
Student's Background

Cowboy Scene Investigation

John Francis Grant



John Francis Grant, NPS photo.

“Johnny” Grant was born at Fort Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, on January 7, 1831. He was the son of a Hudson’s Bay Company fur trader. Johnny was raised by his grandmother in Quebec before joining his father at Fort Hall, Idaho, as a teenager. Fort Hall was a fortified trading post for fur trappers, traders, and pioneers on the Oregon Trail.

Johnny left his father's household in 1850 and went to live among the Bannock and Northern Shoshone. He married a Shoshone woman.

He established alliances with Indians of the Northwest by marrying women from different tribes. His complex family eventually numbered 26 children by eight mothers. He also gave a home to other abused and abandoned children he encountered in his travels.

Johnny traded goods and cattle with pioneers along the Oregon Trail as well as the American Indian tribes he met along the way. Traders offered to exchange one healthy animal for two exhausted and worn-out

animals. The livestock then went to the valleys of Montana and Idaho to spend the winter eating and resting to regain their strength. By spring, they were healthy enough to trade.

Johnny spent his first winter in the Deer Lodge Valley in 1857 and returned there in 1859. Hundreds of his cattle and horses ranged the valley. Until Montana's gold rush of the 1860s, he found a market for his cattle in the mining camps of Idaho and California. He persuaded others to settle near him, and they founded the town now known as Deer Lodge. Mexican and French-Canadian metis (mixed race) families were among its earliest residents. In 1862, Grant began building the large ranch house which now stands at Grant-Kohrs Ranch. He lived there with his Bannock wife, Quarra.

Part of his new house was a trading post, but even as he was building it, his life was changing forever. He began planting grain and hay crops on his ranch. Gold strikes in Bannack, Virginia City, Last Chance Gulch and other areas brought a flood of miners into southwest Montana. Grant opened a variety of businesses to serve the newcomers. They included a livery stable, saloon, blacksmith shop, sawmill, and flour mill. But he did not make much money on these businesses. Johnny could read French, but not English. Some local businessmen used this to trick him. They wrote things into business contracts that Johnny could not read and he lost money in these agreements. Outlaws also threatened his life. Racial prejudice was now commonplace and hurt his large, multi-ethnic family.

At last, Grant decided to return to Canada, as did most of the other French-Canadians in the valley. He sold his ranch to Conrad Kohrs in 1866 and left his family for several months to search for a new place to settle. Choosing the Carmen, Manitoba area, he returned to Deer Lodge to find that Quarra had died of tuberculosis.

After nearly 20 years in the Red River country, Grant moved again. He returned to the Edmonton area of Alberta. He died there in 1907 within sight of the Hudson’s Bay Post where he had been born.

Quarra Grant

Quarra was born about the year 1840, possibly near the Snake River in Idaho where her people, the Bannock, lived. They lived as hunter-gatherers by gathering edible plants, like camas, and hunting deer and bison. As seasons changed, they moved their camps to follow the salmon run. The Bannock also traded with white fur traders and visited their trading posts.

The Fort Hall trading post is where Johnny Grant first remembered meeting Quarra. He said that “she had worked for my people at Fort Hall” as a cook. They were married by 1860.

When she married Johnny, Quarra became a wife in fur trade society. Marrying an American Indian woman was common among fur traders. American Indian women knew traditional skills like sewing, gathering edible plants, and cooking. These skills were important to fur traders because they helped them survive on the frontier. Indian women could make pemmican and other dried foods to last through the winter, when game animals, seeds and berries were scarce. They could make clothing for their husbands from skins and furs, including moccasins. Traders valued moccasins because they were the most useful footwear on the frontier. Indian women could give them children and families, too. They also became a bridge between traders and tribes. Indian wives could speak both white and native languages, allowing them to communicate the needs of one culture to the other.

Quarra played this role after settling in the Deer Lodge Valley with Johnny in 1859. She could speak several native languages, as well as English and French. She helped Johnny raise his family, giving birth to six children and helping care for others. Johnny also mentions her as “being expert with her needle” and “could make my clothing as well as a tailor.” Granville Stuart, who also lived in the valley, once saw “Johnny Grant’s wife.... Going to stop at Hell Gate canon below Flint Creek and gather service berries.”

Though her traditional skills were valued, the world around her was changing. Johnny remarked that Quarra “was very proud of our new house” built in Deer Lodge in 1863. He also said that “she showed a wonderful skill in taking up the ways of white women.” She learned to “cook well...and now she made good butter.” Quarra even began baking bread. Her traditional skills, which had been so valued, were being replaced by the homemaking skills of white culture.

