Reminiscences of Pioneer Days

Section 5, Pages 121 - 150

These reminiscences tell the early history of Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri as written by Mrs. Nelly McCoy Harris. The stories were published in Kansas City newspapers.

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At the old time infair it seemed to me there must have been seventeen of everything; cakes and calf foot jelly, syllabub, charlotte russe, salads, ice cream--but see I have placed the cart before the horse--turkey, cold ham, hot bread, coffee, pickles, sugar plums and other goodies ad infinitum; enough and to spare for the white folks, scores of colored servants, the swarm of children and to send away to neighbors who were unable to be present.

Mr. James Porter, the father of Jesse, was a Methodist preacher and of course dancing was not allowed, but the gayest of games were played, sentimental songs sung and other pleasant pastimes indulged in after the feast and "all went merry as a marriage bell" until day began to dawn and the guests reluctantly pulled themselves away.

HOW THE BRIDE WAS DRESSED.
Drawn from memory by Mrs. N. M. Harris, who attended the wedding.

It would take a whole page of the STAR to recount the festive functions, dining days, big suppers, house parties and so on that were enjoyed in the dear old Porter home.

The servants on the plantation called Mr. Porter senior "Bah" and his wife "Middy"--this was said to be an abbreviation or perversion of master and mistress. The negroes were generously provided for and indulged. Around the "big house" in a semi-circle was what might be termed the "black belt;" Susan's cabin stood near where the Hall homestead is now, then around west and south, then east, in the umbrage of fine linn and hickory trees were the comfortable cabins of the negro families, where the hickory logs blazed and snapped winter and summer in the wide fireplaces.

IN THE NEGRO QUARTERS.

The old time negroes never allowed their fires to die out entirely even when the weather was hot.

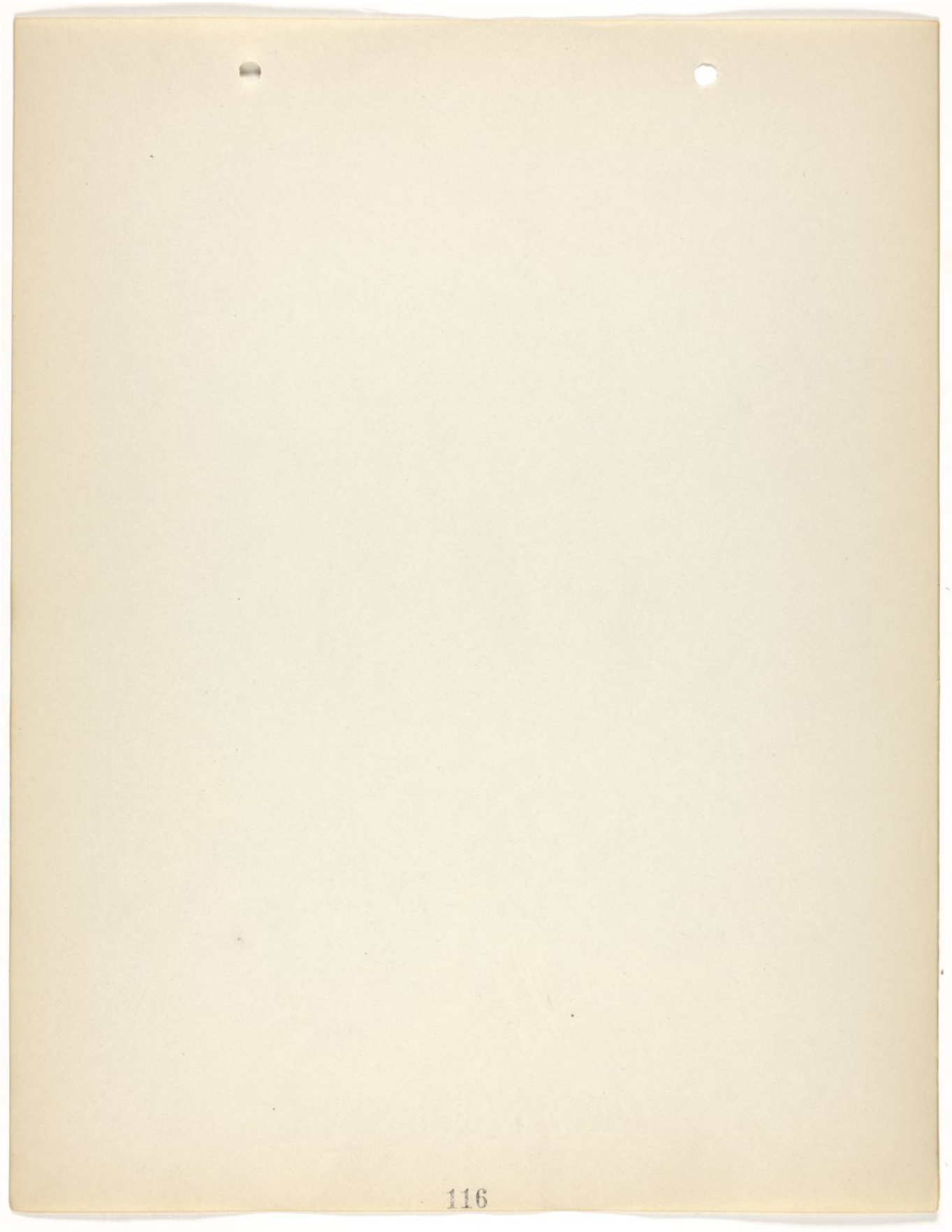
In this dark settlement there was, every Christmas, one or more weddings. There was always ample material in this, quite the reverse of race suicide community, and at these affairs no Methodist, Baptist, (the denominations to which most of the servants belonged) rules or conscientious scruples interfered with dancing. Nothing could control the negroes' feet when the fiddles sawed out "Leather Breeches" or other stirring tempting, coaxing jigs. When Sam played the fiddle and Bill picked the banjo and Rafe rattled the bones I had to hike out of hearing myself to maintain the dignity of caste.

Sam Porter, whose waking hours were in spots, so to speak, for the moment he sat down, laid down or leaned against anything he began snoring. Well, Sam furnished a psychological phenomenon which I believe stands alone

in the mysteries of humanity. Sam could play the fiddle when he was fast asleep--that is--he looked like he was asleep, and he snored, and his compeers, who were more in touch with him than I was, declared that he was at such times as dormant as the seven sleepers. Sam may have been playing 'possum, possibly but not probably. I merely relate the circumstance as I heard it and as it appeared to me.

The musical performances of the old fashioned negroes were, it is needless to say, unclassic, but they were powerfully stirring. I can but hope, for the sake of those who have gone to their reward that the heavenly choir has a fiddle or so in the collection of instruments. The illustrations only display apathetic harps and Gabriel's trumpet.

N. M. HARRIS.



OLD WESTPORT MEMORIES.

SCENES OF FIFTY YEARS AGO RECALLED BY MRS. N. M. HARRIS.

Haunts of her Girlhood, Recently Visited by Her, Brought to Mind Many Interesting Incidents and Persons--The Troost Park Cavern.

(Published in the Kansa City Star, Aug. 12 of about the year 1907)

In a communication to the Star Mrs. N. M. Harris of Rich Hill, Mo., describes scenes in and about Westport of fifty years ago. She writes:

"One afternoon this summer I wandered along this ever lovely portion of God's green earth, beginning my walk where the road curves from Harrison street. Here in the northwest angle, I found one familiar old-time feature, the spring which bubbles beneath the branches of a spreading elm tree, the same elm, I truly believe, that I bent when it was a sapling, and rode its bounding boughs. A tree can grow immensely in fifty odd years. The beauty of this old fountain is marred by a covering of unsightly boards over its bosom, once so sparkling in the sunlight.

"Continuing my walk, I found another familiar old-time friend, the cave-spring. A little distance within the cavern I heard again the muffled murmur of a far away waterfall. This place is a natural grotto, and could with little effort and expense, be made an unique, picturesque feature of the roadway. The source of the cave is at, or near Troost Park, and at one time its course could be clearly defined by the succession of sink holes, the two deepest being at the northeast and southwest corners of Thirty-third and Harrison streets. From this point the cavern extends west and connects with a well near Campbell and Thirty-third streets, thence runs almost due south to the spring at Gillham road.

"Mr. McCoy, whose home was near Thirty-third and Campbell streets, once undertook to prove his theory, that the stream which filled that old well had its outlet at the cave spring, and he threw some oat chaff into the well. The watchers, at the mouth of the cave, saw, in time, the chaff floating on the water.

WATER CRESS BED STILL THERE.

"Along the bed of the brook here I found, still flourishing, a bed of water cress. Mrs. Davenport, an English woman, who lived at the farm-house just east of the spring, sent to England for the seed and sowed them along the banks of the brook more than thirty years ago. Involuntarily I lifted my skirts a little and stepped about gingerly, for I could not forget the numerous water snakes which used to glide among the cress and weeds in my day.

