my short dress while I remain here, as it is not fashionable. But fashion and show hold so small a place in my mind now, that to please a few fastidious ladies for the few days I may remain here, would not recompense me for the bondage I should submit myself to in wearing long dresses, when I can go so nimbly around in my short, loose, and easy dress, to bring water, pick up chips, bring in wood, milk, to get milk, cook in the kitchen, wait on the sick, etc., etc. I have found my present mode of dress so well adapted and serviceable in every way for the past three months, that I can well recommend it to all women who are called to labor or to walk, or who wish to ramble about for pleasure. Long dresses will do for afternoons, when all the work is done up, for drawing rooms, parlors and the inactive - but to energetic, active women who want to live for health, and the good they can do, I would say, don the 'Bloomer!' (2 Colt, 156-157)

Sears (21) related that as her family was preparing to leave for Kansas they learned that five other families were planning to make the same trip. A conference was arranged, and it was decided that all would start together. All the ladies

agreed to make and to wear bloomers instead of skirts. The ladies found the bloomers to be very comfortable and convenient for climbing in and out of the wagons and working about the camps. They never regretted the change in costume.

Wardrobe planning

Early day Kansans did not have many clothes because of the difficulty in obtaining materials and the time consuming hand sewing procedures. Also, the sod houses of most of the pioneers provided little storage area for clothing.

Orpen (13) reasoned that on the plains clothes as objects of beauty simply did not exist. One set of clothes was like every other set, just useful covering for the body, thick and warm in winters, as light as modestly permitted in summer, and nothing more. Summer garments out on the plains were of rough check, blue and grey, such as the plantation Negroes had in the South, very strong and very coarse. Household textiles like clothing materials were homespun. Sheets and towels were made of coarse brownish cotton-stuff that never was and never could become white.

Ream (54) pointed out that the pioneers had few clothes nor did they need many. About the best dresses women had were calico, but made with all sorts of ruffles and scallops and frills. Every woman had an abundance of very full, white petticoats that had to be starched stiff and ironed, and the

irons had to be heated on a hot stove, which was a very hard job on a summer day.

Plumb (39) observed that they were thankful that they did not have to take turns going to bed to have their clothes washed. The only dress she had which could possibly be worn away from home was a light calico. She wore it a whole winter as a Sunday dress and the dress she wore at home was practically a rag. The family that could raise wool and cotton and the woman who could card, spin and weave them was the lucky one and had more clothes.

Fabric used and produced in the pioneer homes

Many duties were included in women's work on the Kansas prairie. Fortunate women who owned the necessary equipment made and dyed fabric for their family's clothing. Rister (16) concluded that much of the time spent about the fireside by the mother and adult daughters was used for making clothing for the family. Many of those who migrated to the plains before or soon after the Civil War brought with them in their capacious wagons, cards, spinning wheels, check reels, warping bars, and looms, or else these articles were made soon after arriving. When once they were set up in the new home, the women industriously busied themselves in carding wool and cotton, spinning it into thread, and weaving thread into cloth which they made into clothing for the family.

Sometimes the thread was colored with dye made from native herbs, barks, and roots for the designers to fashion into

beautiful patterns of striped, checked, or plaid cloth. They also knitted socks and stockings, large and heavy in appearance, but comfortable enough in the winter months.

Lambky (53) wrote that sometimes materials were made in the home. One pioneer woman told of raising cotton which was picked as soon as it was ready for ginning, and carried on horseback to a hand gin about three miles away, where she ginned it herself. Then the mother carded and spun it on an old-fashioned spinning wheel. She also made all the stockings and kept the family in many kinds of clothing. Heavy cloth was made which was used for different purposes. This family also raised wool for yarn, but after one shearing a wolf ate the sheep. One shearing made enough yarn for stockings.

Ise (51) recounted that clothing was scarce. The family got wool and a spinning wheel from a neighbor and spun yarn "on the halves." With this yarn they made all the stockings and mittens. The father cut the boys' overalls and coats, for those who had coats, and the mother sewed. They never had knit underwear, but shimmies made of muslin which was sometimes colored with dyes made from walnut shells. These shimmies and dresses were all the girls had to wear, even in the winter. One suit each was all they had, and on Saturday nights they were put to bed early and the clothes were washed and hung up around the stove. The smaller children never had shoes even in the winter. In the winter they sat around the stove and when they wanted to

go out they would put on some old shoes that the older children could no longer wear; or if it was not too cold they would go out barefooted, play for a while and then come in and warm their feet.

After their clothes they brought from the East wore out, Valentine (40) recalled buying materials for new ones. Calico was the usual dress goods for women and small children, and it cost forty cents per yard, when cents were as hard to get as dollars were later. Heavy gingham came later and they were dress-up materials. These gingham were heavy, coarse and ugly. But the gingham never wore out and they served their purpose well down to the second and third members of the family, who finished them as shirts.

