



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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THE COMMUNITY OF STANLEY

by Irene Mollard

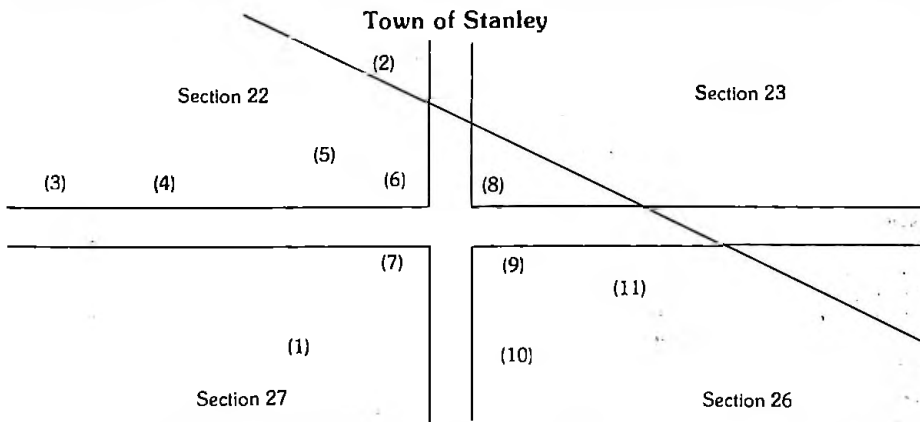
The little village of Stanley, Nebraska played an important role in the early history of Grant Township of Buffalo County in the 1870's and 1880's.

In July 1873, Miles B. Hunt, a civil war veteran, homesteaded eighty acres in the south part of the southeast quarter of Section 22 and eighty acres in the east part of the southwest quarter of the section. It was on this land that Mr. Hunt built a house, probably a dugout, which was 16 x 32 feet with four doors and two windows. He also erected two stables, dug two wells and cultivated about fifty acres of land. Mr. Hunt lived on the land for sometime before filing for his application. An ad in the **Central Nebraska Press** published at Kearney Junction on April 24, 1873 stated:

Stray Cow. Taken up about the 15th March by the undersigned of Sec. 22, Township 10, Range 17 in Buffalo County, Nebraska. One Texas Cow, spotted red and white, about five years old, good size. The owner of said cow is hereby notified to prove property, pay charges and take her away. Miles B. Hunt.

The first post office in the area was established on October 3, 1873, named Huntsville with Miles B. Hunt as postmaster. The name was changed to Stanley on March 15, 1877.

The land that Miles B. Hunt had homesteaded changed ownership several times but was owned by the Defield family in the 1880's. The southeast corner of Section 22, containing one acre, was the site of the store that was operated by R. B. Hanks



(1) Mill, (2) Railroad, (3) Cemetery, (4) School, District 13, (5) Otto's Blacksmith Shop, (6) Store, (7) Peck's Hotel, Livery Barn, Blacksmith, (8) Wagner's Store and Post Office, (9) Bank of Stanley, (10) Methodist Church, (11) Dr. Lightner's Office.

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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.

Annual dues, payable January 1:

- Family membership\$ 7.50
- Individual membership ... 5.00
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- Sustaining membership ... 25.00 +

Life membership 100.00

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

FROM THE MUSEUM —

Trails and Rails Museum now has a covered wagon. The wagon was donated by Sam Bretz of Gibbon. It presently is in parts in the Pony Barn while plans are being made for exhibiting it. The wagon is a very important addition to the museum collection telling the transportation story of Buffalo County.

It's County Fair Time

The Historical Society will have a booth at the Buffalo County fair this year. During fair time, August 9-13, the museum grounds will be closed. A display of pictures of schools in the county is planned for the booth. Come and see us at the fair. Or volunteer to help at the fair booth. Contact the museum (4-3041) to reserve the time most convenient for you.

Successful Stampede

The 5-day Kearney Stampede celebration was a success as far as the museum is concerned. Three times as many visitors stopped by as ordinarily do in a similar 5-day period. The temporary display of kitchenware and cookbooks will remain through Labor Day. Come and see the **kitchamijig** and the **noodle cutter**. Learn how to make squirrel soup and pork cake. Kitchenware collections are loaned by Pat Wadlington of Shelton and Margaret Nielsen of Kearney. Cookbook collections are loaned by Miller Godberson of Gibbon and Margaret Hohnholt of Kearney. Additional cookbooks are from the museum's collection, including recent donations by Edna Donald of Grand Island.

NEW MEMBERS

- Rosemary WalkerKearney
- Meree Haase Bacon .Laguna Hills, CA
- Leo JacobsonLoveland, CO

and later by Frank Bankson. The ground west and north of the store, a parcel of two acres, was purchased by Herman Otto from Mr. Defields in 1888. This is where Otto operated a blacksmith shop.

