

July 1872

Ena began July by restarting her diary. "Dashing Charlie" had been an overnight guest on the Medicine, along with a Mr. Weyman. Then she, her brother, and George Dillard had taken a horseback ride up the creek, where they had observed wild animals, eaten green grapes, and fired their pistols at a target. She had been pleased to observe her first beaver dam. She had enjoyed ^{her} a trip to the upper Medicine, noting "Lots of people are going to settle up there -- i.e. cattle men."

On the same day, Royal Buck was writing from the little settlement at the mouth of the Red Willow. He, too, for^esaw the coming of people, but "his" new people would be farmers, sturdy yoemen, to take advantage of the rich valley land. He noted that Storm King, the pioneer settler of the region, claimed to have a field of corn "now beginning to tassel out, and is as high as a man's head. Other fields I have seen, in which the corn is standing from one to four feet high." Knee high by the 4th of July, indeed. /Riley, "Buck", op.cit., 376/

June had ended there with more rains, including one on Sunday, June 30th, ~~XX~~ "we had another fierce little shower with a good deal of hail...." On the preceding Friday night, they had had "a regular old fashioned drencher /which/ passed down the valley. Some of the settlers say it fell near a foot deep of solid water." It had been a storm fit for neither man nor beast, for One man told me yesterday that near him was a prairie dog town and then the rain filled their holes and drowned hundreds of the dogs--that they floated out and were

lying dead all about the prairie. He also said a buffalo got caught in a torrent which came down a ravine and was drowned and floated out into his potatoe field.

/Ibid., 377/

But the frontier settlers would not have to ⁱleave by bread alone, nor depend upon their small corn patches and kitchen gardens, bothered by potatoe bugs, for, he concluded, "Buffalo are plenty and are "fat and forty." Plenty of them fattening for the fall hunt. /Ibid./

But for the time being, Ena had taken leave of the Medicine country, for a visit to civilization. On the 3rd, she, Paddy, George and John Fritcher "rushed" into the post for the holliday, though the men had to return to work a few days later. On the night of the 3rd, she had attended a horse race and had placed a winning bet. Dick Seymour was there, and she had renewed her acquaintance with Texas Jack, who had returned to Fort McPherson until it was time to join the Pawnee on their hunt. Her description of the 4th of July at Fort McPherson was never written, for her admirer from Camp Red Willow, Lieutenant Miller had arrived to visit her, presumably at Mrs. Snell's.

Her health remained poor, and, one night, she had stayed with Mrs. Cody, where she could sleep late. She could not get her rest at Mrs. Snell's, where meals had to be prepared for the officers three times a day, with breakfast coming at an early hour. Mrs. Cody had two small children to care for, while her husband was out on the long summer scout, and a new baby due in a few weeks. But, even though charmed and amused by little Kit Carson Cody, Ena did not sleep well and "was delerious all night". What bothered her was that "Mr. Omohundro slept in an adjoining room."

July - 3

By the 9th, she was back at Mrs. Snell's, but by the 11th she was being made ill by the smell of the food. She visited Mrs. Cody, where she saw her first whirlwind, which was followed by a rain. Texas Jack was still there, and he lassoed Ena's horse, Falcon, though it was a struggle. She (they?) enjoyed the ride, but he insisted the pony was too wild for her, as others had warned her.

On the 12th, she was quite ill and, perhaps worse, Texas Jack had received a telegram from Agent Troth, ^{dated the 10th,} which had been sent over from the Union Pacific: "Meet me at Grand Island on Saturday, by the train." /Pawnee Agency Letterbook, 50/ The Pawnee and some Omaha had left the reservation on the 8th. Jack stopped by Mrs. Snell's to bid Ena goodbye and, on his departure, Mrs. Snell had thrown an old shoe and a broom after him. The broom "turned toward the house", so they knew he would return safely. Dick Seymour spent the day with her, but, whether due to her health or the absence of her companion, her diary keeping ceased for over a week.

On Thursday, the 11th, Agent Troth wrote General Order, Commander of the Department of the Platte, of the departure of the Pawnee:

I wish to inform you that the Indians have left the Agency to engage in their Summer hunt on the Republican. I am to meet them on Saturday the 13th inst at Grand Island, and expect to have a council with them there.

I have furnished them with 4 white flags 3 x 4 ft with a large P in the center

They were to follow up the Loup Fork on the south side until opposite Grand Island and then cross the

Platt at that place /then/ up the Platt on the south side a /short distance and then strike across to Colonel Devons Camp /at Red Willow/ and report to him.