The value placed on Indian wives was changing, too. By 1866, a wave of white settlers unfamiliar with American Indian and fur trade culture were flooding into the Deer Lodge Valley. This led to a growing prejudice against American Indian wives and their mixed-race children. In the face of this rising racism, Johnny Grant decided to leave his ranch for Canada. But he realized that this would take Quarra away from her Bannock culture. He asked her, “Will you leave your people to come with me?” She responded, “If you will take me I will go to the end of the world with you to be with you and my children.”

Quarra did not get the chance. She died of tuberculosis in the ranch house on February 24, 1867. She was holding her youngest child in her arms.



An artist's depiction of an American Indian woman in western Montana, holding a child in a cradle board. No photographs or images of Quarra are known to exist. NPS photo.

Carsten Conrad Kohrs

Carsten Conrad Kohrs was born on August 5, 1835 in Wewelsfleth, a fishing town in Holstein, Germany. At fifteen he went to sea as a cabin boy. His work at sea took him to Brazil, Cuba, and islands off the coast of Africa. After a serious injury ended his time as a sailor, he traveled across the United States. In his travels, he sold sausages in New Orleans and worked as a butcher for relatives in New York and Iowa. He became a United States citizen in 1857.

Kohrs then followed gold rushes to California, the Fraser River in Canada, and finally to Montana in 1862. Instead of finding gold, Kohrs found that he made more money by feeding the other miners. He opened butcher shops in gold camps across western Montana. Kohrs earned so much money that he bought Johnny Grant's ranch in 1866. He then married Augusta Kruse Kohrs in 1868. Together, they built a home in the ranch house and raised two daughters and a son.

Though it began as a supply for his butcher shops, Kohrs' ranch would grow into an empire on the Great Plains. He began sending herds to eastern Montana in 1869. In time, his cattle herds grew so large that they ranged 10 million acres. He also shipped 10,000 cattle to the Union Stock Yards in Chicago – every year! Despite this success, Kohrs never gave up his dream of gold mining. He partnered with his half-brother, John Bielenberg, to open mines in the Deer Lodge area. Together, they also bought land and water rights.

Because he could not run all these businesses at the same time by himself, Kohrs relied on people to run things in his place. This included Joseph Rosenbaum, his Chicago livestock agent and Thomas Hooban, his range foreman. From his ranch house office, he wrote them letters with directions on what to do. By using letter writing to run his ranch, Kohrs had time to follow other interests. That included politics. Kohrs was elected to the Montana Territorial Legislature in 1885 and the Montana constitutional convention of 1889. Kohrs also helped establish the Montana Stock Growers



Conrad Kohrs, NPS photo.

Association. This group helped ranchers overcome common problems. By working together, they could ask territorial governments to pass laws that stopped cattle thieves and disease.

Kohrs' success and varied businesses protected him from the Hard Winter disaster of 1886 and 1887. In the 1880s, thousands of aspiring cattlemen came west to get rich like Kohrs and other cattlemen had. But too many cattle were on the range by 1886 and little grass remained by winter. Thousands of starving cattle died in the blistering cold and harsh blizzards. This was the end for many ranchers.

For Conrad Kohrs and John Bielenberg, it was a sign that the old ways had to change. They began fencing in pastures and harvesting hay to feed their cattle through the winter. By 1900, their ranch was still thriving. But Kohrs' increasing age and the death of his only son, William, in 1901, caused Kohrs and Bielenberg to leave ranching. By 1918, they sold all their range cattle and much of their ranch in Deer Lodge. Kohrs died in 1920 at age 85. He had seen cattle ranching change from the days of open range into a modern, fenced-in era.

John Bielenberg



John Bielenberg, NPS photo.

John Bielenberg, Conrad Kohrs' younger half-brother, was born in Holstein, Germany, in 1846. John, his parents, and his other brothers immigrated to the United States on June 30, 1854. In 1864, when John was 18 years old, Conrad invited him to Montana to help run his gold camp butcher shops.

Kohrs and Bielenberg soon became equal partners in everything they did. John Bielenberg lived in the ranch house with Conrad, Augusta and their family. They also divided the responsibilities of running their various businesses. Though people knew Kohrs as the "cattle king," John managed the ranch. He oversaw breeding, haying, branding, and the roundups. Conrad Warren, who was the grandson of Kohrs and Bielenberg's great-nephew, remembered that "grandfather needed a man like John, because John was the one who stayed home

and looked after the business, particularly the range cattle part of it.... John trouble-shot for him, time and time again." With John running the ranch, Kohrs was able to focus on their gold mine and water rights businesses.