"Perched periously on the rocky ledge just west of Cave Spring in the old days was a little cottage. In fancy, I sawagain, on its porch, the rotund form and glossy bald pate of Pedagogue Piper, who taught us

pioneer children to spell and read, and who tried to teach us to sing, but the doleful ditties he warbled were so uninspiring and so little to our taste, that we made poor progress in this accomplishment. Mr. Piper's repertoire consisted of 'Barbara Allen,' who died of grief and sorrow; 'Mary She Came Weeping,' and like lugubrious lyrics, so no wonder we light-hearted youngsters proved dullards under his tutelage.

"Passing the building erected by the park board, I turned northwest to reach the old Independence and Westport road. This 'big road' brought a flood of recollections, and again I looked and listened for familiar scenes and sounds. I half expected to see Aunt Vinie Dillard coming along the southwest road from a day's work at Mrs. Maupin's. I missed the mellifluous voice of the good old darky singing, as was her wont, as she walked along the sequestered road, "I loves my Jesus, dat I do; ride on Jesus; Does you belong to de Gideum band?" or some other old-time negro melody. Aunt Vinie once said she never could understand why 'culled folks longed for freedom,' and she told me that her own grandchildren 'got to be plum villains after dey was sot free by Mr. Lincum.'

THE PEACOCK ON THE HILL.

"On the hill above the Harris ranch memory recalled a pretty picture obliterated long years ago. There stood the picturesque, abandoned, old home of the Harrises, and strutting about the yard were numerous peacocks, their pretty gaudy plumage spread and glistening in the sunlight. Westport was an alluring place in those old days and we rural lassies tarried often in our frequent visits there. Lengthening shadows had to warn me often that I must hike homewards, and I felt no fear alone on the big road except at this one spot where those alert fowls would send forth their cry of alarm and warning so dismal and doleful, like no other sound on earth, above it or beneath it. Then with cold chills chasing along my spine, I would urge my pudgy little pony to a brisk gait until I reached the high hill beyond.

"I heard no more the sonorous 'sook, sook, cow,' as the 'widder' called her kine from the open woods; not the faintest tinkle of a cow bell came across the valley. The 'widder's humble cottage stood where Thirty-seventh and Holmes streets now intersect. Two good sons tilled the little farm in summer and split fence rails and cut cord wood in winter, to provide food and clothing for a numerous family.

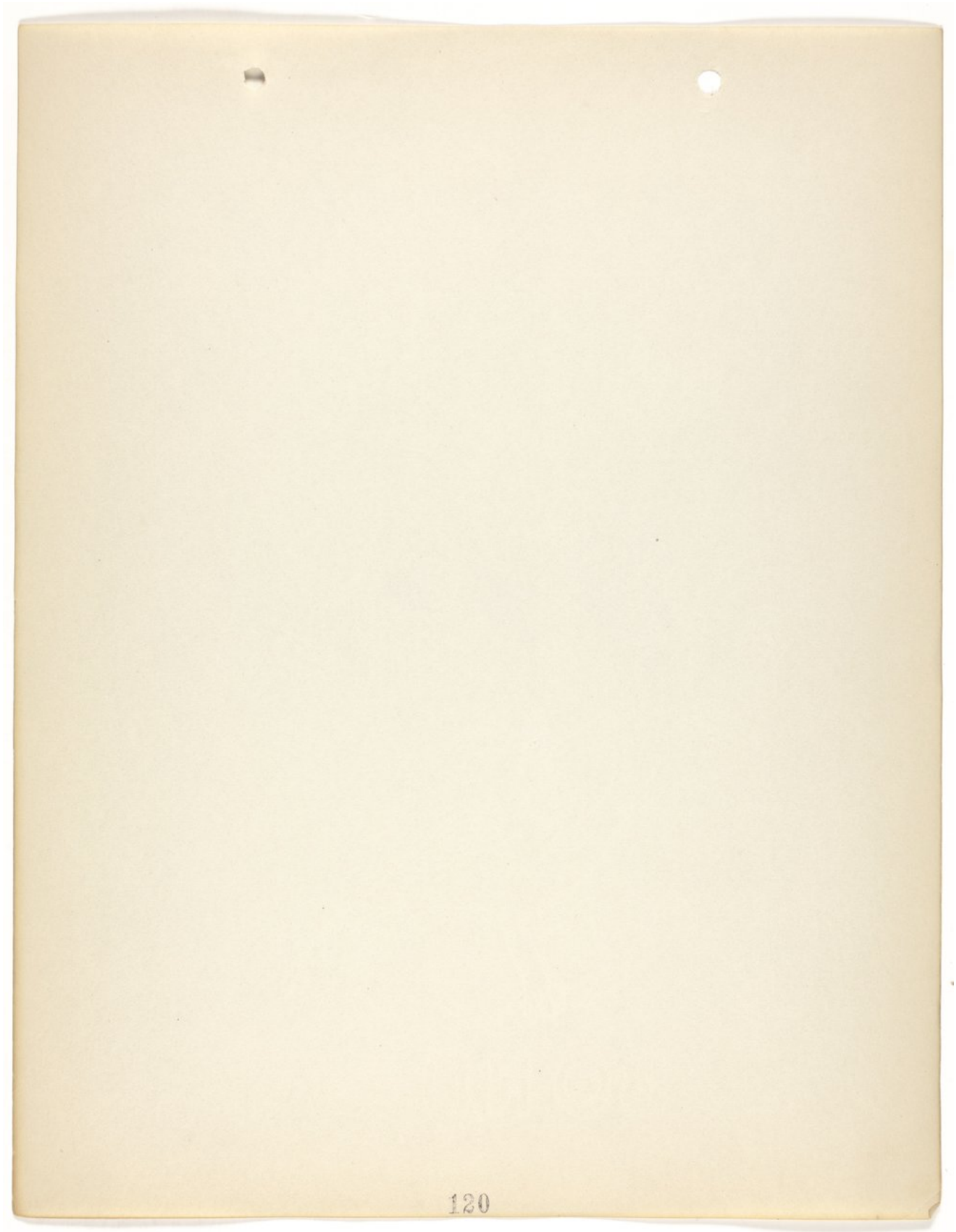
"In my wanderings I did not meet 'General Hebuttel' as of old. This familiar old party was not a billy goat, as one might infer from his name--he was merely a simple-minded, huge, amiable Austrian, who cultivated a market garden on Larkin Steele's farm and trudged daily with his produce across his back along the road to Westport. This was a pathetic picture--the poor old man who boasted that he had once attended to the imperial gardens in Vienna, wearily traversing the four-mile journey to market, tattered clothing and feet bare, but ever happy and uncomplaining.

DEVIL WAGONS INSTEAD OF OXEN.

"When next I travel along the beautiful valley, I will doubtless,

instead of the rumble of prairie schooners, hear the discordant chug! chug! of the devil wagon; not the thrilling bay of the fox hound, but the yelp of somebody's pet pug, which the auto has ground into the dust of the roadway.

Progress is a cruel iconoclast, but there are compensations and my sorrow at the vanishing of sounds and scenes once so familiar and clear may be in a measure assuaged by the thought, the hope, that these modern vehicles may ere long annihilate the entire ugly pug species--sic (him) semper!"



'CINDY AND UNCLE JEEMS.

(The Several Illustrations are Missing.)

Some Unwritten History of the Old Town of Westport.

(Published in the Kansas City Star, about I9Io)

Two Rare Old Characters Who Had Their Ups and Downs--Delightful Recollections of One Who Knew.

The location of the triple towns of Jackson county in the old times could have been marked by an isosceles triangle, Westport at the southwest angle, the City of Kansas at the northwest and Independence at the apex. These towns here were closely connected socially, in many instances by kindred ties, and each had among its citizens peculiar types of humanity; some so marked in uniqueness or special traits and who played so conspicuous a part in our early days it seems a pity to allow the record to pass from memory.

Take Aunt 'Cindy and Uncle Jeems, for instance--I place the lady's name first, otherwise no old-timer would recognize the subject of this sketch.

This old couple were really aunt and uncle to no one that I ever heard of, but on account of their simple, unpretentious ways, their hospitality and sympathetic fellow feeling--that one "touch of nature that makes the whole world kin--" the people hereabouts regarded them with genuine affection and everybody called them aunt and uncle.

The educational advantages of our old friends had been slender and their finances slimmer still, but they were high-headed in a way and Uncle Jeems asserted often that he "nevah would affiliate with the skimmins of the yearth." As for Aunt Cindy, she hobnobbed (figuratively) with the upper ten.

This childless old lady was the pink of neatness, her gray locks always in order with a pair of ringlets behind each ear. About her shoulders she wore a snowy ruffledor lace trimmed [illegible] kerchief, crossed upon her ample bosom. She wore over her frock on week days a checked gingham apron, on Sundays a white one, and these useful if not ornamental accessories to her toilet heralded the coming many blocks away of this familiar figure on our streets in the old days. Aunt 'Cindy wore ordinarily a sunbonnet with pasteboard splits in the casings; on "high days" a dress bonnet--not always, as her neighbor Jerushy M. expressed it, "in the ultry of the fashion," but appropriate and comfortable.