Kansas women often used thick homespun fabrics for the clothing they sewed for their families. Calico was the universal fabric for dresses for any occasion for both women and girls. In addition to dresses a pioneer woman made all the undergarments for the family and shirts and trousers for the men and boys. In some instances she even made shoes and hats. Stockings and mittens were knitted at home. The Kansas prairie was not a place for a woman who had no sewing ability or ingenuity in the use of available materials for clothing.

Wells (74) disclosed that on the plains and frontiers it was the custom for the wives of the pioneers to spin wool from the shaggy fur of the buffalo into yarn and then knit mittens

and socks from it for their menfolks. It was a little coarse and harsh, as compared with fine merino wool, but it was often all they had to do with, and it served the purpose. Women knitted mittens, socks and wristlets. The winters were cold and hands and wrists would freeze and chafe until they would bleed. Buffalo tallow was used to sooth and heal the broken skin.

Women crocheted beautiful lace, made rag rugs and carpets and sewed scraps of cloth into quilts. All the waste rags were saved to trade in the spring to a peddler for pins and needles.

Style and fashion

Some of the women from cultured homes in the East brought a good wardrobe with them. But, as Dick (4) explained, in a few years these dresses gave way to the customary garb of calico. It was the year-round fabric. Women took eggs and butter to the general store to exchange for this useful material. Pains were taken to beruffle the long, full skirts and trim them to look beautiful. The waists were high necked and long sleeved. Two of these calico dresses composed a woman's wardrobe for a year. Sometimes old chests brought from the East, were rummaged and old bedspreads, woven by some ancestor, were unearthed as a last resort and made into skirts.

Rister (16) told of the uncouth attire of the women. The split-bonnet somewhat resembled the forepart of a covered wagon. The shape of the body was often completely lost in the spacious

garments. Ten or more yards of cloth were used in making a dress, the body tight fitting or loose fitting as the styles dictated, and the skirt long and canopy like. From beneath the forepart of the skirt modestly peeked the brogan shoes. The roominess of the skirt was unduly accentuated by the four or five petticoats worn when they could be had. (Plate II)

Lambky (53) believed that although an attempt was made by the pioneer women who cared to adopt the prevailing mode of dress in the East, they usually surrendered to the style peculiarly suited to their environment. The early conditions on the plains precluded the little luxuries that women love and that are so necessary to them. Then, too, few women on the plains kept their complexions, for the winds and the sun parched the skin and gave the features of girlhood a distinctively prairie style which tended to lessen the interest in dress. Environment and necessity, therefore, aided in shaping the mode of dress generally adopted by the pioneer women.

Full petticoats

The long calico gown was the pioneer woman's uniform and to be correctly dressed she wore many petticoats under the full skirts. Most were made of muslin and the problem of keeping them white was a constant concern. Another type of petticoat was the expensive balmoral made from various colored strips of material.

Mickel (65) found that the white petticoats were four or five yards around the hem with tucks, embroidery and insertion

EXPLANATION OF PLATE II

The pioneer woman, gathering buffalo chips, is dressed in the typical split or slat bonnet and long-sleeved, high-necked calico dress. The little girl is wearing a similar type dress. This photograph shows the vastness and bareness of the prairie.

PLATE II



in the best ones. There were muslin and nainsook panties and corset covers with lace or ruffles and long-sleeved, floor length nightgowns.

Many tragedies occurred on the plains as a result of the unsettled conditions. Beach (26) related the story of a pioneer woman who was in a hunting party with her husband and another man. The party was ambushed by Indians while out on the prairie. The men were murdered and their bodies found, but the woman was never located. At the time of the hunting trip she was wearing a new balmoral underskirt, which had been given her by her mother, and which could be easily identified. She had torn strips from this and had dropped them at intervals. These were picked up by the trailers as far north as the Nebraska line. It was believed that the Indians finally separated into two or more small parties, and perhaps one of them returned to the Indian Territory. All efforts were unavailing, and no further trace of the missing woman was ever found.

Bonnets

Pioneers of the 1850's had racial prejudices although they were too busy with the work of establishing a home to go out and demonstrate. These hard working industrious people did not want anyone to associate them with the Indians whom they considered a murdering, shiftless and thieving race. The pioneer woman took precautions to keep her skin white so that she did not have the brown complexion of an Indian. To achieve

this she wore long-sleeved dresses and sunbonnets. The sunbonnet was a type of head covering indigenous to the plains. The pioneer woman wore it for protection from the wind and sun plus tried to make various styles which could be used for everyday wear and dress-up wear.

Reed (75) commented that sunbonnets were made of gingham or prints with a circular crown, dust ruffle and ties. A rectangular piece of material formed the brim.