Together they ran a "steer operation." They bought and grazed two-year-old cattle on the open range. Then they let them fatten for one or two years before selling them. After the Hard Winter of 1886 and 1887, John oversaw the change to a "cow/calf" operation. Instead of buying steers, they relied on a herd of cows to raise calves. Each year, the calves replaced the cattle that they sold. John also switched to raising the beefier Hereford cattle, which fatten quicker than longhorns. In a 1900 letter, John predicted "Herefords are the coming cattle for Montana."

He also raised thoroughbred horses that could do a twenty-mile circle in half a day during roundups. He did this by breeding thoroughbred studs to hardy native mares. These forerunners of today's quarter horses were in high demand by ranchers throughout the territory. On occasion, John raced his thoroughbreds against those of other breeders.

John preferred to work hands-on with the livestock. Like cowboys, he chose clothing that provided comfort while working outdoors. Unlike Conrad, who often wore dark suits and starched white collars, John wore the sweaters, hats, and boots typical of cowboys. He often wore clothing long after holes had worn through them. Augusta Kohrs would buy him new clothes and burn his worn-out ones.

John continued living in the Deer Lodge ranch house after Conrad's death in 1920. He was still raising and selling Kohrs & Bielenberg cattle. But he soon fell ill with cancer. On June 16, 1922, John Bielenberg died at age 74. His death cut the ranch's last tie to the open range, and the legacy built by two brothers.

Thomas Hooban



Thomas Hooban, NPS photo.

Thomas “Tom” Hooban grew up in Wisconsin but was in western Montana by the early 1860s. He first drove freight wagons between the steamboat landing at Fort Benton, the gold camps in Virginia City, and Salt Lake City. Then, in 1864, Hooban shifted his focus to ranching. He worked as a foreman for Montana rancher George Forbes. As a foreman, Hooban was responsible for ranging cattle herds, moving them to fresh grass, and overseeing the cowboys.

Conrad Kohrs first met Hooban in 1864 while moving one of his herds across the Big Hole River in southwest Montana. Hooban agreed to help Kohrs, who was alone. Shortly after they got the cattle across, Kohrs became ill. Hooban cared for Kohrs through the night and following day until he was well enough to travel. Kohrs never forgot this. He hired Hooban by 1868.

Kohrs made him a foreman, and it was not long before he made his first contribution to Kohrs’ growing cattle

empire. He recognized that the Deer Lodge Valley did not have enough grass to support the growing herd. He suggested moving parts of the herd to other ranges. Kohrs trusted Hooban’s judgement and in 1869, Hooban moved a herd to the Sun River in eastern Montana. In the early 1870s, Hooban moved more cattle to the Snake River in Idaho. This marked a major change in Kohrs’ ranching. His herds were now located on many ranges, hundreds of miles away from home.

Kohrs trusted Hooban with the management of these distant herds. It meant making on-the-spot decisions for Kohrs. On cattle drives, Hooban decided when to sell worn-out cattle or buy healthy animals. Hooban kept the cowboys going along the way. He replaced their worn-out clothing or equipment and made sure they had enough food to eat. Hooban also bought feasts for the cowboys after difficult stretches of the journey. His planning and decision making ensured that the cattle were delivered healthy, on time, and within budget.

But Tom Hooban was more than a good foreman. He was Conrad Kohrs’ friend. On occasion, Hooban stayed with the Kohrs family in the ranch house and even joined them on vacations. He was with them when they traveled to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. In October of 1883, the Kohrs family cared for him while he suffered from tuberculosis. Following Conrad’s advice, he went to California, where the mild weather might ease his suffering. But the dampness there only made his illness worse. He then went to New Mexico, hoping the drier climate would help. But it would not. In 1884, Thomas Hooban died in Santa Fe.

Conrad Kohrs paid to have Tom’s body sent to his family in Wisconsin. “My wife and I went to Wisconsin,” said Kohrs, “and followed him to his last resting place.” It was a final show of devotion to his friend and the man who had helped him achieve his success.

Augusta Kruse Kohrs

Augusta was born June 20, 1849, in Hamburg, Germany. Stories passed down through the Kohrs family say that when she was a young girl, she carried water from the community well to her family's home. They also say that her father was a musician. Conrad Kohrs remembered meeting her while they were children in Holstein. Yet, they did not know each other well. She was only 1 year old when Conrad left for his job at sea.

