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Article Title: A Nebraska High School Teacher in the 1890's: The Letters of Sadie B Smith

Full Citation: Rosalie Trail Fuller, "A Nebraska High School Teacher in the 1890's: The Letters of Sadie B Smith," *Nebraska History* 58 (1977): 447-473.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1977SBSmith.pdf>

Date: 5/19/2015

Article Summary: Sadie B Smith's letters to her future husband, Rollin A Trail, cover seventeen years from 1889-1906. The letters presented in this article cover the years 1896 to 1899, during which time she was a high school teacher in North Bend, Nebraska. [Later letters were published in *Nebraska History*, 1979]

#### Cataloging Information:

Names: Sadie B Smith, Rollin A Trail, Sadie Smith Trail, Jerry Atwater, Oren Sylvester Smith, Sarah Frances Thompson Smith, James Lewis, Jane Anne Lewis, Lillian Trail, Rollin Trail, J S Trail, Marge Grewell, Belle Atwater, Hester Ada Smith, Mr and Mrs Fraser, Sue Fraser, Hattie McConnaughey, Miss Truman, Mr Kuntzman [of Crete], Charles E Bessey, Edith Stocking, Mrs Phillips; Ethel Trail, Winnie Hall, Alice Gilchrist, J F Connor, Ed Swan, Charles Purcell, Luella Owen, May Dion, Rosalie Dion, Mrs Jerry Dion, Irene Bell Byam, Dave R Stevens, Dr Harold Gifford

Photographs / Images: [Insert] *Crete Chronicle* June 12, 1891 school program; Sadie B Smith, North Bend, 1898; Rollin A Trail, University of Nebraska graduation, 1897; Nebraska State Normal School certificate, Peru, Nebraska, 1895, for Sadie B Smith; North Bend High School students Byron Ritter, Ethel Hanks, Charles Purcell, Ed Swan; North end high school classroom about 1897; Sadie Smith and a group of her North Bend friends: Edith Stocking, Luella wen, Miss Smith, Cora Owen, May Dion, Rosalie Dion, and Mrs Jerry Dion; North Bend High School graduates about 1898. Superintendent J F Connor and teacher Sadie Smith in the photo; North Bend High School about 1898

**A NEBRASKA HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER  
IN THE 1890's:  
THE LETTERS OF SADIE B. SMITH**

*Edited by Rosalie Trail Fuller*

**INTRODUCTION**

The letters of schoolteacher Sadie B. Smith to her admirer and future husband, Rollin A. Trail, cover a courtship of seventeen years, from 1889 to 1906. They form a part of a collection of her memorabilia which includes letters from her suitor, general correspondence, photographs, two diaries, and other records of those decades.

The editor of these letters, the daughter of Sadie Smith Trail, discovered the collection in 1934 in a small lady's trunk that had for years been stored separately from other family effects. Reading the contents gave her the opportunity to know her parents as young adults. Only a part of the letters from Miss Smith to Trail were preserved. She apparently treasured and saved everything he wrote to her, even the notes he slipped under the door during their quarrels when both lived at the "Atwater Hotel," a Crete board-and-room establishment operated by the wife of Jerry Atwater, town marshal.

Sadie B. Smith was born December 24, 1873, to Oren Sylvester Smith and Sarah Frances Thompson Smith in a sod house north of Western in Saline County. Her mother died when Sadie was 14 months old<sup>1</sup> and Sadie was "adopted" without legal formalities by James and Jane Anne Lewis of Western. Following the death of Lewis in 1884, Sadie was sent by her father to high school in Crete, where she boarded with Atwaters. Her high school courses included Latin through Vergil, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, English literature, physics, and botany. Graduation from such a course was probably the equivalent of two years of college today. Two other boarders at the Atwater Hotel were Lillian and Rollin Trail, children of J. S. Trail of rural Otoe County, who attended Doane Academy.<sup>2</sup>

Well-meaning friends warned Sadie that graduation from high school would jeopardize her prospects of becoming a successful rural teacher. Supposedly, with a diploma she would be labeled

"stuck-up" and would be hampered in establishing communication with pupils and parents. Because suspicion of high school-educated teachers was so widespread, Sadie felt that she must learn a trade to support herself if her teaching plans failed. She apprenticed herself to a Crete dressmaker, Marge Grewell, and worked after school, Saturdays, and holidays.

In her senior year, 1891, Sadie grew increasingly nervous as twenty seniors vied for the "first division" at commencement, where each member delivered an essay, an oration, or rendered a musical number. Losers performed two weeks later—after bringing their contributions up to standard. Sadie was also struggling to complete her graduation dress. Anxious to give a good account of her dressmaking skills, she mistakenly cut out two sleeves for the right arm. The humiliation of explaining why she must buy more material, eye strain, and her anxieties nearly made her ill. Nevertheless, Sadie's essay, "The Heritage of Character," was selected for the first program, and the bouquet presented her was the largest on the commencement stage. The *Crete Chronicle* of June 12, 1891, included the program:

Prayer	Rev. T.B. Hilton
Piano Solo, "The Humming Bird"	Maude Hawk
Oration, "Our Greatest Statesman"	H. Bertwell
Essay, "The Heritage of Character"	Sadie Smith
Violin Solo, Selected	Joe Fronta
Oration, "Aaron Burr"	Albert Cohn
Essay, "Scraps"	Addie Root
Piano Duet	Misses Kubicek & Dolansky
Essay, "A Model Roman"	Townsend Speedlin
Essay, "Superstition"	Lillie Gonzales
Piano Solo, Op. 24, Beethoven	Mary Tidball
Oration, "The Rights of Capital"	Frank Trout
Instrumental Octette (Selected)	
Essay, "The Dresses We Wear"	Lillie Munsey
Solo, with Violin Accompaniment	Miss Munsey
Essay, "Two Writers, Two Centuries Apart"	Henry Miller
Benediction	Rev. W. P. Bennett

#### The following week the June 19 *Chronicle* reported:

All the available seating room in the M. E. [Methodist Episcopal] church was occupied last Friday evening, by friends of the High School, who came to hear the exercises by the first division of the graduating class. The programme was necessarily a little long, but the vast audience was interested, and sat patiently through it all. The scholars acquitted themselves well, and many were the bouquets sent them by admiring friends.<sup>3</sup>

During her senior year Sadie had substituted in a rural school where the Atwaters' daughter Belle taught. After graduation Sadie attended the county institute at Wilbur before gaining her teachers' certificate.<sup>4</sup> She secured the Coplin School, four miles



*Sadie B. Smith, North Bend, 1898.*

from Western, for a two-month term at \$25 per month. For graduation her father presented her a horse and cart for transportation from Western, the home of her foster mother, Mrs. Jane Ann Lewis, to her school. Later she secured another school farther from Western at \$30 per month for a two-month term. Sadie, however, was not rehired. A local girl, not a high school graduate, who had passed the teachers' examination but had no teaching experience, underbid her \$5 for the spring term, when the older boys would be working in the field and teaching presumably was less arduous.

