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Merino Wool in America: Migration, Economic Desire and Patriotism

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Merino Wool in America: Migration, Economic Desire and Patriotism

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts and Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Una Winn

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Dedication

To my grandpa, Larry Winn, who was not an Anderson but made those who were new feel like part of the family no matter what their histories were.

Acknowledgments

Thank you...

To my dad, who talked me through many teary conversations about this project. My mom, who wrote me letters and told me to wrap it up. Henry, for caring more about basketball than Merino wool.

To Gram who wrote me letters and reminded me of a future ahead. Nano, for keeping me close to my roots. Tookie, for all the debates that have inspired many papers before this.

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Introduction

Coming to Kansas

“Make sure you talk with Nano about what to do if there’s a tornado warning while you’re driving,” my dad warned me over the phone. I was 18 years old and had flown from tiny little Delaware to Kansas to spend the month driving through the state to trace my family history from town to town. My family had come to the United States in the early 1600s and resided in New England until, according to my grandmother Nano and her four sisters, Frank and Bert Anderson traveled by wagon with 15,000 Merino sheep to Garden City, Kansas, where my family still owns a small farm. I was following their path, using a car instead of a wagon of course.

Despite visiting Kansas City from time to time, I had never traveled *through* Kansas in any real way and I spent hours driving down their one-lane state highway at 90 miles per hour with nothing around me except flat land and windmills caught up in the always howling gusts. I wrote in my journal at this time, “The vastness of the space is incredibly disorienting. Kansas strangely feels as though you are at the ocean,” speaking of the fields which stretch wide all around you, making it feel as though if you just went a little farther the ocean could be waiting for you on the other side of the horizon.¹ Kansas lies amid the Westward Rising landscape of the Great Plains, enormous stretches of grassland, larger than California and Nevada combined, and one of four remaining temperate grasslands in the world.²

¹ Una Winn, “May 24th, 2019 Journal Entry,” May 29, 2019.

² “The Great Plains | Places | WWF,” World Wildlife Fund, accessed April 1, 2023, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/places/northern-great-plains>.

On my journey I learned about Cottonwood Ranch, which started as a Merino sheep ranch in Studley, Kansas. Noting the similarities between my family's history and that of Cottonwood Ranch, I found myself talking with Don Rowlinson, who owns and lives on the ranch, which stands today as a historic site. Rowlinson is a fourth-generation cowboy and knew the history of the area as well as anyone. When I told him that I was researching my family's history in the area he asked me for their names and told me where I could find their graves in the local cemetery.

Cottonwood Ranch holds a small slice of Kansas history within its walls, a history that has been passed down from generation to generation and embodies a past so distant from today. I wanted to come to understand how places like Cottonwood Ranch, and the history of Merino wool could give me an understanding of another time. I considered how agricultural production of Merino wool could give insight into the lives that my family and others settling in the Midwest would have lived. What would it have been like to be Merino sheep farmers on the plains of Kansas in the 1800s?

In researching the history of Merino wool, I encountered the reality of how this commodity had been used to support the nation-building of the United States after its separation from England. I used primary sources such as the letters of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and an informative pamphlet printed and distributed by J. and A.Y. Humphreys during the time of the Merino wool craze to understand how Merino wool was used in the early 1800s. I also explored interviews, letters, financial ledgers and photographs from the Pratt family, who built Cottonwood Ranch in the mid-1800s, to understand how Merino wool continued to contribute to the market of trade within the

United States even after the height of its popularity. My investigation led to more complicated questions about how Merino wool played a role in creating a patriotic sense of American independence which was promoted by Jefferson in the early 1800s and the settler colonialism of the Midwest in the mid-1800s.

The history of Merino wool is a history of migration, economic desire and patriotism. For Jefferson, Merino wool offered a chance to move away from England by building an independent economy based on agricultural production in the United States. He used sentiments of American patriotism to build a mentality among the public where they were devoted to creating a center of commerce based on the trading of American made Merino wool. Over 40 years after Jefferson's efforts, Cottonwood Ranch was established. Jefferson's hopes were still being realized, and the Merino wool market was stimulating the settlement of the American West with the hope of expansion and growth of the agricultural industry. It is ironic that in the case of the Pratts the English settling in the Midwest were actually promoting the ideas of Jefferson, as Jefferson's original promotion of the production of Merino wool was actually to create American independence from England.

My first chapter uses the accounts of Jefferson through a series of letters to understand how exactly he came to use Merino wool as a political tactic to create separation for the United States from England, and how he used American patriotism to provide him with the labor force needed to do so. By creating a Merino wool market outside of England Jefferson was able to inspire patriotism by emphasizing the United States ability to sustain itself without the help of countries which were abusing the United

States trade agreements which should have allowed them to trade freely with France. We are able to follow the development of the use of Merino wool in the nation's trade, and Jefferson's reasoning for working so hard to promote this area of production, from his first efforts to smuggle Merino sheep into the United States to the crash of the Merino wool craze in 1816. With the brief introduction to the history of Merino wool that is offered in this chapter we can come to understand why Merino wool held so much worth in the market between Europe and America in the first place and why Jefferson came to care about its development within the United States.

We are able to watch as Jefferson molds his sheep breeds to produce wool on a par with that exported from England. We see how he develops the wool market in the United States by gifting his very own sheep and praising Merino wool farmers. Next, we come to understand what all these efforts to establish Merino wool's importance have to do with the fraught relationship between England and the United States as the United States tries to distinguish itself as an established nation in the early nineteenth century. This history gives the reader an opportunity to learn about how the production of Merino wool was marketed as a patriotic act to take part in, both in its production and its consumption.

Finally, we observe as the fears of the Humphreys, who had warned the public against becoming enraptured by the Merino wool craze and questioned the success of this market, come true. In particular they had wondered whether the market was actually beneficial for the United States or just the few individuals who were successful in manufacturing this extremely expensive product. Jefferson came to realize these warnings

himself and worked to bring down the inflated prices of the wool in order to keep it from becoming a luxury good. But, the small Merino sheep were not able to sustain the needs of the economic market, and despite their accessibility after an influx of the breed finally arrived in the United States, the desire for such fine wool had faded.

Having the ability to really look into the tactics that Jefferson used to promote the Merino wool in the United States using American patriotism as a tactic, we are able to ask questions about the role that this particular commodity played in using economic tools to push back against the English. To be able to have an economic market surrounding the buying and selling of Merino wool that functioned inside the United States was a sign of self-reliance and separation from England that was vital to Jefferson in promoting American agricultural production that could compete with that of England.

Merino wool continued to be used as an economic tactic to promote the growth of agricultural production within the United States almost 50 years after the Merino wool craze instigated by Jefferson. I point to the Pratt family at Cottonwood Ranch to demonstrate how Merino wool was used within the U.S. economy and is heavily connected to the expansion and growth of America, in regards to both the development in the nations standing through movement away from England and the physical expansion to the American West. The story of the Pratt family also gives us insight into the realities of what it would mean to be involved in the labor that backed these political ideas and brings up the question, what significance does Merino wool play in the immigration and settlement of the American Midwest? And how does this immigration teach us about the cultural changes taking place during the mid-1800s?

We follow this history as the Pratts arrive in the United States from England and establish their ranch in Kansas. We come to understand how their moves were directly connected to political decisions such as the Homestead Act of 1862, which promoted western expansion by Europeans and settlers previously confined to the East Coast, and how even the stories of small farming communities were involved in acts of settler colonialism. This settler colonialism is defined as “an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of indigenous peoples and cultures. Essentially hegemonic in scope, settler colonialism normalizes the continuous settler occupation, exploiting lands and resources to which indigenous peoples have genealogical relationships” by the Oxford Bibliographies Website.³ As Laura Hurwitz and Shawn Borque explain in their “Settler Colonialism Primer,” “This means that settler colonialism is not just a vicious thing of the past, such as the gold rush, but exists as long as settlers are living on appropriated land and thus exists today.”⁴

The story of the Pratt family gives interesting insight in particular to the lives of women who were connected to this westward expansion, lives that were often not considered or spoken about in the promotion of the political acts of Jefferson. Jennie Elizabeth Place (1862-1959) left all that she once knew in Yorkshire, England, to marry her fiance, John Fenton Pratt, in Kansas, and the experiences of Jennie give the reader an

³ Alicia Cox, “Settler Colonialism,” obo (Oxford Bibliographies, July 26, 2017), <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0029.xml#:~:text=Settler%20colonialism%20is%20an%20ongoing,indigenous%20peoples%20have%20genealogical%20relationships>.