William Green was the owner of forty acres in the southwest corner of Section 23, land he had purchased from the Union Pacific Railroad. In August of 1885, Theo. Wagner purchased one-half acre from William and Cynthia Green, on which was erected a store building. At this time Mr. Wagner was the postmaster with the office in his store building.

F. B. Peck owned forty acres in the northeast corner of Section 27 which had been purchased from the Union Pacific Railroad. This is where the hotel and livery barn was built. It was also in this building that Mr. Barnett of Minden opened his blacksmith shop in 1885.



Peck Hotel, Amherst, 1903, moved from Stanley.
Nebraska State Historical Society photo.

Henry L. Seaman homesteaded the northwest quarter of Section 26. It, too, changed ownership over the years. The Bank of Stanley bought a lot 50 x 100 feet in the corner on which was built a bank building with Frank Spaulding as president and G. A. Monroe as cashier. In June 1888 a tract of land 399 x 178 feet was purchased by the Methodist Episcopal Church on which was erected a church building. This tract of land was directly south of the bank. Dr. Lightner also erected his office nearby in the summer of 1890.

The early settlers were anxious for their children to have some form of education so District No. 13 was organized on March 10, 1873. Reports are vague as to the location of the first school sessions but it was a sod building for a short time. During a visit with Lora Fellows Simmerman in 1983 she told that her grandfather, Albert Fellows, and other men went to the Loup River to cut trees for lumber for the frame school building at Stanley. Some of the first teachers were J. Marsh Grant, Bunyan L. Grant, Adah Seaman and Rena Hollenbeck. In 1885 the district purchased a parcel of land for one dollar from Lorenzo and Etta Defield in the south part of Section 22 for a school. The school house was always the center of activities for all community gather-

ings. Christmas Eve was a festive time, even Santa Claus distributed nice presents from a well laden tree. On New Year's Eve watch meetings were held.

The church had no property until the late 1880's but preaching was every two weeks at 11 a.m. and Sunday School every Sunday at 10 a.m., and prayer meeting every Sunday and Thursday evening. No doubt the school house was used for all these religious services. Revival meetings were also held frequently. The Stanley news items published in the **Armada Watchman** of August 1, 1889 states that "Rev. Fraser, the Methodist pastor, who has recently come among us, is well liked, and preaches good sermons for a young man just from school." Another news item in the same publication is that the "Brethren are quite strong at this point, having a church of about forty members and Brother Boyd, the pastor, is doing good work and deserves praise for his untiring efforts to build up the good cause at this place and other points where he labors." No mention is ever made of the Brethren having a building so perhaps they met in the homes or the school building.

The Methodists were already thinking of building a church at Stanley in 1887, just as soon as the railroad located its depot so they would know where the town would have a fixed point. The tract of land that was purchased in 1888 was paid for by Floyd F. Gargett, Arthur R. Green, and George W. Parker, trustees of the church. The church had a short life in the community of Stanley. It was a common practice to place a new church under the administration of a pastor in a nearby town. Stanley was assigned the same pastor that served the Miller Church. His name was T. M. Thurber and he was appointed to Stanley in 1890 and again in 1891. In 1892 J. T. Lewis was appointed to Stanley and Miller. The Methodist Church building was later moved to the town of Amherst.

The last part of December, 1881, several citizens met at the Greendale sod school house to organize a cemetery association (Greendale was located in the northwest part of the township). William Green was chosen chairman and H. L. Seaman, secretary. Wm. Green, H. L. Seaman and M. V. Esler were elected trustees, said trustees were chosen as a committee to look up a suitable location for a cemetery. The location was decided when Lorenzo and Juliaette Defield and William and Sarah Brown sold to the Grant Precinct Cemetery Association two acres of ground in December 1882 in the south part of Section 22. When the Stanley cemetery was established, graves were moved from the Huntsville cemetery. Among them were two children of the Albert Fellows family, ages one and four.

The price of corn was so low that some settlers were using it for fuel to heat their dwellings. The **Kearney New Era** published in Kearney carried the following item on March 7, 1885. Frank Hartzell started to Kearney with a load of corn. He was offered 24¢ a bushel on the road but would not sell. He hauled it on to Kearney and received 22¢ a bushel.

During the years 1880 to 1890, a society called the Farmers' Alliance spread over Nebraska and other states. Its objects were to better the condition of farmers, to help them buy and sell on better terms and to furnish means of social entertainment. The chief complaint of the Farmers' Alliance was that those who handled what the farmer had to sell took the larger part of what he produced for themselves. They complained that those who made and sold what the farmer had to buy charged him very high prices. The farmers also claimed that there was a combine of the monied interests,

including the great banks, the railroads, the manufacturers and merchants, to rob the rest of the people of what they produced. It also claimed that these large interests controlled both the great political parties and through them, elected men to office who were in favor of the capitalists. The Stanley farmers had an organization called the Wood River Alliance. A meeting was held on March 15, 1881 and the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, that we as citizens and legal taxpayers of Grant Precinct, County of Buffalo, State of Nebraska, will not support any man for Representative to the State Legislature in 1882, unless he be a practical farmer, and pledge himself to do all he can to regulate Railroad Tariff, legislate against railroad monopoly; also pledge himself as a true and tried temperance man.

