



Solomon Valley History

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The Diary Of Luna Warner On A Solomon Valley Homestead Near Downs, KS

In 1871 Luna Warner moved with her parents, Walter and Alice Warner, and brother, Louie, from Massachusetts to Kansas where they settled on land in the Solomon Valley near present Downs, land that is now part of Glen Elder Reservoir. Luna was 15 when they moved and kept a diary which is in the collections of the Kansas Historical Society. Portions of the diary were published in 1969 and excerpts are reprinted here as space permits in this and future issues. Luna lived her entire adult life on the homestead. She married Frank Lewis in 1881 and their children grew up on the family farm.

The Warners traveled to Kansas with 16 other emigrants, most of whom were relatives, who settled in the same area. They traveled by railroad to Solomon KS where they purchased a wagon and horses to find land to homestead in the Solomon Valley. Their relatives later moved to California.

Luna's family sold their Massachusetts property at auction before starting to Kansas. **The following excerpts from her diary begin with their departure in February 1871.**

The Diary (*omissions are "not" noted*)

Friday, February 24 - Papa went to West Brookfield to settle up his affairs. The rest of us worked just as hard as we could packing all day. We are to go to Gilbertville tomorrow to take the cars. It rained in the evening. Mama and I are to sleep at Mr. Snow's tonight. The rest sleep on the floor here.

Saturday, February 25 - Pleasant. We got up and went home, but went back to Mr. Snow's for dinner, then started for Gilbertville. Mr. Snow took our baggage and us on a large corn wagon. Mrs. Snow, Emma and Francis Newton came to Gilbertville to see us off. We started to load the cars before 5 o'clock and loaded until 9 or 10, then not even done in fact.

Sunday, February 26 - We got into New York City this morning. It was raining. We rode over to Staten Island on the boat, then to Uncle Henry's on the cars.

Monday, February 27 - Pleasant. Papa and the men and Louie went to New York City. Papa got a Remington revolver.

Tuesday, February 28 - In the morning we all started for New York bag and baggage. When we got there all the girls got into the horse cars and rode up to 8th Avenue. The girls got their pictures taken. Then we went back to the Astor House and stayed until night when [we] went over to Jersey City on the boat and took the cars for Kansas. We had a car to ourselves.

Wednesday, March 1 - I was sick of riding in the cars this morning. I vomited on my handkerchief. We stopped at Harrisburg three hours. We girls all took a walk. We crossed the river before noon, then rode nearly all day by the Juniata River and past the Blue Ridge mountains and through the Alleghenys. We passed through two tunnels - one a mile long.

Thursday, March 2 - Pleasant out of the cars but not inside them. It is so smoky and dusty. . . . I do not eat more than a spoonful of victuals a day, and that does not taste good. The cars stop quite often.
Friday, March 3-Every day is the same, only each is more tiresome than the last.

Saturday, March 4 - Uncle Ephraim and Gena [Luna's cousin] stopped at Junction City. We got to Solomon City about 7 a.m., washed up, and had breakfast. We had buffalo meat. We do not like it very well. Gena and Uncle Ephraim came at dark There are eight of us to sleep in one room. There are three beds in it.

Sunday, March 5 - The weather is just about perfect. We all took a long walk up the river this morning. Some people went to church this forenoon. We have been to see two or three dugouts.

Wednesday, March 8 - There was quite a severe snow storm this afternoon. It makes it very muddy.

Thursday, March 9 - This afternoon we came about three miles from Solomon and put up the tent by a creek. We built a campfire and made tea. Uncle Howard and Henry Everett each shot a rabbit. We are all to sleep on the ground. We went to a store in Solomon City and were weighed. I weighed 106 lbs.

Friday, March 10 - This morning we cooked the rabbits and some potatoes and had a nice dinner.

Saturday, March 11 - Cold and rainy. We loaded up, pulled down the tent and started up the valley. We ride on Uncle Eli's wagon on top of goods. There are so many of us that some have to walk all the time. We passed several prairie dog towns. We had a good supper.

Sunday, March 12 - We ate breakfast and loaded and started, came to a creek, and just as they were across the whiffle-tree broke, but they got a new one and went on. We came through Minneapolis. We camped on a creek. They put the tent up on trees. We are beginning to have good appetites and nothing to eat.

March 13 - Cold this morning. Mama, Velma and I started walking. We stopped at Delfoss [Delphos] and got warm. We stopped at 2 houses, bought some bread and eggs, ate our breakfast and waited for the wagon to come along. At dark we came through Asherville and stopped at Mr. Gates's log house and had supper. The women slept in the house and the men in the haystack.