Baptist Byhille Interpreter and J. B. Omohundro, late a scout for Government Troops at Fort McPherson, are in charge of them /Pawnee Agency Letterbook, 56, 57/

Troth's council did not take place with the Pawnee chiefs on the 14th, as planned, but took place on Monday, the 15th. Congress had passed a law allowing the Pawnee to sell a portion of their lands, and Troth was trying to get their approval. The chiefs were unhappy to learn that the money was to be placed out at interest in Washington, D.C. The resolutions passed at the council have not been located, but according to Troth's letter of the 18th, the Pawnee insisted the money be spent immediately upon improvements to the remainder of the reservation. The council apparently ended when Troth explained that they could not ~~sell the land for another year unless they consented to the money being put out for interest for four years.~~ Troth returned unhappily to the reservation, while the Pawnee and Texas Jack headed toward the Republican Valley and the buffalo range. /Pawnee Agency Letterbook, 64, 65/

Little is known of the 1872 summer buffalo hunt. Though Texas Jack later wrote about some of his adventures, he apparently did not write of his hunt with the Pawnee. In the spring of 1886, however, the editor of the Holdrege Nebraska Nugget, met Joe Atkinson, foreman of John Bratt's ranch on the Birdwood, near North Platte. Learning that the editor was from Phelps County, Atkinson, though not mentioned in contemporary literature, told of one of the Pawnee's buffalo hunts that

summer, though he misdated it as 1873:

A band of 800 Pawnee warriors, who were the wards of Uncle Sam were ordered out to kill their own meat for winter supply. The Indians were under the supervision of a frontiersman familiarly known at that time as "Texas Jack," who lead the party.

The Indians were armed with bows and arrows. Atkinson was but a 16 year old boy, but used to all the arts of Buffalo war. The entire party was mounted, and after riding quietly a short distance a herd was discovered grazing on the bluffs at the head of Turkey Creek which is in the South part of Phelps county. A herd generally contained thousands of them but there were only fifteen hundred in this one. The attack was made without delay and the indians made terrible havoc with them. The herd was surrounded and kept on the level ground so as to give the ponies a better chance to run. The indians mode wf attack was to ride up close to one and shoot it in the flank just in front of the hind leg, in this part of the body the arrow would strike no bones and a powerful savage would frequently burry it in the bowels of the doomed buffalo. One arrow thus sent home would soon sicken and tumble the best of them. Let the reader imagine then what terrible havoc 800 well armed savages would make with a small herd on an open field. Mr. Atkinson tells us that not a buffalo out of the fifteen hundred escaped.

July - 6

This seems like an incredible story, but when we consider that there was not two buffalo apiece for them to kill it looks more reasonable. This was the last year for buffalo killing in Phelps county, although a few were seen afterwards. The settlers, indians and hunters from eastern counties got too thick and they pushed on farther west. /Holdrege, Nebraska Nugget, 22 June 1886, 4/

Perhaps Jack had hired young Atkinson to go along as an errand boy, rather than depend upon living in the tents of the Pawnee, or perhaps the story is a fabrication, though it seems an unlikely one, for, by 1886, Texas Jack was forgotten hero.

Apparently runners were sent back to the reservation, and, perhaps, the "success" Troth refers to, in his letter of July 25th, is in reference to the hunt described by Atkinson. The dating would be about correct, for the Pawnee were noted for their long distance speed.

To J. B. Omohondru & Baptist Byhille

Dear Friends:

I received a letter from Jack, and have also heard from the bearer of this of your progress and success which is very satisfactory, and I hope you will succeed in getting a large amount of buffalo meat. you can say to the Pawnee their crops look fine they will have the largest crops they have ever had since I have been with them. Baptist corn opposit my place is very fine indeed. Tell the Pawnees I often think of them, and pray to God that they may succeed on their summer hunt

July - 7

and not do any wrong thing to any body whilst they are away from me.

I was glad to hear you had recovered the horses that were stolen from the Indians. Let me hear from /you/ every opportunity. As it is a great Satisfaction to hear from you.

P. S. Mary S. Barns wished me to say the / /ty have a great plenty of every thing at the School now. vegetables of all kinds in abundance, and other supplies. /Pawnee Agency Letterbook, 71, 72/

Back at Fort McPherson, Ena recommenced diary entries on Sunday, July 21st--her first since the 12th. The Snells had moved into a larger house, where Ena had a "large pleasant room all to my self", and, when able, she went riding with young Wilk Snell, who sometimes "beautifully" allowed her to ride too far and too fast. George Dillard arrived from the Medicine, complaining that no one cleaned the grounds around their tent, since she was gone, and brought her the corpse of her wildcat, which had choked to death on its chain.

On the evening of the 22nd, Ena was surprised by a short visit from Texas Jack and a few Pawnee. The purpose of the trip, from whence they came (from the East by train?) or where they headed towards is not noted. There is no evidence that Major Troth was aware of this visit to the Fort, and it seems most likely he would have disapproved.