There was no dissatisfaction with Sadie's teaching, but reducing taxes was the first consideration. There was also a strong feeling that the schoolmarm's pay should remain in the district, providing money for some local girl's hope chest, since she often expected to teach only a term or two before settling down to marry and raise a family. Keeping order in the schoolroom was more emphasized than the quality of instruction or the scope of the curriculum.

After failing to secure a school for the spring term in Saline County, Sadie was employed by a Crete dressmaking shop before joining her father and a new stepmother, Hester Ada Smith, in Colorado Springs.<sup>5</sup> There she did more sewing while studying to take the teachers' examination in El Paso County. Upon receiving a third-grade certificate,<sup>6</sup> she went to the ranching country west of Colorado Springs to teach a summer term at Summit Park (now Woodland Park), a rural district, at \$45 per month—better pay than she could have hoped to receive in a small Nebraska town.<sup>7</sup> But living conditions were almost intolerable, and she had no companionship with young people. A more difficult examination on August 27, 1892, made her eligible to teach in better, higher-paying schools. She was tested in arithmetic, U.S. history, reading, orthography, school law, botany, natural sciences, grammar, theory and practice, physiology, geography, penmanship, and civil government. She then secured a village school at Eastonville.

After two years of teaching in Colorado, Sadie returned to Nebraska, enrolled in the Peru State Normal School as a senior, and was graduated in 1895. The next year she taught at Dunbar and attended the Normal School in Lincoln during the summer. In September, 1896, she went to North Bend in Dodge County as high school assistant. At that time Rollin, who was studying civil engineering at the University of Nebraska, began saving her

letters. The following selection of letters written during her stay in North Bend, Dodge County, will illuminate her teaching experience in a small-town Nebraska high school in the 1890's:

### THE LETTERS

North Bend, Nebr., Sept. 13, 1896

Dear Rollin:

Does it ever rain here? Yes indeed, and that is what it is doing at the present moment. We have had two or three rainy days and it won't be two weeks until Tuesday since I came. . . . I must write one long letter before my mind becomes so occupied with the toils of the school room that my letters are dull and dry. Possibly you have not heard that the Board had a meeting last Saturday night one week ago and postponed school one week because there were two cases of Scarlet Fever in town. But I think it will open tomorrow as no more cases have been reported so far.

The past week has been idleness, study and sewing. You may guess how I wished I had known it before I came and that one week I would have taken to myself for visiting. Really, Rollin, I did try to get time enough to come down,<sup>8</sup> but it seemed as though I had to use it all to get ready to work, and now I am not half way prepared. . . .

I have a very pleasant boarding place so far as I have observed. Mr. and Mrs. Fraser and two daughters, one of whom [Sue Fraser] teaches in the N. B. [North Bend] Schools, comprise the family. Miss [Hattie] McConnaughey, grammar teacher, and myself are the only boarders. I have a very pleasant room by myself, with the other teachers just across the hall. Both of them are very agreeable, as well as the other members of the family. I am about three blocks from the High School. . . . which I went over to inspect and found very satisfactory. A nice sized assembly room, a recitation room, and a laboratory comprise my domain. That building contains beside, the grammar and one primary room. In another building in the west part of town the other four teachers hold forth. . . .

Possibly you would like to know what I have to teach this semester. Caesar, Latin Lessons, Algebra, General History, Literature, Botany, Physical Geography and Grammar. Perhaps I shall have plenty of spare time, but I can't see it now. The place will be a little difficult because Miss Truman, the former assistant, had been here three years and was nearly idolized.

Most of the discipline also falls on me, as does more than half the other work of the High School. The principal is a very excellent man and one with quite a reputation in the state as an educator. I anticipate a very pleasant year and one very profitable to me *if I succeed*. . . .

Well, I finished up at Crete with a herbarium of about 150 specimens which did reasonably well for the time and poison, I think. Mr. Kuntzman [of Crete] has promised to write me a letter when Bryan is elected. . . .<sup>9</sup>

This evening I met one of the School Board and he said he came up on the train the same evening I did but was not quite sure it was me because I am so much fleshier than I was when I was here last spring. I have been happy ever since, and I think he is "an *awful* nice man." But one of those horrid high school boys had the audacity to say, when I mentioned being in Miss Fraser's light, "You wouldn't cast much of a shadow anyway, but you look better than you did last spring. . . ." <sup>10</sup>

When I came up here [Lincoln] I went to get a report from Dr. [Charles E.] Bessey and he made me sit down and talked with me almost an hour about my work.<sup>11</sup> I guess I must stop, though I don't want to. Write soon,

P.S. Hurrah for Bryan!

Sincerely, Sadie

North Bend, Neb., Dec. 13, 1896

Dear Rollin,

Once more examinations, papers graded, report cards made out, I find a little time to take up my interrupted correspondence. Of course all we hear now is Xmas until I am a little like the children. I can scarcely wait for it, though this of all years brings little reunion to me. The medium of circulation is still school order and owing to the kontraction of the kurrency I will be unable to visit distant friends this year. I am thinking of purchasing the proverbial "green goggles" and taking a tie pass to Lincoln to the Teachers' Association. . . . School closes about the 24th and I shall reach Lincoln about the 26th provided the glasses do not render the grass so tempting that I graze longer than necessary on the way. However, I am drawing seven per cent and saving money.<sup>12</sup> As usual I like my work better each day, and if I were not such a doubter I would begin to be encouraged by what people tell me of my work, but one cannot place confidence in what folks say. Too often it is an attempt at flattery. . . .