Uncle Jeems, on dress-up occasions, laid off his coonskin cap and butternut jeans suit and donned his glad garments. When thus decked he had a way of hopping along in a perky kind of a way that reminded one of a little cock sparrow. He was punctual in his attendance at church, where he always stood up during the prayers, at Methodist, Episcopal or any other services, turning his back to the preacher and resting one foot on the pew, with his face elevated heavenwards.

In this attitude Uncle Jeems was a picture of piety. But a conscientious chronicler must often sacrifice personal inclinations in order to delineate correctly biography or events, so right here I must own that, notwithstanding Uncle Jeems's devotional demeanor on Sundays, on week days he could, when circumstances seemed to demand it, out-cuss a turbaned Turk.

These lapses from a proper regard for the proprieties by the pugnacious little man shocked and distressed the good wife, who took him to task many times when they were smoking their not always pipes of peace before the open wood fire.

Aund 'Cindy was much larger of the two and she bossed her small helpmate to a finish, and, as is usual when "the gray mare assumes to be the better horse," the henpecked person sought surcease elsewhere whenever he could.

He was quite a ladies' man, Uncle Jeems was; and his too evident admiration for a fresh, pretty face called down Aunt 'Cindy's wrath and strenuous remonstrances many times.

"Why Lucindy," he replied on one such occasion, "who can help looking at Pricie? She 'pears like she is just made of peaches and cream, and besides, Lucindy, she has manners and customs jest like my fust wife."

This unfortunate allusion to a former partner of his bosom would doubtless have proved the little man's undoing, but for the fact that Aunt 'Cindy loved this dear, lonely lass, Pricie, too well herself to raise too much of a raucus over the affair, but she made it up on other occasions.

"You shriveled up old skilleton you," she would say, "it does look to me like you are old enough and onery enough to learn some sense. Why, them young gearls that you are castin' sheep's eyes at wouldn't wipe their feet on you."

Even Dilsey, the colored cook at Mr. Scarritt's said: "Ole Mass Uncle Jeems he sed, when he fotch de milk dis mawning, dat Miss Aunt 'Cindy she ain't very friendly to'ads him, so he b'lieve he'll toast his shins by my kitchen fiah befo' he hikes out to his mawnin's wuk."

Aunt 'Cindy and Uncle Jeems lived for more than half a century in the town, almost forty years in the little brick cottage on an eminence sloping to the south.

The house had originally three rooms, besides the cook's quarters, a small porch at the front and a long one at the south side. This south porch was afterwards closed to make rooms for persons who boarded at different times with the generous, tidy couple. A bachelor friend took up his abode in that humble home and remained an inmate there for more than twenty years.

To this tirade Uncle Jeems would meekly reply "No, Lucindy, and I don't want them to;" then he would steal quickly away in search of surcease; he would go to the barn and kick the colt or bore for an hour or so a group of loiterers on a street corner; and who could blame him?

Uncle Jeems's occupation was farming in a small way and breaking colts. A familiar sight in the old town was this little sawed-off man mounted on a frisky, young horse, which would cavort and careen in futile attempts to unseat the rider--futile, until one sad day when the dun colt plunged and reared so wildly that this uncommonly fine horseman was thrown to the ground, breaking his leg and, he insisted, "twisted the spine of his back."

The poor old fellow was bedridden for many weary months, but contrary to expectation, the wiry little man pulled through and he was able to limp around the town for years, but never again to break colts.

Uncle Jeems's long confinement in the house was a worrying ordeal to Aunt 'Cindy. She told visitors she was "mighty nigh plum distracted settin' thar listenin' to Jeems's gruntin' an' groanin." At last becoming desperate she rose to the occasion and said, "The old critter can't get well an' he won't die; an' here I've got to stay, day in an' day out. I can't see what good it does Jeems to hang on this way. He'd be better off dead, and gracious knows I would." If there was one thing above another that Aunt 'Cindy enjoyed it was visiting around.

The finances of the old people became pretty low during this period of adversity, which had no sweet uses that I could see, and but for the considerate, generous bachelor boarder, who sacrificed his own comfort that he might help these poor people, they would have suffered for the bare necessities of life.

Aunt 'Cindy, however, was by no means backward about throwing out broad hints to generous friends, or resorting to other means of mending her circumstances. She would knit a pair of gray yarn socks with white heels and toes, put on a well worn calico frock and carry her gift to some well-to-do neighbor. The gaping wounds in the old lady's dress appealed so piteously that she invariably left the house much richer than she came. The price of socks rose immensely amd immediately.

No other two people who walked these streets in the olden times were so universally known as Aunt 'Cindy and Uncle Jeems. High and low, poor and rich, white folks, Indians, and negroes--the three races living in the community then--knew them and felt ever a kindly interest in them.

Scarcely a meal did this hospitable couple eat alone in that humble home. And such meals; incomparable peach preserves, the lightest, whitest biscuit, home cured ham broiled on wood coals; Yum! Yum! I can taste them yet.

I think Uncle Jeems was really proud of his stalwart helpmate and felt a genuine affection for her, and she loved him commensurate with his size if not his merits. But the old lady had such a doleful droop of the corners of her mouth, such mournful expression of the eyes, and her voice was lugubrious in the extreme; so it was no wonder that Uncle Jeems took to breaking colts. The faithful bachelor boarder kept the wolf, the whole pack, from the door all these years, but the long lane reached a turning point at last.

The boom came and to their astonishment our old friends were offered an immense price for the two or three acres on which their little house stood.

Five thousand dollars was paid at once to bind the bargain and the old couple went out from the humble cot that had sheltered them for near half a century. But for that powerful panacea, the $5,000, I believe they would have grieved greatly.

They took up their abode in a fashionable boarding house, arrayed themselves in glad garments and began for the first time in their lives to lead a life of ease and luxury. Aunt 'Cindy seemed to fit into the new niche more readily than Uncle Jeems. He tried his best to demean himself as circumstances demanded; he discarded his butternut jeans clothes and donned store apparel; but somehow his trousers had a dejected kind of droop below the waistband, like Huckleberry Finn's, and his new cloth coat would flare out at the back making him look more like a perky little cocksparrow than ever. Aunt 'Cindy dressed in silk merino instead of calico, and made a tonier reticule to carry her pipe and tobacco in and was a pattern of dignity in this new sphere.

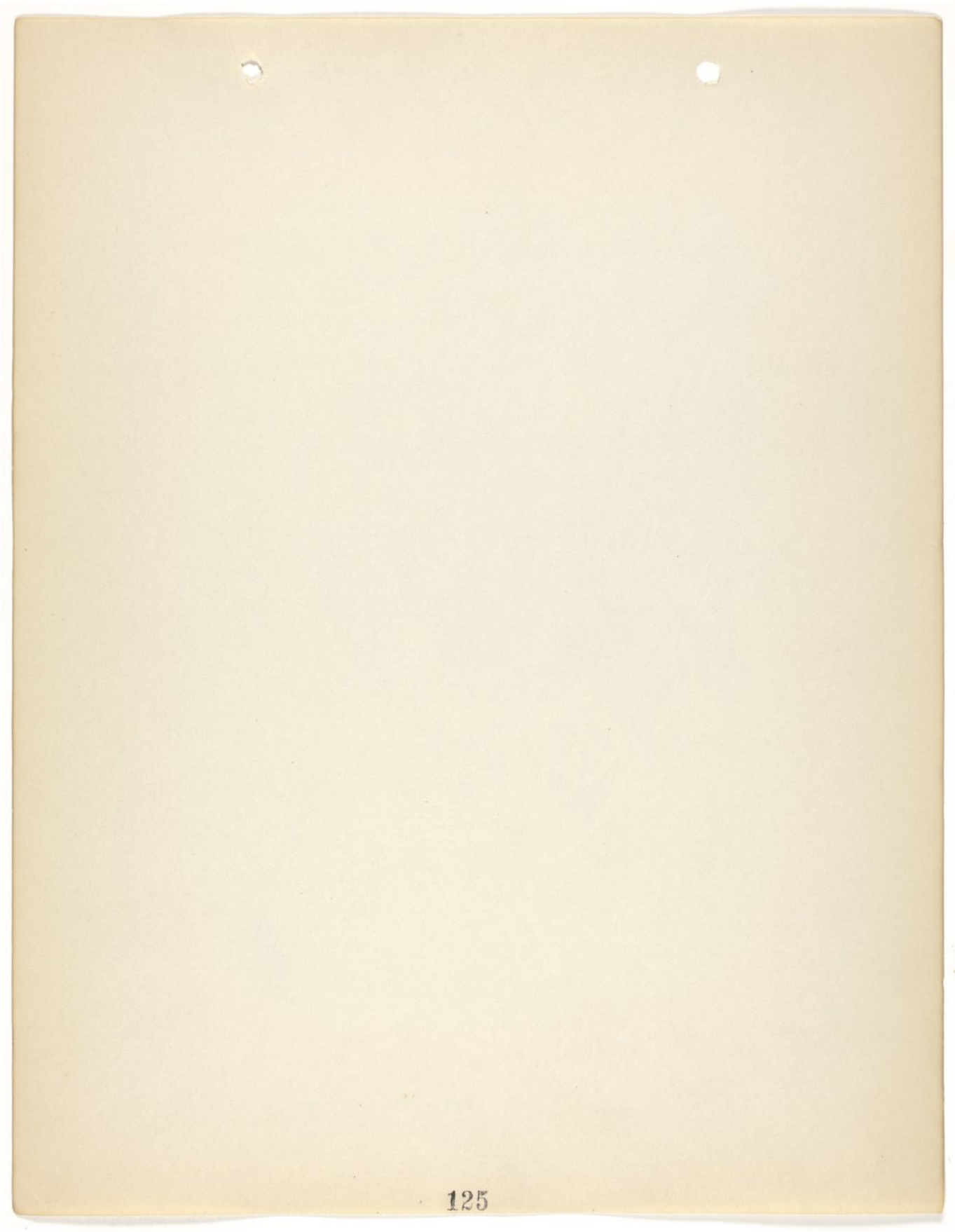
But alas! and alas! These dear old people enjoyed but a brief period of prosperity. The title to their property proved defective, and by the time this was discovered the $5,000 was about spent, so the poor old couple in extreme old age began anew life's struggles and their last days, instead of being their best, as they and the community trusted, were the sorriest, saddest of their lives.

