



Buffalo Tales



Volume 7, No. 8

Buffalo County Historical Society

September 1984

LETTERS OF SALLY COFFMAN TO HER DAUGHTER MARILLA, 1877, 1879, 1880

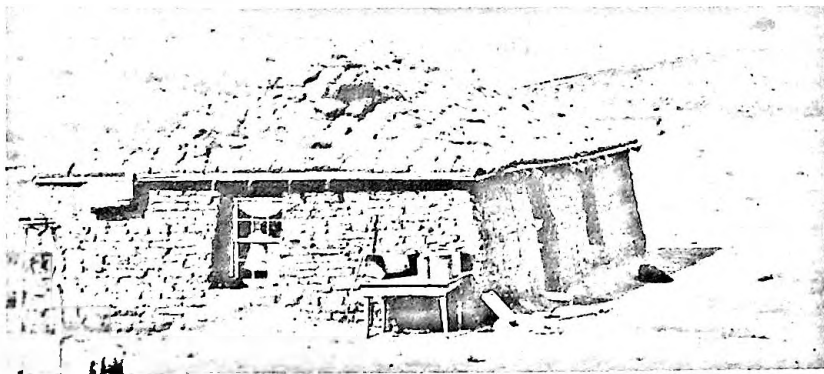
Introduction

Sally Coffman was the wife of Henry Coffman who homesteaded in Buffalo County on the W $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 14 in Grant Township. There were two sons, James H., who married Rena Hollenbeck, George W., who married Lillie A. Hunt, and a daughter Marilla J., who was married to William Wilbur Grant.

Bassett's *History of Buffalo County*, Vol. I, lists William Grant, G. W. Coffman, H. Coffman, J. H. Coffman and Rena Hollenbeck among the settlers who arrived in Buffalo County in 1874. Lillie A. Hunt was the daughter of Miles B. Hunt, who came in 1873. Rena Hollenbeck taught in the Huntsville school before her marriage to James Coffman in 1875.

From the letters of Sally Coffman it appears that Marilla and William Grant moved to Illinois in the summer of 1877 with their baby Warren Albert. It was when Warren Albert Grant sought a delayed birth registration of his birth in Buffalo County on September 18, 1876 that these letters of Sally to her daughter Marilla were used as evidence of Warren's birth date. Copies were recently sent to the Buffalo County Historical Society for their archives.

The letters of Sally Coffman give a vivid picture of the hardship and struggle of the early settlers as they sought to make a home in the new and unsettled land along the Wood River in Grant Township. All of the Coffmans eventually moved to Washington Territory and lived in what is now Pierce County, Washington. Their neighbors, the Hunts and the Koughs, also left Buffalo County and settled in Washington.



An early sod house north of Kearney.

A. T. Anderson Collection

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Buffalo Tales is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Gene E. Hamaker Editor
Alice Howell Circulation
Telephone 237-7858

Membership in the Buffalo County Historical Society is open to anyone who has an interest in Buffalo County and its people, or in the history of the area.

Annual dues, payable January 1:
Family membership\$ 7.50
Individual membership ... 5.00
Institutional membership . 10.00
Sustaining membership ... 25.00 +
Life membership 100.00

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WITH THE SOCIETY

Bus Tour September 29. The Buffalo County Historical Society is sponsoring a bus tour to the Plainsman Museum at Aurora and the Neligh Mills and Antelope County Historical Museum at Neligh on Saturday, September 29. Cost of the tour is \$15.00 for members, \$20.00 for non-members, and reservations will be made on a first come, first served basis. The bus will leave the city parking lot at 21st Street and Avenue A in Kearney at 7:30 a.m., and will pick up at Gibbon and Shelton. We will have lunch in Neligh (cost not included in the tour cost).

Send your reservation and check as soon as possible to the Buffalo County Historical Society, Box 523, Kearney, NE 68847.

