

Craig, Lulu Sadler: (12 August 1868 – 25 September 1972), educator, writer, community leader, was born Lulu Mae Sadler, in Platte County, Missouri, to her mother, Harriet Ellen Samuels and her father, Merriday George Sadler, former slaves. As a young man, Lulu's father fought for his freedom with General Sherman and the Union in the Civil War. At the age of four, Lulu moved with her family to Kansas from Missouri. In 1878, at ten years old, Lulu came to Nicodemus, Kansas, founded in 1877, with her parents and seven siblings via covered wagon. Nicodemus was once a prosperous all Black colony in northwestern Kansas founded by a group of "Exodusters" – former slaves who left the south and migrated to Kansas. In pursuit of a better life Lulu's family was among the early settlers lured to the Kansas plains by promises of free land and freedom from the racism that continued to prevail during the reconstruction period. With lots of anticipation her family arrived in Nicodemus only to find a secluded, windswept prairie. The only signs of life were stovepipes level to the ground. To Lulu's dismay, the residents lived in dugouts, like cellars, dug vastly into the ground with a cover over it.

If not for the dugouts the Nicodemus residents might have frozen to death and fortunately no snow could get inside. Kansas winters were rough and wood was scarce. In their underground iron stoves, the Sadlers like the other residents had to burn roots, wheat, sunflowers and cornstalks, and anything else they could find to stay warm.

Lulu and her family survived under tough conditions. They had no plows so they used their hands for planting. Food was scarce. The Sadlers and other residents, who had horses and wagons, would travel long distances to other towns to ask for donations of food and supplies for their community.

Lulu was a great storyteller. She described how the Native Americans came on horses and all the community hid in their dugouts. The residents were scared, cold, and miserable. The Indians called them “Buffalo man” (because of their hair) and asked them to come out. When some of the men emerged, the Indians formed a circle on their horses and left them an abundance of food. The Native Americans were an important factor in the survival of the colony. By 1880, Lulu was among the more than 400 people who called Nicodemus home.

Lulu Craig’s motto was to always do her best. At fifteen years old, Lulu attended one of Kansas’ first schools and befriended a classmate, George Washington Carver, the famous African American scientist. She graduated from State Teachers College at Emporia, Kansas and taught school in Nicodemus, grades 1 through 8. With no formal teaching program guidelines and few teaching supplies such as books, blackboards, and slates, Lulu worked hard at educating her students under primitive conditions.

In 1886 Lulu left her parents’ household to marry Sanford Craig. They remained in Nicodemus for approximately twenty-eight more years. Rare for a woman during this period, Lulu served on the Nicodemus election board, on 12 Nov 1914.

Their Nicodemus colony was beginning to disintegrate because the railroads failed to extend to their town. The men in Lulu’s family were influenced by stories of rich grazing land in Colorado. They paid their fees under the Homestead Act of 1862. In April 1915, Lulu and Sanford, with their children, her parents, and brother, left Nicodemus. They stepped out on faith.

Lulu and her family were among the first 100 African Americans who shaped a homestead out of the hostile prairie land known as “the dry”, approximately eleven miles

south of Manzanola, Colorado. Upon their arrival, lumber to build a shelter was scarce; instead again they dug into the prairie land. The families knew that dugouts would hold their Homestead Title. Lulu Craig's first Colorado home was a 6' deep hole. It kept them cool in the summer and warm in the winter. The prairie winds were strong but no wind could penetrate it.

The lack of irrigation made farming a real challenge. The Craigs and the Sadlers managed to produce crops of vegetables with the help of a white neighbor who let them use his well. Lulu stayed in touch with her good friend George Washington Carver and he explained carefully to her which weeds were good for food.

Their Colorado community grew to approximately 100. Eventually their dugouts were replaced with more permanent structures. They built a schoolhouse, which gave them a community meeting place for church, school, and other activities. Lulu organized a Sunday school and literary society. She assumed the responsibility as teacher when her predecessor left soon after her arrival. She taught school for the next twenty years. Lulu was a thorough teacher. Some of her students would receive no further education than what they received in her classroom. She was proud of the fact that many of her former students went on to nearby local high schools. The title for her land was issued to Lulu on 3 January 1922. But Lulu was saddened as she watched her Black community dwindle in the 1930s when all the young men moved away to pursue work.

As a member of the Colorado's Writer's Club she wrote about Nicodemus and Colorado. Her in depth manuscript, *A History of Nicodemus: Graham County, Kansas*, is preserved at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas.

On 12 August 1970, five generations of Lulu's family and numerous friends traveled from all over the United States to the farm home south of Manzanola, Colorado to participate in honoring her 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday. As she intently and graciously greeted her guests, the celebration was filmed by Harry Belafonte Enterprises and produced and directed by Academy Award winner Richard Kaplan. He used the story to develop a living history of the American West and demonstrate how many Black families emerged from slavery, settled in the west, and contributed to its development. The documentary, *"Happy Birthday Mrs. Craig"*, features interviews with Lulu Craig and numerous family members. Their candid stories provide important historical insight. You will hear her daughter, Viola's principle of "we won't complain", even though she, her sister Hattie, and Lulu lived together on the prairie by themselves fearlessly, and without many modern conveniences. Lulu liked the prairie and said she was not intimidated by the three of them living there alone. The film is seen in many women's studies and African American studies programs in schools and universities. It is an impressive story of an American family and their determination to survive with dignity.

Lulu was the matriarch of her close-knit family for thirty-one years after her husband died, in 1941. She modeled the family mantra, "We are one". No matter how distantly apart geographically they all remain a family. At 104 years old, at the time of her death, she raised eight children, had 13 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren, and six great-great grandchildren. Intelligent, communicative, a real pioneer through rugged times, she made her transition from this world with positive memories of the past and hopes for her family's and mankind's future. As a successful educator in Kansas and Colorado for 55 years, and a respected community pillar, her positive attitude explains

her success in her interactions with people. She was intuitively guided by her belief in the Lord and practiced the biblical rule, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. Lulu Craig was a grand lady with a nurturing spirit and left a legacy of hard work, endurance, and a desire of peace for mankind.

L.S. Craig. *A History of Nicodemus: Graham County, Kansas*, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

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Antoinette Broussard Farmer