Uncle Jeems spent his time picking his way cautiously along the irregular stone sidewalks in the old town, or standing on sunny corners telling about his exciting journey, when in 1848 he drove an ox team for F. X. Aubrey to Santa Fe, which was true; and relating many other marvelous incidents which he must have dreamed, and selling on the side a liniment of his own manufacture "good for all ailments of man or beast, and nothing can tech it fer a misery in the spine of your back."

Aunt 'Cindy was clothed and fed by the contributions from the benefi-cent bachelor boarder and other charitable friends. Her long stemmed pipe was her only solace.

This unique couple never could, if they had lived a thousand years instead of almost a hundred as they did, have set the world on fire by their brilliant achievements in any line of life. Yet they bore a conspicious and enduring part in the making of the history of our section; indeed Westport would not have been Westport without Uncle Jeems and Aunt 'Cindy. Without these and the hosts of others who were familiar figures here in the old days, a record of our early history would be "stale, flat and unprofitable."

Their ashes repose in Union cemetery and it does seem a shame, a grievous pity, that the little handfuls of duts that remain in that onde sacred, quiet spot must be disturbed and carried to strange places that "knew them not," to satisfy the rapacity of modern progress.



WHEN THE CREAM WAS RICH AND THICK.

(Published in the Kansas City Star, in Nov. of about 1912)

The recent agitation concerning the milk question--pure milk, butter fat milk, embalmed, sterilized or denatured milk--a subject that is disturbing the sensibilities of the adult citizens of Kansas City and the "tummies" of the infants, sets me to thinking. My mind goes back many, many years to a time when neither the quantity nor quality of that wholesome, essential beverage fell short. This section then, like the happy land of Canaan, figuratively flowed with milk and honey.

In the month of October, 1825, there rested for a night at the ford crossing of Big Blue, on the stage road to the territories, a cavalcade composed of twenty-five horses, about thirty head of cattle, twenty hogs, a few sheep and five wagons loaded with household goods, provisions, men, women and children; the group of human beings being the thirteen members of the family of John Johnson, a Tennessee-ean, who was seeking a new home in the far West. This family consisted of Mr. Johnson, his wife, their little daughter, Sarah, and their three married sons and their five children. In the morning the party and domestic animals proceeds on its journey, climbing the long and rugged hill beyond the Blue it traveled westward two miles, then turning northwest, soon reached the destination, a spot in the fertile valley between the hills south of Gooseneck creek and the tall bluffs bordering the Missouri river. Here they lighted their camp fires on that crisp October evening, here they established their domicile, which was to be the home of this fine frontiersman the remainder of his life; part of the farm, now in the heart of Kansas City, is still the abiding place of Mr. Johnson's descendants.

On that eventful evening for the first time the rhythmic tinkle of a cowbell echoed among these tall hills and valleys--thus was initiated the milk business in the section now Kansas City and its vicinity.

Every family kept cows in the earliest days here and their kine wandered at will through the woods, the brass bells hanging to their necks indicating the course of their wanderings.

Cynthia, a negro servant in Mr. McCoy's family, was a famous dairy-maid in the old days. I can see her yet as she would start to "cuppen," near the upper crossbars, with one cedar piggin as large as a tub resting on her well poised head, a smaller one for the "strippings" held against her left hip, calling to the cows as she walked along. Talk about awakening echoes! Cynthia could stand at the edge of the wood, raise that stentorian voice of hers and halloo, "Sook! sook Brindle; sook Piedy, sook Rose!" until the forest would ring and echo for a mile or more around.

Presently we could hear old Brindle--the bell cow--answering "low," then a concert of "moos" from the whole herd as "the kine came hame."

After a while Westport was "laid out." The town grew fast and houses were close together, so all could not keep cows. Then Aunt Vinie Dillard, the colored servant in one of the families, began to carry milk daily to customers.

I think fresh milk then sold for ten cents a gallon. Often we shavers were sent to neighbors for an extra supply and we got it good and plenty, and as cool as the limpid waters flowing through the springhouses could make it.

Some time later on Bunkum Bailey supplied a number of citizens of the new town, Kanzas, on the river, (now Kansas City) with milk, carrying two buckets at a time. Bunkum, by the way, was a resourceful citizen and what honest business of one kind or another he wasn't engaged in at some period of his life is hardly worth mentioning. A sight of Bunkum's pretty, tidy wife was guarantee enough that no milk, except of the best, ever left that house and an army of food inspectors could never have discovered anything wrong there or have downed Mr. Bailey's dairy business.

"Uncle Jack" was another pioneer milk peddler. This chipper little man toted milk to nearby neighbors. Aunt Betsy, his masterful spouse, required this service of him, but if she had only known the genuine enjoyment he got out of it she might have assigned him to some other duty. Her main object was to keep the little man on the move. Her's was a case where one of Josh Billing's maxims fit in, "Laziness is a disease and there is no complete cure for it, but I have known a second wife to hurry it up some."

There seems no sorrow without a twin joy if you can wait long enough, so while "Uncle Jack" hated like poison to pull himself from the comfortable fire and hike out, rain or shine, to carry the milk to his customers, yet he did enjoy above all things the full complement of gossip he was enabled to distribute through the neighborhood, and find listeners to his complaints --"the turrible misery in the spine of his back and them rheumatiz that mighty nigh druv him distracted." His patrons had to listen and Aunt Betsy wouldn't. These neighbors knew how heartlessly henpecked the little old fellow was so they were more tolerant of his gabbing than they would have been under different conditions.

Along in the '50s a thrifty German named Seckinger had a dairy just north of Brush creek, about where Prospect avenue now crosses that stream. His son Joe usually drove the milk wagon to Kansas City, and a long fatiguing trip it was.

I believe the earliest up-to-date dairy in this section was conducted by Mr. Minkler on the Hunter farm. In the north pasture of this estate a passerby could see, about where Thirty-first and Walnut streets now intersect, the dairy men perched on three-legged stools milking the scores of cows belonging to this dairy. A little south of the "cuppen," a few feet east of Main street, was a fine and convenient spring. I do not mean any reflection on the business when I say convenient--I mean that this was a handy place to cool the milk cans, merely.

About this time, or soon thereafter, Foster Asbury of the Hays neighborhood engaged in the dairy business. This dairy man's integrity was unquestioned and his wife was a member of the old dependable Hays family whose fine farms laid along the upland south of Brush creek, so there could be no gainsaying the quality of the milk furnished by that dairy. It was a long and severe drive along that Wornall road in winter time and the milk would be ice cold when it reached the city. Both the Asbury and Minkler dairies had

gaily painted, conveniently arranged milk wagons and I never heard any complaints about unsanitary conditions or other undesirable features.

We learned from our old copy books the adage "There are exceptions to all rules;" so, though I can boast of the good milk of other days, I must confess---I blush to own it--that all our old time dairymen were not above suspicion. A neighbor called me in one day and showed me a small "crawdad" she found in the milk she had just bought from a dairy located on Mabillon McGee's plantation. This dairy was around a fine spring whose waters fell from a hillside in what is now the south end of Penn Valley park. When the customer confronted the milkman with this indispensable evidence of his perfidy he coolly replied that the presence of the little "crawdad" was due to the fact that he placed the empty milk cans beneath the waterfall to cool them and then "the critter must-a-drapped in."

On a recent visit to Kansas City I heard in the street near a suggestive chug! chug! I recognized the voice of an auto of some sort or other, and like the rustic I am, I broke for the window to see what I could see. There stood an automobile milk car, laden with a tempting array of clean bottles filled with what looked like genuine Jersey milk, sans water, sans embalming fluid or other deleterious adjuncts. It looked that way, but I didn't test it. I heard that the milk of this dairy was extracted from the source of supply by auto milking machines, the only function of the erstwhile dairy maid or man being to stand around handy and murmur, as occasion demanded, the soothing "So, Bossy!" or administer now and then the thump in the ribs that seems indispensable in cow culture.