The settlers enjoyed newspapers as that was their only way of knowing what was taking place in other parts of the country. On one occasion the mail driver lost the mail sack containing the Kearney newspapers. The loss was felt throughout the area. As early as 1881 the community had a weekly newspaper called the *Stanley News*. Its editor was Mrs. E. Moss. The settlers felt it was as good as any journal published in the city of Kearney.

The early residents of the community enjoyed entertainments such as dancing. Aden and Albert Fellows often provided the music with their violins. An oyster supper usually followed a dance and often these lasted into the morning hours. There were also rabbit hunts for the men and literary meetings for all the family. A plain, old neighborhood gathering didn't cost much money, nobody had much. The Literary Society met every Tuesday night at the school house. Some of the topics discussed were "That the United States Owes Her Greatness to Her Geographic Position and Not Her Form of Government." Another topic was "That the School District Should Furnish Text-Books and They Should Be Uniform." Then there was a grand clash between the debating teams of Riverdale and Stanley on March 6, 1885 when the subject was "Courts are Bigger Frauds Than the Railroads." Throughout the pioneer days, the 4th of July was the event of the year. The entire family climbed into the farm wagon and set out for a picnic and celebration. The mothers spent the entire day before baking, making potato salad, frying chicken, or if the young chicks were not big enough, roasting a fat hen. Children were up early getting their chores done so an early start could be made to some spot where there were trees for shade or better yet, a lake or river. There would be readings, speeches and singing, after which there might be a ball game.

In 1885 the people of Stanley were sure of a railroad coming because 75 miles of grading was up for bids. The excitement grew in the communities of Grant Township when the Omaha Republican Valley Railroad started to purchase land and bought two hundred feet of right-of-way from thirteen land owners in the township in the fall of 1886. Throughout the rest of 1886 and through the summer of 1887, hopes ran high for the completion of the railroad. The little village of Stanley continued to grow with the expectations of rail service.

In the spring of 1889 some of the business men in Kearney decided to take things in their own hands and they organized the Kearney and Black Hills Railway. The articles of incorporation were filed in the office of the Secretary of State in May 1889. The only obstacle to the project was the Wood River grade and the only competition

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the South Loup line of the Union Pacific. The Kearney-Black Hills Railway purchased the Omaha Republican Valley capital stock in May of 1890. Extensive alteration work was done during the summer of 1890 at the yards in Kearney. New tracks were laid and new switches installed to accommodate the Kearney-Black Hills terminal. In February of 1890 bonds were voted through and construction begun. The first terminal point would be at Callaway.

The following item appeared in the **Kearney Daily Hub** of May 31, 1890: "A new town called Amherst will be laid out two and one-half miles northwest of Stanley in the near future. This means the downfall of the latter." The depot was built at Amherst, so named by John N. Hamilton, first president of the Kearney and Black Hills Railway. He suggested Amherst after the college in Massachusetts. Since the trains would not be stopping at Stanley, the only thing the little town could do was move to Amherst. Peck's Hotel was moved, as was Mr. Monroe's house. In March 1891 Dr. Lightner relocated his office in Amherst. By January 1891 so many residents of Stanley had moved that the post office was no longer needed so it was discontinued at that time.

Even though the village of Stanley no longer existed, the rural population was large, and it became necessary in December 1891 to erect another school building in the northwest corner of the northwest quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 13. This school became known as East Stanley, and the first school was Old or West Stanley.

The 50th anniversary of the Stanley School district was held on March 9, 1923. Mrs. Ada Seaman Basten, who taught there in 1876, spoke of the early homes in 1872-73 being dugouts and many of the people near starvation. Dan Morris, who taught there in 1896 for \$25.00 a month, told of his having only one shirt which his landlady, Mrs. W. H. Grassmeyer, laundered for him after he had gone to bed and had ready for him the next morning.

Today nothing remains to remind us of Stanley—only the memories which have been handed down to the children and grandchildren of those early settlers. The cemetery which is about one-half mile west of where the little village stood contains the remains of many of the settlers who endured so much to help make this land great.

SOURCES

Armada Watchman, Aug. 1, 1889; Central Nebraska Press, Apr. 24, 1873; Kearney New Era, Mar. 7, 1885; Kearney Daily Hub, May 31, 1890, Mar. 16, 1923; Aug. 1, 1959; National Archives & Records; Buffalo County Records: County Superintendent, Register of Deeds; United Methodist Historical Center; Myron Scott, *Ten Generations of Grants*, 1971; Interview with Lora Fellows Simmerman, 1983.