Tales of Buffalo County, Volume II, has just been published by the Buffalo County Historical Society. This book includes the stories and articles printed in Buffalo Tales during 1981, 1982 and 1983. Its 156 pages include 30 stories and 87 photos relating to the history of the area. Authors are present and former residents of Buffalo County.

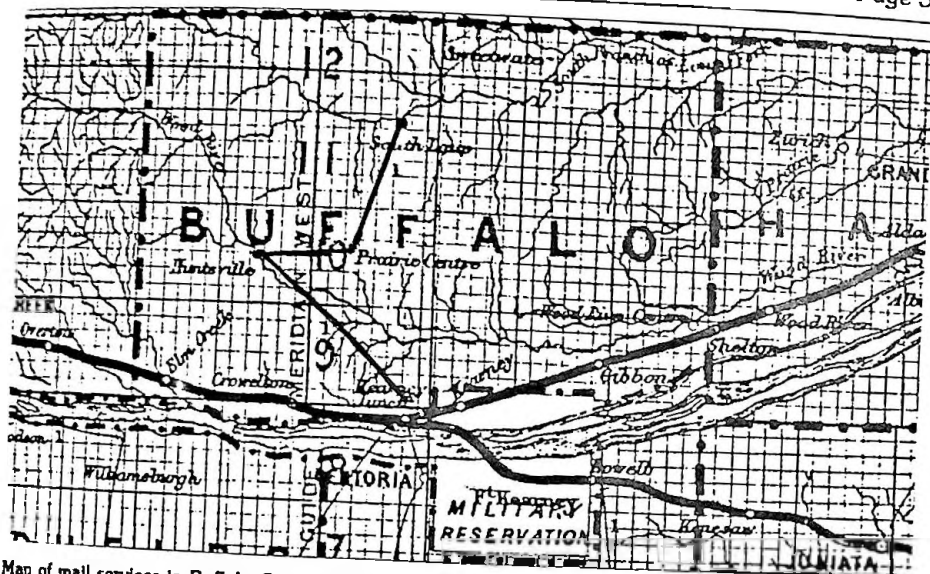
This book can be purchased at the Trails and Rails Museum. Cost is \$5.95 plus tax (plus a 75¢ postage and handling fee if mailed). It is an appropriate gift item for anyone interested in Buffalo County's history and its people.

Volume I of Tales of Buffalo County, which contains the stories published from 1978 through 1980 is also available at the museum for \$4.95 plus tax and mailing charges.

Keep these books in mind for holiday giving.

NEW MEMBERS

Greg KnappKearney DeGolyer Library, SMU . . . Dallas, TX
Mr. & Mrs. Chas. NorrisKearney



Map of mail services in Buffalo County, February 1875, showing once a week mail from Kearney Junction to Huntsville, to Prairie Center to South Loup (present Pleasanton).

Marilla, Dear good girl:

Huntsville, August 26, 1877

We received your welcome letter the 17th. Warren was 11 months old that day and my pretty playful baby was sick, and is now perhaps. It is not as healthy there as here. The journey was too hard for the little darling. Take good care of him and yourself too. You would be so lonesome without him.

I hope you are all well now and happy. Your father and I were most sick for several days, the same as we were a year ago but not so bad. He is well now but I am not as well as usual. I keep around and do the work with Mr. Conn's help. They have been making hay the past week. Have put up 14 large loads for us, got it up without any rain on it after it was cut. We had 15 large loads of wheat. When it is thrashed will tell you how many bushels. No hoppers yet. We have had several showers since you were here. Everything looks well. The cabbage is heading well now. Conn has mastered the worms. Plenty cucumbers and good sour pickles and tomatoes and all the sweet corn we want, and have dried two boilings and have been feeding it to the pigs more than two weeks. And we boil potatoes for the pigs, near a bushel per day, so we don't buy corn for them now.