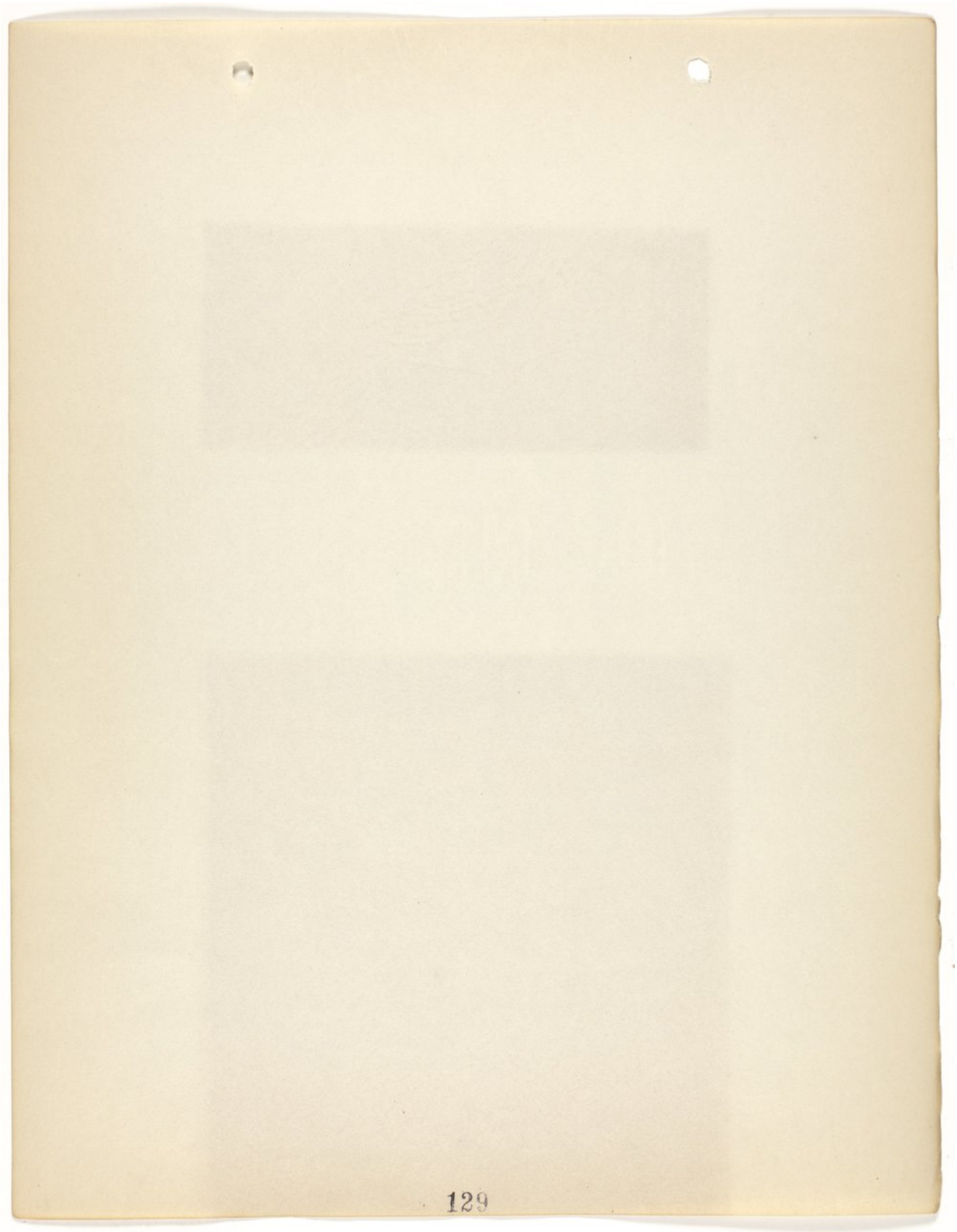
All this seems mighty fine and it is evolution with a vengeance, but it makes nature's beverage cost like sixty. And with all these modern methods --self milkers, auto carts, sanitary supervision and all-I'll wager the article doesn't taste any better--not half so good--as did the rich, cool cream I used to surreptitiously purloin (I believe in calling a spade a spade) from the tempting row of milk pans in my father's icehouse on the point of the bluff at Market street, now Grand avenue and First street.

"How does it happen, Rachel," asked my mother one day of her culinary factotum, "why is it that the cream is so thin and scarce?"

"Don't ax me, Miss Virginny," replied Aunt Rachel, indignantly, "Ax dat bodacious chile settin, dah lookin' so innercent. I done cotch dat chile in dat dah icehouse more dan once an' she want dah for no good, you knows dat. How I gwine make syllabubs or cream gravy if dat spilt chile lick all de cream offen de crocks?"

She didn't lick it off. She found that a flat, folded, clean wheat straw was better for her purpose.

N. M. HARRIS.



FASHION'S FOIBLES & FANCIES

Revival of Styles Discarded Long Ago.

(Published in the Kansas City Star, Sunday, Oct. 28, 1906)

Fashion's fiat in "Paree" announces that trains will be dragged around again. The women must submit to this form of persecution at formal functions and "trotabout" pastimes as well. When one gets to be as old as I am she becomes so accustomed to besetments of one kind and another that a little thing like long trails can be borne with a measure of composure.

"Nothing new under the sun!" wrote sagacious old Solomon. Of all his apothegms none is truer or more enduring than this.

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EACH HAND OF THE TRAINBEARER BEING OCCUPIED HE TUCKED HER TRAIN INTO HIS WAISTBAND AND CARRIED IT IN THAT WAY.

A fine old gentleman whose descendants live still in and about Kansas City said that in his life he led the fashion in collars three times; he wore the same style all his life and fashion returned to him thrice. The older generations of women have been victims of the trail habit through three or four eras.

OLD FASHIONS REVIVED.

To the favored votaries of fashion who pity us as old fogies I say, we commiserate you as well that the styles prevailing now are so long getting around to you. We laid them by long ago. Even hard wood floors with rugs are merely a revival of an old, old fashion, and my! what a task it was to tack carpets down on the hard floors when these became fashionable and rugs were relegated to the dog houses. The tricks of manner affected, from the kangaroo hop to the African flop and to browned bare arms--all these harmless absurdities of fashion have come and gone several times in my life.

THE HOOPSKIRTS OF OUR GRANDMOTHERS.

Just wait till the "Grecian bend" comes around, ladies, as come it will some time; then you will have to hump yourselves. No fashion of modern times is half as absurd, yet sensible ladies adopted it--but for a very brief period. In a certain church in Independence in the '50s where the wealthy and most fashionable element of society congregated, every woman wore a Grecian bend.

ABSURDITIES OF FASHION.

About the same period the men of fashion wore their trousers so tight it was a mystery how they ever got them on. Will Woodson said they hung them from the rafters, went above and jumped in them.

When chignons incumbered the heads of the women one maiden lady, who wished to be in style, cut off her abundant locks, sold her hair for $2.50 and anchored a big chignon to her head with hairpins and bands. One night when she was attending service in a Westport church she sat near an open window and some naughty boys fastened a hook to a long stick, reached in and jerked her fashionable headgear off, leaving her to face the crowd with her hairless head.

At one time the muffs that ladies carried were immense. A lady at Independence came into church on Sunday morning carrying one so large that for a moment I thought she was lugging a black calf in for some kind of sacrifice or votive offering or something.

Dame Fashion runs out of new ideas sometimes, every seven years some say, and must return to vogues of other days, so "there is nothing new under the sun."

I expect to see the hoopskirts of other days return, and oh, ladies! what will you do then in a crowded street car?

THE OLD ARK.

Every now and then in the old days someone of the shavers who lived on the neighborhood road towards Kansas City from the old Independence highway would call out,

"The ark is sailing by!"

This meant that the old carriage of a frugal farmer was passing. The antiquated vehicle loomed high in the air, the body swung on wide weather bands instead of springs; it had steps which folded or unfolded as occasion required, a little round glass window at the back and a flat wooden seat behind for the little darky who went along to open gates. This old "turn out," which should have been "turned in" decades before, looked ancient enough to have been the one that carried the ladies to the ark. Years afterward, like the "one horse shay," it crumbled away.

Not long ago I was in Kansas City and I met some descendants of its owner in a brand new carriage, fine as a fiddle, glistening with shiny paint and burnished metal, and it was the exact counterpart of that ancestral ramshackle rig that rolled along in the air, rounding body and all, only the folding steps and leather springs lacking. The occupants of the new carriage did not seem to feel as much at home as their ancestors did in the "ark." They seemed to feel too fine to be comfortable--that is often the case.

the road in the old days. Mounted high

THE DICKEY.

