
Teacher's Background

Cowboy Scene Investigation

John Francis Grant



John Francis Grant, NPS photo.

Born on January 7, 1831, at Fort Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, "Johnny" Grant was the son of a Hudson's Bay Company trader. His mother died when he was three and he was taken to Three Rivers, Quebec, where he, his sister and two brothers were raised by his maternal grandmother.¹ In his mid-teens, he joined his father at Fort Hall, Idaho Territory. Many "forts" of the West were fortified trading posts, and such was Fort Hall. The fur trade was Johnny Grant's heritage, but it was not his future.

By the 1840s the western fur trade was dying out, displaced by the overland migration to California and Oregon. Traders turned increasingly to the emigrants for trade, and young Johnny was among them. He left his father's household in 1850 and went to live among the Bannock and Northern Shoshone. Grant made his home in a leather lodge and married a Shoshone woman.²

His complex family eventually numbered 26 children by eight mothers.³ He established alliances with Indians of the Northwest by marrying women from different tribes. He kept much of his large family close throughout his long life and gave a home to other abused and abandoned children he encountered in his travels.⁴

In the 1850s, emigrants on the Oregon Trail arrived in southern Idaho with horses and cattle which were too footsore and weary for the difficult trail west. Shrewd traders bartered one fit animal for two trail-weary ones. The cattle wintered and rested on the lush grassland of Idaho and southwest Montana. By the time the next year's immigrants arrived, they were fit to rejoin the westward trains at a profit to the cattle traders. Johnny was among the earliest to be involved in this trade.⁵

Having successfully wintered stock in the Deer Lodge Valley in 1857, Johnny returned there in 1859 and built a home.⁶ Hundreds of head of his cattle and horses ranged the valley. Until Montana's gold boom of the 1860s, he found a market for his stock in the mining camps of Idaho and California. He persuaded others, mostly traders, to settle near him, and they founded the town now known as Deer Lodge. Mexican traders numbered among its earliest residents, along with French Canadian metis (mixed blood) families.⁷ In 1862, Grant began building the large house which is now at the core of Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS. He lived there with his Bannock Indian wife, Quarra.

Part of his new house was a trading post, but even as he was building it, the character of Grant's life was changing forever. His life became more settled, evidenced by his ownership of a cradle scythe used to harvest grains. In stark opposition to his nomadic life among the Shoshone and Bannock, he planted

grain and hay crops on his ranch.⁸ His acceptance of agriculture was not the only thing that tied him to the land. Gold strikes in Bannack, Virginia City, Last Chance Gulch and other areas brought a flood of miners into southwest Montana.⁹ Grant tried to accommodate the newcomers by opening a variety of businesses, including a livery stable, saloon, blacksmith shop, sawmill, and flour mill. Yet, he saw little success in these pursuits.¹⁰

Educated in French, Grant often found himself at a disadvantage in a community where business contracts were written in English, not always by honest men. Road agents threatened his life and taxes were levied by the new authorities. Racial prejudice not evident in the trader's community was now commonplace.¹¹

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 while he searched for a new place to settle. Choosing the Carmen, Manitoba area, he returned to Deer Lodge to find that Quarra had died of tuberculosis. Gathering his remaining family, he left with a party of 200.¹² The fur trade era was over and the gold rush was in full swing, but before he left, Grant had established the livestock industry in the valley. In the long run, it would outlast mining and trade.

After nearly 20 years in the Red River country, Grant moved again, returning to the Edmonton area of Alberta. He died in 1907 within sight of the Hudson's Bay Post where he had been born.¹³



Four-finger cradle scythe owned by Johnny Grant, circa 1860.

This artifact marks not only a major change in frontier life, but also the early modernization of agriculture. Prior to the cradle scythe, farmers used sickles to cut their grain crops. Sickle use was backbreaking; the farmer would hold the grain in one hand and stoop over to cut the grain stalks with the sickle, held in the other hand. Patented in 1823, the cradle scythe's long handle allowed farmers to stand upright while cutting. The fingers, or "cradle," caught the cut grains, which could then be dumped into neat rows. This reduced the time needed to rake cut grains into windrows for gathering.

¹ John Francis Grant, *A Son of the Fur Trade: The Memoirs of Johnny Grant*, ed. Gerhard J. Ens, (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: The University of Alberta Press, 2008), xlv.

² Ibid, 37, 39.

³ Ibid, 368-369.

⁴ Ibid, 181-182.

⁵ Ibid, 51-52.

⁶ Ibid, 92.

⁷ Ibid, 94.

⁸ Ibid, 135, and Kohrs, *Autobiography*, 41.

⁹ Ibid, 95.

¹⁰ Ibid, 108, 119.

¹¹ Ibid, 131-132.

¹² Ibid, 166-170.

