

Buffalo Tales

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2008

Mary Kenney, a member of the Buffalo County Historical Society's Board of Directors, was born and raised in what is now called the Freighter's Hotel, a premier attraction at Trails & Rails Museum in Kearney. The building was originally built in 1884 and operated by Jerome Lalone. He operated the hotel along the wagon trail between Kearney and Broken Bow. Lalone's hotel thrived until traffic on the trail declined due to the appearance of the railroads. Mr. Lalone lost the house and all his property in a sheriff's sale in 1893. Another Buffalo County homesteader, Felix Eckhout and his wife, Flavia, purchased it in 1898. The Eckhouts and their descendents lived in the house for four generations until it was donated to the Trails & Rails Museum in 1983. The Freighter's Hotel is now being preserved and displayed at the Trails & Rails Museum in Kearney.

Mary was appointed to the BCHS Board of Directors in 2007 to fill a vacancy, and then was elected to her first full term at the 2009 Annual Meeting. Mary still lives in Buffalo County and is a Kiwanis member and a member of her Church Alter Society. When BCHS asked Mary to write down her memories of growing up in the hotel, she presented BCHS with a spiral bound memoir. The following Buffalo Tales is directly from that memoir and reprinted with her permission.

HOME ON THE LOUP RIVER (FREIGHTERS HOTEL) - PART I

BY MARY KENNEY

As I grew up on the South Loup River in a beautiful yellow two-story house, I felt like any other person who was protected by four walls. There were the most gigantic elm trees surrounding the house on all four sides! Because of the trees there were plenty of limbs for swings and shade for picnics and for our playhouses. Dad did a lot of grinding scythes for mowing the hay under the trees. He would pedal and pedal this "stone on wheels" until the scythes were razor sharp to cut the hay.

One day a man drove into our yard. He wanted to look the place over and told us of his living there. I remember very little about the man or how long he stayed but I remember feeling sorry for him as he talked about this being his house years ago. Mother talked to him at great length and as he drove away there were tears in his eyes. When he was gone we asked Mother who he was and if he wanted something. That is when she told us his name was Jerome Lalone and that he had wanted to see the house because he had lived here at one time. His parents were the people who had built this house. As I remember, we never heard or saw this man again.

Many years had passed since Mr. Lalone's visit, and this house was our home. I'm not sure that anyone had ever talked about the house as being historical until I moved from it. I was born in 1935

and I have six brothers and sisters. I was the second in our family and remember clearly my early days on the farm.

The house was huge to me. We used kerosene lamps to light the rooms at night. It was a wonder that we didn't start a fire as we struck many a match on the wall going upstairs. We usually had to strike another match at the top of the stairs before we would get to the bedroom and find the kerosene lamp. When it was cold and time for bed, Dad would go upstairs with us and fluff the feather bed. He then would pick us up and put us in the middle of the bed with the fluffed feather bed tucked around us. That was how we snuggled in for the night. On the north side of the house there was a porch that had the wringer washing machine on it. When Mother washed the clothes she would put an exhaust hose out the porch door that was attached to the washing machine. It would get very hot and one day when she was washing I was going in or out the door (I don't remember), but I stumbled over the hot exhaust and fell on the pipe. I wasn't very old but I did get burned very badly on my leg. It was bad enough that I had to go to the doctor several times. I remember it hurt. I still have a scar on my right leg from that adventure.