The ruffle kept the hot sun off the back of the neck and dust from sifting down the back. The generous brim shaded the eyes when the wife took her turn in the driver's seat under the burning sun. Of course the ties kept her bonnet from blowing awry or away with the tumble weeds. To flatter the face the brim was sometimes edged with a narrow lace or embroidered ruffle.

Women of this period who led a more protected life wore the small "bibi" bonnet fashioned with a brim similar to that worn by the pioneer woman with a bavolet or curtain designed as a dust ruffle. The "fanchon" or kerchief bonnet, so named because of its resemblance to a diagonally folded handkerchief, was the prevailing style. These bonnets were made of velvet, satin, crepe, lace and straw, trimmed with ribbons, flowers and fruit encircled with gauze-tulle or blond lace and tied with broad ribbons under the chin.

Owen (38) told that the pioneer woman put on a sunbonnet every time she left the house. She wore it to the well to fetch a pail of water, to the garden for vegetables, to the neighbors' homes, to town and to church. Moreover, she saw to it that her daughters did not run bareheaded. Even her sons were often compelled to wear sunbonnets until they started to school.

Sunbonnets were the bane of tomboyish little girls summer days, particularly if they had a tendency to freckle. Parents made almost a religious rite of taking care of their children's complexions. They were reprimanded severely if they ventured out of the shade of the cottonwoods without sunbonnets tied securely under their chins.

Most women and little girls had at least three bonnets, one for everyday, one for second best and one for Sunday best. Often they were real creations of cambric and lace, an expression of the pioneer woman's longing for the beautiful. For second-best she wore a chambray of pink, blue or buff, lined with a contrasting color and quilted ornately. It was trimmed with ruffles and rick-rack, bedecked with perky bows and cold starched and ironed until it shone.

Women took great pride in laundering their sunbonnets. Dauby starch was a sign of slothfulness. A stiff, glossy sunbonnet was the highest pinnacle in the annals of the old sadiron.

There were the ugly slat bonnets and the teastraws which were worn for everyday and were quickly and easily made at home.

The slat bonnets were considered the homeliest pieces of millinery ever conceived. They were simply a square of calico with casing for pasteboard strips cut from a shoe box. They were no trouble to make or to launder and they did not flop in the wind as the starched sunbonnets did. For that reason they were almost universally worn for everyday by the women of Kansas. (Plate III)

The teastraws were liked for stiffening for several reasons. Chiefly, perhaps, because it was something of a novelty to get the wrapping which the grocer obligingly saved from the tea boxes that came from Japan. The teastraw bonnet usually was made up with Turkey red calico. Small girls liked the bonnets because of their bright color and because they did not "saw" their ears as the starched one did, but mainly for the reason it did not matter so much if they forgot and left them in the playhouse all night and dew fell on them.

The pioneer woman was never without her sunbonnet. It was a jaunty, frivolous and befrilled piece of millinery when she was a girl, and a severe black sateen with a long "tail" when she grew older, but through the years it has ever been her symbol.

Bonnets were not easy to get. Thus they were carefully protected. Adams (58) described how Mrs. Samuel E. Martin, who came to Topeka in 1856, was sitting in Constitution Hall during the summer listening to a sermon. She was dressed in her bridal

EXPLANATION OF PLATE III

The slat bonnets were made from a square of fabric with casings stitched in the brim. Pasteboard strips cut from a shoe box were put in the casings.

PLATE III



best, a pink and white silk bonnet, she noticed something fall into her lap. It was a blotch of tar. Spreading her handkerchief over it she leaned far enough back to prevent its falling on her bonnet, and sat this way through the service. Her husband teased her about sitting under the droppings of the sanctuary.

Innovations in acquisition of clothing

Many of the early settlers lived in one room sod houses under conditions of extreme poverty. The land was excellent for farming and raising animals, but the uncertainty of the weather was always a threat to the crops and livestock. During some of the winters there were periods of sub-freezing temperature and blizzard conditions while the summers often brought severe drought. It took all the resourcefulness of the pioneer housewife to provide for her family's needs. (Plate IV)

One pioneer related an account concerning the use of flour sacks in and after 1861, when aid was sent to the pioneers after the drought period of 1860. Lambky (53) recalled that W. F. M. Army was agent for the distribution of supplies for the colonists. Empty, finely woven manila sacks could be found in many communities marked W. F. Army, Agent. Later on, men and boys might be seen at any community gathering wearing pants and coats made from these sacks with "W. F. M.," for "Army" or "Agent" in sight, and if perchance a Kansas wind lifted a faded

EXPLANATION OF PLATE IV

Most pioneer families lived in one room sod houses. Newspapers were frequently put on the walls for insulation. Often the floors were dirt and the furnishings consisted of what the family had brought from the East plus prairie makeshifts. One of the most valuable and useful items of furniture was the spinning wheel. The woman is wearing the typical sunbonnet and calico dress.

