



Buffalo Tales



Volume 19, No. 4

Buffalo County Historical Society

July-August, 1996

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHURCHES IN BUFFALO COUNTY

Part II

by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

The number of churches and their many denominations during the years 1871 to the early 1920's confirm the importance of religion to our pioneer settlers. The first settlement was on or near the transcontinental Union Pacific completed through Buffalo County in 1866. However, a very early group was the Saxon Colony from Germany which settled in Schneider Township in October of 1873. Dr. Schneider, a native of Saxony, joined the colony and became its president. They settled "on the south bank of the Loup River opposite the mouth of Beaver Creek" and all thirteen colonists spent the winter in a 16' x 24' sod structure which they built. In the spring they found their own land, built soddies and planted crops and gardens, getting established in their new location. In 1874, a town to be called Berg was surveyed and a post office established. Although no town developed there were three churches established: Lutheran, Presbyterian and Catholic. The rural Zion Lutheran

(Continued on Page 3)



New Episcopal Church, 1908, with old church at right.

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

The Building Committee has been meeting nearly every week this spring and summer trying to get ideas together for a new building for Trails & Rails Museum. So far we are planning a building with two stories and approximately 16,000 sq. ft. We have, however, asked a University Class to do a feasibility study, so that we can start making some kind of plans for a fund drive to finance the building.

We want to get as much work done on the Boyd House as possible to use up our 1995 Keno grant. Wisch Construction is working on the interior and we can also do some work on the porch on the north side.

The murals look great in the church and we appreciate all of the work that has gone into the preservation of these paintings.

Larry Nansel, President

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Oops! Your Publications Committee got ahead of itself. The last *Buffalo Tales* should have been identified Vol. 19, No. 3, May-June, 1996. This issue is the July-August issue, Vol. 19, No. 4.

The tour to Fort Hartsuff, Ashfall Fossil Beds, O'Neill and Neligh Mills was well received.

The next tour is planned for Sunday, September 15, to the northeast part of Buffalo County. Time of departure from Trails & Rails Museum parking lot will be 1:00 p.m. Cost per member will be \$6.50; for non-members \$7.50. Send reservation with check covering the cost to Buffalo County Historical Society, P. O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848. Call Mardi Anderson 237-7339, or Merlin Burgland, 237-3007 for further information.

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Memorials have been received from:

Margaret C. Tunks in memory of Horace and Lucile Cary, H. Jackson Cary, Fred and Helen Barlow Nye, and Lyman Cary Family.

Paul and Mitzi Steinbrink, in memory of Florence Griss.

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NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Orin and Elinor Hardin, Kearney

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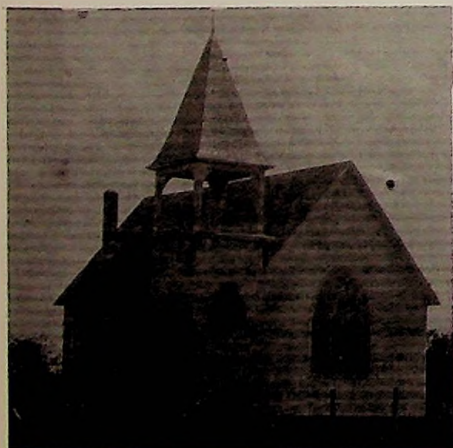
A request has been received asking if anyone has a copy of a poem, "The Great Rebellion," written by Amos Heald Edwards under the pen name of Charles Chester. Mr. Edwards lived in Buffalo County from 1876 until his death in 1905. The poem was printed in *The Kearney Journal* during Mr. Edwards' life here. No microfilm of this newspaper is available at either the Kearney Public Library or the UNK Library, or at the Nebraska State Historical Society. Possibly one of our readers is familiar with the poem. If so, contact Dr. Philip S. Holmgren or Mrs. Alice Howell at Box 523, Kearney, Nebraska 68848.

Church flourished for a time but joined Ravenna in 1910.

Emigration westward from Illinois of the Snively and Fomey families brought the Church of the Brethren to Buffalo County. On May 28, 1881 at the farm home of Moses Y. Snively, five miles northeast of Kearney, twelve people gathered and pledged themselves to establish a congregation whose territory would be twenty miles each way from Kearney. Farm homes or the schoolhouse were their places of worship until they built a church at 18th Street and Avenue A in Kearney, dedicated in the fall of 1900. The church disbanded in the early 1960's. The building has been moved to the grounds of the Trails and Rails Museum and is being developed as a Historical Center of all Faiths in Buffalo County.