⁴ Laura Hurwitz and Shawn Borque, “Settler Colonialism Primer,” *Unsettling America*, June 6, 2014, <https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/2014/06/06/settler-colonialism-primer/>.

opportunity to think about what it would mean for women to follow their husbands to the West.

The life of Jennie's daughter Hilda Pratt (1889-1980) shows a slightly different view, as she was never married and took care of the farm after her father's death. Hilda offers a unique perspective on the possibility of independence for women as a result of her role in the continued farming of the ranch. These women bring into light questions about how Western women have been written about in history and which women gain attention. The Pratt women offer particular penetration into the development of the American West at the hands of settler colonialism but the absence of other outlooks leaves us with a limited understanding of the reality of what this time would have been like in Kansas.

Both the account of the Pratt family in the mid-1800s and the letters of Thomas Jefferson in the early 1800s give unique insight into how the development of the United States was entwined with the agricultural production of Merino wool. Parallel to each other they lead the reader to consider how political moves surrounding the development of agriculture may have impacted the farmers involved in the production of goods such as Merino wool and ask us all to consider how the conceived idea of what it meant to be an American translated to the reality of one's day-to-day life.

Chapter One

Thomas Jefferson and the Merino Wool Craze of the Early 1800s

Merino wool is still available today, but in the early 1800s it was so popular in the New England region of the United States that its use was actually regarded as a craze known at the time as “Merino mania.” This Merino mania references the raising of sheep for use of their fine wool, which built an economic market within the United States based on the trade of both of these goods. What exactly does this mean? Is it just that Merino wool was popular, or were people so obsessed with it that they actually lost control? It is pretty hard to believe that people would be losing control over something as common as wool, but clearly Merino wool and sheep were so desirable that their rise in popularity led to a self-assigned mania of sorts, and is regarded by historians today to be a craze, as Rebecca J.H. Woods says, “sheepmen were caught up in the craze”⁵. For the sake of clarity, in my writing I will focus on the term “craze”, instead of *mania*, as *craze* creates a more accurate description of this historic event and is the language used by other historians.

The word *craze* was most commonly used around the 1850s and refers to someone’s well being as full of cracks. We might recognize this root in today's use of *crazy*. A craze is defined as “an enthusiasm for a particular activity or object which

⁵ Rebecca J. H. Woods 2017. “Green Mountain Merinos: From New England to New South Wales in the Nineteenth Century.” *Vermont History* 85 (1): 1–19.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=134394849&site=ehost-live>.

appears suddenly and achieves widespread but short-lived popularity”, by the Oxford Dictionary⁶ and similarly as “an activity, object, or idea that is extremely popular, usually for a short time” by Cambridge Dictionary.⁷ Both of these definitions seem to fit the history of Merino wool and its short-lived popularity, generally regarded as occurring from 1810 to 1816, though Merino sheep were introduced into the United States earlier and would continue to be farmed long after this period of time. This chapter will work to show how the excitement around Merino wool production and trade was used by the United States to promote an economy within the young country that was self-reliant and created a sense of patriotism among the public.

To better understand what exactly that means I turned to primary sources written at this time, including a booklet that would have been used to inform the public about this Merino wool craze and a series of letters written by Thomas Jefferson which indicate his involvement in promoting the introduction of Merino wool into the economy of the United States as a form of nation-building. I will use the Jefferson letters to comprehend the political and economic factors which led to the rise in popularity of Merino wool, and I will use the booklet as an example of the public reaction to this craze.

The history of Merino wool is substantial even outside of its popularity in the early nineteenth century. While the full history is outside the scope of this project, the entry of this fine wool market into Europe and the United States is relevant to the events that took place during the Merino wool craze and so I will introduce a brief history of

⁶ “Oxford Languages and Google - English,” Oxford Languages, accessed February 20, 2023, <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>.

⁷ “Craze,” CRAZE | definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary, accessed February 20, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/craze>.

Merino wool to help the reader to come to appreciate the height of Merino wool's popularity in 1810.

Merino wool is to this day one of the highest quality wools on the market and can be used for a variety of different products. Thanks to its fine consistency, the wool is admirable for clothing and is soft and comfortable. It is also great for spinning and weaving, meaning that it is used for a diverse range of products outside of clothing itself. Merino sheep are equally versatile, able to tolerate the changing seasons of many regions and consume a wide range of foods, making them relatively easy to raise in a variety of different environments.

Merino wool originates from Portugal but is predominantly associated with Spain where, after its introduction to the country from the Portuguese, a Merino wool market was established. In Spain, Merino sheep were owned by the royal family as part of the Royal Merino Flocks of Spain, and it was illegal to exchange them. The king of Spain at the time, Ferdinand IV, did not seem to be concerned with this rule and despite the exchange being illegal he was known to give these sheep to the royalty of other nations. As M.L. Ryder states in his book, *Sheep and Man*, "At the height of the Merino's importance, it was a capital offense to export the sheep, but the king was the first to break the law, sending them first to Sweden in 1723."⁸ By the 1790s attempts to smuggle the creatures out of Spain had been successful, and high-powered figures within the United States were in possession of Merino sheep.⁹ William Foster is said to have rustled the first Merino sheep out of Spain and to Boston in 1793 but he made the mistake of placing

⁸ M. L. Ryder, *Sheep and Man* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1983) page 173.

⁹ Ryder, *Sheep and Man*.

them in the care of Andrew Craigie who had no idea that these sheep were incredibly special and ate three as a meal. Ironically, Craigie is said to have later paid \$1,000 at the height of the Merino craze for his own Spanish ram.¹⁰

Many other sheep were kidnapped, stolen and given. Robert Morris, who has been credited with the establishment of the United States financial system, was known to possess these sheep as well, likely through illegal means. The most influential trade of these animals was through Colonel David Humphreys, the minister to Spain at the time, who exported 100 sheep in 1802 to his home in Connecticut.¹¹

Of course, before Merino sheep were brought to America there were plenty of other sheep in the country which held their own value. Though they provided very little wool, these sheep were able to withstand the varying climates of the United States which made them popular in their own right. Not to mention that sheep were needed for much more than just their wool: they also provided meat and returned the land, damaged by crops like tobacco brought to North America from the English colonizers, back to its original form.

Before even making it to the United States, Merino wool was brought by the English to Australia, which to this day is the largest manufacturer of Merino wool. It was introduced in the late 1700s to Australia and its production had been popularized in Yorkshire, England, by the same time, soon after it would enter the sphere of the United

¹⁰ Denise Williams, “Merino Mania: A Nineteenth-Century Fiber Craze,” (Spin Off Magazine, January 2, 2023).

¹¹ Breeders of American Merino Sheep, *United States Merino Sheep Register, Containing a Brief History of American Merino Sheep and their Ancestors, Imported from Spain prior to 1812*. (Zanesville, Ohio: Sullivan & Parsons, 1876).

States as well. Colonel David Humphreys was credited with bringing the first Merino sheep to America thanks to his large herd of these sheep.¹² Once the sheep were in the United States the market did not necessarily blossom overnight. At the time of the sheeps' arrival, the textile knowledge and tools needed to build an industry which surrounded the production of Merino wool in the United States were facing pushback from England. This dependence would change in the following years, as the United States moved away from relying so heavily on the English market.¹³

In the years following the sheeps' introduction to the United States a number of acts were passed which influenced the very way in which the industry was shaped. The first was the Embargo Act of December 1807,¹⁴ which restricted trade from England and created a need for wool products, which had previously been coming in from England. In 1809, the Embargo Act was replaced by the Non-Intercourse Act.¹⁵ By this time, Jefferson offered prizes, and premiums were put in place to promote farmers to raise sheep, again to replace the product not coming in from Europe. The production of Merino

¹² Denise Williams, "Merino Mania: A Nineteenth-Century Fiber Craze," (Spin Off Magazine, January 2, 2023).

¹³ L.G. Connor, *A Brief History of the Sheep Industry in the United States*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921) page 96.

¹⁴ ("Embargo Act," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed April 22, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Embargo-Act>.) The Embargo Act of 1807 was put in place by President Thomas Jefferson as a form of nonviolent resistance to England and France which had been disturbing U.S. trade ships.

