



Buffalo Tales



Volume 10, No. 2

Buffalo County Historical Society

February, 1987

THE FARMING COMMUNITY OF BUFFALO COUNTY, 1886

Compiled by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell
Introduction

The Kearney New Era of 1886, from which the information on Kearney 100 Years Ago was taken (Buffalo Tales, January 1987), also contained many stories of farm life in the county. Wolf hunts were held often through the years and the March 27 issue gives a detailed description. In April James McKittrick, alias Grand Curiosity, started to write for the Era, traveling to the farms in the west and northwest areas of Buffalo County on his horse, Button. Grand Curiosity describes the location of his sanctum "in the valley of Jehosephat, five miles northwest of Kearney."

GRAND WOLF HUNT

March 27, 1886—The enterprising farmers and stock raisers of Odessa Precinct have made all the necessary arrangements for holding a grand circle hunt on Saturday, April 3. Coyotes, gray wolves, and foxes have become very troublesome in this precinct, and an attempt will be made to round them up and exterminate them.

The boundaries of the drive will be the north and east sides of Odessa Township, the Platte river on the south, and one mile in Elm Creek township on the west. The north line will be driven under the captaincy of Mr. Wilson; the east line under R. E. Barney; south line under M. S. Richards; west line under L. A. Blanchard.

All parties will observe the following rules:

Strict obedience to the order of the Captains.

No one allowed to shoot unless the game is outside the line and there is no prospect of recovering it.

No intoxicating liquors will be allowed on the ground.

The lines for the circle will be formed at 9 o'clock A.M., those engaging in the sport meeting at points designated by the respective Captains, and the distributed forces as equally as possible will move toward the center of the circle, not faster than four miles an hour.

Each person is requested to bring a horn or something with which to terrify the wild animals. Mr. J. H. Richards has been chosen Field Marshall for this occasion and will see that everybody secures fair play and enjoys themselves.



A Wolf Hunt in the Amherst area at a later time.

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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. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the history of Buffalo County and its people.

Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Basic Membership	\$ 7.50
Institutional Membership	\$10.00
Supporting Membership	\$25.00

Life memberships are \$100.00 for an individual; \$150.00 for husband and wife, jointly.

Officers and Directors: President, Chandler Lynch III; Vice-President, Margaret Hohnholt; Secretary, Alice Howell; Treasurer, Leo Henricksen; Directors: Glen E. Wisch, Frances Link, Barb Avery, Merlin Berglund, Philip S. Holmgren, Minnette Steinbrink, Henrietta Rhamy, Edna Hehner, Robert Stubblefield and Marian Johnson. Publications Chairman, Alice Howell.

WITH THE SOCIETY

Remember these dates:

- February 22: General Meeting at Elm Creek in the Community Hall, 2:00 p.m. Barb Saum, Icel Northrup and Bertha Becker will give the program on Elm Creek's 100-year history.
- April 26: Annual Meeting, time and place to be announced.
- May 30-31: Wagons West Celebration at Trails and Rails Museum. Theme: Early 1920's and transition from horse to motor transportation. The committee for this event has been at work since last August.

Special Thanks to Volunteers

On twenty-seven Monday afternoons during the 1986 year, members of the Fort Kearney Genealogical Society met at the Trails & Rails Museum to continue cataloging Buffalo County archives. They have finished recording information from the school census records for the years 1982, 1983 and 1984. This information is now ready to be alphabetized and put into an index for each year. 1981 and 1982 have been indexed, and 1983 and 1984 will follow. In all 390 hours were spent on this project by these volunteers in 1986.

The number of hours for all volunteers during 1986 came to a total of 1,166. Martha Pierce spent 202 hours as a typist and general museum aide. Lawrence Curd put in many hours restoring the railroad cart.

THANKS to each and every volunteer. Your work is truly appreciated.

Anyone interested in volunteering some of your time and special skills call Mardi Anderson at the museum, 234-3041.