*Rollin A. Trail, University of  
Nebraska graduation, 1897.*

Here it is but five o'clock and I have had to draw the curtains and light the lamp. Not only days, but months and years grow shorter as I grow old. Soon I will pass the twenty-third mile stone and it seems but a year since I was fifteen. I wonder why time flies so fast? And then I wonder if I will have a position worth my years of toil when I am thirty. I'd give a gypsy's fee to know. Next year's vacation will be spent in school again. . . .

High School is full and I have several new pupils. I meet one boy at eight each morning to get him up in Algebra and from 3:30 until 4:00 I have a very pleasant half hour with the sluggards. It does me good to have a chance to poke them up without incurring the fame of "keeping them in." School closes at four but those with good lessons can go at 3:30.

I began with school, have talked about school and I suppose you think I am going to end this epistle with school, but I am not. Yesterday I shocked every one in the house by taking time to make some Xmas presents. . . . I expect to have some fun with the other teachers at the house Xmas morning because I have made some funny things for them. It almost cost my reputation to procure clay pipes, which were very necessary articles in their manufacture.

I was out to a Musicale Friday evening. It was very good. Yesterday I had some very stylish callers which, of course, added to my comfort, as I am so very easy in manner before such people. (I haven't heard a good lecture this year and I am most anxious for those coming with the State Association, also look forward to a class meeting then.)

If this letter sounds queer remember please that I have been interrupted several times. I am well and happy and wish you a

very Merry Xmas and a successful New Year. No wise other wise than yours.

Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebr., Febr. 7, 1897

Dear Rollin,

Had I possessed a typewriter [typist] or an amanuensis, your letter would have been answered long ago. Those articles wanting, besieged by examinations, reports, etc., I have seemingly neglected all of my correspondents. So much for excuses which I am sorry I have fallen into the habit of making . . . My predecessor visited here about ten days after Xmas and was almost a daily visitor at school. It was quite trying, but I have survived.

You certainly ought to obtain a position if energy counts for anything.<sup>13</sup> I am sure you have my most earnest wishes for your success. And now I am sure we have been friends too long for you to think me presuming if I offer a little experience-bought advice. Find out whether they pay what they promise before you work. I have just labored five months without one dollar's pay. It is always just coming. Last reported, "We will have some money in, next week. . . ."

Everyone says I am looking so well, so I think I am entirely happy. Now I nearly closed this epistle without saying I have a roommate. She came two weeks ago and will stay the remainder of the year, if she can endure to live with me so long. She is primary teacher here, so there are now four teachers here. Her name is Miss [Edith] Stocking. A letter from Annie saying everyone except the school teachers in Dunbar have grippe or fever.<sup>14</sup> I must stop now.

Your friend, Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebr., April 4, 1897

Dear Rollin,

Thinking that you may wonder if I am here and remembering also that work begins tomorrow; I take the first opportunity of writing. I found one spot in that way-car that did not leak, and as the men were very considerate about smoking and talking I spent a quiet, comfortable afternoon. There were no other passengers until we reached Cedar Bluffs near Fremont; a traveling man came aboard. They did very little switching and only knocked me off the seat once. I don't know but I enjoyed being on the way

about as much, as I would have the wait in Fremont. We got in at 6:25 and left for North Bend at 7:10.<sup>15</sup> Met the preacher in Fremont so wasn't lonesome, as they are good talkers, you know. Mr. Fraser met me with a big comfortable umbrella and a lantern, so I considered my journey all in all quite lucky, notwithstanding the fact that you have such an excellent joke [when Sadie forgot her pocketbook]. You had some good laughs over it, I know, but I am glad you did. I had a good many myself. I think I must have looked quite as amusing as some "old maids" I have seen traveling. . . .

Summer school at the Lincoln Normal School, begins June 7 and lasts until July 14, so I will try to be in Lincoln for the beginning of it.<sup>16</sup> Forgot to mention that one of my old Western schoolmates sails for Germany this week. Oh that I had improved my opportunities! I hope you suffered no permanent injury from your ducking [from the rain], yesterday. I'll try not to have such frowning of the elements next time you go to the train with me. I must go down to supper now. Best wishes for your success in your work.

Yours sincerely, Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebr., May 16, 1897

Dear Rollin,

I am not at all sure that this will make out to be an answer to your last but I'll do my best considering my time and eyes. My vacation trip quite effectually stopped the rain in this part of the country. Quite possibly they may pay me to go in about three weeks when school is out and they need rain. Just now botany class are making use of this fine weather to finish up their work. Our School Board has been doing some very queer work since I saw you. They consolidated the two Primaries, and my roommate [Edith Stocking], who has taught Primary here for five years was given fifth and sixth grades. Of course she is up in arms. The Grammar teacher was not re-elected, which gave us another wrench. Then I was re-elected at an increase of five dollars a month, which I suspicion some of the teachers don't more than half like.

I half imagine times will be far from dull here next year, but I'll keep up hope. The teacher who will have Grammar room next year (Mrs. Phillips) will come to Lincoln this summer for work in that Preparatory School [at NU]. Do you know anything about it as to teacher laboratories, etc.? Of course I'll take my

# Nebraska State Normal School

## DIPLOMA

This Certifies that Sadie B. Smith  
having completed the course of study prescribed by the Board of Education  
and having satisfactorily passed the required examination, is deemed thoroughly  
qualified to teach in the Public Schools of this State

In Testimony Whereof, we have hereunto affixed our signatures at  
Peru, State of Nebraska this fifth day of June  
in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety five

A. W. Newton

Principal

B. E. Kennedy

President of Board of Education

Henry R. Barrett

Secretary

four weeks course at the State [Lincoln Normal]. Hope to leave North Bend June 7 if possible, at most not later than June 8. But soon semester examinations begin and I tell you taking them don't compare with giving them and then marking the papers.<sup>17</sup> Then there are book reports and attendance reports and I don't know what besides herbariums to examine. . . .

I was out to a Musicale last night, so I am sleepy and I guess I'll say good night. Best wishes to you for success with your work and plans.

Your friend, Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Neb., Sept. 19, 1897

Dear Rollin,

Never before since I have been teaching have I begun work feeling so well, and it seems to me that the pupils go to work with more than usual vigor. I never saw people so cordial as North Bend folks were when I came back, and still are. Mr. Fraser says it is I that am more free as much as that they are more cordial, which I suspect is true. Everyone compliments me on looking so well and tells me how fat I am which you know would put me in a good humor. Then I haven't a thousand names to learn both in and out of school, besides as many natures and dispositions to study.