¹⁵ The non-intercourse act followed the Embargo Act as a response to the bitter opposition of the trade restrictions that had been imposed. With this act there was less restriction on trade between the U.S. with France and England. Macon's Bill No. 2 completely reestablished trade restriction under President Madison and was met well by Napoleon who repealed his decrees. The U.S. waited for England to do the same but they never did and by February 1811 all trade with Great Britain was cut off, setting the stage for the war of 1812. Encyclopædia Britannica, "Embargo Act."

wool was encouraged by Jefferson in particular at this time.¹⁶ To own and raise sheep was seen as an act of patriotism, especially because the War of 1812 created an even greater need for wool goods than just the normal demand. Not only did politicians have a desire to overtake the English wool market but Merino wool was also needed for military uniforms and many forms of workwear.¹⁷

The Merino wool craze did die down eventually when many trade restrictions were lifted. After that time, an influx of sheep caused an oversaturation of wool products throughout the United States, and raising Merino sheep for the production of wool was no longer as profitable as it once had been.¹⁸

J. and A.Y. Humphreys speak to the complications that came with the rise and fall of the popularity of Merino herds in their short informative booklet, “Antidote to the Merino-Mania Now Progressing Through the United States, or the Value of The Merino Breed, Placed by Observation and Experience, Upon a Proper Basis,” which warns to its readers, “Look before you leap.”¹⁹ This booklet was distributed to the public as a warning against jumping into the production of Merino wool just because it was fashionable and provided readers with information which might be helpful if they were not involved in agriculture but wanted to participate in the craze happening at that time.²⁰

¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia, “Agriculture and Gardening: Sheep,”

<https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/sheep/>.

¹⁷ Deb Fuller and Ann Buermann Wass, “‘Without Being Obligated to Send 3000 Miles for the Cloth’: The American Wool Industry, 1789-1815,” *Textile Society of America*, September 2012.

¹⁸ Arthur H. Cole “Agricultural Crazes. A Neglected Chapter in American Economic History.” *The American Economic Review* 16, no. 4 (1926): 622–39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3>.

¹⁹ J. and A. Y. Humphreys, *Antidote to the Merino-Mania Now Progressing Through the United States*, (Philadelphia: J. and A. Y. Humphreys, 1810) title page.

²⁰ The book was seemingly sold along the corner of Second and Walnut St., speaking to the widespread distribution of information regarding Merino wool at this time.

The publication starts off by stating that it would not want to “damp the ardor” and clarifies that the production of Merino wool is “a point of too great importance to the manufactures of our country, to thwart the tide of successful experiment, in which so many are presently engaged.”²¹ Just from this introduction alone, it seems that the production of Merino wool was of importance to the economy of the United States at the time. There is a caution that is taken in this work as to not deter the reader from the manufacturing of Merino wool. The text then goes on to highlight some of the extremes that would have dubbed this rise in production as a craze.

The first point is made when the authors argue that the amounts of money individuals were spending on the sheep and wool were “absurd”: “We have heard that 500, 1000, and 1500 dollars have been given for a Merino ram... and that cloth from the Merino wool, has been sold at 14 and 15 dollars a yard” (Humphreys, pg. iv).²² It is clear from the way that the Humphreys react to the price of the Merino sheep and wool that the cost of these goods were representative of the public enthusiasm at this time. This

²¹ J. and A. Y. Humphreys, *Antidote to the Merino-Mania Now Progressing Through the United States*, (Philadelphia: J. and A. Y. Humphreys, 1810) pg. iiv.

²² J. and A. Y. Humphreys, *Antidote to the Merino-Mania Now Progressing Through the United States*, (Philadelphia: J. and A. Y. Humphreys, 1810) pg. Iv
 (“Inflation Rate between 1810-2023: Inflation Calculator,” \$1,500 in 1810 → 2023 | Inflation Calculator, accessed February 20, 2023, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1810?amount=1500#:~:text=%241%2C500%20in%201810%20is%20worth%20%2436%2C484.15%20today&text=%241%2C500%20in%201810%20is%20eq.>). \$500, \$1000, and \$1500 in 1810 is equivalent to \$12,161.38, \$24,322.76, and \$36,484.15 in 2023, and the yards of fabric selling for 14 and 15 dollars a yard is equivalent to \$340.52 and \$364.18 today. These prices are shocking, especially when you consider that some of the most expensive fabrics today sell for much less, expensive silks sell for around \$100 a yard and Merino wool today sells for around \$40 a yard.

enthusiasm is how we come to this craze; it was so extreme that it called the Humphreys to warn the reader to not get too caught up in the excitement.

According to the Humphreys, the production of Merino wool at the current price would have been a concern for a number of reasons, but two main issues were of the greatest importance. First, there was a fear that the excessive money paid for the animals, the cost of production, and the materials needed would not be compensated by what they could produce. In other words, they were afraid that although a ram might be bought for \$500, the cost of the animal could not be made back from the wool that would be sold from it, or that an article of clothing produced with the expensive wool fabric could not be sold for any profit itself, even assuming that the process of production went smoothly and without taking into account profit loss as a result of unavoidable factors like illness in the sheep. The Humphreys were also not warning against the unpredictable drop in the inflated prices of wool that would follow in 1816.

Bringing a market which promoted the trade of Merino wool to the United States was motivated by a desire to build the American economy up to a point where it could compete with the economy of England, but with the exaggerated prices of the sheep and wool that concept was threatened. We see that the Humphreys' second concern was their worry about how the price of Merino wool would benefit a few individuals but not the whole of the United States. The idea that the production of Merino wool would not benefit the country as a whole directly went against Jefferson's promotion of the product as being an act of patriotism. These individual sellers participating in the inflation of the prices of Merino wool were not willing to sacrifice or devote themselves for the

betterment of America and so they could not be patriots. The Humphreys place a large emphasis on how these exaggerated prices would impact the entire country. We see this sense of community built around Merino wool when we come to the War of 1812. The threat of war with England was exactly why Jefferson had applied so much pressure to developing this industry within the United States.

Creating a market which supported the trade of Merino wool outside of England during the War of 1812 and the time surrounding this conflict gave validity to the fears and efforts Jefferson had previously expressed: “Who is against domestic manufacture must be for reducing us either to dependence on their foreign nation, or to be clothed in skins and live like wild bears in dens and caverns. I am not one of those.”²³ This comment is reflective of Jefferson’s mentality at the time: he believed that if the United States did not build a strong trade market reflective of those in Western Europe then the country would either become dependent on foreign nations or revert to a kind of animalistic nature. It is interesting that even as Jefferson tried to build up the nation of the United States he viewed Western European forms of market to be something that the United States needed to emulate or the country would fail. Independent manufacturing was a step beyond previous forms of colonial commerce, like the trade of tobacco or other types of wool, in which the raw materials were grown in North America and then shipped to Europe to be manufactured. In the case of Merino wool production, there was no trade between England and the United States of either the raw materials or the finished goods.

²³ A. Lipscomb, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Vols. I-XX. (Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Assn. of the United States, 1903-1904).

Though the United States had gained independence from England by 1776, the new nation was still dependent on England for commercial goods, including fine wool. England had been dominating the American wool market even after U.S. independence, and there is a clear fear throughout the writing of Jefferson that if Merino wool could not be sold at a reasonable price, the market for American made wool within the United States could be a failed economic prospect.

Jefferson emphasized the economic possibility that Merino sheep could bring to the United States when he was secretary of state in a series of letters in which he promised to wage a “patriotic campaign to promote domestic manufacturing” for the next three decades, according to historian Margaret Byrd Adams Rasmussen.²⁴ Jefferson told President George Washington, “I had never before considered with due attention the profit from that animal,”²⁵ and after his retirement from secretary of state in 1794, he purchased 40 common sheep, his goal being primarily to restore the land damaged by harsh crops like tobacco and corn but also to create agricultural production within the United States that relied more on potatoes and sheep in hopes that it would be better for the economy. Jefferson was focused on creating an industry of agriculture within the United States in particular, and one of his objectives during his time in the political sphere was to avoid supporting industrialization, which he thought would bring chaos and

²⁴ Margaret Byrd Adams Rasmussen, “Waging War with Wool : Thomas Jefferson's Campaign for American Commercial Independence from England.,” *Material Culture* 41, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/29764496> page 17.

²⁵ “From Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 28 June 1793,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-26-02-0360>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 26, *11 May–31 August 1793*, ed. John Catanzariti. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 396–398.]

unhealthiness.²⁶ This mission to gain independence from England through whatever means necessary was of course quite personal to Jefferson as he himself had co-written and signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776 with the aim of separating the United States from England.

