



# Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

June 1984

## WEDDINGS THROUGH THE YEARS

by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

June is traditionally the month of weddings although a review of Buffalo County's marriage records does not show this to be true; in fact, for the past several years August and December have more often been chosen for wedding dates.

The first marriages of record in Buffalo County were officiated at Wood River Center in 1871. Licenses were issued by Patrick J. Walsh, the probate judge, to Owen Curry and Kate Haverty, Joseph Owens and Sarah E. Oliver, and C. C. Clifton and Mary Duncan. The first marriage in Kearney Junction was that of W. W. Patterson and Pattie M. Giddings on August 8, 1872, officiated by the Rev. Asbury Collins. 23,261 marriage licenses have been issued in Buffalo County from August 17, 1872 to May 14, 1984.

The earliest marriage ceremonies in the new county may have taken place in dugouts or sod houses, later in the parlor of a new home or at a church, and often in the office of the county judge. Wherever a wedding was held, it was an occasion of



Photo of a bridal couple in Iowa in the 1860s. In the days of early settlement of the midwest, brides seldom wore white.

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Gene E. Hamaker ..... Editor  
Alice Howell ..... Circulation  
Telephone 237-7858

Membership in the Buffalo County Historical Society is open to anyone who has an interest in Buffalo County and its people, or in the history of the area.

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Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director. Phone 234-3041

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**WITH THE SOCIETY**

A picnic on Sunday, June 24. Members of the historical society will gather for a covered dish picnic at Centennial Park across from Trails and Rails Museum on Sunday June 24, at 5:30 p.m. Bring a covered dish and table service. Coffee and iced tea will be furnished.

**On Display at Trails & Rails**

A special exhibit of antique kitchenware and cookbooks will be put on display the week of June 18. This exhibit will be ready for the July 4th holiday and remain up for the rest of the summer.

**Special Hours**

Trails and Rails Museum will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the 5-day Kearney Stampede celebration. This will include the week-end beginning June 30 and extend through July 4.

**Wagons - Wagons - Wagons**

In keeping with our transportation theme, Trails and Rails Museum is looking for wagons to add to our collection. Although we need covered wagons used by the pioneers who followed the trails through Buffalo County, we realize not many are left. If you know of wooden wagons with wooden, metal-rimmed wheels and the long tongue which has not been cut off for pulling behind a tractor, see if the owner would be willing to donate it to the museum.

**Rug Braiding**

Some of the Volunteer Tour Guides who work at the museum this summer will be braiding a rug. We would like to put a braided rug in the hall by the open stairway of the Freighter's Hotel. This rug will take heavy traffic in the coming years so heavy material is needed. Old coats would be ideal. If you have any old coats to donate, bring them to the museum any afternoon. You are also welcome to join the "Braiding Bee" to help cut strips and braid the rug.

excitement in the gathering together of family, friends and neighbors of the happy couple. The gown of the bride was seldom white at these early weddings. It was usually made at home and designed to be remodeled for later use as a "Sunday" dress.

Today the news stories of engagements and weddings fill the columns of the social pages and include pictures of the bride, and more recently of both bride and groom. This was not so in the early newspapers. Most marriages did not make the news columns. If one was reported, it was only an item in the "Town Talk" or "Local News" columns giving the names of the couple, their parents, the day and sometimes the place of the ceremony. There might be a second sentence expressing best wishes to the newlyweds or wishing "smooth sailing through life's voyage", but these added sentiments were rare.

From the mid-1880s through the turn of the century news reports of weddings were given more attention although there was no mention of the attendants, no description of the bride's gown, sometimes very little about the ceremony itself except for the name of the officiating minister. However, there were descriptions, sometimes glowing, of the music and flowers, the gifts received by the couple, and the sumptuous food served to the guests.

The listing of gifts and the donors was not uncommon in wedding news during this time. The *New Era* of October 3, 1885 reported the Lupton-Lytle nuptials with the story sub-title, "One by One the Young Business Men of Kearney Contract Alliances in Domestic Life with the Fairest Ones of the Gentle Sex." The story continues:

On Tuesday evening at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. G. N. Seeley Mr. Edward H. Lupton and Miss Clara B. Lytle were united in the holy bonds of matrimony, Rev. John Askin of the Congregational Church officiating.

Shortly after the ceremonies were over, the many friends of the contracting parties began to arrive and congratulations were in order. And a full hour was spent giving good wishes and hopes. The band filled the air with rich music that pleased all the hearers.

Mr. Lupton is a young man of sterling qualities and knows not what the meaning of fail is. The young lady has the admiration of all her acquaintances in this city.

Following was a list of some 75 to 100 guests and their gifts which included silver pieces, china, crystal, linens, pictures, books, lamps, clocks and pieces of furniture.

While the wedding event might not merit more than a sentence or two, the wedding trip or a reception after the couple's return was given more space in the newspaper columns. Such was the case in the marriage of Will J. Scoutt and Maude Carpenter as noted in the *New Era* of December 1, 1888: "Will J. Scoutt and bride returned from their bridal trip to Denver and other parts of Colorado. They went from the train to their home on the corner of Second Avenue and 26th Street. A party of fellows gave them a serenade at eight o'clock in the evening. They did not stay long about the premises, caused doubtless by Mr. Scoutt treating the party."

Before the days of the automobile wedding couples had to rely on trains for honeymoons and wedding trips. Buffalo County towns on the Union Pacific had choices of trains and times of departure following the nuptial festivities, but this was

not so in areas where there was only one train each way a day. A couple in a town north of the county were married at 5:30 A.M. in order to catch the early morning train for their wedding trip.

