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Contact Trails & Rails Museum for more information on becoming an Engineer!)

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Buffalo Tales

January/February 2018

Buffalo County Historical Society

Weddings through the Decades By: Dr. Elaine Batenhorst

We often think of weddings as a symbol of love and commitment between the bride and groom which it should be. However, that has not always been the case. Sometimes weddings were more like a business deal between two families for a beneficial arrangement or alliance. Wedding dresses, then, were chosen to present the bride's family in the best light, especially in terms of wealth and social status.

American brides didn't always wear white. White fabric was impossible to clean by hand and thus reserved for the wealthy. The bride would wear her finest dress to the ceremony even if it was a dark color. Many wore black or brown during that time. Only a few colors (according to some traditions) were avoided, such as green, which was then considered unlucky. Blue was a popular choice as it represented purity, piety and a connection to the Virgin Mary, plus the dark color easily hid stains and imperfections and could be worn again.

As the years passed wedding trends changed dramatically every decade. This is still true today, it seems each year there are more trends that become in fashion while others fade away.

If you look at pictures during the late 1800's the bride always looked angry—don't blame it on the dress—Just the corset. It wasn't easy to smile if you can't breathe. However, we often see that in a lot of wedding photos from that era both the man and the woman are frowning or look impassionate, simply due to the fact cameras of the age took quite a while to process an image and therefore one's face would get tired of smiling!

In the early part of the decade, women wore fitted bodices with high collars and narrow sleeves, much as they had done in the previous decade. From about 1893 however, sleeves started expanding into a leg-of-mutton shape, which was tight at the lower arm and puffed out at the upper arm. Wide shoulders were fashionable and horizontal decoration on the bodice further exaggerated the line. Skirts were worn in a full-length, simple A-line. Hair was worn high on top of the head, in tight curls. If the bride married in the church, the dress might have a train, with a veil of

the same length. The veil could be lace or silk tulle. Hats were small or wide with lots of trimming, but generally worn squarely on top of the head.

For this article many of the pictures are from the Pleasanton Centennial Book or the Amherst Centennial Book. Some examples of wedding dress from the late 1800s are listed below.



John August & Anna (Kreutzer) Gunst

In 1895, John August Gunst married Anna Kreitzer. The dress was white with a hair piece of tiny flowers. The dress has a fitted bodice with the skirt falling naturally. There is no veil shown in the picture.

Another wedding during that time period was Elmer Adams and Phoebe Darling in 1894. They were married at the Windsor Hotel in Kearney. The dress had the long leg-of-mutton sleeves with a fitted bodice and jacket-like affair. She wore no hair piece. Elmer was dressed in a Morning Coat.



Elmer E. & Phoebe (Darling) Adams, 1894

The Kearney Hub carried a notice of the wedding:

“PLEASANTON YOUNG PEOPLE WED.

Quite an interesting event occurred at the parlors of the Windsor hotel at 4 o'clock this afternoon, it being the marriage of Mr. Elmer E. Adams to Miss Phoebe Darling, both of Pleasanton. The ceremony which made these two your people one was performed by his Honor Judge Easterling in the Presence of about twenty of Pleasanton's best people who

came down purposely to witness the event. After the ceremony the party sat down to a splendid supper especially prepared for the occasion by the Windsor people. The party returns to Pleasanton tonight and will be followed by Mr. and Mrs. Adams in the morning.” Enoch Eck photographed the wedding and wrote the article.

Also in 1895, Hugh M. Dixon and Elizabeth Phillips were married. The story has it that they grew up as neighbors. Elizabeth wears a gown with a fitted bodice, A-line skirt, and sleeves that are full at the top with the leg-of-mutton at the wrist. This dress appears to be a light pastel or light gray shade and possibly was made by the bride or her mother.



Hugh M. & Elizabeth (Phillips) Dixon

To end this era we have Francis Adelbert Tuffs and Myrtie Reece (she went by Myrtie Ganzans, her step-father's name) married in 1898. Myrtie's dress had a fitted bodice with the full sleeve on top followed by the fitted sleeves to the wrist with an A-line skirt. The ruffles do give the effect of a jacket. Notice Myrtie's hair-do. This couple were both from Kearney but travelled to Minden, Nebraska by horse and buggy in order to elope!



The turn of the century found some changes in the styles of the dresses. The s-shaped corset was the style, the dresses had a blousy look on top tapering down to the waist. The sleeves were still wide puffy with the forearms tapered. Most dresses had a high neckline, long trains and veiled hats. The make-up for this time period appeared to be unmade, as makeup was readily available nor was it cheap. The most popular hairstyle of the period was called the Gibson Girl. Below is an example of a variation of the Gibson Girl style from the wedding of Ida Mauler. The common flowers used in bouquets were white roses, orchids, lilies of the valley and orange blossoms.

For more on “Weddings Through the Decades,” visit Trails & Rails Museum! Running through the Winter and Spring is a display on wedding dresses from Buffalo County's past. In order to get more information on the couples we highlighted in this edition (or other couples that were married in Buffalo County), please stop by our archives, open Mondays from 1-4pm.



Maurice & Ida (Jilg) Mauler

Coming Events:

- Our Annual “Don't Come Event” will be at the end of February 2018. For more information please contact Trails & Rails Museum.

Education notes (see website for additional details):

- *Fabulous Fridays are held on the 2nd Friday monthly at 2 pm. Locations vary, so check the web site “Events” Tab!
- *Listen to Mardi Anderson on KGFW 1340 AM at 9 am on the last Friday of each month for a fabulous story about Buffalo County!
- *Join the Trails & Rails Museum Blacksmiths (check our calendar under the “Events” Tab on our website) to learn about blacksmith meetings and/or possibly join in the fun!
- *The Archive Department will be open on Mondays from 1-4pm year-round or by appointment. Contact bchs.archives@hotmail.com for more information.

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

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We hope you enjoy these stories about Buffalo County. If you have a memory of Buffalo County and would like to write a story to be considered for a future newsletter then please email us! We'd love to hear from you. Please submit your memories or/and stories to us by emailing them to bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com or sending them to the post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848.

Director's Report—Jennifer Murrish

A great deal of my time has been spent with the opera house curtain project, the Christmas Tree Walk, and end-of-the-year paperwork!

We are so excited to announce that the Kearney Opera House curtain was officially installed at the Family History Center, Archives Room, and unrolled on Tuesday, January 16, 2018!

The half marathon committee has met and we are preparing for next year to be bigger and better!

We appreciate your support!

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