By 1807, Jefferson was breeding sheep in the capital (and by 1808 his flock of sheep had caused various accounts of public injury). These sheep, and the majority of others throughout the United States, produced a coarse, homespun wool that was very undesirable to many despite its accessibility. It was clear that the wool industry needed further development, and by 1810 Jefferson could finally claim his sheep to be purely Merino, as his original flock had been replaced with Merino sheep that had been given to him by financier and colleague Robert Morrison.²⁷ thanks to the Napoleon conquer in Spain on February 16, 1808. Napoleon was happy to sell sheep to the United States if it meant that he could destroy the wool trades of England.²⁸ E.I. duPont²⁹ made it clear that the development of a wool market in the United States would benefit Napoleon's motives

²⁶ Margaret Byrd Adams Rasmussen, "Waging War with Wool : Thomas Jefferson's Campaign for American Commercial Independence from England.," *Material Culture* 41, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/29764496> page 17.

²⁷ "From Thomas Jefferson to Robert Morris, 19 February 1795," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-28-02-0199>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 28, 1 January 1794–29 February 1796, ed. John Catanzariti. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 267–268.]

²⁸ Margaret Byrd Adams Rasmussen, "Waging War with Wool : Thomas Jefferson's Campaign for American Commercial Independence from England.," *Material Culture* 41, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/29764496> page 20.

²⁹ ("Eleuthère Irénée Du Pont," Science History Institute, December 19, 2022, <https://www.sciencehistory.org/historical-profile/eleuthere-irenee-du-pont>.) Eleuthère Irénée duPont (1771-1834) French-born businessman who, upon his exile from France as a result of the French Revolution, came to the United States and started an American Gunpowder company. E.I. duPont continued to hold political prevalence, both within the U.S. and in France

when he asserted that Napoleon would not refuse to sell him sheep: “No greater harm can be done to England than to encourage men to manufacture in this country [the United States],” he wrote.³⁰

Jefferson saw the farming of sheep to be of national importance and cared about how these sheep were incorporated into the agricultural and textile economies of the United States. He actually made efforts to measure the value of the animals before incorporating them into the agricultural landscape, writing to the mercantile firm of Mayer & Brantz that he was “[A]lways desirous of trying the merits of new races of animals, and of adding them, if worthy, to our national stock.”³¹ Jefferson was concerned with both how these animals would hold up in the United States, and how they would contribute to the national economy. He was not alone in recognizing the value that Merino Sheep would bring to the U.S. market. The South Carolina Society for the Promotion of Agriculture offered an award to the first person to establish a flock that was completely pure Merino sheep.³²

Jefferson sent various wools from his sheep to professionals seeking their guidance so that he could understand which products might have market value that could boost the economy and provide an industry that could be relied on within the United States. The quality of the wool that he produced would have to meet or exceed that of European wool if the American trade market of Merino wool was to thrive. Jefferson

³⁰ B.G. Du Pont, ed., *Life of Eleuthere Irénée du Pont from Contemporary Correspondence: 1778— 1834*, (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1927).

³¹ “From Thomas Jefferson to Mayer & Brantz, 18 January 1808,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-7221>.

³² J. Leander Bishop, 1868. *History of American Manufacturers: 1608 - 1860*, Vol. III, 3rd edition, (Philadelphia: Edward Young & Co, 1868).

wrote, "Our embargo, which has been a very trying measure, has produced one very happy, and permanent effect. It has set us all on domestic manufacture, and will I verily believe reduce our future demands on England fully one half. We are all eager to get into the Merino race of sheep."³³ In Jefferson's letters, he clearly showed the desire to move away from U.S. reliance on other countries, especially England, and wanted to have a flourishing economy within the United States itself. President James Madison and Jefferson actually came up with a scheme to use their personal stock to breed enough Merino sheep to provide one to every farmer in Virginia, as their proximity to Jefferson's own farm made this proposition more imaginable.³⁴

Could Jefferson's plan for the American economy to blossom with the introduction of Merino wool possibly work? It seems that at least England believed so. Severe punishments were put in place in England during the early 1800s for the exportation of wool to the United States. But, more important, no artisans or machinery connected to the production of wool could be exported out of England, and anyone found to be supporting the United States in developing its wool production industry could face consequences.³⁵

The separation from England delineated in the Embargo Act of 1807, and the acts to follow, led to the construction of mills and large-scale production of Merino wool.

³³ "From Thomas Jefferson to Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette, 24 February 1809," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-9871>.

³⁴ Margaret Byrd Adams Rasmussen, "Waging War with Wool : Thomas Jefferson's Campaign for American Commercial Independence from England.," *Material Culture* 41, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/29764496> page 27.

³⁵ Margaret Byrd Adams Rasmussen, "Waging War with Wool : Thomas Jefferson's Campaign for American Commercial Independence from England." page 22.

Because there would be no international commerce, many of those who had been involved with trade moved to other industries, like the production of Merino wool. With this industrial expansion came an association between patriotism and using American-made goods. It became fashionable for political figures to wear American-made wool suits, often from their own sheep. Republican Governor Edward Lloyd of Maryland wore a green suit homespun from the wool of his very own sheep to take his oath of office in 1809, and he was not the only one to participate in this trend.³⁶

These fashions symbolized the support of American production by political figures within the United States, and Jefferson wrote, "the determination we have formed of emancipating ourselves from a dependency on foreign countries for manufactures which may be advantageously established among ourselves, has produced a very general desire to improve the quality of our wool by the introduction of the Merino race of sheep."³⁷ Merino wool came to represent a kind of American patriotism in which the United States was a strong, self-sustaining, hardworking country, no longer reliant on the importation of goods from England. This patriotism and political push for the raising of sheep contributed to the Merino wool craze. As mentioned by the historians at Monticello, "What you ate, drank, and wore reflected the level of your commitment to the nation's welfare."³⁸ Not only was participating in or supporting the manufacturing

³⁶ Lucia Stanton, "Sheep for the President," Monticello, 2000, <https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/sheep/#fn-src-36>.

³⁷ "Thomas Jefferson to George W. Erving, 23 November 1809," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-02-02-0012>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 2, 16 November 1809 to 11 August 1810, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 31–32.]

³⁸ Lucia Stanton, "Sheep for the President," Monticello, 2000, <https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/sheep/#fn-src-36>.

and production of American goods patriotic but also the desire to target the economies of England, including that of wool, was strong. Many tools were used to promote these patriotic ideas, including poems written to promote this market. David Humphreys, an American Revolutionary War colonel and an intelligence agent to George Washington, penned a poem that contributed to the promotion of merino wool during this craze,

See *wool*, the boast of Britain's proudest hour,

Is still the basis of her wealth and pow'r!

... Shall we who dar'd assert the rights of man,

Become the vassals of her wiser plan?

Then, rous'd from lethargies—up! men! increase,

In every vale, on every hill, the fleece!

And see the fold, with thousands teeming, fills

With flocks the bleating vales and echoing hills.³⁹

Political figures promoted the industry surrounding Merino sheep throughout the United States at this time through politics and as a cultural trend that supported American patriotism, but the price of wool and sheep became so inflated that Jefferson became concerned about just how far this craze would go, as did J. and A. Y. Humphreys. In May of 1810, Jefferson expressed this feeling after hearing about four Merino sheep being

³⁹ Humphreys, David, and George Washington, *The Miscellaneous Works of David Humphreys: Late Minister Plenipotentiary ... to The Court of Madrid*, (New York, 1804).

bought for \$6,000.⁴⁰ Jefferson wrote to President Madison, “I have been so disgusted with the scandalous extortions lately practiced in the sale of these animals, and with the ascription of patriotism and praise to the sellers.”⁴¹ We can see here that “patriotism” became a symbol which justified the inflationary prices of the fine wool production of Merino sheep, until it came to a point where even those who originally promoted it, like Jefferson, began to see it as a problem. This disgust led Jefferson to come up with a plan that would not let these animals become a luxury good. Jefferson proposed that Merino sheep be distributed throughout the United States. He planned to take the power out of the hands of the sellers, whom he saw as not true patriots because they were selling at such inflated prices that they could not be supporting the economy of the country, only themselves.

During this peak in the inflated prices of Merino sheep, Spain opened the sale of the sheep to the United States, and almost 20,000 sheep entered the country in the span of only two years. The price of wool and sheep dropped dramatically in a short period of time and by 1816 many woolen mills and farms had failed.⁴² One of the problems that led to this failure was that the Merino sheep, while producing fine wool, were quite small and

⁴⁰ (“Inflation Rate between 1810-2023: Inflation Calculator,” \$1,500 in 1810 → 2023 | Inflation Calculator, accessed February 20, 2023, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1810?amount=1500#:~:text=%241%2C500%20in%201810%20is%20worth%20%2436%2C484.15%20today&text=%241%2C500%20in%201810%20s%20eq.>) Almost \$146,000 dollars today

⁴¹ “Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 13 May 1810,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-02-02-0338-0001>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 2, 16 November 1809 to 11 August 1810, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 388–390.]