I went one day to the house of a seamstress and presently an old citizen came in and asked her to do some work for him. She said she could and opened a bundle containing a yard of calico, a spool of thread and a half dozen brown speckled china buttons. He said:

"I am going back to Elinoy to visit my folks. I haven't seen any of them in thirty year and I nachelly want to spruce up a bit. I want you to make me a counterfiet outen this caliker."

Miss Sally's good Methodist tenets taught her to shun shams of every kind and she had, I believe, a vague suspicion that he was in the green goods business, so she answered indignantly:

"If you think I am going to lend a hand at any dishonest business---"

She was interrupted by the old man, who explained: "I mean I want you to make me a dicky, Miss Sally; half a yard is a plenty, ain't it?"

The unsophisticated maiden lady knew precious little about man's apparel anyway, and she became more bewildered the further the directions advanced. Then I went to the rescue of both and explained to Miss Sally that the bachelor wanted her to make for him a detachable shirt front.

Miss Sally asked rather crustily why, if he was trying to make a good impression on his kinery back in Elinoy he didn't have a whole shirt made.

"I dasn't run the risk," he replied. "You see I have worn flannin shirts year in and year out for twenty year on account of a misery in the spine of my back, so you see I don't dust make a change."

A poor girl who possessed for the first time in her life enough all wool goods to make a whole dress and enough money to hire it made, came to Miss Sally and begged her to make it cheap. When asked what pattern she preferred she replied:

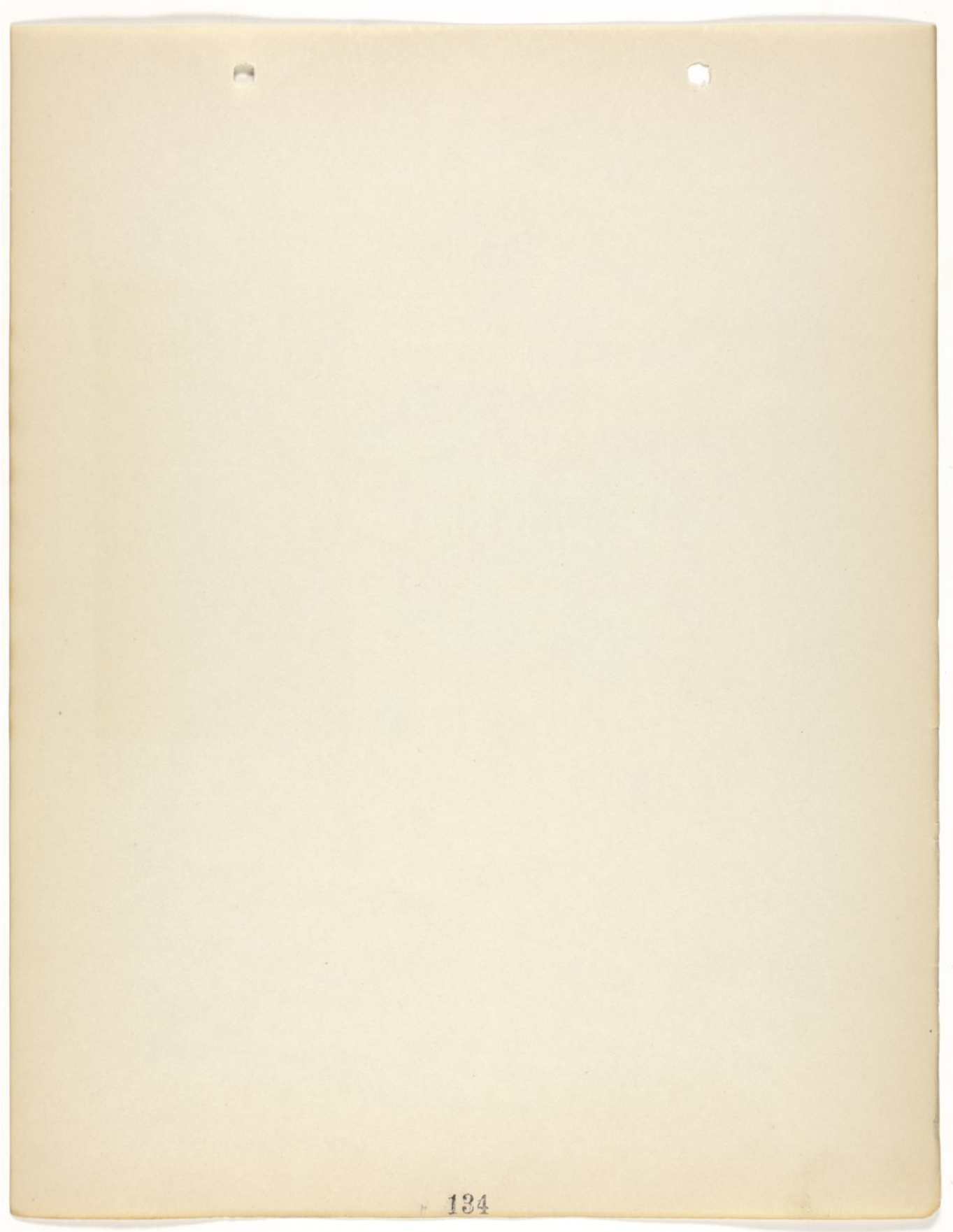
THIS STYLE WAS POPULAR IN THE '70S.

"Oh, I ain't a carin' jest so it is in the ultry of the mode."

Poor pitiful girl! This was her very first opportunity to gratify woman's innate longing for fashionable finery, so whether the garment was V-cut, sleeveless, fastened backwards or any old way just so it was in the extreme of fashion it suited her.

In an Italian theater years ago the custom of carrying long trails was well ridiculed in a hope that the style would be abolished. Pasquaviello was engaged to attend the Countess Fernambrocco; he had one of his hands employed in carrying her muff, the other held her lap dog, so he bore the train of the countess majestically along by sticking it in the waistband of his breeches.

MRS. N. M. HARRIS.



ON THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY.

(Published in the Kansas City Star, about 1911)

A Pioneer Found Only The Squirrels Unchanging Here.

Wild Turkeys on Benton Boulevard and the Pigeon Roost at Argentine--
Hunting Days on Gillham Road--Hoopskirt and Hobble Skirt.

Friends of my youth, dearly remembered faces and familiar forms I rarely meet in my meanderings about the big and beautiful city which has supplanted the cherished haunts of my childhood.

Alone of all those who crossed my pathway among sylvan scenes in the old days, the brown fox squirrels remain ever the same. These confident little denizens of country and town still scamper and bound at will over smooth lawns, across flower beds, along the boulevards, even upon the porches and roofs in the heart of the city.

As I was stepping from the porch of a handsome home a week or so ago a walnut passed perilously near my head falling to the steps below. My hostess said:

"The squirrels have taken possession of the filagree in the gable and abide there the year round. They are now storing their winter supply of nuts and chinquapin acorns.

HUNTING ON RIDGES - NOW GILLHAM ROAD

The other day as I was resting at Armour Boulevard and Charlotte the brown squirrels were darting hither and yon, one now and then pausing to gaze a moment into my face. In that brief moment, I recognized the familiar lineaments of my early friends of the forest. I have no doubt these saucy little creatures are lineal descendants of the squirrels of pioneer days--the remnant of the hordes that escaped the trusty rifle of Captain Scruggs. Times unnumbered I have seen the sturdy figure of this famous huntsman along the wooded ridges around (now)Gillham Road, or returning along the big road, now Gleed Terrace, with bunches of squirrels foreand aft across his stalwart shoulders.

The lively little fellows who so pleasantly entertained me knew not that I had devoured many a choice morsel of their ancestral anatomy.

Once in awhile I would go from school with my friend, Ann Eliza Scruggs, and usually, in season, on the supper table was a huge dish of fried squirrel piping hot, brown and crisp. The aroma of that delectable dish haunts me as I write.

The good captain had an impediment in his speech, which was the despair of us hungry youngsters. After he would get as far as:

"N-n-n-ally wha-h-a-a-a pa--------" My vigorous longing for the toothsome "victual" arranged so temptingly before me, so tantalizingly deferred overcame my polite training and I would interrupt in an almost undertone:

"The hind leg, sir, if you please." That piece seemed to have the most meat on it.

With a chuckle the kindly captain would give me not only the chosen portion but the kidney joint of the back as well, covering both with the good, old-time cream gravy. Between Captain Scruggs, Gregg Halloway, Long Will Woodson, the Hunter boys, Milton McGee, Uncle Jack, the colored coachman, at J. Calvin McCoy's, and other noted Nimrods, I wonder there was a squirrel left to lift its tail in the neighborhood between Brush Creek and the river.

In slavery days the men servants were not required to work Saturday afternoons, and Uncle Jack usually spent these privileged hours in hunting. He carried his game across his shoulders to one or another of the nearby towns, finding ready sale for it always. Returning, the good old darky carried not the profits of his prowess over his brawny shoulders, but where he considered it would do the most good. He loved the cup that cheers, several of them, not wisely, but too well, the old man did.