Prior to 1876, early traveling priests administered to the needs of Catholics in Kearney and throughout Buffalo County. A small church was built in 1876 on Avenue A between 18th and 19th Streets, later at 26th Street and 6th Avenue. St. James in Kearney was organized April 16, 1881. In 1905 they acquired the vacated United Presbyterian Church at 1st Avenue and 24th Street, and in 1910 built a new church on that site, which served them until a second new church was built at 3801 Avenue A in 1980. Elm Creek Catholics were organized in 1878, built a frame church in 1879 which was dedicated on December 8, 1880 and named Immaculate Conception. In the fall of 1917 a new brick church, Romanesque in style, was built and continues (1996) to serve the congregation. Other Catholic congregations were Ravenna's Church of Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes, 1889; Prairie Center's St. Mary's in Thornton Township, 1890; St. Joseph's (1900-1905) and St. Wenceslaus (1912-1969) in Schneider Township; Pleasanton's St. Mary's 1906; Shelton Catholic 1908 and Amherst's St. John Capistran Mission, 1914.

Episcopalian Church of the Good Shepherd was organized in Kearney on October 22, 1882, the name changed to St. Luke's in 1888. Their present (1996) church was built in 1908 and gives them the distinction of serving the longest in Kearney at one location. St. Luke's operated the Kearney Military Academy northeast of the city from 1890 until 1923, and also operated a hospital in Kearney for several years.



Presbyterian Church, Buda, 1907



Evangelical Church, Kearney, 1887

Elm Creek's early Episcopal Chapel was of short duration and St. Agnes Chapel in Gibbon (1890) never had a sufficient membership to have its own pastor.

Swedish and Norwegian Lutherans had congregations in Kearney and erected a brick church as early as 1886. They did not worship together but had separate pastors and meeting times. The church still stands at 2523 Avenue A and is now (1996) the home of the Kearney Jubilee Center. No further history is known of these congregations.

The Swedish Lutherans, now First Lutheran, organized in 1884 and built a frame church at 19th Street and Avenue C. The congregation did not flourish until a new church was erected on the south side of 25th Street between Avenues A and B in 1924. Zion Lutheran (Missouri Synod) did not organize in Kearney until 1911. Their first church was located on 25th Street at Avenue C, the present location (1996) of their second church edifice and parochial school.

Many of the first Lutheran churches were rural. In the northwest part of the county in Scott Township several German families settled in the early 1880's and organized Immanuel Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod. Members first met in a sod school at Greendale in 1882, then in homes until a sod church was built in 1885. A frame building erected in 1889 served the congregation for 87 years before it was razed in 1972. A parochial school operated from its earliest days until 1950. When disbanded in 1972 members joined Trinity Lutheran at Amherst.

Soon after Immanuel was founded, another rural Missouri Synod congregation, Zion Lutheran, was organized in 1885 on the eastern edge of the county, north of Shelton in Gardner Township. It was known also as the St. Michael church or the Luce church, but for many years has been identified as the North Shelton church. A parochial school operated until 1946. Mrs. Floyd Pope, who prepared a history of the church, recalled the custom in the early years of the girls sitting on the west side with the ladies behind them, and the boys on the east side with the men in back of them.

Other Lutheran congregations in the early years include St. John's Lutheran of rural Poole and St. Paul's Lutheran of Peake, whose congregations merged in 1955 to form Grace Lutheran Church at Pleasanton. Trinity Lutheran Church at Amherst was established in 1907, and Bethlehem Lutheran at Ravenna in 1917. Many neighboring rural congregations have joined them when their churches disbanded.

A Congregational Church was organized in Kearney in 1872 and was an active congregation until their pastor left to serve in the army during World War I. The church disbanded following the war. One of its stained glass windows in memory of Mary Finch was given to St. Luke's Episcopal Church and sets over the high altar in their church. A Congregational Church was also organized in Ravenna in 1886.