¹³ Ibid, xxxvi.

Quarra Grant

Much is unknown about Quarra. She is known to have been one of at least three American Indian women married to Johnny Grant during his time at the ranch site. Her life, pieced together through scant accounts and artifacts, reveals that she was more than a housewife on the ranch. She was an agent of cultural change.

Quarra was born about the year 1840, the exact date and location unknown. Her people were the Bannock, who by the mid-1800s lived in the Boise and Snake River region of present-day Idaho. They subsisted as hunter-gatherers. Native plants such as camas were gathered and camps moved seasonally to follow the salmon run, deer and bison. The Bannock also maintained trade relationships with white fur traders, periodically visiting their trading posts in the region.

A trading post is where we find the earliest mention of Quarra in the historic record. In his memoirs, Johnny Grant remembered that “she had worked for my people at Fort Hall” as a cook.¹ They were married by 1860.²

With their marriage, Quarra became a wife in fur trade society. Marrying an American Indian woman was common among fur traders. American Indian wives knew traditional skills, which included sewing, gathering edible plants, and cooking. Fur traders considered these skills an important asset on the Northern Plains because they contributed to their survival on the frontier. Indian women could make pemmican and other dried foods to last through the winter months, when game, seeds and berries were scarce. They could also make clothing from skins and furs. Traders particularly valued their ability to make moccasins, which were accepted as the most practical footwear on the frontier.³ In addition, Indian women gave traders the opportunity to have children and

families on the frontier. They also became a bridge between trader and tribe, able to communicate the needs of one culture to the other.

Quarra appears to have epitomized this role after settling with Grant in the Deer Lodge Valley in 1859. She could communicate in several native languages, as well as English and French. She helped him raise his family, giving birth to six children and helping care for those of his other wives. Grant also mentions her as “being expert with her needle” and “could make my clothing as well as a tailor.”⁴

Granville Stuart, who also lived in the valley, noted in his diary that he saw “Johnny Grant's wife.... Going to stop at Hell Gate canon below Flint Creek and gather service berries.”⁵

Though valued, her traditional world was changing. Grant remarked that Quarra “was



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.

very proud of our new house," completed on the present ranch site in 1863. Among the few Grant-era artifacts remaining in the house, only a manufactured pie safe is associated with Quarra. Its purpose of storing baked goods indicates her adoption of white cooking culture, including the baking of bread.⁶ Grant suggests this shift, remarking that "she showed a wonderful skill in taking up the ways of white women," having learned to "cook well...and now she made good butter." This large furniture piece also suggests a dramatic shift in her life, one where permanent settlement and manufactured goods were quickly replacing the native lifeways that had been so valued in fur trade society.

But Quarra appears to have been unafraid of change. By 1866, a wave of white miners and

other settlers unfamiliar with American Indian customs and cultures were streaming into the Deer Lodge Valley. This led to a growing prejudice against American Indians and Indian wives. In the face of this rising racism, Johnny Grant resolved to leave his ranch for Canada. Realizing his decision would sever Quarra from her culture, Grant 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."⁷

Quarra did not get the chance. She died of tuberculosis in the ranch house on February 24, 1867, holding her youngest child in her arms.⁸



Pie safe used by Quarra Grant, circa 1845 to 1865.

Though called a "pie safe," this furniture item was used to store any perishable food items, including bread and meat. The punched tin panels on the doors and sides allowed air to move through the cabinet and cool freshly baked foods, protecting them from mold growth. It also kept foods safe from insects, rodents, and other pests. Pie safes were common in American kitchens since the 1700s, but marked a new way of life for many on Montana's frontier in the 1860s. By the mid-1800s, cabinet makers were manufacturing them from the lower Mississippi Valley to Pennsylvania. Its presence shows a shift from Quarra's traditional lifeways to a world where manufactured goods were increasingly valued.

¹ John Francis Grant, *A Son of the Fur Trade: The Memoirs of Johnny Grant*, ed. Gerhard J. Ens, (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: The University of Alberta Press, 2008), 100.

² Ibid, 93.

³ Sylvia Van Kirk, "The Role of Native Women in the creation of Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1830," in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 56-58.

⁴ Grant, *Son of the Fur Trade*, 100.

⁵ Granville Stuart, *Forty Years on the Frontier* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1925), i 184. This entry is dated August 5, 1861.

⁶ Edwin Ruthven Purple, *Perilous Passage: A Narrative of the Montana Gold Rush, 1862-1863*, ed. Kenneth N. Owens (Helena, Montana: Montana Historical Society Press, 1995), 82-87. He spent a night with the Grants in August 1862, at which he was given a supper of "bread and fresh meat, served in Indian style, that is, all in a pile..."

⁷ Grant, *Son of the Fur Trade*, 159.

