

## Who Worked in Southwest Kansas, 2012 Tour

In the late 1800s, children on the prairie did not go to school regularly and they did not spend the day at play. Instead, youngsters were expected to help with providing for the family. Very small children, as young as three or four, carried kindling, wiped dishes, and helped their mother around the house and barnyard. They gathered cow chips for fuel.

Many girls, often from the time they were six or seven years old, provided child care for younger siblings while their parents worked. Chores for girls also included sewing, cleaning, gardening and occasionally helping in the fields.

Little boys planted seeds, weeded the garden, and tended animals. Older boys, some as young as twelve, worked in the fields, cultivating, harvesting, storing crops, building fences, and hauling water from the closest well. "Going for water" often meant hitching a team to a wagon with water barrels, traveling several miles to a windmill that pumped the water from underground, filling the barrels, and returning.

Providing for the family often meant having children help with raising money for provisions that the farm did not supply. Children of all ages hunted ground squirrels to collect the bounty given on "scalps" and gathered buffalo bones and horns to sell for \$12.00 per ton to be used in fertilizer. Boys would help their fathers with jackrabbit drives, ridding the area of prolific pests and collecting three cents per pelt.

As time went by and farming became more industrialized, it was not necessary for children to work on the farm as often. The first school in Hugoton began at the town hall on January 3, 1887, and soon school became the norm. But, children were available during the summer months when harvests required additional help.