

Introductory notes by the transcriber

Francis Marion Stahl's life is well documented via a variety of sources. His autobiography, *One-Way Ticket to Kansas*, was published in 1959, a little more than twenty years after his death. It was based on notes he made while alive and was compiled by Margaret Whittemore. Frank also kept a diary of an 1865 cattle drive that he headed on the Santa Fe Trail. A copy of that diary and a transcription are at the Kansas State Historical Society. Finally, there is this personal diary that covers (with gaps) the first sixteen years of his married life as he was setting up a farm and establishing a family. A copy of the handwritten version is also at the KSHS.

In transcribing the diary I have tried to let Frank's voice come through as much as possible. I have maintained at least some the original layout and look so as to provide an approximation of its appearance. I have tried to use his own spellings, underlining, styles of entering dates, and abbreviations if they do not get in the way of understanding what he writes about. I have similarly left his grammar uncorrected. I have also generally used his own spellings of surnames, although these have been made more standard for the index and footnotes. Many of the individuals he mentions are referred to only by their last names. Where I can identify them through the use of old censuses, maps, or published sources I have tried to do so. Otherwise I have simply indexed the surnames without attempting to make too many wild guesses.

As always with old manuscripts, some passages are difficult to read. The original copy is quite faint in many places. Where illegible sections occur I have indicated them by dashes and notes in brackets. The text in strikethrough reflects his original. I suspect these are cases in which he was correcting his memory if the diary entry was written a day or two late, or correcting what was supposed to have happened if was anticipating the day. (One final note on his style: he consistently used "&c" to stand for "etc.")

The people in the story

Frank often refers in shorthand ways to people that he knew closely. In order to make easier to understand who those people were and how they fit into his life, I offer the following description of the main figures who appear in the diary. The central axis around which most events take place involves two families: the Stahls and the Dicksons. Frank's family is (obviously) the Stahls. His wife, Jennie, was a Dickson.

Frank was born in Darke County, Ohio on 23 May, 1841. He moved to Kansas while in his mid-teens. By the time this diary starts he had already made two trips on the Santa Fe Trail, prospected in Colorado, served in the 2nd Kansas Cavalry during the Civil War and with the 18th Kansas Cavalry during the Indian campaigns. In later years he would also be elected to one term in the Kansas legislature and serve both as head of the Kansas Temperance Union and chief of police in Topeka. He died on 4 March, 1937 and is buried in Auburn cemetery.

Frank's father, Michael, had moved to Kansas in 1860 but died in 1862. His wife, Susan, remained on the farm on Six Mile Creek, mentioned often as the "Sixmile." All of their children, Frank's brothers and sisters, are mentioned at various times: Jerome (his brother, married to Laura Johnston); Lavinah (married to Joseph Youngs in 1865); Sarah (married to G.A. List in 1870); Florence Jane (married to John Mongold in 1872); and Mary Bell ("Bell," married to Mack Fleck in 1876).

Frank married Jennie Dickson in April 1869. They would eventually have eight children. Seven of them were born in the years covered by this diary: Alexander (“Leck,” born in 1870); Effie May (“May,” born in 1872); Edgar, born in 1874; Lloyd and Lewis, twins born in 1876; and Clare William, born in 1878. One other daughter, Eva, was born in 1881 but does not appear to be mentioned. (Their last child, Francis Leon, was not born until 1889.)

Jennie’s parents, Alexander and Isabel Dickson, were originally from Scotland. Probably with tongue in cheek, Frank sometimes refers to his father-in-law as “the Old Gentleman.” He died in 1878. Relations with other members of the Dickson family are evident throughout the diary.

Jennie’s brother, Jim, is mentioned frequently and was a close friend of Frank’s. They had served together during the Civil War and traveled the Santa Fe Trail in 1865. Jim owned a farm very close to Frank’s and worked for him on a regular basis. Jim’s wife was Lizzie. They were wed in 1872.

One of Jennie’s other brothers, Alexander, jr., also shows up often, usually referred to as “Alex.” He married Nancy Hatcher in 1869. One of Jennie’s sisters, Helen, married John Thompson in 1872, and she is mentioned often as well.

The yearly round

As is to be expected, the diary mostly documents the repetitive tasks associated with farm work. Throughout the year, these included repairing equipment, opening up new fields, building sheds and corrals, making fence posts, and other routine chores. During the early years Frank also quarried a good deal of stone, mostly for his own use while he was getting his farm and buildings built up. During the winter, things like cutting wood, cleaning out and hauling manure, and tending to stock tend to show up with greater frequency.

By grouping tasks based on the months in which Frank mentions them, it is possible to get a larger view of the seasonal cycles and of the crops he relied on. Based on his entries, here is a list of the primary things mentioned month-by-month, together with the years in which they are referred to. (Since none of the diaries covers a complete year, sometimes the coverage varies.)

January

Butchering (1871, 1872, 1874, 1880, 1883)
Hauling corn stalks (1872)
Pulling corn (1874)
Husking corn (1874, 1883)
Hauling corn (1880, 1883)

February

Husking corn (1870, 1878, 1883)
Butchering (1870, 1872, 1874, 1879)
Making sausage (1874)
Pulling, gathering corn (1879, 1883)

Breaking down wheat stalks (1880)
Hauling corn stalks (1883)

March

Breaking down cornstalks (1870, 1874, 1879, 1882)
Plowing (1870, 1874, 1879, 1880, 1882)
Staking out orchards (1872)
Setting out peach trees (1872, 1879)
Setting out currants and gooseberries (1874)
Planting rhubarb (1874)
Sowing wheat (1874)
Cleaning out around grapes, trimming (1879)
Preparing ground for potatoes (1879)
Topping haystacks (1879)
Setting out blackberries (1879)
Trimming grape vines (1882)
Harrowing (1882)