⁸ "From Deer Lodge," *The Montana Post*, March 16, 1867.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025293/1867-03-16/ed-1/seq-2/> (accessed September 22, 2020).

Carsten Conrad Kohrs

Carsten Conrad Kohrs was born on August 5, 1835 in Wewelsfleth, a fishing town in the province of Holstein, at that time a possession of Denmark. It became a part of Germany, and Kohrs considered himself German.¹

At fifteen he went to sea as a cabin boy, and for the next seventeen years led a varied life. His work at sea took him to Brazil, Cuba, and islands off the coast of Africa. He learned something of the butcher trade working occasionally for relatives in New York and Iowa. His travels also found him selling sausages in New Orleans, running logs down the Mississippi, and working in a distillery. He became a United States citizen in 1857.²

The lure of gold drew him to California, to the Fraser River country of Canada, and finally to Montana Territory in 1862. He found gold, not only in the mines, but in his gold camp butcher shops and eventually in a cattle empire that sprawled over four states and two Canadian provinces.³ His empire was built on a solid foundation, beginning with the home ranch purchased from Johnny Grant in 1866. Initially, he only needed a place to keep the cattle that supplied beef to his shops.

In 1868 he married Augusta Kruse Kohrs, with whom he built a refined Victorian home and raised two daughters and a son.

Montana's cattle industry began in its sheltered western valleys, but it was in the vast plains east of the continental divide that Kohrs' cattle operations reached their largest size. Kohrs began sending herds to eastern Montana in 1869.⁴ In time, his operations grew so large that his herds were ranging 10 million acres, and he shipped 10,000 head annually to the Union Stock Yards in Chicago.⁵



Conrad Kohrs, NPS photo.

Besides his contributions as a rancher, he played a significant part in Montana's political history. In 1885, Kohrs was elected to the Montana Territorial Legislature and spent time in Helena during the session called the "Cowboy Legislature" because so many of the topics and legislation involved the cattle industry. Kohrs also served in the Montana state constitutional convention in 1889. Another organization Kohrs was active in was the Montana Stockgrowers' 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. During meetings in Miles City, Montana, Kohrs became acquainted with a North Dakota rancher named Theodore Roosevelt.⁶

Kohrs also entered a variety of other business pursuits. Never giving up on his dream of gold mining, he partnered with his half-brother, John Bielenberg, to operate several hydraulic mines in the area. A gold scale remains in his office, atop the desk where he managed his cattle ranching empire. It is a reminder of his resolve

to keep his dreams alive. Kohrs also invested heavily in real estate and the purchase of water rights.⁷

Kohrs managed these ventures from his home office, where he corresponded frequently with a network of employees and partners on whom he could rely. A letterpress in the corner of his office, used to make copies of all his business correspondence, is a witness to his meticulous management. It has seen his letters sent to Joseph Rosenbaum, the Chicago livestock agent who ensured his cattle received top dollar at market. It has seen the financial gains and losses of his gold mines. It may have also seen the messages between himself and Tom Hooban, his range foreman in whom he entrusted the safe keeping of his cattle.

These varied business ventures insulated Kohrs from the Hard Winter disaster of 1886 and 1887. In the 1880s, a get-rich-quick ranching boom brought thousands of aspiring cattlemen to the range. In just a few short years, the range had become overstocked and overgrazed. Drought and wildfires further depleted the range and an unusually hard

winter caused staggering losses.

This was the end of many a stockman's dream. For Conrad Kohrs and his brother, John Bielenberg, it was a sign that the old ways had to change. They were willing to make a gradual change to fenced range, summer haying and winter feeding. By the turn of the century, the "open range" system of cattle raising was almost gone, but the Kohrs and Bielenberg operation thrived. Only advancing age, increased homesteading on former cattle range, and the death of Kohrs's only son, William, in 1901, combined to cause Kohrs & Bielenberg to gradually withdraw from the cattle business.⁸ It was no sudden sellout. In fact, 1909 marked one of their biggest years, with cattle sales exceeding \$500,000.⁹

But by 1918 all their range cattle were sold, and the operation was limited to a few hundred acres at the home ranch in Deer Lodge. Kohrs died in 1920 at age 85. He had seen the cattle industry evolve from the days of the mountain men through the freewheeling days of the open range and into a more scientific, modern era.



Letter press and copying book used by Conrad Kohrs and John Bielenberg, circa 1880.

Letter presses were common office equipment in Kohrs' time. Like a late-1800s photocopier, it is used to make copies of letters or other documents. First, the document is written or printed using a special copying ink. Next, the copying book, filled with thin tissue paper, is prepared. One page is dampened with water and the document laid face-up underneath. The book is then closed and placed into the press. As the press is screwed down, the ink on the document is squeezed into the damp tissue paper, leaving an exact copy in the copying book.