Mrs. Brown's health is very poor, some of the time she is sick in bed. They hired Bunnel's oldest girl to teach this school. She can get no place to board, wants us to board her. I would if I was able to do the work rather than stay alone. We kept Maggie 3 weeks. Conn did not like her, told Pop he would help me more than she did and it would not cost him anything. Mrs. Mudge wanted her. Their baby was very bad with the whooping cough. They had to be up with it nights for several weeks, it is better now. Mag went there so I have been alone since. Mrs. White's family have got into Idaho, have stopped at a ranch, dare not go on now on account of Indians. They were all well and the boys had got work. I will send you George's and James' letters to read

and you can send them back when you write to me, which I hope you will do soon for I want to hear how my poor baby is. If he had stayed here he would be dancing and laughing so one could hear him ten rods. That is my opinion.

George's P.O. is Steilacoom, Pierce Co., W.T. (Washington Territory). We have not heard from Allamakee since you left here. Write, I want to hear if you have got your goods all right or not. Some have had thrashing done. Their wheat turns out 19 bushels to the acre, good plump wheat makes good flour. Plenty of everything in Nebraska that farmers can raise. I presume as much or more fruit in this state than in Illinois. Grant will have to chop a great many cords of wood to get money enough to buy eighty acres of land there and the land no better there than it is here. It is not as healthy there as here, so what has gained by leaving his homestead and all that he had done on it, but that is none of my business, is it? I want Grant to review the last seven years as far as the Coffmans are concerned, his talk about them and all the way they have done by him, and see if he has done as he would wish to be done by.

You see I cannot write very well. You write if I do not. I will write as often as I can. So goodbye for this time. That God will bless and prosper you is your mother's prayer always.

Sally Coffman

Marilla J. Grant

Stanley, Dec. 17th, A.D. 1879

Marilla, Dear Girl:

We got the letter you wrote the 5th of Oct. in a few days after you wrote it. Glad as we always are to hear from you, if you could come home and stay with us this winter how glad I should be. We live alone and expect to all winter. George cuts the wood and brings it in when it is bad weather. I help him all I can. He has 2 stoves to get wood for now and it takes all day to get one load. Have to go farther and it is not as plenty. More folks here than used to be. We should have had corn for fuel if the hail had not destroyed it. The storm come from the northwest and kept that course as far as I know. The corn on James' was not hurt much and half a mile south of his it was cut down almost to the ground.

We had 20 bushels of wheat besides what was raised this year that is ground for bread. The other will do for seed. We have twelve dollars and a half money. That is all. We owe two years tax. Have wrote to Jep to sell that Forty for what he can get and stop paying taxes on that, and Bush will sell them lots if he can. We hope to get something for them to help us through the winter. Charley Wandell took two of our hogs to fatten. We have half. We are wintering two. Our cow gives a quart of milk a day. I make butter—what we need.

Delbert lives 6 or 7 miles from here with his wife's mother and step-father. I hear they have everything nice. Dell will be Pa before spring, but his money is going and he has no feed yet. Mrs. Thompson has another boy, weighed eleven pounds, all well.

Lillie wrote to her folks for some money. Forest and Emmel sent her five dollars apiece. She has not got her quilt quilted yet and won't very soon unless they hire it done. She got mad because I cleaned up the dish cloths, said I did it to impose upon her. I did my best to help them. The baby is here every day, stays 3 or 4 hours and plays. We take lots of comfort with him. He talks some, I can understand most all he says. Mira Kough has a girl baby born 9th of Oct.

It has been cold since the 6th of this month, not much snow but real cold most of the time. I have to make every fire. Your father can't do anything, I have to wait on him. He is not sick, his appetite is pretty good for one that don't exercise any more than he does.

We made a bee and got our house sodded up, part of it to the roof. Could not get it all done then, but will if it gets warm enough to lay the sod. It is much better than it was before. Has Grant got home? How is little Warren? I dream of him every night lately, am afraid he is sick. Three years and 3 months old. Sweet, dear baby. Take good care of him. This cold weather don't let him get hurt.

I hope you are well and enjoying life as one of your age ought to. Write and tell me all about it. What is Grant going to do next year. Have you a cow? I think you have heard from Mary or I would send you her last letter. Please write soon, not be slow like your Mother if you can help it. I am not as lame as I was, I can work more, but have to be careful.