⁴² Lucia Stanton, “Sheep for the President,” Monticello, 2000, <https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/sheep/#fn-src-36>.

did not produce large quantities of wool. This led to a decrease in the sale of Merino wool in areas where people did not have the resources to invest in it. As a result, the areas where Merino wool could be sold were limited as in most cases its use was impractical for its price.

Jefferson himself moved away from the focus on the Merino breed and instead decided to support and raise a variety of sheep. He chose rather to promote “home grown” sheep that were larger and hardier and produced high quality wool at a greater quantity than Merinos. Just four years after the Merino wool craze, advertisements for Merino mutton cropped up in newspapers.⁴³ Sheep once selling for \$1500 were now being sold as an everyday meat. Over about a 15-year span merino wool had come to the United States, became an incredibly sought after commodity and faded out.

⁴³ Merrill D Peterson, *Visitors to Monticello*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989).



Example of Merino sheep, from the Pratt farm⁴⁴

⁴⁴ John Fenton Pratt, "Sheep on the John Fenton Pratt Ranch," photograph. Sheridan County, Kansas, <https://www.kansasmemory.org/item/313189>.

Chapter Two

The Movement of Merino Wool to the American West

Post-Merino mania the interest in farming Merino sheep remained, especially for those coming from New England and Europe to the Midwest of the United States. After the Merino wool craze of the early 1800s, we continue to see migration based on the farming of Merino sheep, as well as many other agricultural pursuits such as cattle-raising and farming of wheat, as a result of a series of political decisions in the mid-1800s, primarily the Homestead Act of 1862. Because of this act, 160 acres of land could be acquired by paying a small fee. Those who purchased land were required to live on and improve it. After five years they could claim it fully as their own.⁴⁵ As Jefferson's original push for the production of Merino wool was a tactic of nation-building within the United States, acts such as the Homestead Act also worked to foster an agricultural economy that created self-sustainment within the United States and leave the country less dependent on other nations. While Jefferson, in his own words, was focused on "emancipating ourselves from a dependency on foreign countries,"⁴⁶ we might ask if this push to cultivate this territory is any different from what Richard Hakluyt defined as

⁴⁵ (Homestead Act), Public Law 37-64 (12 STAT 392); 5/20/1862; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789 - 2011; General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.)

⁴⁶ "Thomas Jefferson to George W. Erving, 23 November 1809," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-02-02-0012>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 2, *16 November 1809 to 11 August 1810*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 31–32.]

“implantation” 300 years before⁴⁷, what Native Americans call their removal and “the allotment of land to individuals without the permission of tribal governments,”⁴⁸ or what we today would name *settler colonialism*.

In this chapter I move away from looking at the political tactics that led to the development of the Merino wool craze that in turn promoted patriotism within the United States. I focus here on individuals, in this case members of the Pratt family of Studley, Kansas, to come to realize how these tactics affected those involved in the establishment of sheep ranches. Using a series of primary sources, which include interviews, letters, financial ledgers, and photographs that come from the Pratt family and their property, Cottonwood Ranch, I bring us to interpret the experience of those who partook in the actual raising of sheep and production of wool. In particular we have an opportunity to observe the role that women played within this family as the mother, Jennie Elizabeth Pratt, spoke about her experience in a series of interviews, and her daughter, Hilda Pratt, kept the financial ledgers for the ranch after her father’s passing. It is important to understand that the political tactics of nation-building implemented by the United States government affected individuals greatly in a number of ways. With the reach of my project I examined who came into agricultural production as a result of these policies. The history of the Pratt family is unique as it not only gives us insight into the realities of what it would have meant to come to the American West as settlers but also introduces us to two women who tell of their lives within this history.

⁴⁷ Emily C. Bartels “Imperialist Beginnings: Richard Hakluyt and the Construction of Africa.” *Criticism* 34, no. 4 (1992): 517–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23113521>.

⁴⁸ Kaw Nation, “Historical Events,” www.kawnation.gov, accessed April 22, 2023, <https://www.kawnation.gov/historical-events/>.

We hear about the life of Jennie through interviews in two small, local newspapers, the first is the *Hoxie Sentinel* and the second is the *Hays Daily News*. The *Hoxie Sentinel* was first published in 1884 and is a “true hometown paper” focused on the national, regional, and local news that directly impacts the city of Hoxie, Kansas.⁴⁹ The *Hays Daily News* is similarly a local newspaper which focuses on the lives of people within the city of Hays, Kansas.⁵⁰ They tell the stories of local residents, like Jennies telling of her experience of coming to Kansas from Yorkshire.

The archives which grant us access to this information impact the ways that these histories are told in and of themselves. Despite the prevalence of scholars researching the histories of indigenous and Black peoples stories’ of migration to the West of the United States, in my use of the archives of The Kansas Historical Society these histories were not at the forefront. Instead histories of figures like the Pratts were spoken about with no regard for their connection to the lives of non-white or even non-protestant populations. The historical society claims to “collect and preserve the story of Kansas History,”⁵¹ but the history offered is limited. The pieces made public by the archives and the articles written do not address the histories of indigenous people living in Kansas before the mid-1800s and use language to describe the land, such as “barren” and “desolate.” This language highlights how the histories of Native Americans have been erased despite their occupancy of this land from before the white settlers and resettled coastal tribal nations

⁴⁹ “Kenoxie Archives, the Sheridan Sentinel,” the sentinel, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://www.sheridansentinel.com/archives>.

⁵⁰ “The Hays Daily News,” accessed April 29, 2023 <https://www.hdnews.net/>.

⁵¹ “Mission and Vision,” Kansas Historical Society, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://www.kshs.org/p/mission-and-vision/10008>.

arrived in Kansas today. It also does not address histories of Black people in Kansas except in regard to issues surrounding slavery during the “Bleeding Kansas” era.

Therefore, these archives allow a continued telling of a history which largely excludes the lives of indigenous and Black people. While recovering these stories is vital work, what's important here is that this historiographical erasure has sustained the image of the hardworking settlers building something from and these settlers stand as symbols of American patriotism.

There are only two articles previously written about Cottonwood Ranch, both published in the *Kansas Historical Society Journal*. The first was written by Don D. Rowlinson in 1989, and the second was authored by Sara J. Keckeisen in 1991. Both give general histories of the Pratt family's experience coming to Kansas from Yorkshire, England, and their role in building the small English settlement of Studley, Kansas.

Within the capacity of my research I was not able to investigate the full extent of settler colonialism in Kansas, but there is a clear connection between the double migration of the indigenous people removed from this land and the entrance of families like the Pratts, especially with regard to the Homestead Act of 1862.⁵² Currently, many

⁵² (“American Indians in Kansas,” Kansas Historical Society, accessed April 16, 2023, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/american-indians-in-kansas/17881>.) In 1854, with the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Indigenous groups in Kansas were forcefully removed from this land as Kansas Territory was occupied by settlers, these tribes included the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, Kiowa, Osage, Pawnee, Wichita and the Kansa, all of whom were native to present day Kansas. This also included the Cherokee, Chippewa, Delaware, Iowa, Iroquois, Kaskaskia, Kickapoo, Munsee, Ottawa, Peoria, Piankashaw, Potawatomi, Quapaw, Sac and Fox, Shawnee, Stockbridge, Wea, and Wyandot tribes who were forcibly removed as a result of the Indian Removal Act of 1830 from their homes on the East Coast and moved to Kansas with the promise of no further relocation. Today four Native American reservations remain, the Iowa, Kickapoo, Potawotomi, and Sac and Fox.

scholars are addressing these histories, especially by considering how industrial movements impacted this landscape.

The Pratt family is just one example of the many families who migrated to the Midwest of the United States to raise Merino sheep during the 1800s. The Pratt family actually established their working ranch on the high plains in the mid 1800s, years after the Merino wool craze, possibly as a result of their exposure or experience to the wool industry in Yorkshire.⁵³ Even as Merino wool lost popularity, the Pratts would establish a successful ranch, The Cottonwood Ranch, which stands today as a historic site.

Abraham Pratt was born in 1827 in the English county of Yorkshire, in a city called Ripon. He originally came to the United States following the gold rush of 1840.⁵⁴ He would return to England shortly after, where he resigned from the navy and became a liquor merchant. He married in England in 1855, and had four children, two sons and two daughters. Abraham returned to the United States only 12 years later, in 1867, and with the money he had acquired from his business in England, bought 160 acres of land in Sheridan County, Kansas, along the South Solomon River in the east.