¹ Conrad Kohrs, *Conrad Kohrs: An Autobiography* (Deer Lodge, MT: Platen Press, 1977), 1.

² Ibid, 5-6.

³ Ibid, 7-14, 22-23.

⁴ John Albright, *Historic Resource Study, Cultural Resources Statement, and Historic Structure Report* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979), 18.

⁵ Anna Fey Rosenburg, "Hard Winter Endurance: Conrad Kohrs' Cattle Raising Operation – 1887-

1900," (master's thesis, University of Montana, 1996), 2, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3528&context=etd>.

Kohrs, *Autobiography*, Introduction by Conrad Kohrs Warren.

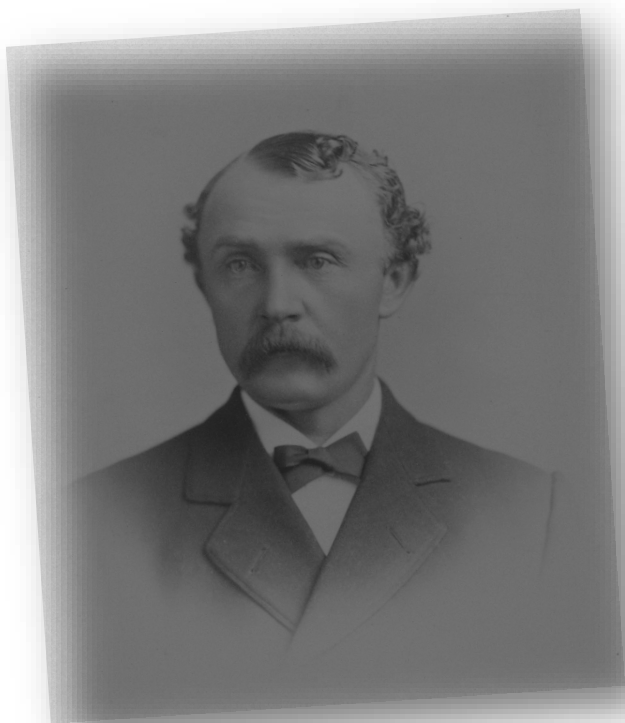
⁶ Kohrs, *Autobiography*, 80-81.

⁷ Ibid, 45-46.

⁸ Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 91.

⁹ Kohrs, *Autobiography*, Epilogue by Conrad K. Warren, 100.

John Bielenberg



John Bielenberg, NPS photo.

John "Johney" 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, 1854.¹

He was eighteen when he came to Montana Territory in 1864 to assist Kohrs with his gold camp butcher shops.² It was the beginning of a partnership which lasted for over a half-century, and encompassed a vast cattle empire, highly productive mining ventures, advances in horse breeding, and a mutual commitment to public service.

Those who judge a book by the cover might dismiss his contribution to Kohrs' cattle operation, but Kohrs never did. Kohrs and Bielenberg were equal partners. John Bielenberg lived in the main ranch house with

Conrad, Augusta and their family. In general, Kohrs and Bielenberg divided the responsibilities of running and managing their various business interests. Bielenberg managed and operated the day to day ranching operations and communications such as breeding, haying, branding, roundups and the other daily and seasonal tasks on a ranch. Con Warren, his grand-nephew, remembers his grandfather and uncle as, "very devoted, and apparently they had considerable mutual admiration. And 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."³

Though Kohrs was popularly known as "the cattle baron," nearly all the hundreds of letters about cattle were written by Bielenberg.⁴ Letters written by Kohrs tended to involve mining and investments more than they did cattle. Both men, in both pursuits, would have made equal use of the letterpress in Kohrs' home office to copy and keep on file all correspondence. This dual handling of correspondence and business records symbolizes their equal effort to manage the Kohrs and Bielenberg cattle empire. It was an effort built on the bond between two brothers.

Together they ran a mainly steer operation, buying and grazing two-year-olds on the open range, before shipping them to market as three- and four-year-olds. With the close of the open range, John oversaw the gradual transition to a cow/calf operation, with a breeding herd providing new stock to replace cattle shipped to Chicago.⁵ In a 1900 letter, John correctly predicted "Herefords are the coming cattle for Montana."⁶

His personal contributions to the livestock industry were many. Among them was his breeding of thoroughbred horses. Breeding

thoroughbred studs to hardy native mares, Bielenberg bred cow ponies which could do a twenty-mile circle in half a day during the roundup. This was a huge territory to cover in trail-less, broken country, where cattle scattered over two million acres within a single grazing district. These forerunners of today's quarter horses were in high demand throughout the territory.⁷ John occasionally raced his thoroughbreds against those of other prominent breeders.