With the growth of Kearney in the late 1880s there was a stepped-up program in the social life of the city, and with five newspapers in circulation the parties, balls, entertainments and amusements in the community grew in proportion resulting in a kind of fierce competition to be the biggest and the best. The **Kearney Daily Hub** over the years has concentrated on straight, factual reporting. A Saturday society column with news of interest to women was started in December 1889 and some wedding news was included, but this varied greatly from present day reporting. Writing about the social whirl of the community with great flourish was the **Kearney Enterprise**. A local lady, Maude Marston Burrows, became its social editor writing under the by-line of Miss Muffet. One of her columns included this story:

One of the prettiest and merriest weddings that has occurred in Kearney for some time was that of Miss Maud Moore and Lawrence Keck Wednesday evening. The parlors and halls were profusely decorated with apple blossoms, and their delicate fragrance and soft bloom filled all the rooms with sweetness. The presents were extremely beautiful and numerous. There were a large number of pieces of cut glass and solid silver, an elegant silver pitcher, several fine water color paintings, a handsomely upholstered Morris chair, several Oriental rugs and many other useful and dainty gifts.

No mention was made of where the ceremony took place, the members of the bridal party or the officiating minister or judge; but as was usual in that day, the floral decoration and the gifts received were given more attention.

Even Miss Muffet's columns did not include accounts of many weddings. Silver and golden anniversaries and receptions and balls for a newly married couple were covered in detail. Accounts often included a description of the gowns of the ladies and of course, the floral decoration, the music and the food served.

In the **Miller Forum** of October 8, 1908, the account of the marriage of Miss Josephine Schukar and Carl Labs gives a detailed picture of that happy event at which about 500 people gathered. The wedding vows were said in the rural Immanuel Lutheran Church east of Watertown. The Rev. J. F. M. Grosse officiated. The wedding march was played by the Amherst Band, and following the ceremony the choir "rendered an appropriate selection." After the marriage was solemnized, everyone went to the home of the bride's parents to "celebrate the happy event and to honor Mr. and Mrs. Labs". The celebration was one of "huge and grand proportions" planned and executed for days preceding the wedding day. The story continues:

One hundred invitations had been sent out and upon these were based an estimate of at least 400 guests to be provided for. However, there were present not far from 500 and there was more than plenty for all. To entertain royally such a vast number of people was a task more easily imagined than described; yet it was done and most perfectly done at that. Some four days before a large beef and hog specially fattened for the event were slaughtered; and the work of cooking the great quantity of meat, cakes, pies, bread and other delicious dishes was begun under the skillful

supervision of Mrs. Schukar assisted by relatives. While this great task was proceeding in the kitchen, Mr. Schukar and assistants were busy early and late outside erecting an annex on three sides of the house, 16 x 114 feet, to shelter the throng and to serve as a dining hall. Even the safety and comfort of the guests' horses were provided for by the erection of stalls to accommodate 200 teams. Tables extending the entire length of the annex were handsomely decorated with large vases of cut flowers and were loaded with the choicest and best of everything to eat. Nor were all the good things to be had on the tables. Among the guests were constantly being passed cigars and a choice of fruits, and off to itself was a booth where refreshments were served. The young people were provided with amusements to suit their tastes, and through the afternoon and most of the night the merry-making continued without a hitch to mar its enjoyment or to interfere with the perfect execution of the well-matured plans of the excellent host and hostess.



Mr. and Mrs. Carl Labs, 1908.

Mrs. Labs is presently a resident of the Mother Hull home in Kearney.

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The ethnic background of the families of the bride and groom often influenced the wedding festivities and resulted in food, drink and dancing until dawn or even a two-day celebration for all.

By 1920 weddings were described in more detail and showers for the bride were often reported. A community shower might include a "mock wedding" designed to tease or embarrass the bride and groom-to-be. A post-nuptial activity that did not make the social columns was the shivaree at which friends would kidnap the couple, take them for a ride—sometimes separately—and make lots of noise around the countryside before returning to the home of the newlyweds for refreshments. While shivarees are not common today, the harassment of the bride and groom continues with the decorated car waiting for them after the ceremony, with tin cans and clatter calling attention to the new status of the now married couple.

It was not until the 1930s that a description of the bride's gown or the colors of the gowns of her attendants were included with other details of the nuptial ceremony and the reception or dinner following.

A wedding continues to be a traditional event however celebrated and regardless of the financial or social status of the couple. Whether it is a simple affair or an elaborate celebration, it is a time for family and friends to gather for a happy and joyful occasion.

### SOURCES

Buffalo County Marriage Records, *New Era*, Oct. 3, - 885; Dec. 1, 1888; *Kearney Daily Hub*, Nov. 1888 to May, 1889, June 1895; May 1905, June 1925; June 1935; Sept. 10, 1963, Feb. 21, 1983; Miss Muffet's scrapbook; *Platte Valley Tribune* 1935; *Miller Forum*, Oct. 8, 1908; *Where the Buffalo Roamed*, 1967; *Historical News*, Vol. 10, No. 8; Interview with Mary Badger, June 5, 1984.

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

Identification of the members of the Kearney High School Class of 1908, pictured on the first page of the May 1984 issue of *Buffalo Tales*, is as follows:

Top row: Ada Tollefsen, Margie Hume, Leroy Lambert, Wilma Crossley, Jack Halliwell; Middle row: Louis Holmes, Ella Gunn, Lloyd Barn, Cora Pauli, Laverne Hamilton; Bottom row: Albert Tollefsen, Nell Stevens, Ethel Scott, Myrtle Saunders and Alice Miller.