NEW MEMBERS

- Ray E. & Doris E. LundyKearney
- Neil L. Kilpatrick Winter Park, FL
- Robert S. AyresKearney

SUPPORTING MEMBERS

- Bonnie Bernholz.....Kearney
- Lawrence & Ardella WebbKearney
- Jack & Joan EricksonKearney
- Roger WischKearney
- Mitzi & Paul SteinbrinkKearney
- Violet Wensel.....Gibbon
- Wilma A. LarsenKearney

COUNTRY COMMENTS

Dove Hill, June 1—As many are anxious to know what sort of land is in the State of Nebraska, together with the agricultural prospects and commercial business that is carried on, I propose, by your permission, to give from time to time through the columns of your valuable paper, my notes truthfully as I can find them. As it is my intention to solicit insurance against fire, lightning, hail, tornadoes, cyclones for some of the best companies in the world, I will have a fair chance of seeing the country, and reporting accordingly; and will also solicit subscriptions for the ERA.

As I live just five miles northwest of Kearney, among farmers, all of which have been and are busily engaged in sowing and planting to a great extent, rumor sayeth greater than has ever before been done in this section or part of Buffalo County. My sanctum is built upon the farm of Mr. George Mancer in Section 30, Township 9, Range 16. He is my son-in-law; he intends to strictly give his best attention to agricultural and horticulturalism. The land in this section of the country is excellent. Crops in general look good.

The land is owned on the east side by Mr. George W. McGill, who has a very fine farm and mansion. Mr. McGill is making great improvements by planting the choicest selection of shade and fruit trees, all of which he has planted in avenues. Most of his vines and berries look beautiful, and ere long he will have a beautiful home. From his house, which is substantially built, can be seen three, or I might say five, miles of the waters of the Platte. He prides himself in raising a good stock of horses of the best pedigree for both farm and road service.

On the north side the land is owned by Mr. John McConville, who is a very industrious farmer. He also has shade trees planted in every direction. It is my opinion that trees grow faster in the valleys than elsewhere. This farm is just south of Dove Hill, which is owned by A. J. Crossley, J.P. On his farm is growing the best wheat that I have seen. His house is situated in a valley which shelters it from all hurricanes that may come, and his shade trees are arranged so as to make a grand appearance, and beautiful fruit trees and vines he has growing thriftily. Mr. Crossley came from Indiana in 1879 and is the only man of the legal profession in Dove Hill section.

Directly southerly from my sanctum lives Mr. Patrick O'Day, his farm being four miles direct west from Kearney. Mr. O'Day is getting somewhat tasty and he has built a handsome new barn. He carries on farming extensively, largely into hog raising. He was born in Ireland, and has been about eleven years in the vicinity of Kearney.

The great David Anderson farm and stock ranch is the next worthy of note. I am at loss to know what acreage the widow is possessed of, but I do say that her handsome residence adds greatly to the appearance of the country surrounding her palatial residence.

Crops and grass look good. The needful came down and watered the earth abundantly on Saturday evening. On Tuesday night, the 25th, a great wind storm passed over this country and shook houses a little but no serious damage was done.

Potato bugs are plentiful; wild plums will be scarce; wild grapes plentiful.

James McKittrick, *alias* Grand Curiosity

Riverdale, July 15th—Weather is very dry and small grain and late corn is suffering; early corn growing and beans and potatoes at a standstill for want of rain. Hay crop, except in center of draws and valleys will be light. Wheat seems to have a plump grain, but straw very short.

I had the pleasure of viewing the handsome two-story house lately built by Mrs. Sobiaska Thompson. I passed alongside of a large piece of wheat that looks good . . . She recently lost twenty of her fat hogs by cholera but is not discouraged and will still

try raising hogs. Her house is built on elevated ground. She has a new windmill and well. This is one of the best rolling land farms in the county.

I noticed handsome buildings southwest and curiosity caused me to stroll in that direction. I found the first house I came to was owned by Mr. Wm. Crossley, a carpenter of Kearney, but does not live on it but has it rented. I think his land is second to none in the valley. West of his farm some men are engaged in making a road from north to south, superintended by Mr. J. P. Hicks, who has a farm situated three miles from Odessa.