Bielenberg was a down to earth man who did not dress in expensive clothes, instead choosing the dress of an outdoorsman who preferred comfort to style while working on a ranch with livestock.⁸ In contrast to his brother Conrad, who often wore dark suits and starched white collars, John wore the sweaters, hats, and boots typical of cowboy dress. According to his grand-nephew, Conrad Warren, he continued to wear clothing long after holes had been worn

through them. Augusta Kohrs would buy him new clothes and burn his worn-out ones.⁹ Perhaps an indication of his preference for comfort, a pair of green-lensed spectacles remain among his clothing in the park's museum collection. Green lenses are known to block sunlight better than other colors, and even provide better contrast between light and shadow. This would no doubt be useful to a person who spent so much of their life outdoors among cattle.

His correspondence written prior to his death from cancer at age 74 show he was still actively engaged in marketing and sale of Kohrs & Bielenberg cattle.

Like his brother, Bielenberg was active in Montana territorial and state legislatures and the Montana Stockgrowers Association. With his death on June 16, 1922, the last tie to the open range was cut.



Green glass spectacles and leather case used by John Bielenberg, circa middle to late 1800s.

Use of colored glass in spectacles was common by the mid-1800s. Opticians chose certain colors to treat visual impairments or assist a person in their occupation. Green glass was thought to be useful for blocking harsh sunlight and providing a better contrast between colors and light. This could be useful for a man who spent so much time outdoors. However, whether Bielenberg sought better color contrast or help with a visual impairment is unknown.

¹ "New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1891," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939V-5NSV-55?cc=1849782&wc=MX62-X3D%3A165779301>: 21 May 2014), 141 - 12 Jun 1854-30 Jun 1854 > image 25 of 803; citing NARA microfilm publication M237 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

² John Albright, *Historic Resource Study, Cultural Resources Statement, and Historic Structure*

Report (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979), 9.

³ Ibid, 137.

⁴ Ibid, 136.

⁵ Ibid, 119.

⁶ John Bielenberg to H. Tomas, November 20, 1900.

⁷ Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 120.

⁸ Ibid, 137.

⁹ Conrad K. Warren, interview by Rex Myers, Deer Lodge, MT, August 22, 1980.

Thomas Hooban



Thomas Hooban, NPS photo.

Thomas Hooban, often on the move between Kohrs' Deer Lodge ranch and other range lands, personifies the cowboy. His role in Kohrs' ranching empire, however, shows a skill rarely attributed to cowboys – a skill that ensured the professional success of a cattle king.

Little is known about Hooban's early life. He grew up in Wisconsin, supposedly the child of Irish immigrants. By the early 1860s, he was in western Montana driving freight wagons between the steamboat terminus at Fort Benton, the gold camps in Virginia City, and Salt Lake City.¹

Hooban had shifted his focus to ranching by 1864, when he was working as a foreman for Montana rancher George Forbes. As a foreman, Hooban was responsible for ranging cattle herds, moving them to fresh grazing areas, and managing the cowboys responsible for their care. It was in this capacity that he first met Conrad Kohrs. In his autobiography, Kohrs recalled a chance meeting with Hooban, who

agreed to help him move one of his herds across the Big Hole River in southwest Montana. Shortly after completing the task, Kohrs fell ill with cholera. Hooban cared for Kohrs through the night and following day until he was well enough to travel.² Perhaps recognizing in these actions a man he could rely on, Kohrs hired Hooban by 1868.

Kohrs quickly made him a foreman, and it was not long before Hooban made his first mark on Kohrs' growing cattle empire. He recognized that Kohrs' herds were becoming too large for the Deer Lodge Valley's grasses to support and suggested moving parts of the herd to other ranges. Kohrs trusted Hooban's judgement and accepted his recommendations to move cattle to eastern Montana. In 1869, Hooban moved a herd northeast to the Sun River, and in the early 1870s moved more cattle to the Snake River in Idaho.³ This marked a major shift in operations, as Kohrs' herds were now located in multiple ranges, hundreds of miles away from home. Unable to be directly involved in the care of these herds, Kohrs' reliance on Hooban deepened.

Management of these distant herds was entrusted to Hooban. For the Snake River herds, Kohrs gave him the authority to construct buildings, purchase supplies like wagons and mowing machines, and determine when and where to move cattle.⁴ But the depth of Hooban's skill as a foreman, and what Kohrs' relied on him to do, is seen in his management of cattle drives. His personal notebooks, today in the park's museum collection, document the scope of his skills and responsibilities. His notebooks show his careful management of thousands of dollars in cash, with which Kohrs entrusted him to purchase supplies and pay cowboys. His ability to make on-the-spot decisions for Kohrs is on display, as well. On cattle drives, Hooban typically decided when to sell lame cattle or purchase healthy animals

along the route. As a way of keeping costs low, he would begin drives with a small cowboy crew and only hire more as needed along the drive. He kept track of the crew's budget along the way, ensuring they had enough money to resupply and purchase clothing or equipment as they wore out. Hooban also managed moral. He reserved enough money to buy "feasts" for the cowboys after difficult stretches of the journey.⁵ His planning and decision making ensured that the drive went as smoothly as possible, and the cattle were delivered healthy, on time, and within budget. It was this skill that helped Conrad Kohrs' cattle operations achieve their grand success.

