

Kansas History

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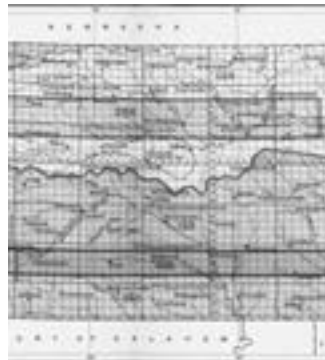
Front cover: *Me-chu-chin-ga, or Little White Bear, who was among the signatories of the 1825 treaty discussed in this issue, is pictured here in an 1832 painting by George Catlin, courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.*

Back cover: *Lutie Lytle served as assistant enrolling clerk for the state legislature in 1895, a patronage position from the Populist party. She was also the first Black woman admitted to the Kansas bar.*

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R E V I E W S



For Want of Wings: A Bird with Teeth and a Dinosaur in the Family

by Jill Hunting

xiii + 241 pages, illustrations, notes, index.

Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022, paper \$21.95.

For Want of Wings chronicles journeys and discoveries. At its core is an 1872 expedition to the fossil beds of Kansas, where Jill Hunting's great-grandfather Thomas H. Russell discovered a "flightless, toothy, five-foot-long prehistoric creature that lay entombed for millions of years in the gray chalk of a Kansas canyon." *Hesperornis regalis*, from the Cretaceous Period, "may be the least famous of the most important finds from the Age of Dinosaurs," Hunting writes (p. 10).

Thomas Russell joined the third of four expeditions mounted by Yale Professor O. C. Marsh, one of America's early paleontologists, a "competitive, indefatigable, self-aggrandizing fossil hunter and a socially awkward lifelong bachelor who was most at home in the field" (p. 9). Russell, just graduated from Yale, sought this western adventure before going on to Yale Medical School. Lamenting that the Marsh expedition of 1872 is the least documented, Hunting tasks herself with piecing together military records, guidebooks, local histories, newspaper articles,

military histories, accession records from Yale's Peabody Museum, where Marsh sent his specimens, and even a photograph of the four Yale students, an army officer, a local scout, and Marsh himself. She tracks down the Denver photographer William Gunnison Chamberlain, writing about his colorful career.

Hunting discovers that "Tom" stayed at Fort Wallace and found a fossil on his first day of exploration, the only student to do so. Nearly a week later, on October 27, he found *Hesperornis regalis*, the first complete specimen with skull and teeth. The expedition's discoveries, Hunting writes, "narrowed gaps in the understanding of comparative anatomy and were superior in number and variety to anything Europe could offer to explain the evolution of life on earth" (p. 138). Tom's *Hesperornis* lived eighty-three million years ago, yet his 1872 discovery came only thirteen years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. These discoveries, especially those that showed a link between dinosaurs and birds, strengthened Darwin's theory of evolution.

Hunting's own journey of discovery includes family research. Her great-great-grandfather William Russell was an abolitionist who was instrumental in organizing and financing the New Haven Colony that settled in Wabaunsee, Kansas, for the free-state cause. The colony brought crates of Bibles packed above Sharp's rifles, bought through the fundraising efforts of Henry Ward Beecher, New York Congregational minister and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The Russell family had connections not only to Beecher but also to John Brown, who stayed in their home, and publisher Henry Holt. The Russells were of the New Haven elite, a family of ministers, doctors, and lawyers. William founded Skull and Bones, a secret society of Yale students, to give them "training and practice to think on their feet and to debate and speak extemporaneously" (p. 44).

Hunting also journeys to Kansas, to the fossil beds, to Fort Wallace, and later to the Beecher

Bible and Rifle Church. She writes, “It is hard to imagine he [Tom] ever thought that a great-granddaughter would one day follow him there, and like a paleontologist arranging fossil parts, piece together fragments of his trip west in hope of understanding what he saw and felt” (p. 11). She is accompanied by her daughter, who is piecing together her future amid career and relationship conundrums, so each woman is discovering her place, her role, her past and future. Of this journey’s meaning, Hunting writes, “We had seen no evidence of our ancestor, but we had imagined what he felt when he looked around. We understood how foreign this place must have seemed to him. We had . . . seen a fascinating new landscape . . . climbed rocks, looked at the far horizon. . . . The value to us turned out to be our own experience, not our ancestor’s” (p. 178).

For Want of Wings is full of helpful metaphors. Hunting writes, “I became a paleontologist of my family, looking at strata and piecing together fragments to form a more complete picture” (p. 16) In reconstructing a life, you construct part of your own life, Hunting says. “It’s not unlike finding a fossil. You hold a fragment in your hands and ask yourself how this piece fits with that until enough pieces come together to form a skull, a skeleton, a picture in your mind.” (p. 212). At the end of the book, having entered a raffle when visiting the Wabaunsee County Historical Society in Alma, Kansas, Hunting wins a quilt, which she gives to her daughter. She writes, “Stitched by many hands from many pieces of fabric, could there be a better metaphor than a quilt for a story that brings together a mother and daughter, an abolitionist, a fossil hunter, and so many others?” (p. 212). Hunting is also a time traveler, scientist, philosopher, and mother. She wonders how we give wings to those we love or how we find our own. According to Hunting, “Emily Dickinson said hope is the thing with feathers. Confidence is the thing with wings” (p. 15).

The quilt squares of Hunting’s story, the many fragments she places together, make for a few random distracting asides. One is a citation of a newspaper report of a train car west of Wallace being hit by something that tore a hole in the floor and scattered

a cargo of oysters. Hunting notes that oysters were not uncommon on menus of the time and mentions Topeka’s Tefft House Restaurant, which offered seven varieties. She wonders if her great-grandfather might have heard of the incident. In another aside, Hunting traces descendants of John Brown to the same California city as descendants of the Russell family. The inclusion of such anecdotes demonstrates Hunting’s belief in layers, and in proximities: “Then again, this is the nature of history: chancy, surprising, and full of unlikely intersections” (p. 55).

Although *For Want of Wings* does not always soar, the book is grounded, attempting to understand where and who we are, piecing together our journeys toward meaning in our time and place, whether 83 million years ago, 150 years ago, or a few years ago, in New Haven, California, or Kansas.

Reviewed by Thomas Fox Averill, *professor emeritus of English, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.*



The Missouri Home Guard: Protecting the Home Front during the Great War

by Petra DeWitt

xiii + 207 pages, illustrations, notes, index.
Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2022, cloth \$40.00.

The Great War drew considerable public attention during the centennial celebration of the conflict. Historians have focused on all facets of the war, including the social, political, cultural, and