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 Katherine Wielechowski, Editor
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Trails & Rails Museum
Buffalo County Historical Society
710 West 11th St. P.O. Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848-0523



Visit us at
www.bchs.us

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Buffalo Tales



March/April 2016

Memories of Growing up in Buffalo County

by Nancy Van Allen

I Walked to School

People over 70 who grew up in Buffalo County all have stories about walking to school. We have to tell how far we walked and how cold it was. This is my story:

My older sisters and I were staying with our grandparents for a week while our parents were on a trip. One morning, we got up to see that two feet of snow had fallen overnight.

My sisters, Jill and Maren, were in fifth and first grade at Wittier Elementary School. Their school started earlier than mine, so they went the few blocks together.

I was in kindergarten at A.O. Thomas at the Kearney Normal School. My grandmother didn't want to take her car out of the garage because of all the snow. She decided that I would walk to kindergarten. We bundled up, normal for Nebraska. I put on my rubber boots, leggings, snow suit, jacket, cap, scarf, and mittens. I had never seen my grandmother walk around in the snow, so I watched as she put on her ladies' rubber boots for "grandmother high heels," her fur coat, gloves, and hat.

We walked from West 21st Street to West 24th Street on Second Avenue. When we got there, she stopped. "Now, Nancy, you walk in this direction (pointing west) until you get to your school. It will be on the other side of the road." I started walking and turned around to see her going back to her home. She would have a cup of tea when she got there.

I had nowhere to go except where Grandmother had sed. I didn't know how to get back to wherever I had come from. We had walked to a corner I didn't know. So, I had to keep going. It was 23 blocks*. Most of the sidewalks had not been shoveled yet. If the cross streets had been plowed, there were snow mounds at least as high as my waist. I must have been over an hour late when I finally did arrive. I did not see anyone else walking the entire way.

For my whole life, I have been very easily lost and very poor at following directions. Somehow I persisted! This is my only "not getting lost story" of my life.

To my knowledge my Grandmother was never criticized for sending me to school that day. And, I only walked there one day. However, 74 years later, I still remember that walk.

*Close to 2 miles.

May Day

I grew up in Nebraska, the very center geographically of the United States. I thought every girl in grade school celebrated with May baskets. When I went away, I found girls from other areas who had not enjoyed this tradition. May is officially in spring, as is Easter. These dates should be moved, so that the weather has a chance of being acceptable. This might not work as one year it snowed on May 30th as we walked to school to pick up our end-of-tear report cards.

May baskets celebrate the possibility summer will be coming. I don't think boys participated in this ritual, but certainly every girl did. We made or bought tiny baskets, larger than nut cups. On May Day, we would go straight home after school and spend hours getting our baskets ready. Each one contained candies and cookies and needed several small flowers and a tag, "from Nancy" in my case.

Now the tricky part: About 5:15 my mother would drive my sister, Maren,

and me to our friends' homes. Keeping the car hidden from view, we would try to sneak to someone's porch, place the May basket by the door, ring the bell, and run. If the basket recipient saw you, there was a lot of shrieking that went on. The girl inside would run out and try to catch you! Safety was your mom's car.

By the time we got home there would be some May baskets for us! I loved May Day!

The Fruit Roll

"What did we do that was so bad"?

"How can we get out of the dog house"?

"Why is she mad at everybody"?

We fourth graders had a hard time trying to understand grown-ups, especially our teacher. We fell back on the only solution that could possibly work, a fruit roll.

Jean Woolridge had the courage to ask Miss Lavington* to "step out of the classroom, please" for a few minutes. So we picked Friday morning. That day each student had to bring one piece of fruit hidden in a bag. The plan began to evolve.

At 11:35, Stephen Lowe would start coughing. I knew my cousin could make a lot of noise with a fake cough. That was the signal to get your fruit out of the drawer and out of the bag. Then we chose John Haerberle to give the "start" signal.

John was the tallest boy in our class. He was excited to have the honor of starting the big event. He would drop a book on the floor. Did I mention John was tall? He sat in the last seat in the back of the classroom. A good plan would involve someone in the front of the class, but that is hindsight.