From the porch there was a door into the kitchen. The kitchen was not very

wide, but it was fairly long. There was a small pitcher pump by the sink so we didn't have to carry our water from outside. The stove was a grey and cream colored enameled (Copper Clad) stove. Cobs, wood, and coal were used to heat the stove on which we cooked our meals. At the end of the kitchen was a pantry to store food. It was very nice with two shelves with a counter and shelves below. At the end of the pantry was a door that leads to the basement. The basement had brick walls and a dirt floor. There was an area that held potatoes that were harvested in the fall. The cream cans were stored there to keep the cream cool. If cream got too warm, it would bubble up and run over and spill out the cream can. There also were very large crockery jars in the basement, or what we called the cellar. Mom would place pork such as ham, roasts, pork chops, and bacon in them to cure. The smoke house was full of baloney, bacon and dried beef. The smell and taste was indescribable. Mom would also can meat. The meat would be cut into small chunks and placed in clean jars, and then the jars were put into a canner that held 8 to 12 jars. They put water into the canner and would boil it for several hours. I think that it would be about 4 or more hours to process canned meat. In the fall when it was butchering time the folks would get together with the neighbor and it would take a couple weeks to cut, cure, smoke and can meat. When we would get too hot in the summer we could cool off in the cellar because it was much cooler down there.

Off the kitchen was a large dining room. The floors were wood and Mom had them shining all the time! We never heated the dining room in the winter unless it was a holiday or some other celebration. For years there was an old wood burning stove in the dining room. We did finally get an oil stove which was wonderful! Having more of an even heat, instead of real hot and then cold, was great. This room was always a wonderful place for the Christmas tree. We always had about a two foot Christmas tree that was placed on an old black marble table in the bay area of the dining room. Mom always hung ropes from wall to wall and put icicles on them to decorate. They were beautiful! Our holiday meals were always served in the dining room. The wedding dinners for three of the girls and one of the boys were served there also. There was a long hall that led to the stair-

way, bedroom, dining room, and out to the south porch. Above each door was a window or transom to let air through. The bedroom downstairs was our parent's room. When we were little we all could sleep in that room. There were two double beds and a crib in there. We slept three to a bed and as we got older two of us moved upstairs to the west room. We didn't have that too long when along came another baby and the boys took the smaller bedroom upstairs and the girls moved into the larger room. The third bedroom upstairs was used as a storeroom and was unfinished. One day my older sister and I decided the room needed to be cleaned out. We drug out all of the stuff from the store room, which was the third bedroom. Then in 1948 we had a flood and water backed up into the brooder house where Mom had 500 baby chicks. Our parents woke up my older sister and me to help carry the chicks into our house. We put them into the cleaned out room upstairs for about two weeks. It took that long to get the brooder house cleaned and dried out enough to put the chicks back in. My sister and I got to clean the storeroom that saved the chicks again! This time Dad made a beautiful room (at least we thought it was) out of this store room. Mom put her bedroom suite (that she had received from her parents when she was young) in this room and from then on it was "the spare room". With seven children and three bedrooms we still slept three to a bed and thought nothing of it. The fourth room was kept for a "spare room". In those days you did not touch anything in the "spare room".

None of the houses in those days had a bathroom. The "little house" down past one of the big elm trees was where we went to the bathroom. It was too far to go after dark. We didn't have a flashlight and the light from the kitchen didn't shine far enough to find our little house. So we walked a few steps down the path to the little house and that was where we stopped and relieved ourselves. As a matter of fact, electricity was not in our area until May, 1953. Even after that, it took a couple of years to put plumbing in the house. One of the first things that we purchased after we had electricity was an electric stove and refrigerator. About four years after we had electricity on the farm, Dad got running water to certain parts of the yard and the house.

Bath time was every Saturday night. A big galvanized tub was brought in, placed in the middle of the kitchen floor

and filled with water. When we were young we took turns bathing in the tub. Several of us took a bath in the same water. Privacy was not a concern for anyone as we had fun during bath time! We all felt good afterward—just like now when we step out of the shower! When I was six or eight we put up a sheet for privacy. When we were able to carry our water to the bedroom and fend for ourselves without making a big mess, we would have to carry out the water from the tub and then clean the tub after our bath so it would be clean for the next person to use.

