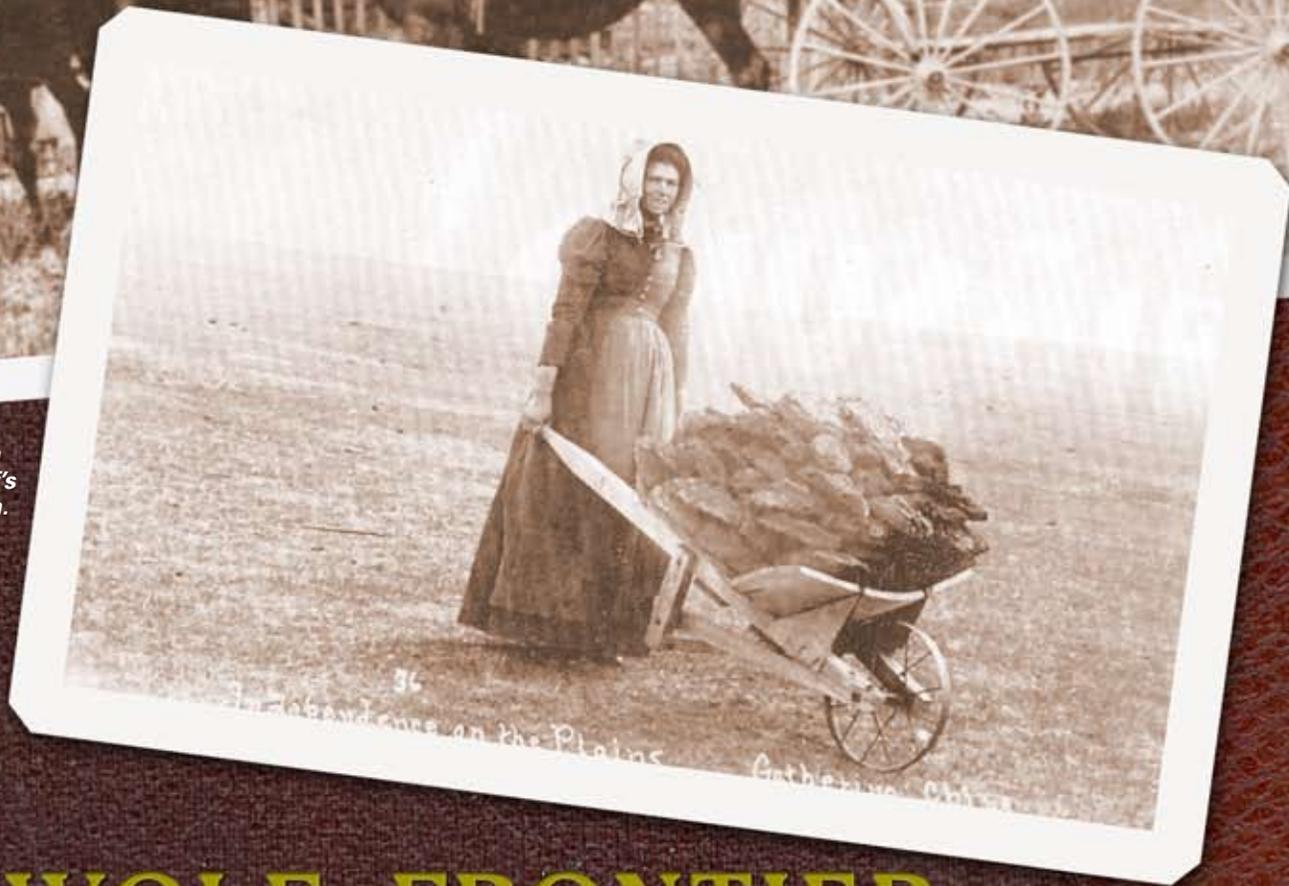




(right) "Independence On the Plains" was H.L. Wolf's most famous photograph.



H. L. WOLF, FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHER

Thank goodness for early-day traveling photographers! Without these men who were willing to engage in an exhausting and at that time somewhat hazard-

ous profession, our view of pioneer life before the turn of the century would have been extremely limited. Photography, the art or process of producing images on sensitized surfaces by means of the chemical action of light, was first discovered

by J. H. Schultze, a German, in 1727 (he made copies of handwriting, but there is no record of practical photography until January of 1839, when two men, Daguerre and Talbot, announced to the Royal Society in England that they had been experi-



Portrait of Reba Wolf taken by her father, frontier photographer H. L. Wolf, while the family was living in Garden City, Kansas. H. L. Wolf and his son, Max operated a photographic studio in Garden City from 1888 until 1901. During those years Wolf also maintained a studio in Dodge City for about three years, and took many excellent photographs depicting the life and times of the pioneers of Southwest Kansas. (Portrait of Miss Wolf courtesy of the Finney County, Kansas Historical Society Museum in Garden City's Finnup Park.)

menting (separately) with photography for several years. Both had developed a process by which they could obtain prints and camera images. During the time that these men experimented, a photograph required an exposure of seven to eight hours and was still far from satisfactory. Later in 1839 an Englishman named Herschel discovered a chemical way to fix the image and drastically cut down the development time. The first sunlight picture of the human face made in America was a daguerrotype (named for Mr. Daguerre) made in 1840 of Miss Catherine Draper by her brother, Professor John W. Draper. Miss Draper's photograph required an exposure time of only about six minutes.

During these early years, the chemicals used in developing photographs presented a serious health hazard to those few who could call themselves 'photographers.' H. L. Wolf, one of the best known traveling photographers in Kansas, grew up in that era and as a young man (about 1870) was apprenticed to H. H. Cole, a professional photographer in Monmouth, Illinois. After his apprenticeship, Wolf started his own

photography business in Chilicothe but discontinued it when he became ill, probably with cyanide poisoning, and did not take it up again until he moved to Kansas in 1883. By this time, the advent of 'dry plates' (developed around 1878) had made photography much safer and Wolf resumed his studio work in Eastern Kansas.

In March of 1888 Wolf, his wife Ruth, and their children Reba, Max, George and Nelle moved to Southwest Kansas where they filed on a homestead in the sandhills seven miles southwest of Garden City. (That same year, 1888, Eastman Kodak marketed the first roll film

located upstairs on the east side of the 200 block of Garden City's Main Street, and about two months later he purchased a studio from a Mr. Hood in the Nelson building where he and son, Max, were to work for the next thirteen years. During that time, the Wolfs also operated a studio in Dodge City, and maintained a traveling studio which they used for taking photographs over a wide area of Southwest Kansas. The whole family eventually moved into Garden City where Mrs. Wolf set up a millinery and dressmaking shop opposite the Windsor Hotel. Finally, in 1901, H. L. Wolf decided to move his family back to Eastern Kansas



camera which, along with flexible celluloid photographic film, revolutionized photography.) Wolf brought some photographic equipment with him to Southwest Kansas, but probably didn't intend to set up a studio right away. The expenses involved, however, in shipping their household goods, lumber for their new house, and other things from Eastern Kansas to Garden City on the railroad, and then hauling everything to the new homestead where they built a small house and stocked it with necessities, soon used up all the family funds and H. L. decided to open a photographic studio in Garden City right away. His first studio was

and he set up a photography studio in Manhattan.

His years in Southwest Kansas were productive, and H. L. Wolf was a fine craftsman. When he moved from Garden City in 1901 he left behind hundreds of excellent photographs depicting the life and times of the pioneers of Southwest Kansas. The finest collection of this period of his work is a part of the photographic collection of the Finney County Kansas Historical Society Museum in Garden City's Finnup Park. ■



H. L. Wolf

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