At this point they have traveled as far as Asherville where they stayed the night of March 13, 1871.

March 14 - At noon we stopped at Beloit. It was a warm day but at night it blew up cold and we went into a store to stay tonight. We are hungry most of the time. We do not have much that is good to eat. We are to sleep on the store floor.

March 15 - Cold and stormy. We moved into a dugout. It is a nasty, dark place. We went to most every house but could not find a warm place. We froze all day and starved too. In the afternoon Mama and I started out to find a place to sleep. We are to sleep in the Post Office. I am awful homesick.

March 16 - We went to the dugout again and ate what passed for a breakfast, then the men had a jaw and the women a cry, then we started on a-foot as usual. It is most all prairie dog towns all the way. At night stopped at Glen Elder on Asher Creek. It is quite a pretty place for Kansas.

March 17 - We started early this morning, arrived at Cawker City about noon. It consists of 4 or 5 finished houses, one store and 2 or 3 unfinished houses. The men hired a little frame house with two rooms about as big as closets. The cracks between the floor boards are a half inch wide. We shall be pretty well crowded. All the men sleep on the floor in one room and the women in the other.

March 18 - All the men started off to hunt up claims. The 3 boys went hunting. They got back at dark with 5 lbs. of buffalo meat which they bought at 3 cents a lb. There are 3 kinds of flowers in bloom here. We bathed for the first time since we started from home.

March 19 - We are awfully crowded in the two little rooms. The men got back towards night. They have not decided upon any claims. There are wild geese flying over every day. We are in a prairie dog town.

March 21 - Very warm. Some of us walked down to the forks of the river. We wore no coats but almost melted. It is quite pretty by the river. We took off our shoes and stockings and waded in the river.

March 22 - The men went to look at some claims. They found 6 just the other side of the river about 5 miles from here. They went over to the land office and filed on their claims.

March 23 - Quite warm and pleasant. Uncle Frank hitched up his team and most of us went to the Great Spirit salt spring about 3 miles away. It is a beautiful place. We went past the soldiers' camp. Uncle Frank says every day that he is going back to Massa- chusetts but he doesn't start.

March 24 - **Some** men went to the claims with rifles and shovels to work. All the men and boys that were left started off buffalo hunting. We all eat nothing but spider bread and meat and sorghum until yesterday we had beans. We eat more all the time and are just as hungry.

March 25 - We all went up the river to see the claims. I like ours best. Papa bought some potatoes—the first we have had for a long time. They were \$2 a bushel.

March 27 - We started for a log house just opposite our claims to live till we get houses built. I walked. We crossed Oak Creek. It is a very bad crossing. The log house is one little room. The men went back to Cawker after another load of goods. Gena took Henry's revolver and I took Louie's and we waded across the river and went over all the claims. We saw 5 wild turkeys and 2 ducks. I shot at a turkey but did not hit it. We waded back across the river and went home. It was dark when we got there and the folks were out hunting for us. We got some gooseberries. I shot at a large animal in the dark but did not hit it. When we went to bed we had to pack as tight as we could. Some slept out.

March 28 - Mamma and I went over to our land and set out some gooseberry bushes. The men got a prairie chicken.

At this point she is describing daily life in the valley, including construction of their new home.

March 29 - Our family went out onto our land and commenced to dig a cellar. All the men have been at work on Uncle Eli's dugout. It is the south side of the river. We girls get lots of funny stones along the river. We all played drop the handkerchief in the evening. There are lots of flowers around here.

April 1 - Gena and I put on old dresses and went bathing in the river. The water was above our waists.

April 2 - Very windy. We looked out this fore noon and saw bows and ribbons of all colors flying over the prairie. Arabella's trunk had blown open. We saw 7 buffalos across the river. Uncle Frank went after them but did no good. We went over to Uncle Eli's new dugout. It is very nice. In the evening there was a splendid prairie fire northeast of us. There is a prairie fire in sight every night almost and some - times 5 or 6.

April 3 - The men went buffalo hunting. They got home in the evening with a buffalo in the wagon.

April 5 - Mercury was at 92 through middle of the day. Uncle Frank's family started for Solomon City on their way home to Massachusetts. Alpheus will take them to Solomon and bring our goods back.

April 6 - Temperature 98. We planted peas, turnips, and squash on the claim.

April 7 - Papa got some early rose potatoes and planted them on the claim in buffalo wallows. Velma came over and baked bread in our stove. It sits outside the house.