There was also a fainting couch in the kitchen. We played, rolled, and took naps on that leather fainting couch. The table was covered when we ate our meals. Usually we had a chair for one person and the next one stood up, etc. I always stood by Dad as I was one of the smaller ones and because of that I got to stand. If I got tired of standing, Dad would lend a knee for me to rest on until I was done eating. Beside that, there was no goofing around close to Dad and meal time was usually an enjoyable time of day. There was always plenty of food on the table and we were to eat what we put on our plate. We did not waste food. Meal time was news time and Dad always listened to the news on the radio. We were to eat in dead silence for the rest of the meal. Dad was a real disciplinarian. If he pointed to a chair we moved it quickly. I never was beaten or spanked by him but I know when he said move it — I moved! His theory was if we fought he would make us sit by each other and hug one another until he said time was up. Often it seemed like hours that we had to hug each other! Then when time was up, we had to kiss each other. We did this, but we were not happy to do it. We also learned that if we did it again we ended up hugging each other again and we didn't like that!

Fun on the farm included games, playhouse, fishing, and the most fun of all was playing hide and seek. That game we played until I was in high school. One time we were playing in the house and we used the table in the dining room as base. One time we tried so hard to get to the base and not get caught one of us fell into the china hutch and cracked the glass. That was the last time we played in the house and needless to say Mom was very unhappy. Mom was in about 13 weddings when she was young and she had all those beautiful dresses in the cedar chest. I think that we were about 8

or 9 years old when she finally let us play with them. We would dress up in them and walk down the open stairway and go out on the porch and parade around like queens. We pretended we were going to weddings, ballroom dances, and to banquets. We had years of fun modeling those pretty dresses. After playing "dress up" a lot we had worn them out. This necessitated us helping more in the kitchen. We had a playhouse up under the trees. We had an old stove and would use tin cans and lids from anything we could find to make mud cakes. We spent hours there and Mom would have to honk the car horn when she wanted us to head home. We always stopped whatever we were doing and went to the house. We had a horse named Sally. She was so tame; she let several people ride her at one time. She also came along to the play house and would watch us make mud cakes and then we would pretend we were having a party. She stood still very patiently for hours on end.

Fishing was a summer highlight also. We had a stick with a string on it for our pole. We each took off digging our own fish worms and headed for the South Loup River which was only a few yards from the house—just over the hill. We would find a spot and try to hide from our brother and sister — trying to see who could catch the biggest fish or the most fish. Most days we each had fairly good luck and that meant that there would be fish for supper that night. We learned to clean and cut up our fish very early in life.

Swimming in the summertime was always a lot of fun. We used lots of energy running over the hill to the Loup River. Our two dogs were always our companions, running along and jumping in the river right beside us. They would bark and we would yell to the top of our lungs, always having fun. The river was usually knee deep in the area that we swam. We were cautious about testing the depth by using a long stick and poking it in the river ahead of us as we walked and scouted the swimming area. Once in a while we would see a snake in the river. That snake usually never got away as the dogs would always take care of it! I guess they were protecting us also.

Growing up our parents finally decided some of us were old enough to stay at home while they went to Kearney to shop. There was a long rug in the dining room and we found that if one of us sat on

one end of the rug another one could pull you around. Remember the dining room floor was always shiny. We started just short runs in that room and then decided that if we pulled them all the way around the kitchen, down the hall and back into the dining room, we had a longer route. That lasted for awhile and then the rug tore in half. The fun was over and there was no way to mend the rug before our parents returned home. The best part was no one knew who did it and blamed one another.

Another time when our parents went to town they left us to take care of a few chores. We had all been to town a few days before. That time the folks bought a lug of bing cherries. They left to go to town and we did the chores. We got the chores done and we were hungry. We started eating cherries and could not stop so by the time the folks returned home from town the cherries were all gone. We had eaten all of them! It wasn't because we didn't have other things to eat, it was just that the cherries were so darn good! It was not a happy return for our parents. When I was five years old our cousins were staying with our grandmother. That day we decided to climb buildings! One building was next to a mulberry tree and the mulberries were ripe and ready for eating. We sat on the roof and ate mulberries until we were full. We then climbed on other buildings. The one that was the most fun to climb was the windmill. I was too small to do these things but I wasn't going to be left out of the fun either. In the evening the cousins went back across the river to Grandma's house and Mom was milking cows. My Dad was still in the field and as Mom milked the cows