The big wall clock told us 11:35 had arrived as Stephen nearly choked with a horrible cough. Miss Lavington started to go check on Stephen. By now it was John's turn. He had noticed that he was in the back of the room. Instead of dropping a book which the students might not notice, John went "all-out". He stood up and held his book high over his head. He threw the book on the floor. The "WHAM" that sounded was noticed by everyone, even the janitor in the basement.

We each took our fruit and rolled our gift toward the teacher's desk. A word of explanation is necessary here. An orange rolls really well. A grapefruit also rolls well, despite being too large for a fourth grader's hand. An apple cannot be rolled straight. It quickly veers under small desks. A banana cannot be rolled. It has to be thrown. Pineapples were not grown in Nebraska, though that would have been a treat.

Fruit wobbling around, each student got up and ran to pick up a piece of fruit and place it on the teacher's desk. I remember Miss Lavington putting her hands on her cheeks and saying two times, "My, my." It could have been a catch in her throat or a tear in her eyes, but she seemed unable to say anything more.

The lunch bell rang, so we all got up and left the classroom.

There is no teacher who could have missed "the surprise of the fruit roll".

Fourth graders are not good at keeping secrets.

However, imagine this lady who lived alone, going home with 24 pieces of bruised fruit.

As we students went home that day we all felt our apology had been accepted.

*Only the teacher's name has been changed

The \$64 Question

I loved being in eighth grade. Kearney Junior High was amazing. We were more important than the seventh graders. A bell rang and we changed classes every period. We actually had a few men teachers! We had our own sports teams, for the boys. We were actually starting to grow up.

In our classes, the girls were very smart. The boys didn't like to pay attention, or seem to care. However one day changed that.

Almost everyone's favorite radio program was "The \$64.00Question". A contestant would answer the first question to win \$1.00.* He or she could quit then and keep the dollar, or go on to try the next question. A wrong answer would lose the dollar and end the show for that contestant. A correct answer doubled the prize

to two dollars. It went up to \$64.00, the largest prize.

Our history teacher, Mrs. Jackson** decided to have us play a game, "The 64 Point Question", boys versus girls. The girls expected to win easily.

I remember names were drawn for the order of answering questions, alternating between boys and girls. My friend, Marnie Bishop,** was very smart. She answered the first question easily. And so the second question. Then she sat down.

I encouraged her, "Go on. Try again."

She looked at me and said proudly, "I won two points."

Frank Mattson came next. He stumbled around and did finally guess the first answer. He went on, bravely. His next question was easier. The following question, too easy! He pushed his luck, now up to eight points. Frank was happy to sit down, a winner.

It was Joyce Ferguson's turn. Two points for the girls. Fred Monroe answered three questions correctly; then he missed. No points for the boys. On and on it went. Finally I was the last contestant. The score was: Boys.....54 Girls.....20.

None of the girls had tried to get even eight points. None of the boys had seemed to fear making a mistake. Girls were 34 points behind.

So I answered the first four questions. Let's see, one point, two points, four points, eight points. Now the score was: Boys.....54, Girls.....28. That's still horrible! The girls were calling out, "Don't give up, Nancy. Keep going."

Next, for 16 points, "What major country helped the colonists in the Revolutionary War?" It had to be France. 16 points.

The next question was, "When Nebraska joined the United States, what numbered state were they? Everyone knew that! 37, we were the 37th state. Yes, 32 points.

The temporary score was: Boys.....54, Girls.....52. No one had tried for 64 points. But, how could I stop? Girls were losing! Were the questions getting harder? I wasn't sure.

And now, the question which I will never forget (and which I have never needed to know again). What year was the Constitution of the United States adopted?

There was no leeway - no between this year and that year. What year? Name the year. No one in the classroom knew the answer except Mrs. Jackson, who wrote the questions. The boys were excited, and the girls deflated.

Well, I had to guess. I knew it had to be after 1776, but I didn't even get close. 1779 was ten years off. There was no joy in Mudville for the girls that day. However, I think the boys were surprised that they had been successful academically. They were very proud and encouraged. From then on, the girls were not automatically the brightest students.

*One dollar in 1940 would equal \$9.97 today.

** All names were changed

About Nancy Van Allen

Nancy Henry was born in Kearney, NE. Her parents were John and Jane Gibbons Henry; her siblings are Jill Allen (now in Iowa), Maren Henderson, and Charles Henry (both in California). Nancy's maternal grandparents were Dr. Charles K. and Nellie Downing Gibbons, both born in Kearney in the 1870s.