I board at Mrs. Fraser's, as I did last year, only I am the only one here now. Miss Fraser who did teach here went to Wayne, Miss McConnaughey did not come back, and Miss Stocking has gone to another part of the town to board. Mrs. F. is lonesome without her daughter and I kind of come in as one of the family, which exactly suits me. I feel quite at home and have everything my own way.<sup>18</sup> I don't get lonesome because I have to work most of the time. . . . Another cause for cheerfulness is the fact that the district doesn't owe me a dollar of last year's salary now.

You will now be prepared to tell me how it happened Ethel [Rollin's sister] came to Doane [College]. Please tell me also something of yourself, as I don't know anything about your work and surroundings. Really I must stop as it is very, very late. Forgive my blunders, and write soon.

Yours sincerely, Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebr., Oct. 3, 1897

Dear Rollin,

One month of work was completed last Friday and I feel as though it had been a month well spent, so far as I am concerned. I believe I never taught with more energy or more definite, fixed aims. I haven't quite finished the examination papers, so I can't tell how well I have succeeded. It is quite different to go back to a school the second year, where there is a chance to profit from your first year's blunders, than to start in a new place, where you can't profit by any former experience. Each year I teach I like the work better. I hope I am doing more work this year than last, but it don't worry me half so much.

Since I last wrote you I have taken a very great notion to join most everything. First I brought my letter to this M.E. church. Then the North Bend ladies concluded to have a Woman's Club. They especially desired the teachers to join. I joined and now I am afraid I'll wish I hadn't. I wanted to do the Club work in history, and thought I'd have ample time for it. Now they have made me leader of the history work, which will make it take much more time. Aside from this I have been placed on a committee to plan all the work from time to time and arrange all programs. Though I tried, it seems impossible to withdraw from either position. Though I don't relish the idea of making a pretense of leading a class of women, most of whom are old enough to be my mother, I suppose nothing can help me but to go ahead and do my best.

I have purchased an International Cyclopaedia, a work of fifteen volumes up to date, and I think it a very good investment. It seems a little extravagant, but I am going on the principle Mr. Leger (Mrs. Walter's husband) said the Africans do. They buy more wives to raise more chop to get more money to buy more wives to raise more chop. I have wanted the books for some time and I got them because I need them in my business. I am starting a class in general history in the source method and that with U.S. source history in the [Woman's] Club, I fear will make me a source crank for this year. It was botany and Latin last year, so it is well to change a little. . . .

A letter from one of my boys at Lincoln says he likes the Uni. but not the city. He also states that the board [food] is sufficient in quality but not in quantity. Then he signs himself "Byron in misery."<sup>19</sup> Evidently he is undergoing a siege of homesickness. I think I'll write him a lecture in which I shall tell him that I positively know he will soon find he has too much to eat if he don't drop some of his work. He has only started in with eighteen hours. One of the boys is home, sick; he claims the water is alkaline. I am of the opinion that homesickness sometimes makes folks actually sick. He hopes to go back in about two weeks. . . . I must close now as it is late. Please answer soon.

Yours sincerely, Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebr., Nov. 28, 1897

Dear Rollin,

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if it wasn't for Sunday afternoons. It is the only time of the whole week that someone doesn't require. I fear I would not have many correspondents. Now I imagine you are supremely happy at this state of the elements. So am I for I heard today that the skating is good, and I mean to steal time for a good skate or two. That is one way in which I don't get old; I love outdoor sports as well as ever. I hope I shall always enjoy them. . . .

Our Lincoln students have been home to spend Thanksgiving and some have called to see me. Byron still dislikes Lincoln very much, but is very much impressed with Uni. He rooms within a block of you on 14th and O. I tell him he will like Lincoln when he has gone to school two years. He has met Winnie Hall<sup>20</sup> and has joined the Y.M.C.A. through his influence.

We had two days vacation for Thanksgiving and I succeeded in examining all of my month's installation of papers. As the

custom of the town is for everyone to take dinner downtown with whichever church makes the dinner, we went down. All the folks around kept warning me about eating too much, so I am feeling as well as usual today. The new teacher [Alice Gilchrist] is quite jolly, so we teachers had quite a nice time. Mrs. Phillips, who teaches at the same building with me, is so nice, and we have splendid times together. She is one of those cozy, comfortable people one likes to be with, and strange as it may seem she appears to like me. . . .

Just twenty school days more and I'll have a whole week in which to loaf. Our vacation may come before that as one very malignant case of Diphtheria has made its appearance. People here are almost as much afraid of that disease as of Smallpox. It and Scarlet Fever have raged so here that all the teachers have to contract to allow their salaries to stop while the school is closed during an epidemic. . . . It is growing dark and I must close now.

Yours truly, Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebr.. 4/19 '98

Dear Rollin,

As I had intended writing tonight, I'll carry out my intention although your last letter arrived only tonight. Three weeks or even four are not long in the life of a schoolmarm at this season of the year. You'll be surprised at the proportions of this missive and the immensity of the envelope, so I'll explain immediately. I wish if you know of a good type-writer [typist] you would have six copies of each of the inclosed recommendations made and send them to me. As I don't have any idea of the expense of such a procedure, I will wait until I find out before sending money. If it isn't too much bother it will accommodate me. Now as I know you will be all curiosity to know what I am up to, I'll state that as usual I am trying for something better, but haven't the slightest doubt but I shall remain in North Bend next year, so please don't mention the fact. I am not trying for anything in Nebraska. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Monday morning presented an opportunity for me to display uncommon judgment, but instead of doing so I showed my usual want of it. When I walked into the high school room a lurid glare met my sight. The red flames were leaping past the second floor in the ventilating shaft, and without stopping to reason as to what I was doing, I rushed down and started those children who had arrived [to go] for help. Meanwhile a big boy and I pumped water and poured on the fire. Some men arrived, and with some

six or eight buckets of water put it out. Some sparrows had built nests in the shaft and a spark had ignited it. No possible harm could have come to the building because it is brick and there was no way to catch anything. But my reasoning came too late and I made a goose of myself and several others. . . .

We have our commencement near May 27. Shall have a lecturer. Let me hear from you soon and come up if you can.