We can speculate that the Pratt family acquired this land primarily because of The Homestead Act of 1862, which as indicated earlier granted 160 acres of land to settlers coming to the American West. Signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln, this act

⁵³ (T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Yorkshire." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 26, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Yorkshire-former-county-England>.) In the 14th and 15th century, Yorkshire began to have a growing wool manufacturing industry. After this period agriculture would remain one of Yorkshire's dominant economic activities, and would enter the industrial revolution as a center for the manufacturing of woolen textiles. Industrialization would shift the focus of Yorkshire from these agricultural practices to manufacturing.

⁵⁴ "Cottonwood Ranch," Kansas Historical Society, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/cottonwood-ranch/11767>.

granted land in Kansas, which was home to the many indigenous groups living on this land, as well as other parts of the West to white people coming from Europe and the East Coast of the United States.⁵⁵ This area, currently the township of Studley, was established as an English Settlement, with the help of the Pratt family.⁵⁶ Despite what we may infer from the area's name, there was not a large emigration of the English to Kansas: only about four percent of the population in Kansas immigrated from Great Britain.⁵⁷ Instead the majority of settlers often moved from the New England region within the United States, or if they were immigrating to Kansas they often hailed from Germany, Russia, Scandinavia, or the Czech Republic. There was more effort to bring the English to the American West with the Pacific Railway Act than the Homestead Act in particular.

The focus of Abraham Pratt was to purchase farmable land, and he was able to accumulate a 320-acre plot over time, with access to significant water sources which would be used for his farming, as well as the home. His two sons, John Fenton (1856-1937) and Tom, would follow their father to Cottonwood Ranch. The ranch that Abraham Pratt and his sons built consisted of just a stone house and a sod stable, but over

⁵⁵ "Homestead Act," Kansapedia (Kansas Historical Society), accessed April 16, 2023, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/homestead-act/15142#:~:text=The%20Homestead%20Act%20was%20one,160%20acres%20of%20public%20land>.

⁵⁶ (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Yorkshire," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 26, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Yorkshire-former-county-England>.) The greatest effort made by the U.S. to bring settlers to the west would have been made by the railroads who deemed English settlers to be valuable and made efforts to bring them to Kansas. The west was also advertised to the British, post civil war and there were efforts made to have them come to the united states as homesteaders as well.

⁵⁷ J. Neale Garman, *Foreign Language Units of Kansas, 1: Historical Atlas and Statistics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1962), 9.

the years a sod corral and a bath house would be added on, and by the late 1800s the house would also have running water.⁵⁸ John Fenton would send for his fiancée Jennie Elizabeth Place in the following year of 1888 but wanted to first establish a livable home and business.⁵⁹



Shearing and lamb building at far left, shop and stable in center⁶⁰

The three men would develop a ranching business surrounding the raising of Merino sheep and the selling of their wool. According to the journal of John Fenton Pratt, they appeared to run quite a successful business⁶¹. In March and April of 1891, a little over 3,500 pounds of wool were sent to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and St. Louis,

⁵⁸ “Cottonwood Ranch - Exhibits,” Kansas Historical Society, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.kshs.org/p/cottonwood-ranch-exhibits/11765>.

⁵⁹ “Sheridan County Clippings,” 1:54; Pratt Interview.

⁶⁰ Stokes, Keith, “Shearing and lamb building,” photograph, Sheridan County, Kansas, <http://www.kansastravel.org/cottonwoodranch.htm>.

⁶¹ (Kansas State Board of Agriculture *Third Biennial Report 1881-1882* (Topeka Kansas Publishing House, 1883), 458-61.) Between 1881 and 1882 there was a drastic decrease in the population living in Sheridan County losing over 50% of its population, despite this there were two areas of livestock which increased that of milch cows and sheep. Sheep increased from 177 in 1881 to 2,418 in 1882.

Missouri. Only a month later they would sell over 3,000 pounds again, this time to the Hagley Brothers in St. Louis, Missouri, and for this they received a little over \$500.⁶² At the end of 1892 about 1,500 sheep were recorded at the ranch, supporting this large production of wool that could then be dispersed throughout the country,⁶³



Pratt family posing in front of John Fenton Pratt's home⁶⁴

The son of Abraham, Tom, went on to marry Elizabeth Mosier, and together they had eight children. Abraham's son, John Fenton, married Jennie Elizabeth Place almost immediately upon her arrival to Kansas, and together they had two daughters, Hilda, the eldest, born in 1889, and Elsie, the youngest, born in 1894. Jennie was a native of Yorkshire and the High Plains of Kansas were at first a shock to her, "Life on the High Plains was very different from middle class England. At first Jennie did not like living in

⁶² Hilda Pratt Financial Records, 1890-1973, entries for March 6, 1891; April 7, 1891; and May 28, 1891, Pratt Ledgers, Manuscripts Department KSHS.

⁶³ "Pratt Financial Records 1890-1973" John Fenton Pratt Ledger's, Manuscripts Department, KSHS.

⁶⁴ John Fenton Pratt, "John Fenton Pratt's Home Near Studley," photograph, Sheridan County, Kansas, <https://www.kansasmemory.org/item/205827>.

Kansas, but Fent worked hard to make a nice home for her.”⁶⁵ We know from interviews of Jennie published in the *Hoxie Sentinel* and the *Hays Daily News* that despite the familiarity of an agricultural life, she missed the many neat farms of Yorkshire and the security she had there, especially the comfort of home.⁶⁶ She was expected to busy herself by helping out with the ranch and taking care of domestic chores, spending time in the washhouse, the only area in their house built on a foundation.⁶⁷ As people traveled, she was frequently expected to host and never knew exactly who she should expect to be occupying her space. She said in an interview with *The Hays Daily*, “Everybody who came pulled up to the table. Strangers and everyone! When people came to call, they brought their bedding with them,”⁶⁸ We can see here that Jennie was surprised by the change in lifestyle that greeted her upon arriving in Kansas.

Middle class women in the 1800s would have been expected to participate in more than just household management and supported their husbands in their business sometimes by bookkeeping, running errands, and overall “smoothing the path” for her husband.⁶⁹ To Jennie taking on these roles would have been unsurprising but to be a “farmer’s wife” came with a whole new set of expectations, as noted by Olwen Huffton in *The Prospect Before Her*, “the term farmer’s wife carried with it the notion of a

⁶⁵ “Cottonwood Ranch, a Kansas Historical Site,” Cottonwood Ranch, Kansas, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://www.cottonwoodranchks.com/>.

⁶⁶ *Hoxie Sentinel*, August 13, 1893, in “Sheridan County Clippings” 1:53.

⁶⁷ J.S., “COTTONWOOD RANCH STATE HISTORIC SITE,” Cottonwood Ranch in Sheridan County, Kansas, accessed March 6, 2023, <http://genealogytrails.com/kan/sheridan/cottonwoodranch.html>.

⁶⁸ *Hays Daily News*, August 2nd, 1893.

⁶⁹ Olwen Huffton, “On Being a Wife,” in *The Prospect Before Her*, vol. 1 (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995), pp. 137-176.

particular kinds of work recognized as essential to the efficient running of the farm... the farmer expected his wife to be a worker.”⁷⁰ This role of worker would have needed to be taken on by Jennie to have the farm function at its fullest capacity.

John Fenton tried to create some of the comforts that Jennie would have been used to when building their home. Cottonwood Ranch is not built in the style of American ranches but is instead built like the farms of Yorkshire. Cottonwood trees were planted all around the house. To some extent, this was John Fenton’s way of adding some of the greenery that the family would have been accustomed to in Yorkshire, but it was also a way to protect the buildings from natural occurrences, like strong winds, that may have damaged it or the crops. Cottonwood trees are one of the few trees native to Kansas, and they symbolized to the Pratt family their movement to the United States and the establishment of their new home.⁷¹

The spring was dominated by the shearing of the sheep. Shearers and sheepherders would be hired and stay at the Pratts’ home as all of the animals' wool was prepared. This work continued into the summer but not to the same extent. In the summer, local children would be hired to work on the farm as shepherds and were paid five cents per sheep sheared.⁷² This wool was then shipped off to the markets.

Despite there being almost no mention of indigenous people in the historical tellings of the Pratt family, we know now that they would have been present on this land

⁷⁰ Olwen Hufpton, “On Being a Wife,” in *The Prospect Before Her*, vol. 1 (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995), page. 156.

⁷¹ “Sheridan County Clippings” 1:54; Pratt Interview.