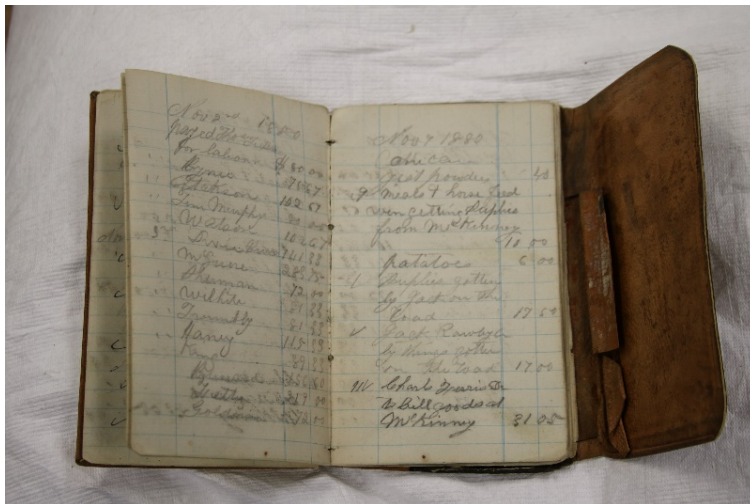
But for Conrad Kohrs, Thomas Hooban was more than a good manager. He was a personal friend. Hooban periodically stayed with the Kohrs family in the ranch house and even joined them in their travels. He was with them when

they travelled to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876.⁶ The sense of friendship they felt toward Hooban is seen in their care for him after he fell ill in 1883. In October of that year, Hooban stayed briefly with the Kohrs family in Deer Lodge while suffering from tuberculosis. Following Conrad's advice, he went to California, where the milder climate might ease his suffering. But the dampness there only aggravated his condition. He then went to New Mexico, seeking salvation in a drier climate. It was to no avail. In 1884, Thomas Hooban passed away in Santa Fe.⁷

In a final show of devotion to his friend and the man he relied on for his success, Conrad Kohrs paid the expenses of sending his body to the Hooban family's home in Wisconsin. "My wife and I went to Wisconsin," said Kohrs, "and followed him to his last resting place."⁸



Leather bound notebook used by Thomas Hooban, circa 1879 to 1881.



A memoranda book, used to keep business records in the 1800s, is in of itself nothing special. But its being in the possession of a cowboy, whose handwritten notes fill its pages, speaks volumes about an often-underrepresented part of life on the open range. Thomas Hooban used this book between 1880 and 1881 to track business expenditures, cattle inventories, and trail crew wages while on the range. One entry even shows his care for the cowboys, paying for "Clothes for Jimmy," including pants, boots, underwear, and a coat. Worn pages, dirt smudges, and a weathered leather binding show its heavy outdoor use. It was just as much a part of Hooban's cowboy gear as his hat, boots, and horse.



¹ John Barrows, *Ubet* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1934), 20-4, 29.

² Conrad Kohrs, *Conrad Kohrs: An Autobiography* (Deer Lodge, MT: Platen Press, 1977), 32-33.

³ John Albright, *Historic Resource Study, Cultural Resources Statement, and Historic Structure Report* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979), 18, 29.

⁴ *Ibid*, 29, and Kohrs, *Autobiography*, 58.

⁵ Thomas Hooban's Notebook from 1879-1881, GRKO 15721, Series 2, Subseries A, Folder 1, Kohrs Family Personal Papers, Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, Deer Lodge, MT. This drive moved a herd of 1079 cattle from the Sun River range to a Union Pacific Railroad depot in Wyoming.

⁶ Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 39.

⁷ *Ibid*, 54.

⁸ Kohrs, *Autobiography*, 57.

Augusta Kruse Kohrs

An air of mystery surrounds Augusta Kruse Kohrs. We know little of her childhood and personal life. In true Victorian fashion, she burned all of her letters later in life. This leaves a scant documentary record to piece together her personal life on the Kohrs ranch.

Augusta was born June 20, 1849, in Hamburg, Germany. Family tradition has it that she would carry water from the community well to her family's home and her father was a musician. Known for certain is that she and Conrad Kohrs had met while children in Holstein. However, because she was only 1 year old when Conrad left for his job at sea, their relationship was not close.