On the following day, Ena finally met Buffalo Bill, who had returned that evening from the military expedition, which had left on June 5th. He came ahead of the rest of the command and had stopped at the office of the North Platte Democrat, on his way to the post. His visit was

noted in the next issue of that paper:

"BUFFALO BILL."
His Trip to Ft. Randall and Challenge
to a Buffalo Hunt.

Last Tuesday evening we were agreeably surprised to see the brown visaged countenance of "Buffalo Bill" enter the office with his customary salutation of "How!" We were surprised, from the fact that his appearance was unlooked for.

Mr. Cody left the command about 65 miles northeast of this place, on Tuesday evening, and succeeded in reaching this town. He says that the North Platte is booming high, and where he crossed, about fifteen miles from here, the current is very swift. A person possessing the ordinary amount of nerve would have hesitated in crossing such a deep and turbulent stream; but Bill has taken so many chances during his career as a scout that he was not to be turned off. He was alone in the perilous undertaking. He stripped himself to the waist, and, taking the bridle reins of the animal in his mouth, he boldly struck out, and after a desperate effort succeeded in reaching the opposite shore.

His friends tried to prevail upon his remaining in town over night, but his anxiety to see his family was too great, and after a short rest he pushed on to the Fort, making a ride of eighty-five miles in one day.

CHALLENGE TO THE WORLD.

I hereby challenge any Hunter in America to a trial of Buffalo killing, and will wager one thousand dollars

that I can kill more in the same length of time.

BUFFALO BILL,
Fort McPherson, Neb.

/North Platte Democrat, as republished in the Omaha
Weekly Herald, Wed., 31 July 1872/

The challenge and the one thousand dollar bet undoubtedly came as a great surprise to Mrs. Cody.

On Friday, July 26th, Ena noted in detail that Buffalo Bill had invited her to go shooting. She pondered over the egotism involved in such a meeting, that just because she had "acquitted myself with decided credit," when she shot with Texas Jack, she should not allow herself to become to try and make "my self famous as a shootest." The invitation was tempered by a report that the camp on the Medicine had been flooded badly, though the reports were vague as to what had been lost.

The following day there was new material for Ena's attention. The two youngest Snell children, Mary^f and James, arrived at Fort McPherson. Apparently they had been going to school in the East. She was intrigued that Mary Snell was even smaller in build than she was. She was interested in having a young woman her own age as a companion, if only for a few days.

Shortly before the month ended, a James Willett, wrote an Omaha newspaper, of the Red Willow country, up-dating Royal Buck's account of July 1st. Writing on July 27th, Willett wrote:

The settlement of Red Willow is looking up; about thirty-four families having homesteaded here and commenced working their claims. Rains have thus far been both regular and abundant; in fact, almost daily showers have descended to gladden the earth....

Buffalo are almost without number between the Republican and Beaver, the last mentioned stream being not over fifteen miles south of this place. Elk are in great numbers on the different streams; also deer and antelope. The Red Willow (and no doubt other streams) contains fine fish, mullet and cat of about 3½ to 4 pounds, being the principal kinds.

Our military post consists of Co. B, 9th infantry and Co. C, 2d Cavalry, commanded by the captain of the former company numbering in all seven officers (including the surgeon) and about 125 men. They are all encamped about a mile from the river on Red Willow, and the camp is located on the school section.

Four surveying parties are west of this place sectionizing and subdividing, and will probably survey to the west line of the State, and South to the Kansas line. They met "Whistler's" band about 42 miles west of here on Frenchman's or Whiteman's fork. Only part of the band was seen, numbering 58 warriors and 2 squaws. They showed no hostility, and no trouble was expected. The surveyers sent in a messenger and notified the military. It is rumored that 100 lodges of Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and some other Indians have stolen out of the southern reserve bands in Kansas, and moved over on the Beaver.

The real good sound sense idea would be to establish a permanent post of two companies of cavalry at or near

Red Willow. In another year enough corn will be raised here to obviate the difficulty of transporting forage to maintain them, and to no better purpose can troops be used than in the protection of frontier settlers. If all the troops now in the Southern States were sent into Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota, and scattered out into camps of two companies each for the protection of the frontier settlers, it would not be three years before the influx of settlers would so populate these countries as to work out a solution of the Indian question, rendering them harmless by reason of numbers.

But to return. No better stock raising country exists than can be found right here. Buffalo and Bunch grasses are higher and heavier in growth than in any other part of the country. This is proven by the tenacity with which the buffalo cling to their feeding grounds. Cattle cannot be brought to perfection sooner in any other part of the world than here.

A great advantage this Republican valley has over the Platte, is its timber. Cottonwood of the yellow variety, closely resembling poplar, attains a large size. Judge Hinman of North Platte has a steam saw mill now in successful operation, and lumber for building purposes can be had here cheaper than on the line of the railroad....
/Omaha Daily Herald, 13 Aug., 1872, as found in the "Burlington Scrapbooks", Vol.7, 191 (Nebraska State Historical Society Library)/