I suppose I should add, "I grieve to say," but what if one doesn't see it in that light?

The colored servants on plantations had comparitively few diversions; these were limited to the annual circus, autumn camp meeting, Sunday dining days among themselves, a hoedown now and then, casual fist fights and the occasional dearly bought "booze." Uncle Jack was childless, and, as he expressed it, "rheumatified" and was hopelessly henpecked. Let the one among you who, in like circumstances, would have resisted the temptation to find surcease, condemn, others please be silent.

FROM WESTPORT TO INDEPENDENCE IN 50s.

Travelers from Westport to Independence in the '50s had choice of only two roads--the main stage road, leading east on Main, now Westport Avenue, across the Harris branch at about Thirty-eighth, along (now) Gleed Terrace thence mainly a northeasterly course. The other road diverged from this one at (now) Thirty-fifth and Highland, then running almost directly east, passing the large brick home built by Squire Davenport, known later as the Rev. Thomas Johnson home, at or near Thirty-fifth and Prospect, past the Parish home, Gunsmith Davenport's and the Woodworths, crossing the Blue at Renick's Ford, joining the stage road near Pitcher's Hill. Save for a few cleared fields along this route, the ground was heavily timbered and alive with game. In addition to the squirrels, which are yet numerous, and few rabbits, which cower in sequested nooks now, there was an abundance of prairie chickens, quail and many wild turkeys.

WILD TURKEYS ON BENTON BOULEVARD.

I have seen more than once a flock of wild turkeys in the Lockridge woods near (now) Benton Boulevard and Thirty-third, and several times

a flock crossed the old Westport Road in front of me and ran up the densely wooded ravine (now the lovely Gillham Road), at the north terminus of the speedway.

Another sportsman's delight was a famous "pigeon roost" above where Argentine is now in the Kaw bottoms. These singular visitants made annual pilgrimages to this resort for many years, remaining for a season, then pursuing their journey, whither we knew not. So numerous were the pigeons, that their weight broke good sized limbs from the trees on which they perched and all vegetation for an acre or so around was destroyed during one brief visit of these birds.

BAGGING A WAGON LOAD OF PIGEONS.

It was rare sport for the hunters--these would form parties, go to the pigeon roost and with lighted torches so blind the birds that they were entirely defenseless. The sportsmen gathered all they cared to carry away. I heard Milton McGee say that in one night's quest he and his party bagged a wagon load of pigeons and you couldn't miss them.

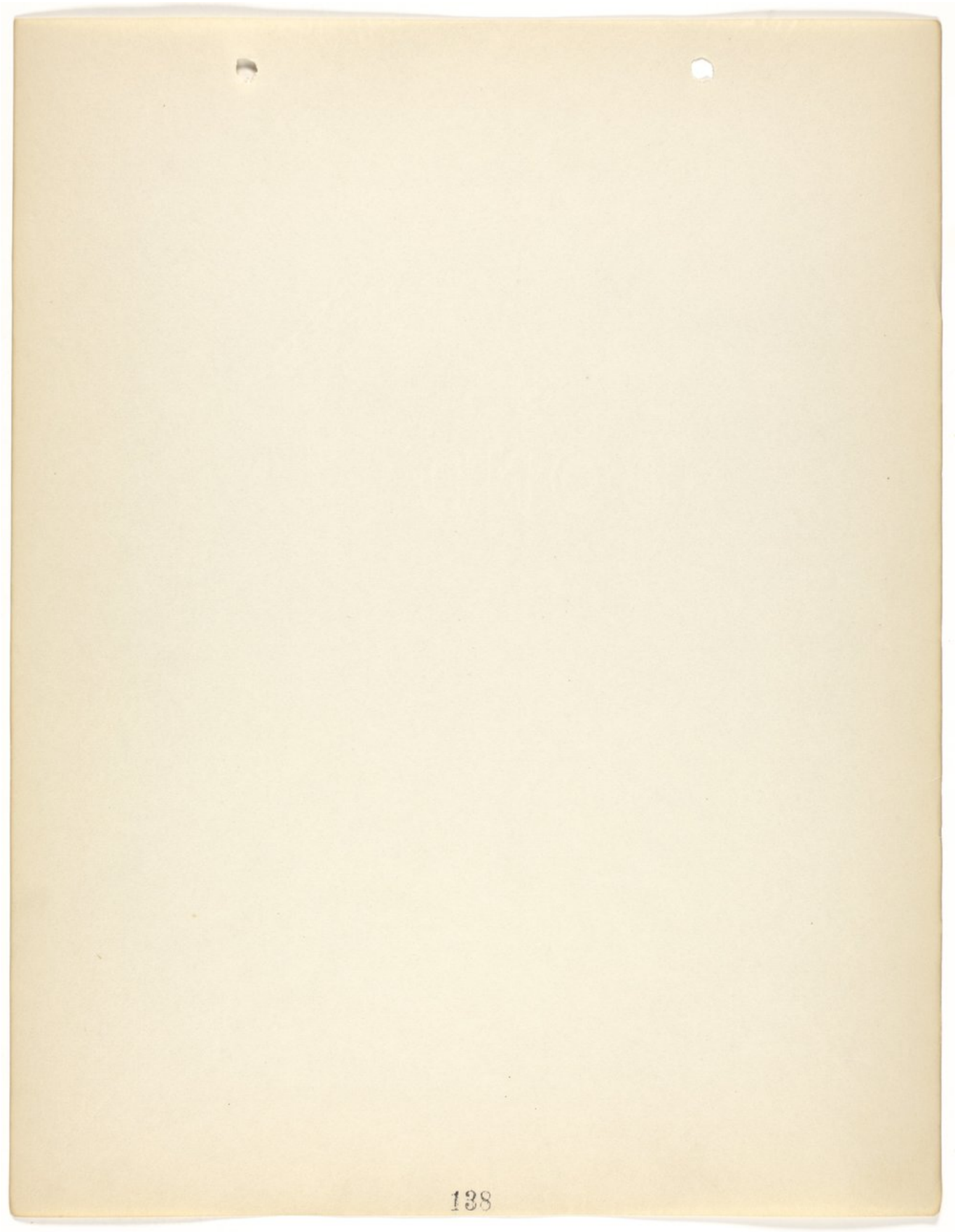
Most of these birds were good and tough, the tender ones made good pot pie, a few tenacious old parties were used for soup and the rest fed to the hounds until even these voracious nuisances prowling about every farm in the old days refused to eat any more. One particular episode I suppose it may be termed occuring in the early days in our section was the annual visits of paroquets or parrakeets, birds of the parrot species but smaller than those of the latter we see in cages, and with brighter plumage. The body was vivid green, head and neck yellow, and face covered with scarlet feathers.

FLOCKS OF PARROTS ON BROOKLYN.

These beautiful birds would sweep across the tops of the trees--myriads of them, alighting invariably in and around a large honey locust tree that J. Calvin Mc Coy had left standing in an open field--this tree stood almost on the identical spot where Brooklyn Avenue and Linwood Boulevard now intersect. The ground about this tree was like it was covered with a carpet of green with crimson and gold decorations during the visit of the gayly colored birds. The parrakeets tarried here only a few days but in that brief period they pecked to fragments the hulls of every coffee bean on the tree and opened every cockle burr within reach. I suppose that was what they came for.

Well the parrakeets have gone never to return. Wild turkeys have vanished and tame ones have reached a price almost prohibitive. Soon the few turkey tail fans still in existence, will, I fear, be our only reminders that the delicious bird which Ben Johnson, I believe it was, said was a very inconvenient fowl as a toast and was rather too much for one person but not enough for two, ever existed. "These have changed as all things changeth" but not so radically as some other things--women's apparel, for instance. In the old turkey triumphal days, women wore ample skirts held comfortably apart by spreading hoops; they possessed hips and were proud of it. Nowadays our ladies are hipless and hobbled and hampered in locomotion. The question is, which costume or custom is the least becoming or most absurd.

MRS. N. M. H.



A SANTA FE TRAIL INCIDENT.

When Washington Irving was "Skinned" In a Horse Deal.

(Published in the Kansas City Star)

A Trader of the Early Kansas City Sold His Balky Mare to the Author--Trouble on the First Hill Out of Town.

While the location of the Santa Fe trail is exciting fresh interest it seems to me opportune to give people here, unfamiliar with conditions during the freighting days when no grass grew on the old trail, an idea of the immensity of that business.

Only those, however, who saw the long lines of big prairie schooners, sleek teams with shining harness, dapper drivers and managers mounted on mettlesome steeds, marshalled for the start on the long journey to the Far West, can realize what an inspiring spectacle this was.

I will give statistics for one year--1860. In that year there were employed by capitalists or corporations to carry the freight which was loaded at the big commission houses on the levee at Kansas City:

11,608 men.
6,922 wagons.
67,950 oxen.
7,554 mules.
844 horses.

In addition to this vast collection nearly as many more men and teams were used to transport freight on their own hook, starting from Kansas City, Independence and Westport.