Augusta immigrated to the United States in 1864. By 1868, she had settled in Cincinnati, Ohio. For mysterious reasons, Conrad traveled to Cincinnati in 1868 to find her. He only says this about their meeting in Cincinnati: "There we renewed our acquaintance and after a short time became engaged." After this "short time" of three weeks, Conrad and Augusta married on February 23, 1868, at the home of Kohrs' mother in Davenport, Iowa.

After their marriage, Conrad and Augusta made a seven-week steamboat journey up the Missouri River to Ft. Benton, Montana. It took five more days in a wagon, through a cold rain, to reach Deer Lodge.

Ranch life was not gentle for this young woman used to city life. Augusta was 19 years old and pregnant when she arrived on the ranch. She was also confronted by a lot of new responsibilities. Conrad said that there "was altogether too much work to do for one woman." But she immediately set to work. Augusta cleaned the house, exterminated a bed bug infestation, cooked, made soap and candles, and fed chickens. She helped family and friends with childbirth. And between all this, she raised a family. She and Conrad had three children: Anna, Katharine, and William.

Between these responsibilities, Augusta found time to bring fine art onto a frontier ranch. Augusta enjoyed needlepoint work and collected fine furniture, paintings, and small sculptures. She often traveled to Chicago and New York to view the latest fashions, technologies, and artworks of the city. Augusta also loved music and made sure her children had music



Augusta Kohrs, NPS photo.

lessons. She never missed the New York opera season, even into her 90s.

In 1900, she and Conrad moved their home to Helena. But they always spent their summers on the ranch. Augusta cherished spending time with her grandchildren there. They lovingly called her "Ohma," which is German for "grandmother."

In Helena, charity became important to her. She donated money to local young men to help them go to college. Augusta also gave money to build the Conrad Kohrs Memorial unit of the St. Peter's Hospital. But family was always most important to her. Conrad Warren, her grandson, remembered how she would telephone the Deer Lodge ranch to check on John Bielenberg.

She continued to spend summers on the ranch until her death on October 29, 1945. It was the end of a long life of blending culture, cattle, and family.

Conrad Kohrs Warren

Conrad Kohrs Warren was born on August 6, 1907. He was the youngest child of Conrad and Augusta Kohrs' daughter Katharine. His father, Dr. Otey Yancey Warren, died when Con was three months old. Called Con by many, he grew up in Helena but spent summers on the Kohrs and Bielenberg ranch. From his grandparents and great-uncle John Bielenberg, he learned a passion for ranching.

His passion for ranching grew as he grew older. He had cowboyed for the Dana Ranch in Wyoming in 1927. But he left cattle country that fall to go to the University of Virginia. Yet, as Warren said, "all I could think about was a little scrap of land someplace and a few cows." During summers, he returned to the Kohrs ranch to help with haying. He left college in 1929, when he took a job at the Kohrs ranch.

Warren's love of ranching earned him the role of ranch manager in 1932. His management began as the Great Depression plagued the United States in the 1930s. In these lean years, high quality beef brought the best profits. The health of his cattle gained importance because of this. Warren upgraded his livestock, raising registered Hereford cattle and Belgian draft horses. He bought more land to provide summer range for his growing cattle herd. Warren harvested hay to keep his stock fed through the winter. He also asked local veterinarians to help with the breeding of his Belgian draft horses. Because of this interest in raising healthy livestock, nearby ranchers asked Warren for help. He assisted them with calving and cattle medical emergencies. Warren also worked with other ranchers to stop the spread of cattle diseases.

In 1940, Warren bought the Kohrs ranch and house. Shortly after, cattle health was hard hit. Dwarfism appeared in the top lines of the Hereford breed. This disease caused Hereford calves to have defects like bowed legs, shortness of breath, and misshaped mouths. Warren didn't escape this crisis. T.T. Triumphant, a bull which he bought for \$32,500, carried

the dwarfism. He stopped breeding registered Herefords in 1958.

Warren never achieved the financial success of his grandfather and great-uncle. But his contributions to cattle ranching were many. He served as president of the Board of Livestock Commissioners. Warren was also president of the Montana Stockgrowers Association. His responsibilities with these organizations included the establishment of livestock auctions. These auctions are how Montana ranchers sell their cattle today. They remain one of the cattleman's most important marketing tools.

Warren continued raising purebred Herefords, even after selling the ranch to the National Park Service in 1972. Throughout his life, Warren also worked to preserve the Kohrs home ranch. He and his wife, Nell Warren, saved every object and written document inside the ranch house. This has provided historians today with a 120-year record of the cattle industry. Warren lived at the ranch until his death in 1993 at the age of 85.



Conrad Warren, NPS photo.