PLATE IV



calico dress the impertinent eye would see "W. F. M. Army" staring at the landscape from a sheltering petticoat.

Quite often sheets, tablecloths, comfort tops and lining were made by sewing together six flour sacks. The use of flour sacks was unlimited and it took only the ingenuity of the pioneer housewife to adapt it to various needs.

Sammons (44) commented that one winter her mother told her and her sister that she was afraid they would have to stop school because they did not have enough clothes to keep warm. But when they came home from school the next night their mother had solved the problem. She had made petticoats out of an old quilt she decided she could spare. They were proud of their warm quilted petticoats and showed them to the other girls. On bitter cold mornings they donned their petticoats, and their father wrapped their feet in gunny sacks and they trudged off to school.

Brawner (42) described the bitterly cold winter of 1855 when Dale, the eldest child badly needed a new coat. Grandmother rose very early and began her weaving. By night she had woven enough cloth to make Dale a coat. When the evening meal was over, Grandmother cut out the cloth and began her sewing. Elizabeth the eldest daughter, sat by her and threaded her needles. The work was done by candlelight, and as the hours passed the candles burned out. Undismayed, Grandmother continued her sewing by the flickering flames of the logs in the

fireplace. Day was breaking when the coat was finished.

Moore (11) commented on how the winter of 1858-1859 found her family without shoes and with no prospect of getting them. Here her mother's ingenuity came into play. The men all wore boots and when the feet wore out they would throw them away. Her mother gathered up the old boots, ripped them, soaked them soft, and pounded them on a smooth surface. She then fitted every child with a last, which she made herself. She made pegs by sawing off rounds of an oak limb the length she wanted the pegs. There were no barefooted children that winter. These shoes were known on the prairie as brogans. The children's clothes were ill fitting, coarse and heavy. The houses were very poor and fuel was scarce. Even with heavy garments the people suffered terribly from the cold. (Plate V)

Laundry procedures

Among the many problems facing the pioneer woman was the difficulty she had keeping the family's clothing clean. Water was scarce and had to be saved until there was enough accumulated for a washing. The family who lived near enough to wash in a creek or river was fortunate. Soap and starch were both homemade.

Dick (4) discussed the problem the pioneers had in obtaining enough water for washing. The hard water succumbed to no devices for softening it. This water hardened and roughened the skin and left the clothes in bad condition. The pioneer

EXPLANATION OF PLATE V

Children's clothing was ill fitting and made from coarse homespun fabrics. Clothing was handed down from child to child until it wore out.

PLATE V



woman set about to supply herself with wash water by putting tubs, dishpans, and other available vessels under the eaves. The wind scattered these hither and yon; a little later the rain barrel, a well known institution, appeared at the corner of the house to catch the raindrops which dripped from the eaves and were carried to the barrel by means of a trough. This receptacle became the reservoir to draw on for any soft water needs. In time cisterns were dug.

Wash day brought its problems for the frontier woman. As one woman remarked, wash day meant Monday and Tuesday and should have been wash days. In the earliest times there was no bar soap. Soft soap and hot water were put into a keg and then the clothes were dumped into this mixture. The clothes were first vigorously prodded with a stick, and then taken out and laid on a block and pounded with a mallet. Great care was taken not to break any of the buttons with the mallet for buttons were too scarce and costly. They were made of pearl or bone, mostly bone.

When the clothes were sufficiently clean they were hung on bushes to dry. Washboards, boilers and machines were unheard of.

Frequently the women migrated to a little creek or branch on washday. The large ten gallon iron kettle and the clothes were taken to the bank of the stream and there, where wood and water were plentiful, the washing was done and the clothes hung on the brush and high grass along the bank to dry. When the

washing was over, the big kettle was turned upside down and left there and the dry clothes were taken to the house.

Colt (2) wrote about her experiences when washing her family's clothes.

Have been to the creek and done up our last months washing. Had the inconveniences of hard water, a scanty supply of soap, and only one pail to boil in. Expected our Secretary, who was to purchase necessary articles for the settlers, would not neglect to have a supply of one of the most necessary articles, soap. Starching and ironing will be dispensed with, for the want of what we have been in the habit of calling indispensable, flat irons. A rub through the hand is all my own and the children's clothes can have, and the same will be done for their papa's linen, though that is to be exchanged for their striped blue wear.

Have been washing today, and dried our clothes right out in the burning hot sun. We dare not leave them out in the dewy nights, for fear of the Indians, who come thieving round - slying about - taking everything they can lay their hands on; pieces of rope, cord, strings, twine, matches, and bits of paper, which are all valuable to us now, on account of their scarcity.