Previous to this year the Santa Fe trade had been enormous; and along with it the Mormon emigration which outfitted here, the thousands of gold seekers who began the long journey to California from this point, buying teams, wagons, provisions and other necessary supplies here, made Kansas City even then a very important point.

NOTABLE MEN AS VISITORS

While discussing Kansas City's early glory I will venture to boast a little of her special advantages in other lines. This little town in olden times had many distinguished guests; Thomas Benton visited here; Freemont, the famous pathfinder, began one or more of his journeys across the continent from this place, and on his return from California in 1844 met his wife here and remained for a while "in our midst." Captain Sutter, at whose mill race gold was discovered in California, landed with his retainers at the wharf in Kansas City and came near committing suicide in old Westport. The captain had had a series of reverses, remittances which he expected to find here were not forthcoming, his men were clamoring for salaries,

and his once gorgeous apparal was already "powerful seedy" looking. Happily at this moment J. C. McCoy, who had lent him money on his arrival and encouraged him, accepted a lot of court toggery in lieu of the financial obligation, thus preventing the consummation of the captain's desperate design.

Mr. McCoy and others helped him to secure men and other necessaries and sent him away rejoicing on the journey, which in its results, marks a wonderful epoch in the county's history.

I will curb my reminiscent propensity, however, and conclude this with one episode at the beginning of Washington Irving's trip across the plains from Kansas City. The distinguished author remained here for a while to prepare for his journey, buying his teams, carriage and other requisites here. Mr. Irving shared the fate of many a tenderfoot before him and since; he was a victim of unscrupulous traders and injudicious advisers. He purchased from an old pioneer horse trader a mare; her name was Bet. This animal was, with another, hitched to Mr. Irving's carriage. Old Bet was as slick as a ribbon and as fat as an opossum and the famous traveler doubtless congratulated himself in securing this apparently valuable acquisition to his outfit.

Sometimes teams turned at Sixth and Main and followed the hollow along where Deleware street is now, but many times the brook running from Mrs. Liptrap's fine spring at Ninth street rendered parts of this way rather miry. As the Washington Irving cavalcade proceeded along this lower road old Bet now and then showed symptoms of her perverse propensities, but she may have remembered that there was a better time and place a-coming for the exercise of her favorite form of cussedness. It was when the teams began to pull up the long hill south of O. K. Creek that Old Bet got in her work.

Mr. Irving's private carriage was in the van and when his driver started his horses up the bank old Bet pulled a few steps, then planted her hoofs firmly in the yielding soil and stayed there. Neither "Gidaps!" coaxing, thrashing, nor the generous supply of frontier anathemas fired at the obstinate animal had any effect; she wouldn't budge an inch.

The road was muddy and the dapper author had to trapse around with the commonest of them and presently was so spattered with mud his own tailor would not have known him.

SON EXPLAINED TO MR IRVING.

In the excitement of the hour the young son of the former owner of old Bet sidled up to Mr. Irving and whispered:

"Say, mister, I see pap a comin' and I know what he is goin' to say; he allus says it when he sells Bet and the fellers come back at him. But don't you believe him. Pap knows good and well that old Bet has balked more times than she's got hairs on her tail. It's plum onpossible to plow with her, she jes' stops stock still in the first furrer and that's the end of it."

Sure enough when Mr. J. came panting up he said:

"By Gannies, sir, I AM surprised! Who'd ever urthought Bet would all of a sudden act contrary."

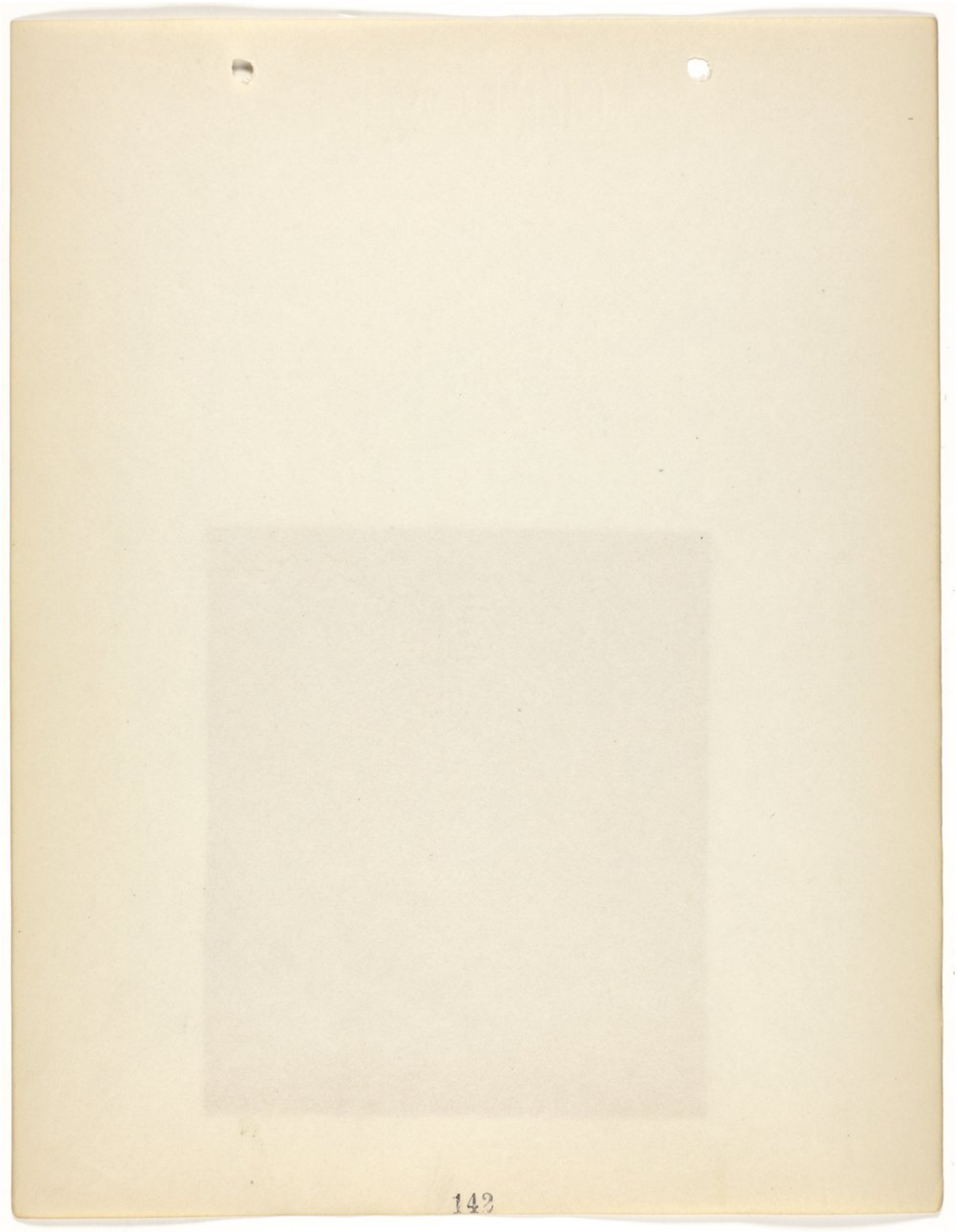
Going up to the old mare he remonstrated with her and appealed to her and attempted to give her a boost, but it was time and dissimulation wasted. Bet held her ground and looked as placid as a seraph.

Mr. J. Was informed of his son's valuable advice and turning in his direction remarked, "Why you blamed idgit"--but the son was by this time hiking like all possessed towards tall timber.

Mr. Irving's journey was delayed until he could find a substitute for balky Bet. Then he proceeded on his buffalo hunt. I could never find out exactly which animal received the severest castigation on the return home of the baffled old gentleman, old Bet or son, but there remains no doubt that both got what was coming to them.

That long tedious hill had a dreadfully demoralizing effect on men and teams and I hope the recording angel as she hovered over that spot and overheard the prevailing language, her pure nostrils greeted with sulphurous fumes--I hope she took a good look at the road before making the entry in the book which chronicles good and evil. If she jotted down the real facts in the case it would have proved a powerful strain on her tear repository to have welled enough to wash away the record in case she felt bad about it.

N. M. HARRIS.



HOW THE FORESTS FED OUR FATHERS.

(Published in the Kansas City Star, about 1912)

Mrs. Emmelin Heiskell, a niece of Dr. Johnston Lykins, the first mayor of Kansas City, who has spent the winter in Kansas City, and who came here first in 1852, said in an interview recently it was a mistaken idea that pioneers hereabouts were entitled to any sympathy. They had an abundance of Nature's food supply and kind neighbors and were content and happy. At the hazard of being called a Nature faker by those unfamiliar with primitive conditions and the bounteous supply of wild foods that the woods and prairies yielded I will review the edible products pioneers found in this favored corner of the world.

Actually we would not have suffered nor felt greatly inconvenienced in earliest times if we could not have had a dust of flour or a pound of store sugar.

In our list of indiginous food were walnuts in superabundance, a few

WILD FRUITS THAT WERE THE FOOD OF PIONEERS.