Yours sincerely, Sadie B. Smith

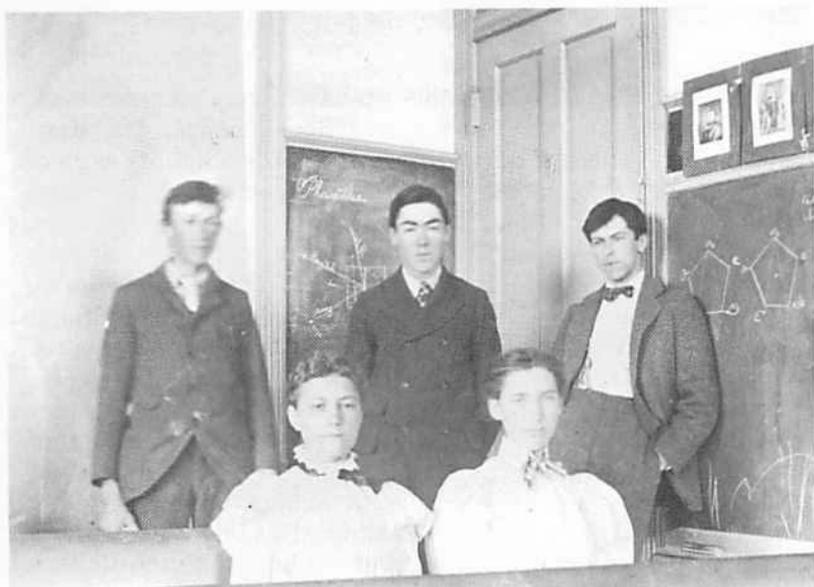
P.S. You have my consent to read the inclosed documents, because I know you will anyway, and I want you to feel free of guilt.

North Bend, Nebr., Sept. 17, 1898

Dear Rollin,

Your letter came two days ago, and I am more than usually prompt, because I have not heard anything at all during summer. Where are you and what were you doing during a greater part of the summer? I supposed you were in Dakota some place. Was surprised to know you had changed employers and states.<sup>22</sup> I think however you are doing better now than before financially. Sometimes the pay is much larger than we know. The part measured by dollars and cents is the smallest I think. Experience and skill gained by practice are much more to those beginning and form the capital of the future. I imagine you are not over-burdened with social duties. No one in the West is except in cities. Do you board or does the crowd batch? I am sure I prefer the latter to some of the fare I found in Colorado boarding houses [during her teaching stint in that state]. However, I suppose you are on the move so much that you get a change of diet often enough to keep an appetite. Are you in or near the mountains and is the country picturesque?

Our former Grammar teacher, Mrs. Phillips, teaches at Cambria [Wyoming] at an increase of thirty dollars a month in salary. She is in a mining town and finds everything very different from Nebraska. She also mentioned the snow of some two weeks ago. Mr. [J. F.] Conner went to Rock Springs [Wyoming] as Superintendent at twice his former salary here. He now receives \$1,800 I think. All this makes me very content with my present position, I assure you. However one year here will not hinder me in the least and I find the ties of friendship growing stronger. I think I like the place better the longer I stay and the interest in my work does not diminish in the least. I had dreaded



*North Bend High School students Byron Ritter (left), Ethel Hanks, Charles Purcell, unidentified, and Ed Swan. Purcell later became a civil engineer and helped design the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. . . (Below) North Bend high school classroom. Both photos taken about 1897.*



to begin with a new Principal, but we have a very pleasant man, Mr. Sherman, Uni. [of Nebraska] 18 [95] of Fairfield. He seems to take quite well and is quite agreeable to work with. My work of course is no lighter and in some respects I have more responsibility, but I think I am better able to take it.

Your friend Miss Irene Bell Byam is my roommate, so your message has been duly delivered. She said, "Thanks, give mine to him when you write." She is a very agreeable companion and as we teach in the same building we are constantly together when not actually engaged in teaching. I think she is making a success of her work so far and will be a good teacher. . . . She has very difficult work, I think, the grammar room in the matter of discipline, but I imagine she is quite strong in that qualification. I was quite amused at her when she first came to room with me. We had not been alone ten minutes when she said, "Aren't you a friend of Mr. Trail's?" Then she told me how you used to have such good times at Uni. Some of the other teachers take dinner here and we have jolly times I tell you. We make enough noise to be heard several blocks at times. It seems to be the end and aim of each one in the crowd to get a joke on me, and I spend my time getting even and generally succeed.

Had the jolliest [summer] vacation I have ever spent, that is the latter part.<sup>23</sup> About six weeks after school closed I was about as near down and still be able to maintain my usual appearance of good health as I care to be. Some times I thought I could not begin school again, but after a rest I was as ready as ever for work. Miss Storms, a schoolmate who went to New York some six years ago, had returned, and Mr. [Dave R.] Stevens of Cleveland, who was a childhood playmate, were spending a vacation at Western.<sup>24</sup> Then there were several others, who had been away at school, home for the summer. The Kodak craze ran high and we put in the time fishing and kodaking. Twice I rode more than twenty miles to the [Big] Blue and camped. No other river in Nebraska is so dear or so picturesque to me as the Blue. No water ever contained the possibilities of such rollicking good times as its muddy depths. With three Kodaks in the crowd every attitude was photographed and some were comical. I'd send you a proof of one that Mr. Stevens caught of me, but I fear it would have the same effect as the famous head of Medusa. They nicknamed it "The Charmer." I guess I'll send it anyway. . . .

Miss Byam is complaining about its being such a warm day. We had such very cool weather to begin school that the warm



*Sadie Smith and a group of her North Bend friends: Edith Stocking (left), Luella Owen, Miss Smith, Cora Owen, May Dion (child), Rosalie Dion, and Mrs. Jerry Dion.*

weather is quite a hardship. I suppose you are more comfortable, though I can't think staying in bed to keep warm would be contrary to your liking. . . . Please write me again soon and tell me all about your journeyings.

Just the same, Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebr., Nov. 20, 1898

Dear Rollin,

I wasn't in the least surprised at receiving a letter from you in Colorado.<sup>25</sup> Nothing you do ever surprises me you know, just as I suppose none of my movements ever surprises you. It is more easy to surprise myself than anyone else I know. . . .

Not long ago I had a new case made for my books, as I thought ever so much too large for my books, and now it is almost full again. I shall not move next year, I have stayed so long the town would have to bear my expenses did they wish to be rid of me. "Rolling stones gather no moss" but stationary ones are incrustated with tons of it.