For reasons unknown, she immigrated to the United States in 1864. By 1868, she had settled in Cincinnati, Ohio. The mystery deepens when Conrad Kohrs travels to Cincinnati in 1868 to find her. He makes the only reference to their meeting in his autobiography: "There we renewed our acquaintance and after a short time became engaged." After this "short time" of three weeks, Conrad and Augusta were married on February 23, 1868, at the Kohrs family's home in Davenport, Iowa.¹

Following the marriage was a seven-week steamboat journey up the Missouri River to Ft. Benton, Montana Territory. It was another five days in a wagon, through rain and cold temperatures, to reach the Kohrs ranch at Deer Lodge.

Ranch life was anything but gentle for this young Victorian woman used to life in a city. Arriving at the ranch age 19 and pregnant, she was confronted by a range of new responsibilities that Conrad recalled "was altogether too much work to do for one woman." She immediately set to work cleaning



Augusta Kohrs, NPS photo.

the house, exterminating a bed bug infestation, cooking, making soap and candles, feeding chickens, acting as midwife to family and friends, and raising a family.² She and Conrad would have three children: Anna, Katharine, and William.

Between these responsibilities of frontier life, Augusta brought high culture into the cattleman's world. Certain artifacts and furnishings in the ranch house shed light on her attempt to blend these two worlds. Augusta was accomplished in needlepoint work, winning "1st premium" at the 1869 Territorial Fair for an ottoman cover.³ A footstool in the parlor especially shows the blend of cattle and high culture. The legs are made of cattle horns, but Augusta embroidered the image of a neoclassical sculpture by Albert Wolff onto the cover. The original sculpture, entitled "Lion Fighter," was installed outside the Altes

Museum in Berlin in 1861.⁴ Augusta likely referred to a small-scale copy of the piece in her possession.⁵ This indicates her interest in the neoclassical and Greek revival fashions popular in late 1800s Victorian society.

Augusta loved music, and ensured her children received music lessons, even while the family vacationed in Germany between 1880 and 1882. She traveled extensively throughout her life, often to Chicago and New York to view the latest fashion trends and modern conveniences of the city. This continued into her later life, never missing the New York opera season, even into her 90s.⁶

Mystery gives way to certainty in Augusta's later years, when much more is known about her life. In 1900, she and her husband moved their permanent home to Helena. Philanthropy

became important to her in these years, making private donations to help local young men gain higher educations. She also donated funds to build the Conrad Kohrs Memorial unit of the St. Peter's Hospital in Helena.⁷

But family remained ever important. Conrad Warren, her grandson, recalled how she would telephone the Deer Lodge ranch to check on her brother-in-law, John Bielenberg. Until his death in 1922, she periodically returned to the ranch to mend or replace his worn-out clothing. Augusta cherished her grandchildren, who affectionately called her "Ohma" – German for "grandmother."⁸

After a life of blending culture, cattle, and family, Augusta Kruse Kohrs died at her daughter's Helena home on October 29, 1945.



Cattle horn footstool with a cover embroidered by Augusta Kohrs, circa 1870s.



Though much of cattle horn furniture was homemade in the 1800s, it became a popular style in the eastern United States between the 1870s and 1910. Chicago furniture manufacturers became a major producer of horn footstools like this, as well as tables and chairs. The nearby Union Stock Yards provided an ample supply of cattle horn for their furniture. What sets this footstool apart, however, is the hand embroidered cover by Augusta Kohrs. The image of a man with spear on horseback is from "Lion Fighter" by sculptor Albert Wolff, circa 1861. The collision of cattle, high culture, and American styles is a testament to Augusta's blending of worlds.

¹ Conrad Kohrs, *Conrad Kohrs: An Autobiography* (Deer Lodge, MT: Platen Press, 1977), 50.

² Ibid, 51.

³ John Albright, *Historic Resource Study, Cultural Resources Statement, and Historic Structure Report* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979), 350.

⁴ Nick Scrattish, *Historic Furnishings Study Ranch House (HS-1) and Bunkhouse (HS-2), Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site. Deer*

Lodge, Montana (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1981), 88-89.

⁵ This piece is currently in the museum collection of Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site.

⁶ Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 142.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 140-142. The proper spelling of this word in German is "Oma." Augusta Kohrs spelled it "Ohma" in her personal correspondence.

Conrad Kohrs Warren

Conrad Kohrs Warren, the youngest child of Dr. Otey Yancey Warren and Katharine Christine Kohrs, was born on August 6, 1907. Conrad, or Con as he was known, spent a lot of time with his grandparents, Conrad and Augusta Kohrs, and his great uncle John Bielenberg. His father passed away when Con was just three months old, in November 1907.