Nancy grew up in Kearney, going to A.O. Thomas for kindergarten, Wittier Elementary School, and Kearney Junior and Senior High. She graduated from Stanford University and married her college sweetheart, James Boyle. They moved to Hawaii after Jim's law school graduation.

Nancy enjoyed the privilege of being a homemaker and community volunteer as they raised their three children. She worked for many charities and clubs, especially running golf and tennis tournaments or presiding over women's club meetings.

Cancer took Jim's life after 40 years. Later, Nancy married Col William G. Van Allen (USA, ret). Unfortunately, she became a widow again! Nancy now lives in a retirement community in Honolulu and is writing stories about her life.



2016 Calendar of Events

Sunday, April 17 1-3 pm: BCHS Annual Meeting-A great gathering of BCHS members to reflect back on the past year's accomplishments and enjoy an entertaining program while eating yummy food. The general public is welcome to join us for the program, too!

Sunday, June 5: 9th Annual 1/2 Marathon, 10K, & 5K Buffalo County Stampede-registration is at 6 am-race begins at 7.

Saturday, June 18 10-1 pm: 31st Annual Wagons West Celebration-Live music, delicious food, exhibitors, demonstrators, archive researchers, kids' games, and contests (including, back by popular demand ---the BEARD contest). FREE admission/donations are appreciated.

Prairie Blacksmith Association's Fall Conference-Date TBD
Dec.3-4 and Dec. 10-11 from 1-5 pm: Open to the public: **29th Annual Christmas Tree Walk** -check out dozens of trees decorated by area not-for-profits that tie their mission into this year's theme, Christmas Cinema. ***All of November: Decorating (during regular business hours plus open late on Thursday, Nov. 3 for decorating)*** **Saturday, December 3 from 12-1pm: Members Only Preview of the 29th Annual Christmas Tree Walk*****

Education notes (see website for additional details):

***Listen to Mardi Anderson on KGFW 1340 AM** at 9 am on the last Friday of each month for fabulous stories about Buffalo County!

*Join the **1733 Blacksmiths** (time and dates TBD) to learn about blacksmithing and/or possibly join in the fun!

*The **Archive Department** will be open on Mondays from 1:30-4 year-round or by appointment.

*Trails & Rails Museum will be **closed to the public** April 25 through May 6 for Kearney Public Schools' **"Pioneer Days."**

***Fabulous Fridays** are held on the 2nd Friday monthly at 2 pm. Check the website for locations.

January: Flour Sack Quilts

February: The History of the WCTU Mother Hull Home

March: The Sod Town Band and Hall

April: Bee Keeping

May: On the Road to Ravenna for a tour of the Historical Center of Ravenna

June: The Brick Yard in Kearney, NE

July: Washday in the Olden Days

August: Jelly Making of Long Ago with Choke Cherries, Grapes, and other available fruits

September: Chickens on the Farm

October: U.S. Postal Service through the Years in Buffalo County

November: Kearney Goes to War, 1941

December: Christmas Traditions

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

PO Box 523, 710 W. 11th St., Kearney, NE 68848

(308) 234-3041 www.bchs.us bchs.us@hotmail.com

We hope you enjoy these stories about Buffalo County. We would love to have a stock pile of Buffalo Tales ready so they can go out in a more timely manner. Please submit your memories and stories to us by e-mailing them to bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com or sending them to the post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848.

We appreciate your support!

Director's Report

-Taylor has a great start on Wagons West for this year. We already have the Kearney Community Theatre lined up for two showings of a ½ an hour long melodrama and music booked for the last hour. Several exhibitors and cultural partners have already committed.

-I met with Bob Krier about our web site. He looked at the list and said most of it is minor updates. He set us up with a program, came in to install it, and taught us how to use it. The new program allows us to make as many updates as we want, but we won't try to do the big stuff.

-We have 18 spots to use on NET radio through a grant with the Kearney Cultural Partners. Our main contact is moving to a different job, so to keep the continuity before he leaves I approved using a basic message for all 18 spots that promote Fabulous Fridays.

Be our friend on Facebook: "BuffaloCountyHistoricalSociety"