By the way, I must boast a little for variety's sake. Last week Mr. Sherman handed me a report which he had prepared to send to the Uni. to sign. He had given me the title of principal and when I remonstrated with him he said, "Why that is what you are; you do the work of a principal and are entitled to the name." If it amounted to anything I should feel elated, but it doesn't so I am no larger than before. . . .

I must tell you how I have settled a dispute with four of my largest boys. On Friday noon when the line marched in there was a large arm chair sitting back by the stove and each in succession saw that it was his duty to drag it a step (accidentally of course) with his foot. When school closed, two lady visitors, one of them a wife of a member of the Board, did not deter me from telling the boys that this week in marching in they would pass into another room and wait. . .[for] my "awkward" squad to be marshaled in. I will place about two or three chairs in the line of march and we will see my awkward squad march around them. This is a mild sample of the way I torture the poor youngsters. Aren't you glad you are not under my jurisdiction? Please write soon.

Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebr., September 3, 1899

Dear Rollin,

I reached North Bend about nine o'clock Thursday, and it is needless to state that I was and am still a little weary; but, not withstanding, I am in better shape to enter school tomorrow than I have ever been. I weigh a hundred and nineteen pounds and have a coat of brown on my face some inches in thickness. Everyone remarks how well and strong I look. . . .<sup>26</sup>

Yesterday I went to the schoolhouse and should have done a day's work there, but I did not get around in time and did not feel as yet equal to the task. It will take a week at least to break me into the routine again, and I shall have much more sympathy with the children with their tardiness in going to work. A music teacher has been engaged and books ordered, and he will labor with teachers and pupils on the Do-re-me ground. Three of us do not sing at all. Don't you imagine he will earn his money. . . .

Rollin, I must put you off with this short note tonight because there are a number of people anxious to know of my safe arrival. I trust I shall see you soon, for I have many things to tell you of my trip and our last meeting was so short it served to make me forget half the things I had had in mind to tell you. Now please write me often. I like to hear if it is only a dozen lines. . . .

Yours truly, Sadie B. Smith

Crook, Colorado, September 10, 1899

Dear Sadie,

Yours of September 3 at hand. I am glad you reached home safely and in good health. You can rest until school begins. I am

sure you feel much enriched from your trip although a few dollars short. I am anxiously waiting for the chance to go to North Bend for a Sunday so I can hear you talk of your new store of good things. I may be able in two weeks to visit with you. The North Bend people of course will have you tired out by that time.

The work here is progressing nicely, considering the scarcity of men. Laborers are not to be had in any numbers for \$1.50 per day. They can get more money elsewhere. We have only \$15,000 of the appropriation left and last month's expenditures were \$16,500 so you see we may all be out of a job in a few weeks.

Last week I had trouble with our foreman, and since then we do not exchange "friendly" greetings. Mr. Davis lays no blame on me, so I feel free. When this work closes down, I do not know what they will do with me. I want to remain with the company if possible now since I have a fairly good start. \$100 per month is not easily picked up, although work is easy to find. I am sure you do more work for your salary than I do for mine. . . . Let me hear from you soon, and I shall try to reach North Bend as soon as I can get a day off.

Yours truly, R. A. Trail

North Bend, Nebr., September 15, 1899

Dear Rollin,

Now I feel quite like a schoolmarm again. Forty-nine youngsters together with other troubles that go along with the profession have a tendency to recall one from dreamy pondering to activity once more. School work is, though, more of a pleasure if possible this year because I feel so well. Every nerve is ready for action save that which governs the eye, and tomorrow I go to see what can be done for it. I have put off the evil day as long as possible, but it must come anyway. I am in hopes something can be done for them aside from wearing glasses, but I presume the oculist will be the better judge in the matter. I shall consult Dr. Harold Gifford of Omaha.

Let me warn you that this letter is to be full of my woes. Last night Bennie came home bringing a wife.<sup>27</sup> Straightway we girls went over and pulled up the flowers we had planted in his heart. The first thing this morning on my way to the post office I met him and I had to say, "Good morning, Mr. Marley," just as pleasantly as though my heart wasn't aching. Miss Cusack and Miss Byam and Rosalie and in fact all of us feel what a heavy blow it is. Really I can't see what we will do for fun this winter, since the bachelor across the way is no more. . . .

I, too, had just a grain of disagreement with Mr. Sherman because he protested that I must teach music or pay his sister for doing so. I went to the School Board and they very promptly settled the matter in my favor. There is a limit you see to most things and there was in this case. He is certainly most agreeable now and so far as I can see the affair makes no difference in our relations. I am willing to be subordinate in every reasonable way so I presume we will make it all right.

I am anxious to hear what you will do and where you will be next. I wish for the winter that it might be office work. I am glad to hear that you have decided to try to come so soon for I have much saved up to tell you and I am fearful that I shall forget some of it. Shall I look for you then in one week? I wish you could stay longer than the few hours, but of course I am thankful for small favors. Now I'll look for a letter next week telling me when you will certainly reach North Bend.<sup>28</sup>

Yours sincerely, Sadie B. Smith

North Bend, Nebraska, October 13, 1899

Dear Rollin,

Allow me to congratulate you upon your sudden acquisition.<sup>29</sup> I trust that your sorrows may truly "be halved and your joys multiplied." You begin to talk already of the cumbersomeness of your family, so I am inclined to believe that in your case at any rate the old adage "Needles and pins, needles and pins, when a man marries his trouble begins," may be true. The joys I trust will outweigh the annoyances.

Do I feel rested? Oh, yes, I do at times feel quite so; at others I think I am more weary than ever before in my life. So far as the school itself is concerned, I do not remember to have had as nice a high school. The work is exceedingly heavy however and Mr. Sherman's waywardness or incompetency or whatever it may be called makes it much more so. He hears three classes in his office daily, two of them containing six pupils each. This of course reduces the correction of his written work to a minimum. I hear seven recitations, each class ranging from seventeen to fifty members. It is impossible to get weekly grades in my botany class otherwise than by written test. Then I have a large class in source method history, and I grow unutterably weary looking over narratives and outlines and questions. True, Mr. Sherman has the superintending work to do, but at the present rate it had better be left undone.

He has put nature study into the schools, and instead of helping the teachers by teaching them the way he wants it taught, he has put an indefinite text into their hands and commanded them to go ahead. Each is floundering along and without a single exception every teacher "hates" nature study. Please imagine good results that will be gained with teachers in this state of mind.