Have been saving a little water every day now, for some days, to get enough to wash with, or make a pretension. Truly we are in a land where there is neither soap nor water, so how can we keep clean? What would my mother say, if she should see the color of what we call our white clothes? I think she would say as one Bohemian said to another, when asked, 'Why, is not my shirt clean?' 'Well, yes - it's clean for brown - but it's awful dirty for white.' So it is with our white clothes, they are 'Awful dirty for white.' (2 Colt, 52, 136)

Chouteau (60) described how soap was made by filling a hopper with wood ashes, the accumulation of months, then adding water and later a very good grade of lye emerged at the bottom. This was later combined with months' accumulation of grease and the pioneer had his supply of soft soap.

No starch could be bought in the stores, therefore it was made at home by soaking wheat or bran in tubs for several days and then strained through clean straw. The mixture was returned to a tub to settle, as soon as the water was clear it was poured off and the white mass placed in the sun to dry and bleach.

Starch was also made of the dross that forms when potato water is allowed to stand. After boiling potatoes the water was drained off and set in a cool place. Within a few hours there would be a thick, starchy substance in the bottom of the vessel. Collars and cuffs were starched with this. It was not very thick, but made an excellent substitute for starch.

The clothes were seldom blued; if they were, commercial bluing was not used. Sometimes a piece of old blue calico was rinsed in the water and the clothes were run through the bluish solution.

Overcoming obstacles to fashion

The Kansas pioneer woman, due to her isolation on the prairie, did not have the opportunity to follow the latest fashions. Ebright (5) noted that although the pioneers did not have much time or money to spend on dress, the year 1858 saw skirts at their fullest. A hoop of steel wires, weighing a pound, held out the cloth, and some skirts measured eight yards around the bottom edge. (Plate VI)

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VI

The fashion of 1858 featured skirts approximately eight yards full worn over a hoop of steel wires.

PLATE VI



In the early days of Fort Scott, as well as other places, Lambky (53) related how opportunities for following the dictates of fashion were limited. Fashionable dressmakers or millinery establishments where ladies could have dresses and bonnets made in the latest styles were unknown. However, some of the ladies were not going to allow this obstacle to affect their efforts to be in style, and as the old fashioned merchants refused to import the new style of hoop-skirts, they improvised a skirt after their own ideas and methods. Some ran clothes lines into the cloth six to eight inches apart, and fashioned this makeshift into a skirt, after which they used enough starch to make them stand alone. However, some of the pioneer women did not stop at even this expedient. Grape vines were plentiful in the woods, so the girls in the country had an advantage over those in towns. A good straight vine would be chosen and they would sew three or four into the skirt. Such a device adequately answered the purpose of the latest style in crinoline.

This style of dress was not without its humorous incidents. At a country dance two country belles wore their grapevine skirts which stood out so much that the young men had to stoop over in order to shake hands with them. As they danced if the grapevine hoop would hit a gentleman's leg, he would suffer the danger of being knocked down.

One dry goods merchant informed his lady customers that seven yards was enough for a dress at which they would retort

that this amount might have been sufficient several years before, but that such an amount would never make a hoop skirt. The merchant would answer, in surprise, "Madam, I did not think of the late fashion you ladies have adopted in looping yourself in like a hogshead."

Hoops were in evidence in the towns but they were rarely seen in the country districts as the Kansas winds played havoc with them and they were soon discarded. Lambky (53) wrote of the problems of hoops. A pioneer woman wore a hoop skirt while battling with a fire line built against a possible prairie fire. She was quite proud of the skirt, but the dress was a hindrance to fighting fire, so she took it off and put it in a safe place, but, as it was dark, she could not find it when she started home. The next morning a pioneer found the blackened wires and thought that some unfortunate woman must have been caught in the fire, at which, the pioneer woman laughed and explained the situation.

Fashions from 1856

As the territory of Kansas became more densely populated and the railroads began to cross the plains the pioneer women had more opportunity to have stylish clothes. Towns were now being established and merchants were adding more than the bare necessities to their stocks. The fortunate pioneer families had survived their battle with the environment and the women were now more concerned with fashion.

Considine (40) reported that the following advertisement appeared in The Kansas Free State, Lawrence, March 17, 1856.

'Dress Making' Mrs. M. Legg, late of Rochester, N. Y. would respectfully inform the ladies of Lawrence and vicinity that she has permanently located in this city, and is prepared to do business in her line according to the latest and most approved styles. Having several years experience in Dress Making, she flatters herself she will be able to please the most fastidious. She will be happy to receive customers at her residence on New Hampshire Street.