April 9 - It rained and hailed this evening. The fireplace smoked so we could not stand it. This morning we saw 6 buffaloes coming down the river. Louie took the rifle and I took the revolver and went under the bluff until we got opposite them. They came toward us and we lay down and waited until they got near, then Louie fired. He shot 5 times. How they did run!

April 10 - The snow sifted into our faces all night. Our fireplace smokes very badly. It keeps our eyes crying all the time. Toward night it cleared off and the wind went down. I have found 8 kinds of flowers here. The cabin is full of mice.

April 11 - Louie and I started for Cawker on foot. The other side of Oak Creek, Vesteen overtook us with the wagon. We went on to the store and bought 20 pounds of provisions. I bought a gallon of sorghum.

April 12 - We picked dock greens for supper. They were very good but made us sick.

April 13 - Uncle Eli's folks have made a bridge across the river. Alpheus came from Solomon with part of our freight. All of it came to over \$90. He has bought a hen and a rooster. The Indians have permission to go all through this valley. There are a lot of them down below us.

April 14 - Rainy. I dug fish worms and went fishing. Waded in mud up to my ankles. Every speck of mud sticks to your feet. There have been Indians seen in a good many places. We have to be very careful.

April 15 - We took the things out of our barrels and dried them. They got wet when it rained. Alpheus and Louie went buffalo hunting this morning. Uncle Ephraim killed a badger and a skunk. There are a good many skunks here. Uncle Eli's folks see antelope every day.

April 16 - Alpheus and Louie came home this morning. They brought a buffalo - a very large one. Louie shot it once. The bridge has washed away.

April 17 - I saw a prairie squirrel. They have holes in the ground. There are a good many here.

April 18 - The wind blew very hard. Everything out of doors blew away, even two pails of water. Papa salted a tub full of buffalo meat.

April 19 - Louie and I went over to Uncle Eli's. The wind blew so hard we could hardly get there. We had to wade the river.

April 23 - We went out on our claim and picked out a building spot on this side of the river. We had baked antelope for supper. It is like mutton.

April 24 - Uncle Eli plowed a spot for our house and garden and started digging on the cellar. I went out by the river bare foot and came very near stepping on a small rattlesnake.

April 27 - I killed 3 snakes today. Helped Papa plant onions and peas, sweet corn and melons. The cottonwood trees are leafing out.

April 29 - The men finished hewing sills for our house. I planted morning glories and mustard. There are a great many blue violets here. There are swallows.

April 30 - We set out two young elm trees - one each side of the house spot. We found 3 new kinds of flowers today - one beautiful red cup, one pink and one yellow. There is a little plant that smells and tastes very nice. I saw a king bird.

May 1 - We set out another elm tree. Louie and Teen went hunting. Louie killed 3 ducks and shot at a rattlesnake. We got some flowers and hung May baskets. Uncle Eli brought us some fruit trees - 4 apple, 2 peach and 1 pear. Also 3 hens and a rooster.

May 4 - Alpheus plowed about an acre for us. The men worked on the timber. Papa got us some good butter. The first good butter we have had in Kansas. Choke cherries are in bloom on Oak Creek.

May 5 - There was a white frost this morning. The water froze in the water pail. Uncle Howard and Henry got the sills on our house today. Mamma and I planted 81 hills of melons. At night I went and drove Mr. Ray's cattle away from our garden with Buffalo bones. I found some flowers like verbenas. It makes 20 kinds that I have found.

May 6 - Uncle Howard and Henry worked on our house. They raised the frame. Louie and I went down to the raising. Then went home with them and played drop the handkerchief.

May 7 - Several of us started for the bluff, 2 miles and a half. We found 11 new kinds of flowers. The prairie was covered with them. They are beautiful. We went to the top and found verbenas, geraniums, celery, sorrel, and penny royal. Found the queerest stones - some like turtle shells. Brought some home. We found blackberry and gooseberry vines. Then we went on to Burnses, 2 miles above 12 mile creek. Had a splendid supper. On the way home we forded the river. Saw 4 snakes, 4 buffalo and ever so many antelope. We found yellow violets.

May 8 - Mamma and I waded the river and went over to our claim. We have peas, potatoes and pumpkins up in the buffalo wallows. We saw 5 buffalos off on a hill about 2 miles. They were lying down. The men went after them. They killed one and broke the leg of another, which they finally killed after it ran down into the river. Then they got the team and cut up the buffaloes and brought them home. The buffaloes smell like skunk.

May 10 - We planted potatoes. Saw 2 beavers and a turkey gobbler.

May 13 - All the men went to the raising of a log house up on the river 2 or 3 miles. We killed a rattlesnake here. There were 2 in Uncle Howard's cabin and the girls killed one of them. Some cattle were being driven past on the road and Papa and Mamma went up & bought a red cow.