The other day he went into one of the rooms, I should rather say took the county superintendent to visit one of the rooms during music period. He so far forgot his manliness, so far departed from pedagogical principles, as to stop the recitation and criticize her before her whole school and the company as well. She is one of the strongest teachers in the corps, too. I am not certain as to what would happen if he should try the trick with me before my high school pupils.

In his dealing with his teachers he is making for himself some trouble which may annoy him considerably. So far our relations have been pleasant enough but he has been heaping up several "straws like to break the camel's back" and I can't tell what might happen. This week he has gone to Lincoln to the superintendents' and principals' meeting, so perhaps he will come home loaded with new ideas and inspiration.<sup>30</sup>

I am glad that your father has seen fit to break your fruit fast with a barrel of apples. You would surely appreciate them now if ever. North Bend is losing much of its beauty now that the trees have but a feeble grasp on their green mantles. People are very busy now topping [sugar] beets. Miss Byam complains of much absence on this account. By the way, her second-best beau comes again this week, and I am to be used as sort of a defense. I know he must positively detest me, for I am ever in the way. . . .

I am glad to hear such good news of Lillie [Rollin's sister]. I'd like so much to see [her] wonderful boy. Write again and tell me what was the trouble with your hand this time. What a faculty you have for exciting my curiosity!

Sincerely, Sadie B. Smith

P.S. I nearly forgot to say that I shall not be surprised to see you sometime, any time.

Julesburg, Colorado, October 22, 1899

Dear Sadie,

Your letter was welcomed some time ago. Every week for ever so long I have longed for Sunday to come, because it might



*North Bend High School graduates about 1898. Appearing with their students are Superintendent J.F. Connor (third row, fourth from left) and teacher Sadie Smith (second row, third from left).*

afford a chance to visit you, but each week has brought a busy Sunday and I have remained on the work. Today I have been busy every hour, and no doubt will be a week from today, that being near the end of the month. The contractors must have a complete estimate on their first contract, which covered 50 miles of line. They have moved near 220,000 yards of earth. I am still looking after the work on the new round house here, and doing my regular work with the ballasting gang. . . .

Your principal or superintendent Sherman must have learned how to draw pay with little work. Don't you grow weary of doing all the work? Does he get a good salary? I am sorry you have an unpleasant year in progress. I am much doubtful if you and Mr. S. get along agreeably from now on. My hopes are that you do, however, and in some way transfer some of your heavy work. . . .

I should like to go to Lincoln to visit friends this year. It has been so long since I saw any of my Uni. friends. Prospects are favorable for two more full years' work here. By that time I shall have enough money to pay my debts. By spending all I need to, and getting everything I want, there is about \$70 or \$75 of my check left for the bank each month. The U. P. people are very good indeed to give me \$100 each month for the service they get in return. However, I am not complaining. . . .

I most forgot to tell you of my hand. I knocked most of the hide off the back of it while getting on a moving caboose. Either I caught cold in it or got it poisoned, and a very sore hand was the result. It is well now.

Keep on looking for me. I am liable to come any time. The gravel business is liable to stop any time so I can get as far away as N. B. [North Bend]. Hope you are well. Write soon. As ever,  
R. A. Trail

North Bend, Nebr., Nov. 3, 1899

Dear Rollin,

Perhaps I have been somewhat less prompt than usual about answering, though I appreciated your letter just as much. This week ends our first quarter, and I have been very, very busy with my examination papers. However, I am glad to say that I finished my work before leaving the schoolhouse tonight, so I shall have tomorrow for myself, but as usual Woman's Club will come in for a larger share of the time. The program is American Literature, and I have had charge of that work for three months, but tomorrow is my last and Miss Byam's turn comes now.



*North Bend High School, about 1898.*

I am feeling very much better than when I wrote to you last, and though my work is no lighter, I perform it with much less cost of physical and mental force. Mr. Sherman seems to have found out a few points about the management of teachers. At any rate, he is very much more pleasant. At first I thought we would never get through the year together, but we will do so very nicely if he does not tread on my toes any harder than at the present writing. Yes, his salary is a thousand a year. Somewhat larger than mine, you see.<sup>31</sup>

Several ideas have come as to how I can dispose of myself next year, but it is much too early to decide. Much will depend on how I feel so far as strength goes when the school year closes. The folks are very anxious for me to rest a year and spend the time with them. I'd like this very much, but how utterly useless for me to think of wasting a year at my time of life. It is a very short time when we use every moment. I can't see how people get anywhere at all who waste their time. Miss Byam and I room together and things are much pleasanter in that line also. We are in fact very congenial. Teaching is doing her a great amount of good. Her views of life and people in general are growing much larger. . . .

I, too, look forward to Sundays, thinking perhaps to see you, but never a glimpse do I get. Now I don't know, of course, what

your plans are or when you can best get away, but you are always welcome. Come at any time, even if you cannot let me know. . . .

Your position is certainly a fine one in many respects, and I am heartily glad the prospects for its permanence are so good. You are doing remarkably well financially, too, I think, to save so much. I did not know that you had debts to pay, but if you have, it's nice to see a way clear to pay them. My expenses are greater than yours, and I don't manage to keep a fortune from my salary. I've made several investments, however, in the way of emptying dollars into my head that prove quite remunerative in the way of enjoyment, and I do not regret a single cent.

Well, Rollin, it is long past my usual bedtime and Mrs. Dion will be scolding me, for sitting up late, in the morning. . . .

Yours sincerely, Sadie B. Smith

Sadie remained at North Bend through the spring of 1900. In May she accepted a position as principal of Holdrege High School, where she remained until 1905. On March 7, 1906, she married Rollin A. Trail, now a civil engineer, and kept house under primitive conditions in construction camps and frontier villages in the West. They had three children: Rosalie, born in a construction camp 60 miles from Billings on the Great Northern line between Billings and Great Falls, Montana; Doane, born in an apple-picker's shack at Sunnyside, Washington; and Rollin A. Trail, Jr., born in Omak, Washington.

Because a severe illness required Sadie's hospitalization in Lincoln for a number of months, the family returned from the state of Washington to Otoe County, Nebraska, and moved onto a farm near Rollin's father, where they lived until Rollin's death on December 15, 1916. As a widow, Sadie returned to teaching to support her children and her foster mother, Mrs. Jane Ann Lewis. She was principal of the high school at Waco, 1917-1919; superintendent of schools at Carleton, 1919-1920; and high school principal at Castana, Iowa, 1920-1922. Then she moved her family to Lincoln with its accredited high school, learned to drive a Model T Ford, and drove out to teach at Malcolm, 1922-1923. After that for several years she was a substitute teacher in the Lincoln schools. She died in Lincoln after a long illness on May 24, 1942.