Farewell. God bless and protect you is your Mother's Prayer.

Sally Coffman

Marilla J. Grant

Stanley, July 26th, 1880

Dear Girl:

I received your very welcome letter a week ago. I had began my washing, a large one. I had been near sick three weeks with a bowel complaint and fever. Am not well yet, feel weak and tired all the time. Was three days washing, 2 days churning, ironing and baking and repairing to do. So you see I have just sat down to write on this poor paper, and so many flies.

Your father is well, only more helpless. George and his family are well. Delbert's baby is dead. It was buried a week ago today. Cholera Infantum caused its death. It was near 6 months old. Mrs. Clark has a girl baby 8 weeks old. Mrs. Seaman has a girl 7 weeks old. Mrs. Majors has her 3rd boy, 6 or 7 weeks old. Lots of babies, and folks too. There is from 25 to 30 scholars in school this term.

We had a dry winter, very little snow, a great many windy days, and so little rain all the spring until June. Seed laid in the ground and did not sprout. Garden seeds planted early and nothing came, in June a few come up but there is no gardens and no potatoes now and I think there will be but few if any raised this year in this part of the state. The 3rd of this month there was a heavy storm. It blew away our little house and tore it to pieces and broke some of the boards, and broke my ash tree that Grant set out, took the roof off from several houses. I think the wind blew the hardest I ever heard it. Wood River was so high they had to tie the bridge to keep it. There is quite a large nice house built south of the schoolhouse, another one on the other side of the river on that level pretty ground. The families living there are sending their children to school—smart and well off.

The Koughs have all gone, everyone. They started near the last of May for W. T. Mag was married two weeks before they left to Franklin Crawford. He is near her own age, how smart I don't know. Mag's man has no property. They were going through with a span of mules and John had two yearling colts. I don't know how much money. They expected to be 4 months on the road. We have not heard from James since March. Your father or George has not sold yet. The man that talked of buying their

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land last spring bought R.R. land east of here. The season not good—no buyers. Our cow come in 13th of May. I fed the calf until it was 7 weeks old, sold him for 5 dollars cash. I have sold 3 dollars worth of butter, have some on hand now, it is cheap now.

Marilla, dear girl, I am sorry you have got to suffer so much again. Take care of yourself, do not work too hard, and don't worry. Do not drink cold water. I think drinking cold water when her child was young killed Del's wife. Now he is alone and very lonesome. Take good care of my little Warren. I expect he is most a man, helping his Mother pick up chips as his Mother used to for me. Tell him his grandma in Neb. loves him. I see him, the sweet ten months old baby. Three years tomorrow since I saw him and his mother. Cruel separation, long dreary years. This is the 27th. Do you know anything about your Aunt Marilla. I wrote to her in March, have not heard from any of them.

Write please, do not wait for me. Goodbye, God protect you.

Your Mother.

Marilla J. Grant

FROM THE MUSEUM

At the Fair

Museum activity moved temporarily to the Buffalo County fairgrounds at county fair time in August. Our display of pictures of schoolhouses in Buffalo County attracted considerable attention from fair-goers of all ages. Especially encouraging was the number of Buffalo County residents who stopped to visit who are not members of the Buffalo County Historical Society but who were interested in the display.

Our collection includes pictures of schoolhouses in about 76 of the 120 districts in Buffalo County. With information given to us at the fair, we should be able to locate pictures of buildings from several more districts. We were also able to identify many children in the pictures, thanks to our visitors at the fair.

Donation

Additional depot furnishings are being donated by Murel Hensley of Holdrege. Mr. Hensley is a retired depot agent from the Loup City-Ord area. He is donating a safe, wardrobe, waiting room bench, Union Pacific sign, various other signs, form holders and other miscellaneous items used to furnish Union Pacific depots.

End of Tourist Season

Another successful tourist season is drawing to a close at Trails and Rails Museum. After September 14, the museum will be open by appointment only. Call 234-3041 if you wish to visit the museum.