April

Sowing and harrowing oats (1870)
Plowing (1870, 1872, 1880)
Harrowing (1871, 1879, 1880, 1882)
Marking out corn fields (1871)
Planting corn (1871, 1880)
Planting potatoes (1872, 1874, 1879, 1880, 1882)
Planting apple trees (1872, 1879)
Planting peach seeds (1872)
Planting onions (1872, 1874)
Sowing wheat (1874)
Setting out fruit trees: apple, cherry, peach (1874)
Setting out strawberries (1874)
Cutting corn stalks (1874)
Castrating colts (1879)
Setting out grape cuttings (1882)
Mulching potatoes (1882)

May

Planting corn (1871, 1872, 1874, 1879, 1880, 1883)
Castrating colts (1871, 1874)
Planting peaches (1871)
Planting potatoes (1871, 1872, 1874, 1879, 1880)
Planting pumpkins (1871, 1879)
Picking strawberries (1871)
Planting melons (1872, 1879)
Plowing corn, harrowing (1872, 1874, 1879, 1880, 1882, 1883)

Sowing alfalfa (1874)
Planting sweet potatoes (1879, 1883)
Mulching blackberries (1879)
Trimming apple trees (1879)
Cutting rye out of the wheat (1879)
Turning manure piles (1883)
Sowing, harrowing millet (1883)

June

Plowing corn (1870, 1871, 1872, 1879, 1880, 1883, 1885)
Replanting corn (1871, 1883)
Cutting and stacking wheat (1871, 1879, 1880, 1883)
Pruning the orchard (1872)
Removing rye from wheat (1874)
Caring for the garden and orchard (1874)
Castrating colts (1879)
Mulching apple trees and grapes (1879)
Trimming apple trees (1880)
Picking cherries (1883, 1885)
Mulching raspberries (1883)
Planting potatoes (1883)
Plowing for beans (1885)

July

Cutting grass (1870)
Cutting and stacking oats (1870, 1879, 1883)
Cutting and stacking wheat (1870, 1879)
Hoeing potatoes (1872, 1883)
Planting cabbage (1872)
Planting cucumbers (1872)
Pruning and mulching the orchard (1872)
Cutting and stacking rye (1879, 1883)
Plowing corn (1879)
Raking wheat fields (1879)
Mulching berries (1879)
Hoeing sweet potatoes (1880)
Plowing potatoes (1880)
Weeding grapes (1883)
Threshing oats (1883)

August

Cutting grass (1870, 1871, 1872, 1879, 1882, 1883)
Raking and hauling hay (1870, 1871, 1872, 1879, 1882, 1883)
Threshing oats (1870)
Cutting up corn (1871, 1879, 1882)

Sowing turnips (1883)
Cutting millet (1883)

September

Cutting and hauling hay (1871, 1882)
Cutting, gathering up corn (1871, 1872, 1882)
Plowing, harrowing (1871, 1882)
Hauling pumpkins (1872)
Tying up corn shocks (1872)
Harrowing for wheat (1872, 1882)
Sowing oats (1879)
Threshing oats (1882)
Threshing wheat (1882)
Topping and wiring haystacks (1882)
Digging potatoes (1882)
Sowing wheat (1882)

October

Cutting grass and hauling hay (1870, 1872)
Drying hay (1870)
Picking corn (1870, 1872, 1880, 1882, 1883)
Mowing oats (1870)
Hauling pumpkins (1872)
Butchering hogs (1872)
Digging potatoes (1872, 1882, 1883)
Threshing buckwheat (1872)
Husking corn (1880, 1882)
Digging sweet potatoes (1880, 1883)
Threshing wheat (1880)
Sowing rye (1882)
Picking and storing apples (1883)

November

Pulling, gathering corn (1870, 1871, 1872, 1878, 1879, 1880, 1882, 1883)
Digging potatoes (1870, 1880)
Making sausage (1870)
Butchering hogs (1870, 1872, 1882, 1883)
Butchering beef (1871, 1872)
Gathering turnips (1882)
Husking corn (1882)

December

Hauling corn (1872)
Butchering (1870 1871)

Making sausage (1871)
Digging potatoes (1879)
Gathering corn (1880)
Husking corn (1882)

The diary shows other things that occupied Frank's time as well. He was a devoted churchgoer and active in the Masons. Beginning in 1879 he also organized an annual temperance picnic and was an avid campaigner against alcohol. Sundays were spent in socializing after attending church and Sunday school.

The diary offers a window into one person's experiences in the early days of the state and into the community of which Frank and his family were part. I hope you find it enjoyable and interesting. I welcome any corrections and can be reached at the following address:

John Meredith
1416 Cedar Ave.
McLean, VA 22101

Tuesday, Feb. 9, 1869 - Cloudy this morning and very warm. Wind from the south. Worked in the stone quarry all day except what time I was doing errands. Cleared up about three o'clock P.M.. Fixing of rifle by McLaughlin³ of Topeka - \$8.50.

Wednesday, Feb. 10, 1869 - Sun rose clear this morning. Wind from the south. Quarried stone in the forenoon. Laid up stone fence in the afternoon. Sun set clear. Mud drying very fast.

Thursday, Feb. 11, 1869 - Sun rose clear this morning. Brisk wind from the south. Worked today building stone fence. Sun set clear. Fleecy clouds during the day.

Friday, Feb. 12, 1869 - Sun arose clear. Wind from the south, strong. Built stone fence. Cloudy in the afternoon, with thunder and lightning and a little rain.. Cloudy at sunset. Caught a coon in a steel trap last night.

³ Almost certainly John McLaughlin, listed in the 1870 federal census as a gunsmith in Topeka.