we started to climb the windmill again. However, this time I fell about 38 feet off the windmill. There were fire weeds growing below and also an engine that ran the windmill if the wind didn't blow to get enough water for the cows. They thought that perhaps the weeds helped to break my fall and keep me from falling on the engine. It scared my mother half to death and she picked me up and started down to the field where Dad was. I remember getting to the bottom of the hill and then passing out again. The next time I remember is when I was on the kitchen table and the neighbors were all around me. They were cutting off my dress and getting me ready to go to the hospital. I did "come to" again as we got very close to the hospital. I don't remember much other than I hated the hospital. There was a Catholic Nun at the hospital who took my blood sample and she took it from under my big tow nail - it hurt like heck! I was there for several days and Mom stayed with me all the time. I remember her holding me and showing me the lights of Harmon Park. When I got to go home I was in bed for some time. Grandma came to see me and I did a dance on the bed to show her that I was doing better. She warned me not to be so cocky. However, maybe I didn't listen because I had a set back and had to return to the hospital for awhile. It was the same old thing of hating it while I was there and then finally I got to go home again. The priest gave me a Prayer Book and a Rosary with a little purse to keep them in. I finally did get well and I still have the box full of handkerchiefs that people gave me as get well messages.

CONTINUED NEXT NEWSLETTER

BUFFALO TALES is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization, whose address is P.O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848-0523. Phone: 308.234.3041 Email: bchs@bchs.us

Dr. Mark R. Ellis, Editor

2009 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Individual	\$35.00
Family	\$40.00
Institutional Membership	\$50.00
Supporting Membership	\$75.00

We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.

Directors

- Term expiring June 1, 2009: Janice Martin, Lee Sanks, Mary Kenney, Gary Straatmann
- Term expiring June 1, 2010: Jim Cudaback, Janice McGregor, Sharon Mason, Jolene Ward
- Term expiring June 1, 2011: Dr. Mark Ellis, Sharon Martin, Duane Muhlbach, Barb Riege

Officers (1 year term)

President	Sharon Mason
Vice-President	Barb Riege
Secretary	Janice McGregor
Treasurer	Jim Cudaback

2009 BUFFALO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 19, Sunday (from 1-3 pm): BCHS Annual Meeting

May (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Mrs. David Anderson born May 11, 1849 (2009=160th)

May 30, Saturday: 24th Annual Wagons West Celebration Music from 10-7 pm and Exhibitors from 10-6 pm

June 14, Sunday: 2nd Annual 1/2 Marathon: Buffalo County Stampede reg is at 6 am-race begins at 7

June (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Mrs. William Nutter born June 16, 1835 (2009=174th)

July 3, Friday, (from 9-10:30): Members Only Night (watch city's fireworks)

July 23, Thursday (from 6:30-9 pm): 3rd Annual Trivia Contest

July 30- August 29: Smithsonian Harmonies

August (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Ms. Fannie Graves born August 1885 (2009=124th)

August 15, Saturday, (from 10-3 pm): 5th Annual Genealogy Open House with spotlight on One-Room School w/ a picnic!

October (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Maud Marston Burrows in 1864 (2009=145th)

December 4, Friday (from 6-8 pm): Member's Only Night: 22nd Annual Christmas Tree Walk

Dec. 5 through Dec. 13 (from 1-5 pm daily): 2nd Annual Christmas Tree Walk, Open to the Public

***Special Night: Friday Dec. 11 from 1-7 pm: Public Official Lighting at 6:30 pm

December (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Sarah Oliver born Dec. 1, 1832 (2009=177th)

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 68845
(308) 234-3041 www.bchs.us bchs@bchs.us

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.us@hotmail.com or sending them to our post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523 Kearney NE 68848.

We appreciate your support!

Director's Report

Greetings from the BCHS director's office!

Please join us for the following events in 2009. We appreciate your support and attendance. If there are events that you would like to see more of please let me know. We host events to share Buffalo County's past, but also to give guests a fun time. I encourage your feedback and look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely, Jennifer



Trails & Rails Museum
Buffalo County Historical Society
710 West 11th Street Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848-0523

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www.bchs.us

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