⁷² “Pratt Financial Records 1890-1973,” John Fenton Pratt Ledger’s, Manuscripts Department, KSHS.

and it seems likely that the local children and laborers hired to work for the Pratt family during the busy times of spring and summer could have included indigenous people from the community around them. During the late 1800s members of the Cherokee, Chippewa, Delaware, Iowa, Iroquois, Kaskaskia, Kickapoo, Munsee, Ottawa, Peoria, Piankashaw, Potawatomi, Quapaw, Sac and Fox, Shawnee, Stockbridge, Wea, and Wyandot tribes as well as other members of their immediate community and those who may have regularly traveled for work may have participated in the labor of shearing the Merino sheep for sell in markets across the country.

By 1904, John Fenton had sold all of his sheep and moved onto other businesses outside of wool. At this time the price in wool was falling rapidly and the cattle industry was growing throughout Kansas.⁷³ During John Fenton's time on the farm he most likely would have taken on many other jobs to supply the goods needed to sustain his own family and also pursued woodworking and blacksmithing in order to keep the farm running.⁷⁴ John Fenton died in 1937. His wife Jennie passed away in 1959, leaving just the two sisters in charge of the ranch, where Hilda remained. Elsie moved away from Sheridan County to Manhattan, Kansas,⁷⁵ leaving Hilda alone on the ranch until she died

⁷³ ("People of Kansas," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed April 16, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kansas/People>.) Along with the railroads, job opportunities like raising cattle attracted people to the state. Texan cattlemen drove their herds to Kansas during this time. But, because sheep eat about four times less than cattle, and have a more expansive diet they took better to the land. Even though the sheep seemed to be a better fit for the Kansas landscape, there was political tension between those raising cattle and those raising sheep. There were periods of rise and fall between the two industries but cattle raised for beef is still one of the main agricultural products of Kansas.

⁷⁴ "Sheridan County Clippings" 1:54; Pratt Interview.

⁷⁵ "Cottonwood Ranch - Exhibits," Kansas Historical Society, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.kshs.org/p/cottonwood-ranch-exhibits/11765>.

in 1980. From the point of her father's death forward Hilda took on his role, keeping a financial ledger of all the ranch business.⁷⁶

After Hilda's death the ranch became the historical site that it is today and is representative of the colonial settlement of Kansas and the migration to the Midwest of the United States during the nineteenth century. The house today is owned by a fourth-generation cowboy, Don Rowlinson, who carries on the history of this home and continues to tell stories of the experiences of many who moved through the Midwest.⁷⁷ The graves of the Pratt family can be found within the Studley Cemetery.⁷⁸ The story of the Pratt family serves as a personal example of the ways in which the industry of Merino wool was connected to the expansion of America to the West. Merino wool was more than just the politics of late 1800s America: it was a tool used by the United States to continue expansion, and families like the Pratts stand as an example of how this translated to the day to day lives of people. Interestingly, because the Pratts are originally English they go against the original Jeffersonian ideas which promoted the separation of American reliance on England to cultivate a Merino wool market, and yet they promote his ideas of American expansion.

There are two people within the Pratt family who navigate this history in a way that many did not. The first is Jennie Elizabeth Pratt, who migrated to Kansas from Yorkshire, England, to marry her fiance John Fenton Pratt. We hear her story from a

⁷⁶ Dorothy Johnson Campbell to Richard Mermis, September 11, 1980.

⁷⁷ Keith Stokes, "Cottonwood Ranch - Studley, Kansas," Cottonwood Ranch - Studley, Kansas, accessed March 6, 2023, <http://www.kansastravel.org/cottonwoodranch.htm>.

⁷⁸ J.S., "Studley Cemetery," Studley Cemetery in Sheridan County, Kansas, accessed March 6, 2023, <http://genealogytrails.com/kan/sheridan/studleycemetery.html>.

series of interviews in local newspapers where she spoke of her experience of migration and adjustment to this landscape which was new to her. The second is her daughter Hilda Pratt who took on the role of her father in running Cottonwood Ranch after his death and gives us insight into the development of this land through her financial ledgers.



Hilda Pratt with pet⁷⁹

The women of the Pratt family also stand as examples of how women in the American West have been considered by historians. I hope to use the insight they offer us into their lives as a way to compare the ways in which we generally consider the history of the Western woman.

As previously mentioned, this arrival to Kansas was shocking to Jennie. She had traveled alone across the ocean and to a country she had never been before, and it was quite unfamiliar. In Yorkshire it would not have been unusual for women to work in the

⁷⁹ John Fenton Pratt, “Hilda Pratt, John Fenton Pratt home,” photograph, Sheridan County, Kansas <https://www.kansasmemory.org/item/205827>.

wool market, but they would have been involved in the manufacturing of the yarn, not the raising or shearing of the sheep. While we do not know if Jennie took on the role of spinning the wool sheared at Cottonwood Ranch, that is a possibility with her background. Yorkshire's history is heavily connected to wool manufacturing, and immigrants from that area would have been accustomed to rural life and agricultural pursuits, but the environment of the Plains themselves and the way of life for the settlers would have been very new to Jennie.⁸⁰ She was greeted with the flat earth of Kansas and settlers so often threatened by extreme weather and starvation that figures like the original Buffalo Bill, William Mathewson, so nicknamed for supplying buffalo meat to hungry people after a drought, gained fame.⁸¹ The wind would blow nonstop, and without any trees to cut through the noise, the howling was continuous.

For Jennie coming from Yorkshire it must have been quite a shocking realization to her that in her fast marriage to John Fenton she had agreed also to leave her comfortable middle-class existence behind in order to build a family in this space that was distant to the life she had once known. Jennie focused her time on making her new home on the wide plains of Kansas as comfortable as she could for herself and her family. During this period mailorder catalogs first began to circulate, and items from these catalogs could be found throughout the Pratt home, from kitchen appliances to wallpaper.

⁸⁰ Norman Twell, *The British Settlement at Studley* (unpublished manuscript, 1953) 1-2, library, KSHS.

⁸¹ ("People of Kansas," *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed April 16, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kansas/People>.) Actually William Mathewson, "Buffalo Bill" killed buffalo to provide for the starving settlers in the winter, a testimony of how harsh this land could be for those who were not accustomed to living there

Farmer's wives were often considered to have "new wealth" and were frequent participants in the consumption of new consumer goods.⁸²

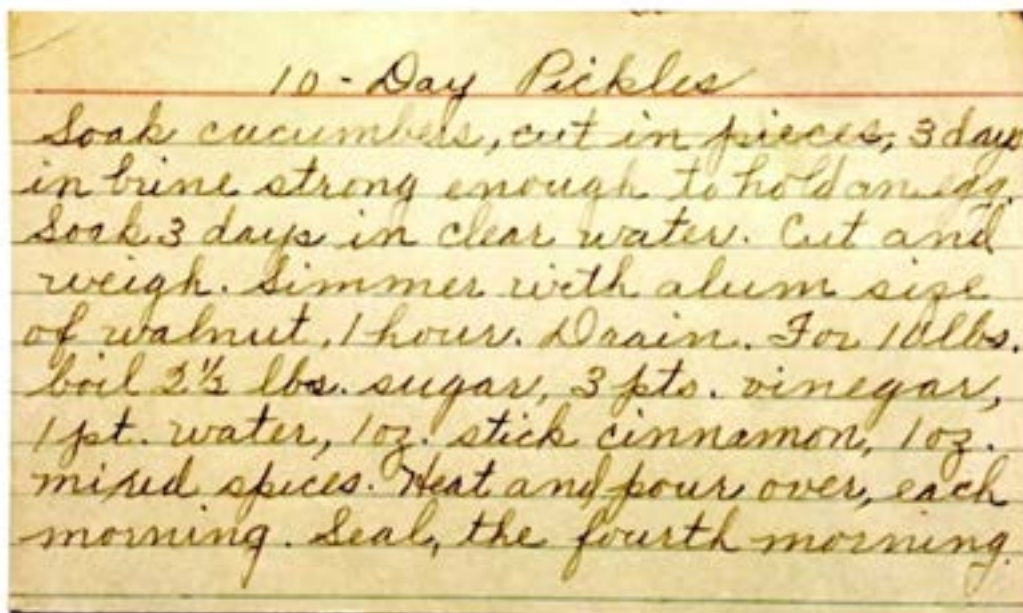
Jennie's situation speaks to the complications of leaving one's family and home in hopes of gaining wealth and stability on the frontier of this new promised land and having to come to terms with the emotional isolation of the unfamiliar as well as the physical isolation of the country where neighbors were acres and acres away from each other. The political moves of Jefferson were more extensive than simply building an economy of wool. It took individuals like Jennie to fulfill Jefferson's ideas of patriotism. Jennie was lucky, comparatively, to have John Fenton alongside her, as many women followed their husbands to the midwest and then were left for extended periods of time as the men went to work on building the railroads.⁸³ Not just anyone was able to withstand the landscape of the Plains, and the women in these positions often found themselves facing this reality alone. They were to take care of the animals or the home completely by themselves and miles away from another house or person for months at a time.