May 17 - I am 16 years old today. I do not feel so old. Mamma and I went across the river and went all over our claim. It is splendid. The trees are beautiful. The mice or birds or something are disturbing the things in our garden. The mosquitos trouble us very badly when the wind does not blow.

May 20 - I have been bringing water from the river. It is hard to get it. It is so slippery. I found a dandelion. We have found 37 kinds of flowers. I milked some this morning. We get 4 or 5 quarts of milk at a time.

May 26 - Two loads of lumber came from Solomon City for our house. They raised the roof today. We went to a dance in Cawker. Arabella curled my hair and I wore my white dress and slippers. We all went in the wagon and sang all the way. The dance was in a little house with 3 rooms. Two sets could dance at once. They had fiddles. The music wasn't very good but we had a good time and danced till 2 o'clock then had refreshments and came home over the trails in the dark. Got home at 4:30.

June 2 - The men got back from buffalo hunting. They got a buffalo and gave us a quarter. They went 20 miles. Uncle Eli's folks saw 27 this morning. I went fishing and caught a catfish. I found a sensitive plant in blossom. It is beautiful. It rained very hard in the night. The lightning was splendid.

June 3 - The men worked on our house. I went down to the garden and set out turnip plants and some cabbage plants that Papa got of Mr. Ray. The mosquitoes trouble us nights. We went over to Mr. Coop's and practiced shooting.

June 5 - Hotter'n blazes! All the lumber is here so the men can work on our house right along. We plant garden at night because it is so hot.

June 6 - When Uncle Howard and Henry went back home from working on our house, the river had risen on account of showers up above. It came over the bridge. Henry tried to cross but it was over his head before he got to the bridge and he came near drowning. Uncle Ephraim and Tene had been to Cawker. They all had to stay here and went down to the new house to sleep.

June 8 - I planted all kinds of flowers. Papa and I planted corn. We are teaching the calf to drink. It is a splendid calf.

June 9 - I waded the river and went over to Uncle Eli's. Alpheus is going to contest the claim west of ours. Henry homesteaded his.

June 13 - It rained and blew very hard last night with thunder and lightning. We all slept in the new house for the first time. I went bathing in the river. Lately the mercury has been from 90 to 100 and over.

June 14 - Last night some wild animal came and caught one of our hens. Alf shot at it and it dropped the hen and ran off. Louie and I went over to Uncle Eli's with Alf and his team. We ate dried buffalo meat all the way back.

June 15, 1871 - Gena came over at 4 o'clock and we went in swimming on boards. We floated from here down to Mr. Ray's watering place. Had a splendid time.

June 16 - It rained all day. Uncle Howard has made us two bedsteads, a table and sink.

June 17 - The river is nearly two feet higher than it has ever been before. Uncle Ephraim came horseback and stayed to supper.

June 18 - The river is very high yet. Uncle Howard came over. He tried to cross the river on a raft that he made. The raft sank and pitched him into the water. He came near drowning before he could get out of the current.

June 20 - Gena and I went in swimming. Stayed in a good while. Uncle Eli and Alf came with the goods from Solomon.

June 21 - A very hot day. We got up early. Arabella curled Gena's hair. The men went over to Uncle Howard's cabin and got Gena's trunk. After breakfast Gena went down to the house and dressed to be married in her white pique and pink ribbons. Henry was dressed very nice. They are going to Beloit to be married. Uncle Howard and Uncle Ephraim are going to Massachusetts.

June 22 - Alf brought home a nest of young birds when he went chopping. After dinner I went over to Uncle Eli's and carried them back. Venelia, Tene, and I went bathing. Had a nice time. I did not get back till dark. Papa got the stove set up.

June 23 - Venelia and I started for Cawker on foot. I went barefoot part of the way. We got the mail.

June 24 - Hotter'n blazes. After dinner Gena and I went into the river. We went upstream and floated on our backs. The fishes bit us. Louie is sick with boils. Our stove is splendid.

June 25 - Very hot indeed. I planted a few potatoes. Mamma went over to Cawker with Alf and Arabella. They got home about one o'clock, brought me a pair of shoes and four kinds of pink calico. Papa was cross today.

June 30 - This morning Mr. Coop came before we were up for Ma to go with him because his wife is sick. She got home just before noon. We went all around Alf's claim. It is very nice.

July 1 - Alf went to Cawker with Uncle Eli, so Louie and I went to water his horses. I rode one and he the other. Then Gena rode one back. It was fun.

To Be Continued