P. S. Pantaloons, vests and shirts, also, made to order.

Several authors described the fashionable dress of the late 1860's for women of higher socio-economic levels. Carpenter (48) traced the styles of women's dresses in the 1860's, during the period when westward expansion was in full swing. Dresses were tight in the bodice and full in the skirt. Shoulder lines were broader than in the 1840's and sleeves were cut extremely broad. Skirts were cut with almost the same fullness at the hem, plaited or gathered into a waistband and distended by the hoop skirt worn beneath. Moire silks, crisp taffetas, fine smooth wool materials as well as cambrics, muslins and calicos were favorite fabrics for the bouffant gowns. (Plate VII)

Schirkofsky (55) described a high style dress of the later 1860's as fashioned of black Scotch cotton broadcloth, with a tight neck, long fitted sleeves, tight skirt and a bustle. The weskit of sheer material was heavily beaded with cut jet beads and had a double row of fasteners down the front covered with cross stitching to hide the crude hooks and eyes. The hat

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VII

Fashionable dresses of the 1860's had broad shoulder lines, full sleeves and skirts plaited or gathered into a waistband. The full skirts were worn over a hoop.

PLATE VII



was a small bonnet, trimmed with a turquoise feather and tied under the chin with a big bow. High topped black buttoned shoes were worn with this costume, as well as a black alpaca cape lined with crepe de chine.

Silk was the general favorite of the period and no fashionable wardrobe was complete without at least one silk dress. This was the day when women had their "best clothes." The silk dress was always in this class and worn for church, visiting, and other dress up occasions. As only the most fortunate could afford the latest in fashion, many a housewife ripped and re-made her black silk over and over. (Plate VIII)

Laces and frills were used as dresses were flounced and furbelowed. Embroidery was used on all occasions. Decorative buttons, buckles, belts and jewelry came into importance at this stage. The jewelry of the period included brooches, earrings and bracelets. Locketts were worn, usually carrying a picture of a loved one. Brooches were generally worn at the neck, and for evening a band of black velvet encircled the throat. Key-wind watches were worn around the neck.

Hats of silk or straw were small and of the bonnet type and tied under the chin with ribbons. They were trimmed in ribbons, plaiting and feathers.

Shoes, generally limited to black, white or tan colors, were of the high top type which buttoned up the front or side with very high heels. The year 1865 marked the change in shoes.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE VIII

Fashionable wardrobes had at least one black silk dress which was worn for church, visiting and other dress-up occasions. Accessories which were popular included contrasting belts and brooches worn at the neck.

PLATE VIII



They were now made entirely of kid or patent leather and frequently the two were combined. Lacing was over the instep, the heels were high and gradually became higher. During this time shoes were made specifically for the right and left feet.

In the 1860's the hair was combed backward into a loose mass on the nape of the neck and held in place by a hairnet. The beauty advice of the time was more of a lecture on health and modest behavior. For bright eyes the remedy was to splash the neck, chest, back and face with cold water. Rosy cheeks were acquired by rubbing beet juice, red tissue paper or red flannel on one's face.

Capes and shawls were most often worn for wraps. During the winter plush capes were worn. A large hook and eye fastened the cape at the neck with a collar which could be turned up or down and the elegant lady carried a muff. A large gray shawl trimmed with fringe was the usual winter wrap for the less fortunate. (Plates IX and X)

Well dressed ladies of this day always had their hands covered. They wore mitts, a kind of glove without fingers just covering the hands to the first joint of the fingers and a separate thumb sheath to the joint of the thumb. They were made of silk. A pair of knitted mittens, and a pair of black kid gloves completed her glove wardrobe.

Improved living conditions were now very evident in Kansas in the 1860's. There were more fabrics available for

EXPLANATION OF PLATE IX

Capes worn in the winter had a collar which could be turned up. This lady is substituting a muff for the usual knitted mittens. During the 1860's hats were small and of the bonnet type and tied under the chin with ribbons. They were trimmed in ribbons, plaiting and feathers.

PLATE IX



EXPLANATION OF PLATE X

The two women on the left are wearing shawls
trimmed with fringe which was the usual wrap for winter.

PLATE X



clothing and dressmakers had establishments in many of the towns. In addition to the refinement in the types of clothing worn by some of the pioneer women there was an improvement in housing. Sod houses were placed with more permanent structures of wood or stone. Where formerly furniture had been made of boxes and rugs of buffalo hides, the settlers now had marble top tables and braided rugs. (Plate XI)

Not all women could afford fashionable clothes and sometimes they had to be used for purposes other than that originally intended. While no Civil War battles were actually fought in Kansas many Kansas men were in the Union Army and the families in Kansas experienced a scarcity of certain items. Doran (28) described how the lives of the pioneer families were especially hard during the war. There was little or no money, and while food was abundant, clothing and boots and shoes were very expensive. Biegert (46) also wrote that when the Civil War came all materials that could be spared were torn into bandages or made into underwear for the soldiers, and what was left into underwear or clothes for those at home.

Jones (52) related that after the Civil War dress material cost a great deal. With money so scarce dresses were made over for the girls. There were few occasions to wear their lovely dresses so it seemed practical to use the material in them for dresses for the children.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XI

Housing was improving in the late 1860's. Wood and stone structures replaced the sod houses. Furnishings were more refined, but the spinning wheel was still an important item in the home. Women's clothing had replaced calico fabrics with moire silks, crisp taffetas, fine smooth wool, cambrics and muslin.