Warren grew up in Helena but spent summers on the ranch with his grandparents and Uncle John. From Kohrs and Bielenberg, young Warren learned a passion for livestock and ranching, the importance of breeding and bloodlines, and the values of family, hard work and teamwork, as modeled by Kohrs and Bielenberg in their daily lives.¹

His passion for ranching grew as he grew in years. He had cowboied for the Dana Ranch in Wyoming in 1927, but left cattle country that fall to pursue a degree at the University of Virginia. Yet, as Warren said, "all I could think about was a little scrap of land someplace and a few cows."² During summers, he returned to the Kohrs ranch to help with haying.³ He ended his college career in 1929, when he came to work at the Kohrs ranch as a hired hand.⁴

Warren's great love of ranching thrust him into the role of ranch manager by 1932.⁵ His management began as the worst of the drought and Depression plagued the United States in the 1930s. In these lean years, when high quality beef brought the best profits, the health of his cattle herd was paramount. Warren upgraded his livestock, raising registered Hereford cattle and Belgian draft horses.⁶ He acquired additional acreage to provide summer range for his growing herd cattle.⁷ Hay was harvested from the irrigated pastures of the home ranch to keep his stock fed through the winter.

The influence of Warren's physician-father was expressed in his concern for his livestock's health. Though he lacked formal training, Warren was in constant demand to assist with calving problems, vaccinations, and other medical emergencies. He consulted local veterinarians to assist with the breeding of his Belgian draft horses. Warren recognized that artificial insemination could reduce disease transmission.⁸

In 1940, Warren purchased the ranch, the house, and its contents from the Kohrs family trust that had been managing the ranch.⁹ Cattle health was hard hit in the mid-1940s, when a strain of 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 had purchased for a record \$32,500, was found to carry the dwarf



Conrad Kohrs Warren, NPS photo.

gene.¹⁰ He ended his registered Hereford breeding program in 1958.¹¹

Though Warren never achieved the financial success of his grandfather and great-uncle, his contribution as a cattleman was unquestioned. He served as president of both the Board of Livestock Commissioners, and the Montana Stockgrowers Association.¹² Among his industry responsibilities was the establishment and authorization of livestock auctions, which are managed in Montana as public utilities, and which remain one of the cattleman's most important marketing tools.¹³

Warren continued to raise purebred Herefords, even after selling the core of the home ranch to

the National Park Service in 1972. The ranch had been designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960.

Throughout his career, he preserved the Kohrs home ranch and every object and record associated with it, assisted by his wife, Nell Warren. His own papers were as meticulously maintained as his grandfather's, providing historians with a nearly unbroken, 120-year record of the cattle industry. Warren continued to live at the ranch until his death in 1993 at the age of 85.



Medical syringe used by Conrad Warren, circa 1950.

This syringe was produced by the Randall Faichney Corporation of Boston, Massachusetts. Randall Faichney began producing medical and automotive equipment in 1888 but narrowed their production to hypodermic needles and syringes after World War 1. This model, called the "Imperial Viking," was marketed for medical, dental, and veterinary work. Its metal and glass construction allowed it to be sterilized in boiling water after use. Warren may have used this syringe to vaccinate his livestock, a practice that gained importance as the success of cattle ranchers depended less on massive range herds and more on smaller, healthier herds on the home ranch.

¹ John Albright, *Historic Resource Study, Cultural Resources Statement, and Historic Structure Report* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979), 114, 122.

² Conrad K. Warren, interview by Rex Myers, Deer Lodge, MT, August 22, 1980.

³ Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 104, 107.

⁴ Conrad K. Warren, interview by Rex Myers, Deer Lodge, MT, August 6, 1980, and Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 104.

⁵ Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 105.

⁶ Ibid, 107-109, 116.

⁷ Conrad K. Warren, interview by Rex Myers, Deer Lodge, MT, August 6, 1980.

⁸ Conrad K. Warren, interview by Bill Haviland and Michael Holm, Deer Lodge, MT, December 1, 1976.

⁹ Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 114.

¹⁰ Conrad K. Warren, interview by Rex Myers, Deer Lodge, MT, August 4, 1980.

¹¹ Albright, *Historic Resource Study*, 117.

¹² Ibid, 130.

¹³ Conrad K. Warren, interview by Rex Myers, Deer Lodge, MT, August 12, 1980 and Conrad K. Warren, interview by John Douglass, Deer Lodge, MT, November 11, 1970.

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Page 240 in this book discusses Cradle Scythes.

Useful Resource for Students:

[Chronicling America](#) is a searchable online newspaper archive provided by the Library of Congress. It can provide primary source documentation for students, including advertisements for the objects included in this lesson plan. Period advertisements can reveal what these objects were for, their value at the time, and who they were marketed to.