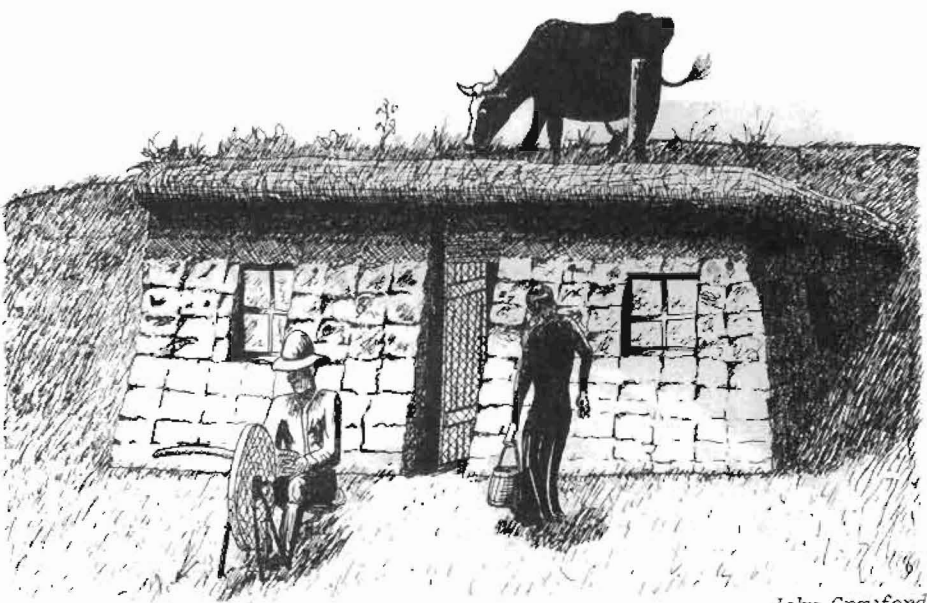


LIFE
ON THE
PLAINS



John Crawford

SOD HOUSES

The log cabin, the buffalo, and the coonskin cap have become symbols of the American frontier. For some reason the dugouts and the sod houses of the plains have been forgotten. On the treeless plains, the pioneers turned to the earth for protection from the ravages of the weather. At first they went underground, living in cavelike dugouts hollowed out of the sides of cutbanks and sidehills. Then, later, they learned to use the incredibly tough buffalo grass sod for building houses above ground. For years until the coming of the railroad made lumber available, the sod house was as common on the plains as the log cabin had been in the eastern woodlands.