PLATE XI



The hoop skirt and crinoline continued to be worn well toward the 1870's, but fashion in skirt designs changed. It was about this time that skirts were cut in gores. Approval for this measure was based on the economy factor. The sixteen or seventeen yards of material necessary for a correct gown before now were reduced to ten or twelve. They were lined with horsehair or over horsehair petticoats for extension was still desired even after the steel hoop had lost its popularity.

Clothing for special occasions

Although there were few times during the early days in Kansas when one needed dress-up clothes, occasions such as church services, national holidays and even parties did arise. Clothing for these special occasions was usually a mixture of what was on hand plus what could be obtained.

Robinson (17) described the strange, motley group attending the funeral of a man who had been killed by border ruffians.

There were hats of satin and velvet, with plumes, and Paris flowers with dresses of rich material, and costly furs. There were brides of a few months, just arrived in this western home, and city belles come out for a winter's sojourn where the artificial has wholly given place to simplicity and nature. There were some with log-cabin bonnets of black silk, or cotton velvet, and dress of plain coarse stuff, giving to the wearer an odd, strange look. There were others whose apparel is the safer medium between the two, which ever bespeaks the taste and intelligence of the wearer.
(17 Robinson, 185)

Dick (4) described a New Year's ball at Lecompton in 1857 given by the United States officers on the prairie. The ladies

all wore mackinaw shawls and overshoes and at the end of every cotillion ran to the fire to warm their noses. The supper was served in a tent. In the morning holes were cut in the ice of the Kaw River so that the ladies could wash their faces.

The dances were varied occasionally. There was the so-called calico ball. As a matter of fact a calico dress and a sunbonnet was the proper dress for any occasion on the prairie. At a calico ball, the lady made a calico dress and a necktie to match it. The men were given a bunch of neckties and asked to choose one without seeing the lady whose dress it matched. In this way the partners were selected. This same method of selecting partners was often used in church festivals and other social occasions.

The Story of The Early Life Of Fort Hays and of Hays City (45) related that despite the fact Hays City as a frontier town was more interested in progress than in culture, the substantial sector of the population had come from homes of refinement and it was not long before dramatic clubs, literary societies, church groups, and political parties were lively in activity. There were tent shows, circuses and as long as Fort Hays was there, there was no end of entertainment at the Fort to which townspeople were invited as guests.

There were buffalo hunts for the officers and men of Hays and there were soirees galore where the women were veritable fashion plates in gowns of velvet and stiff taffeta, with loops

and bows, beads and ornaments which must have taken weeks in the making. (Plate XII)

The Fourth of July was always a festive occasion, and Becker (41) related that most of the girls had new dresses or at least new hair ribbons. One girl had spent a good deal of time making a new dress, and it was pretty - all ruffles and flounces. She starched it carefully, but it did not stick out far enough to suit her. Then somebody told her to try sugar water, for it made fabric very stiff. She did and the effect was ravishing. Never did a dress stick out like this one did.

She went to the picnic proudly, but the day was hot and she perspired quite a bit. As usual there were many flies around. They loved her sugar-water dress and swarmed around her until finally she became so embarrassed that she had to go home. A sadder and a wiser girl.

Robinson (17) described the Fourth of July celebration in Topeka in 1855. Some half a dozen military companies in handsome uniforms paraded about. Ladies promenaded with little banners flying from their parasols.

Rath (15) recalled that the bright spots of her life were the shopping trips to Kansas City and Topeka, the inaugural balls at Topeka, the officers' parties at Fort Dodge, and the concerts and parties among the pioneer families. She remembered that among her favorite party dresses was a cream brocaded silk, frothy with cream lace. (Plate XIII)

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XII

These Hays belles are wearing stiff taffeta dresses trimmed with lace and ruffling. The elaborate hair arrangement is not typical. The hair was usually combed backward into a loose mass on the nape of the neck and held in place with a hair net.

PLATE XII



EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIII

This elaborate dress is made of brocade with lace trimming. A brooch is worn at the neck. The shoes are a combination of kid and patent leather. The parasol protected one from sun and rain.

PLATE XIII



Parties were not the only type of entertainment on the prairie. Chouteau (60) commented that in the winter time the few persons who skated did so on home-made skates, composed of strips of iron and straps. Home-made caps kept their ears warm. When a pair of trousers wore out the legs were cut up into caps, which were lined with fur.

Bridal clothes. Swender (56) recalled that weddings made a good excuse for a "turn-out." The next day was the "in-fair" at the groom's old home and a few days later the shiveree (charivari.) All the neighbors would come to the wedding and there would be a big dinner. No licenses were required in those days and in a letter from a preacher's wife she told of her husband meeting a couple that wanted to be made man and wife. He performed the ceremony then and there in the road and then wrote out their wedding certificate on a piece of paper.