Swedish Mission Church in Kearney, organized in 1899, was the beginning of the Evangelical Free congregation. Seventh Day Adventists were in Shelton as early as 1885, and were organized in Kearney in 1914. Church of Christ, Scientist started in Kearney in 1890.

St. George's Syrian Orthodox Church was organized in Kearney in 1903. It was the second church of its kind in the nation, and the only one west of the Missouri River at that time. Its first priest was Father Nicola E. Yanney, a resident of Buffalo County, who served St. George's from 1904 until 1918 when he died from Spanish influenza at 44 years of age.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) organized throughout the county—Kearney 1874, Miller 1889, Riverdale 1898, Elm Creek 1910, and Fairview north of Elm Creek in Logan Township in 1904. Fairview merged with the Elm Creek congregation in the 1940's.

The Church of Christ had a rural congregation in Rusco Township as early as 1893, in Elm Creek in 1913 and Miller in 1914. Church of the Nazarene was founded in Kearney on February 27, 1916. Near Pleasant Valley Cemetery in Loup Township a non-sectarian church was built in 1917 and was active for more than thirty-five years. Sartoria, a ghost town west of Pleasanton, did not have a church building, but did, in 1888, have a Union Sabbath School which met regularly.

A Presbyterian congregation in Sweetwater met as early as 1889 but a church was not built until July of 1903. Lutheran congregations in the area included the Sweetwater community in 1883 and later years, but their church buildings were rural and outside Buffalo County. A Presbyterian Church was also established in Buda around 1907 to 1909. It was located next to the general store for several years and eventually the building was moved to southeast Kearney.

Grand View Church in Harrison Township was built around 1917, originally the People's Mission, then the Pilgrim Holiness, more recently Immanuel Missionary, with regular Sunday School classes and occasional preaching services.

S. C. Bassett, in his *History of Buffalo County*, (1916), mentions unorganized religious services. In Crowellton on the Union Pacific between Odessa and Kearney, Sunday School was held in the schoolhouse and "was attended by everybody in the neighborhood." This was in 1874. Also from Bassett's history, in early Huntsville (near present Amherst) Mrs. Basten writes, "There was no social life in the community except church and prayer meeting. Politics and baseball interested some of the men. At a Wednesday night prayer meeting all those gifted in prayer took turns praying for Washington Petit's bad temper."

Of twenty-nine rural organized congregations in Buffalo County, only six rural churches are left, indicating that rural churches are going the same route as rural schools, but while they lasted these churches were important assets to the social and religious life of Buffalo County communities in their first fifty years.

SOURCES

Bassett's *History of Buffalo County*, Vol. I (1916); *Where the Buffalo Roamed*; Lynnda Shaffer, *Buffalo County Church Records Survey*, 1982; Centennial Books: Gibbon, Kearney, Amherst, Miller, Elm Creek, Ravenna, Pleasanton and Sweetwater; Church history books: First Methodist, First Presbyterian, First Christian, First Baptist, St. Luke's Episcopal, Evangelical Free, St. James Catholic, Grace Evangelical, Zion Lutheran, all of Kearney; Church histories from *Kearney Daily Hub*; *Buffalo Tales*: November-December 1978, January, June 1981, July-August 1982, February, July-August 1984, July-August 1985, May 1986, April 1987, June, July-August, September 1989, February, October 1990; Interviews with Leroy Walker, Vincent Wolford, Susan Underhill.

PHOTOS: from Postcard Collection of Jan Eickmeier.

Author's Note

The Buffalo County Historical Society needs copies of church histories and photographs for the Church History Center in the church building on the Trails & Rails Museum grounds. Although we have several of these in our archival collection, we know there are many that we do not have.

Please advise me of any errors or additions to the historical data contained in this 2-Part History of Churches during the first fifty years of settlement (1871-1920).

— Alice Howell

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TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

Summer is almost over. It doesn't seem possible that school is about to start. It's also time for all of you to come visit School District #1 and see the difference 125 years can make in a child's back to school plans. Perhaps you can fill us in on some differences we have forgotten.

The quilt show is still on display until about August 27th.

You also should see all the things that are happening at Trails & Rails. If you haven't been there recently, you may be surprised.

I want to thank all of you who have so faithfully volunteered this summer and to Wilma Larsen and her helpers for organizing it all.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

Trails & Rails Museum 706 West 11th Street (308) 234-3041

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