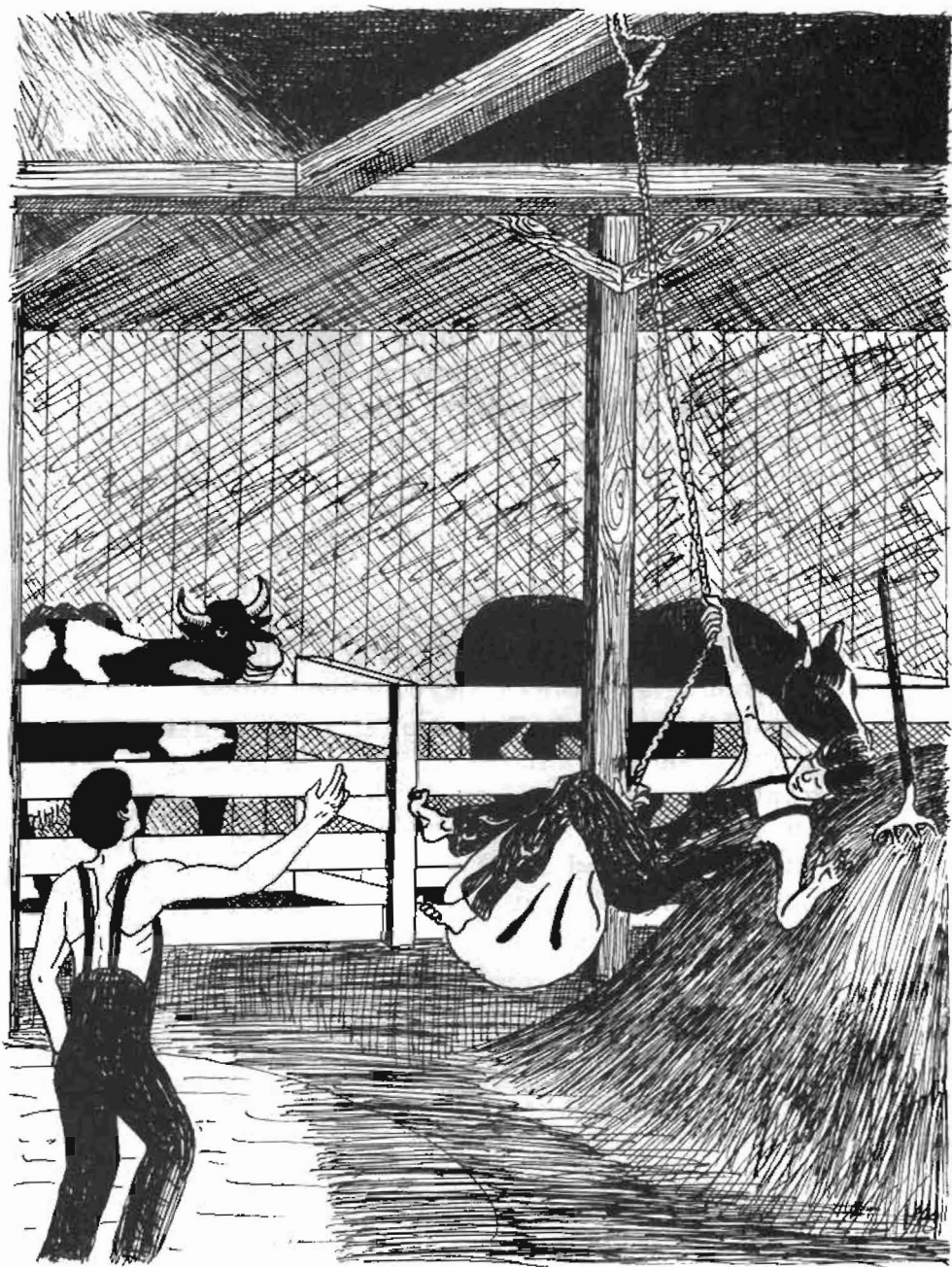


Brenda Street

PLUM GROVE PRANKSTERS

Christmas Eve 1883 citizens of Plum Grove, Kansas, crowded into their small school house for an evening of festivities. Conspicuous among the crowd was the bright shiny, bald head of a prominent citizen. This glowing target was irresistible to a group of rowdy, and probably intoxicated young men who showered the target with mud balls and spit wads. Because of their intolerable conduct, they were immediately asked to leave the party. This public ridicule made their need to retaliate even stronger. One of these young men set fire to a bundle of straw, sounding the alarm of "Fire! Fire!" The citizens poured out of every door and window only to discover another prank. This type of conduct further infuriated the good citizens of Plum Grove and warrants were sworn out for the arrest of these rowdy pranksters. The trail, which lasted only two days and ended in a hung jury, cost these pranksters only court costs and their lawyer's fees.

This is an oft-told tale in Butler County, Kansas because one of these rowdies was none other than Frederic Remington, the dean of American Western Art.



John Crawford

"PAPPY-DADS"

One of the favorite playthings of farm children on the Great Plains was a swing made from a gunny sack filled with hay and tied to a rope. Sometimes this swing hung from a rafter in a barn, sometimes on a tree limb, and sometimes over a favorite swimming hole. Later, as the horse and buggy days gave way to the automobile, the tire swing replaced the gunny sack. Both are excellent examples of the folk urge to recycle old materials into something new and useful. The tire swing is called simply a tire swing, but the gunny sack swing is sometimes called a "pappy-dad." If anyone knows where this name came from, please contact the Center for Great Plains Studies.

JACKRABBITS

Ordinarily a harmless and picturesque animal, the black-tailed jackrabbit becomes a pest on the plains in times of drought. During the 1930s the rabbits ate so much wheat and forage that western Kansans organized rabbit drives, where drivers herded the rabbits into pens and clubbed them to death. For the biggest rabbit drive of all, ten thousand people, some from outside the state, assembled in Lane County and surrounded sixty-four sections of ground. At the center of the area the drivers killed an estimated 35,000 to 50,000 jackrabbits. One driver from New Mexico said, "I never saw so many rabbits in all my life. Where the hell did they all come from?"



photo courtesy Kansas State Historical Society