Gowing (30) reported the accounts of couples married at the Delaware Baptist Mission near Edwardsville during 1860. The weddings varied from one where the bride dressed in white muslin with a veil trimmed with orange blossoms to a couple who rode eight miles to the mission to be married. This bride wore a homespun woolen dress, blue checked apron and the usual slat bonnet which she did not remove.

Isely (7) described her marriage on May 31, 1861.

I wore a wool and silk dress with black and wine-colored checks trimmed with a lace collar. The skirt was worn over hoops which were the fashion then as decreed by 'Godey's Lady's Book.' My bonnet was of white leghorn faced with ruching. It had a bow at the crown, flowers on either side, and wide plaid ribbons which were tied in a bow under my chin. I wore no gloves and carried no flowers. (7 Isely, 112) (Plate XIV)

A wedding dress of pink cashmere made basque style with staves in the waist, leg of mutton sleeves, and a wide lace ruffle around the neck tied with a lace bow was described by Graves (50). The skirt was not very full with a small ruffle on the bottom skirt, which did not touch the floor.

Rockwell (69) described her wedding in Junction City on September 29, 1870. The bride's sister had brought her textiles from Indianapolis, from which the bride made most of her trousseau. For her wedding she wore a gray traveling dress. She changed to a plaid dress for the going away, and wore the groom's gift, a set of Tiffany jewelry. (Plate XV)

The daughter of the Tucker family who settled near Eureka married the teacher of the one room school she attended. The Kansas City Star (64) quoted her description of the wedding preparations.

Mother and father drove forty miles to get me some things and mother chose my wedding dress. It was brown. We thought of wear, not fashion then. Mother made it herself. She never asked me what I wanted. I was taught not to care what I wore so long as it was serviceable. But I was very proud of one thing. Mother made us all, boys and girls, hats from wheat straw. She bleached and braided the straw and father made her a block. My hat was trimmed with a piece of ribbon that my aunt had sent out and it was my pride. I do not remember how many seasons we wore those hats.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIV

A bridal portrait made in 1861 shows the bride in a wool and silk dress with black and wine colored checks trimmed with a lace collar. The full skirt was worn over hoops.

PLATE XIV



EXPLANATION OF PLATE XV

A typical bridal portrait shows the serviceable type gown which was worn by most brides. Earrings are the bride's only jewelry.

PLATE XV



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The early settlers arrived in Kansas with clothing that was appropriate in their former homes, but they soon realized that conditions on the prairie would require a different type of dress. The housing, vagarities of the weather and primitive washing conditions either proved their clothing unsuitable for the environment or ruined by the hard water and homemade soap. Women and girls found the bloomer costume, calico dresses and sunbonnets were the clothing styles most adaptable for prairie living.

Homespun fabrics and calico were generally the materials used when the pioneers replaced their clothing. The ingenuity of the settlers resulted in knitting yarn being made from buffalo hair, children's shoes from worn-out adult boots, petticoats made from quilts, hats from wheat straw and many other available resources used for clothing.

As Kansas became more populated it was no longer essential that the pioneer family be entirely self-sufficient in providing their own clothing and household textiles. Merchants' stocks were enlarged enabling women to obtain fabrics and trimmings for more fashionable clothes. Families lived closer together or even in towns, and there were more opportunities for special events where the type of clothing one wore was important. Previous to this time the importance of clothing was only to cover one's body for modesty and protection. One was judged by

his actions rather than his appearance. As long as one was hardworking, dependable and a God fearing person he was respected by his peers.

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CLOTHING OF KANSAS WOMEN
1854 - 1870

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of
Clothing, Textiles and Interior Design

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This study showed how clothing brought by the settlers from their former homes had to be adapted to conditions that existed on the Kansas prairie. Clothing peculiar to prairie life such as the bloomer costume, sunbonnets, calico, brogan shoes and flour sack clothing were studied.

A study was made of items in the collection of the Kansas State Historical Society Library. Among the items reviewed were the Kansas Historical Collections, settlers' diaries and autobiographies, and unpublished materials such as theses, collections from the women's Kansas Day Club and personal remembrances. Museum displays of clothing were studied.

Clothing worn by early day Kansas settlers was chosen with regard to the environment and materials that were available. Fashion and style were soon forgotten on the prairie. The prime interest was not in one's appearance but in establishing a home and providing for one's family.

As Kansas became more populated it was no longer essential that the pioneer family be entirely self-sufficient in acquiring clothing. Merchants' stocks of fabrics and trimmings were enlarged and there were more opportunities for special events where the type of clothing one wore was important. Previous to this time the importance of clothing was only to cover one's body for modesty and protection.