As shocking as the experiences of immigration may have been for women like Jennie, there is a broader experience of displacement that this project does not address. The settler colonialism of people like Jennie would have meant the removal of people who were already accustomed to living on the land, such as the many indigenous tribes previously mentioned. As a result of the Homestead Act of 1862, the settler colonialism

⁸² Olwen Huffton, "On Being a Wife," in *The Prospect Before Her*, vol. 1 (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995), pp. 137-176.

⁸³Encyclopedia Britannica, "People of Kansas." After the civil war land was given to those who worked on the railroads throughout the state and this attracted many. Those who migrated for work may have included Russians, Bohemians, Germans and Scandinavians. Some of their cultural heritage can be found in the festivals and traditions practiced in small communal towns.

that Jennie participated in sought to replace the indigenous population with white-protestant families. With the massive removal of indigenous people there was also a move to repopulate these areas of the West and the reproductive labor of the settler woman was needed for this.⁸⁴



Hilda's recipe for 10-Day Pickles⁸⁵

While Jennie's experience tells a story of the immigration brought about by policies like the Homestead Act of 1862, and what it meant for her to leave her life as she knew it and adjust to the life of the Midwest, her daughter Hilda provides us with another story of the Western woman. Though Hilda was certainly involved in homemaking, as Jennie had been, she also continued to take care of the ranch long after everyone else in

⁸⁴ Jacobs, Margaret D. 2017. "Reproducing White Settlers and Eliminating Natives: Settler Colonialism, Gender, and Family History in the American West." *Journal of the West* 56 (4): 13. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=30h&AN=128157818&site=ehost-live>.

⁸⁵ "Recipes from Hilda Pratt's Kitchen Wwww.cottonwoodranchks.com Cottonwood ...," Recipes from Hilda Pratt's Kitchen, accessed April 17, 2023, https://www.cottonwoodranchks.com/uploads/2/8/9/3/28932565/recipes_1a_08-16-16.pdf.

her family was gone, managing both the upkeep of the farm and its finances. Living on her own, Hilda shows an alternative way for a woman to exist on the Plains – a life of work and labor that was looked down upon by many but not uncommon for women in the Midwest. Author Hamlin Garland wrote that this type of work “ground the women into battered ruins of their former selves.”⁸⁶ We do not have records that show how Hilda felt emotionally about her circumstances, but to say that this was not a life that she desired seems to be too large of an assumption. We have photographs of Hilda appearing to enjoy her life on the ranch, and her financial ledgers are rich with information that indicate that she was passionately involved in the upkeep of the farm.

To work, to participate in the labor outside of the home, even if directly connected to the home, was just seen as too much work, and these women were pitied for the involved role that they took on their property. The reality is that Hilda might represent something more, someone who had access to other ways of being but chose to participate in the labor of her home in the way that we know she did.

The histories that we understand of these women have more complexity than may be seen on the surface, and by oversimplification of these families’ and these women’s histories, we lose important information that can help to inform how we learn about moments in history like the Merino wool craze and the Homestead Act of 1862.

These women faced conditions that would have been new and challenging, and it is not unbelievable to think that such experiences may have affected their quality of life.

⁸⁶ Hamlin Garland - William Dean Howells (essay date 1891)" Short Story Criticism Ed. Drew Kalasky. Vol. 18. Gale Cengage 1995 eNotes.com 17 Apr. 2023
<<https://www.enotes.com/topics/hamlin-garland/critical-essays/garland-hamlin#critical-essays-garland-hamlin-criticism-william-dean-howells-essay-date-1891>.

There were harsh winters, heavy rain in spring that caused their homes to flood and their ceilings to leak, prairie fires and tornadoes, and bugs that could ruin their crops and leave them without food. In addition to facing the fearful realities of the environment, these women were having to learn to make a home in a new way, having left all they knew behind. In leaving their loved ones in another country behind they also found themselves in isolated spaces with very little familiarity or access to comforts they may have relied on in the past.

At the same time, the way that these women have been written about gives us an understanding of how the histories of settler colonial women fit a narrative of hardship and struggle that needs to be considered more thoughtfully. Based on the sources I was greeted with upon researching this topic it is easy to think that the lives of these settlers were difficult and strenuous. This in itself seems to promote Jefferson's notion of patriotism connected to the production of wool, in which one was a patriot because they were willing to labor and suffer for the development of the nation. These settlers were framed as willing to sacrifice for the betterment of the country as a whole, but through analysis of the lives of the Pratt family we can question the reality of this claim. Though Jennie struggled to adjust to her life in the United States, the responsibilities she met were similar to those of European women in similar circumstances. Hilde had the opportunity to be completely independent as a result of the Pratt's ability to create a business surrounding the production of Merino wool.

What can be said for this history is that these one-dimensional stories about Western women are not enough. Women's experiences as pioneers on the Western front

are greatly varied, and they had to respond and adapt to the particular challenges they faced. For Jennie that challenge may have been leaving all that she knew behind in exchange for a new life alongside her husband, for Hilda it may have been trials and tribulations but also the joys of taking care of her family's land, and their stories are far from the only ones.

Conclusion

This project was not what I expected it to be. I wanted it to give light to the voices of women that have not been heard before. The reality is that to come to these voices you have to follow the path that led them to the space they occupy. This path is often created by men, whether it is Thomas Jefferson promoting Merino wool as a tactic to enhance patriotism in the United States through separation from England, or John Fenton Pratt bringing his fiancée Jennie from England to the American West to marry him.

Though I have not yet reached the story that I want to fully understand, the history of Merino wool helps us to understand what stories have been told and prompts us to ask why these are the stories that we know best. The absence of so many alternative voices speaks to how the history of the expansion of America has been taught in itself. This dialogue is changing, and as I came to the end of my research for this project, more and more articles, authors, and histories popped up that will allow me to make my understanding of this history more full in the future (right now I am looking forward to essays I found on “cowgirl feminism”).

What my project did give insight into is how Merino wool was used throughout the 1800s to promote the expansion of the United States. Through movement away from England in the early 1800s with the Merino wool craze, which promoted a fine wool trade within the United States itself, we see expansion in the economy and independence of the United States. Then in the mid-1800s we see physical expansion of the country

through promotion of agricultural production of goods, like Merino wool, which led to immigration to the Midwest as a result of many national political decisions, such as the Homestead Act of 1862.

I wanted this project to be about women – women in craft, women in the American West, women working with textiles. Though we have the experiences of Jennie and Hilda Pratt to offer some insight into how women were connected to the market of Merino wool, the historical picture is simply very incomplete. What I am left with at the end of this project is the question, how did I start out writing a paper about women in craft and end with a tale of the use of Merino wool as a tactic to promote American expansion in the 1800s? And the bigger question, what does this redirection say about how the history of women is being told to the public through historical archives, and through academic work?

Artist Statement

For Because of Sickness Exhibition

My family came to the American West through the farming of Merino wool in the early 1800s. In my historical essay, I look at how Merino wool moved into America from Europe in the early 1800s and then continued to migrate with the expansion of the country to the West. My family was part of this expansion. “Because of sickness” is a two part show which brings the arch of my family's historical ties to this wool into the present, and asks the viewer to consider where this history lives on today.

The first section of my work is a series of prints and hand-made paper. The prints tell the ghost story of a woman who lived on the Plains of Kansas in the Mid-1800s. This piece speaks to both the historical and the present. They look at the life of a woman living on the plains and how she has been remembered. The buffalo she sees in her history stand as a symbol for the passage of time even when she herself continues to exist long after her death. The hand-made paper series shows an abstract map of migration which considers how the movement of Merino wool was connected to the movement of those following this market. Embedded in the paper are bits of letters written between me, my grandmother and my mother.

The letters embedded in this paper bring us to the second section of my work which brings the viewer into the present and asks the question, how do these histories exist today? This section is a collection of books and ceramics which symbolize my present life. The ceramics are symbols of stable objects frozen in time. The books are inspired by letters written between me, my mother, and my grandmother during my time here at Bard.

My history is the history of merino wool and yet I am far from occupying the plains of Kansas. I spend my days in academic buildings, swimming pools, and cars manufactured in 2007. This is a very different existence than Merino wool farmers in the 1800s, and yet this history stays very close to me as my mom is a textile artist and my dad spent his whole life on the Kansas Plains. These ceramics and books address how the present for me exists alongside the history of Merino wool.

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