## NOTES

Source material used in preparation of this article is found in the Sadie B. Smith Archives Collection, MS 3738, Nebraska State Historical Society.

1. An obituary which appeared in the March 12, 1875, *Muscatine [Iowa] Journal* gives Sarah's age at the time of death as 25 years and 2 days. Her parents, Gustavus and Love S. Matthews Thompson were former residents of Muscatine.

2. Crete Academy (also called Doane Academy) was established in 1871 at Crete. After Doane College was founded in 1872, the academy prepared students for entrance to Doane. Thomas Doane Perry, *History of Doane College* (Crete, 1957), 117-120.

3. The *Chronicle* also included a program for the second division of the graduating class: prayer, the Rev. D. J. Jones; piano solo, "Secret Love," Addie Root; essay, "Work," Rosa Kubicek; essay, "Joan of Arc," Minnie Prohaska; violin solo, Gad Root; essay, "Among the Least of Creation," Maude Hawk; oration, "The Great Convention of 1787," Clayton Mann; violin duet, Misses Andrews and Billings; essay, "Pearls," Grace Skinner; essay, "How Some People Obtain Their Traits," Lillie Mullin; essay, "The Past, the Present, and the Future," Jos. Francel; class prophecy, Ray Norris; presentation of diplomas; awarding of Doane College scholarship; and benediction, the Rev. E. W. Johnson.

4. Teachers' institutes, generally held on a county-wide basis under the oversight of the county superintendent, provided inspiration and instruction for local teachers. In the days before most educators had the advantage of college training, the institutes were an important means of improving the quality of common school instruction.

5. Hester was the third wife of Sadie's father, Oren. Following the 1875 death of Sarah, his first wife, Oren had married Elizabeth Queer. According to the April 30, 1885, *Western Wave*, Elizabeth died at 16 from "an attack of lung fever."

6. A third-grade certificate entitled the certificate holder to teach the least advanced schools. A second- or first-grade certificate, secured by passing more difficult examinations, entitled the bearer to teach in larger, better schools.

7. Rollin congratulated Sadie in a June 15, 1892, letter: "It takes a good teacher to draw \$45 per month in Nebraska. You must get on the good side of your superintendent and [then] maybe you will have a real good place offered you in the fall."

8. To Rollin's Otoe County home south of Nebraska City.

9. Democrat William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska ran for the presidency in 1896 against Republican William McKinley. Rollin apparently did not share Sadie's interest in the 1896 campaign; he replied in an October 4, 1896, letter: "There is no end to the debates. . . on the street corners and everywhere. I am tired of this political agitation." *Poison* refers to the poison ivy encountered in assembling the herbarium.

10. Correspondence between Rollin and Sadie indicates that each was trying to gain weight.

11. Nationally recognized professor of botany associated with the University of Nebraska from 1884 to 1915.

12. Sadie was at this time being paid in scrip, which could be redeemed only in North Bend. "Taking a tie pass" refers here to "bumming" a ride on the railroad, hobo-fashion to Lincoln, where the Teachers' Association met during Christmas vacation. The phrase usually refers to travel by foot along railroad tracks.

13. Rollin was anticipating his graduation from the University of Nebraska in June, 1897, with a degree in civil engineering.

14. Rollin's sister, Anna Trail, had taken Sadie's teaching position at Dunbar after Sadie accepted a job at North Bend.

15. Sadie had traveled by train from North Bend to Lincoln to visit Rollin and other friends during spring vacation at the University of Nebraska.

16. The Lincoln Normal School, started in 1891 by Edward R. Sizer and John H. McClay of Lincoln, was located near the intersection of 56th and South Streets. Intended to accommodate up to 1,000 students, the school thrived for a time but enrollment declined for several years before the main school building was destroyed by fire in December, 1898. *Nebraska State Journal*, (Lincoln), December 1, 1898.

17. "Don't" as a verb contraction following a singular subject was commonly used at this time to mean both "do not" and "does not." Henry L. Mencken, *The American Language* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1937), 446.

18. Sadie's initial satisfaction with her landlady diminished sharply as the year progressed. She confided to Rollin in a January 12, 1898, letter: "I think I shall change boarding places before the year is over. . . Mrs. Fraser gives the impression that she keeps me for accommodation, and because I am anxious to stay. As Mr. Fraser's income is thirty dollars per month I think the anxiety lies in the other direction."

19. Probably Byron Ritter, listed by the June 3, 1897, *North Bend Republican* as a participant in commencement exercises. His later troubles at the University of Nebraska seem foreshadowed by his commencement oration, "Heights Charm Us But the Paths That Lead to Them Do Not."

20. Winford Hall, a childhood friend of Sadie's from Western.

21. Sadie did remain in North Bend for the fall, 1898, term. In a May 10, 1898, letter to Rollin, she confessed, "I haven't worked earnestly to get away because I felt another year here would do no harm. If I had worked hard, I am conceited enough to believe I could have found a place."

22. Rollin had accepted a job as a surveyor with the Union Pacific Railroad in July of 1898.

23. Sadie had spent the summer with her foster mother, Jane Anne Lewis, of Western.

24. David R. Stevens, former editor of the *Western Wave*. *Crete Chronicle*, June 19, 1891.

25. Rollin was at this time near Lafayette, Colorado, where the Union Pacific was constructing a spur line to a coal-mining area.

26. During the 1899 summer vacation Sadie had visited relatives in Maine and toured points of interest along the East Coast.

27. Bennie Marley, a North Bend attorney and perennial bachelor.

28. The projected visit was postponed.

29. Rollin had in a September 10, 1899, letter informed Sadie of the birth of a baby boy to his sister Lillie. He had also enclosed a newspaper clipping stating that R. A. Trail and wife had registered at an area hotel. He was with a married engineer and his wife, and the reporter confused the two men.

30. The three-day meeting featured lectures on such topics as "Drawing As a Mental Discipline," "Art in Public Schools," "Industrial Training for Girls," and "The Superintendent as an Inspector and Supervisor." *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), October 12, 1899.

31. Sadie was then earning \$495 per year, paid in nine monthly installments of \$55.