—Grand Curiosity



Roadbuilding in the early days.

Odessa, July 20—Last week when the thermometer stood 108 in the shade, I and my pony Button took a trip over the valley to the new town of Odessa. Along the way I found that almost every farmer was busily engaged with either the Deering binder or header harvesting their grain, which is in abundance in this section of the country; which is noted for good land and good farmers and beautiful buildings and groves surrounding.

Just in the immediate vicinity of the village I had a brief conversation with Mr. Richards, who is an Englishman, and carries on farming extensively . . . His house is of modern style, neatly painted; his granary and stables are built to taste and also neatly painted; his crops are all good.

I next visited the farm of Mr. B. F. Tussing. Two years ago he purchased an excellent farm of one hundred sixty acres within a mile northwest of Odessa. He is making preparations to build a new house next summer and is planting avenues of walnut trees in various directions, and all are looking good. His wheat crop is the best I have seen.

On my return I met three teams heavily laden with sand from the Platte river for plastering a new two-story house which Mr. Hunt is building on his farm at Stanley. They report crops good in the vicinity of Stanley.

Bush and jack rabbits are plentiful. Prairie chickens scarce and I think quail will be plentiful. Unless some water is turned into the canal soon, fish will suffer.

—Grand Curiosity

August 7, 1886—The appearance of the whole country has taken a sudden change since my last. In consequence of the great drought, farmers and business men were all discouraged; but how soon the Giver of all good gifts sent the rain. Let all that is on earth give glory to God.

I notice that nearly all the small grain is harvested and safely put in shocks . . . In

my last item about Odessa I omitted to mention the happy home of Mr. Otto Olson. His farm consists of eighty acres, all of which is laid out in beautiful style; his grain, corn and meadows are excellent, and his grain is neatly stacked. Everything looks prosperous. When he appears on the road it is behind a beautiful young black horse. He was born in Sweden and has been eight years in Buffalo County.

Being somewhat anxious to see the village of Stanley I proceeded to within one-fourth mile east and called "whoa" to Button; he obeyed and I viewed what I must admit is a beautiful farm owned by Mr. Rice. Some years previous he planted in order trees the whole length of his farm which runs on the north side of a beautiful road and they form a grand appearance. Two hundred feet from this road, about the center of his farm, he has built a very handsome house. — There is only one thing about this valuable farm and house that I disapprove of; that notwithstanding his wealth and happiness on this earth, he is a bachelor . . .

Just in sight on the next place north is Mr. John T. Hunt's 160 acres of tableland, for which he paid the sum of \$2,000, and has built a new frame house costing \$1,000, neatly painted and finished. He carries on farming with vim and is assisted by his two able-bodied sons.

I arrived at the little village (Stanley) which consists of two stores, dry goods and grocers by Mr. Butdick, and the other by Mr. Wagoner, who is also postmaster. Blacksmith Mr. Melville Stocker is a first-class workman and is building a new house. A hotel is kept by Mr. Park. The school house is in the immediate vicinity. In speaking of schoolhouses I desire to congratulate the people of Buffalo County in having good schoolhouses. The scarcest buildings are churches. In the East in almost every direction can be seen churches. On Sabbath days the roads are lined with beautiful carriages well filled going to their several places of worship. I hope ere long this land of plenty, that flows as it were with milk and honey, will enjoy the same privileges.

On my return I had the pleasure of seeing the large herd of cattle belonging to Mr. Huston. His farm is a large one, and well supplied with never-failing waters of Wood River, being one of the best in the county for stock or agricultural purposes. He has placed in his herd a cow and young bull which he purchased at the sale of Mr. Geo. W. Frank at the Phil Kearney Ranch.

Mr. John Summerville, a wealthy farmer north of Wood River reports crops good in his section. Frank McGee, a farmer living eight miles north of Buda, reports crops in good condition.

—Grand Curiosity

September 24, 1886—Hay harvest booming all over the county . . . Mr. John McConville is entitled to the cracker box for the largest and best tomatoes. As he lives near by my sanctum, just five miles from Kearney, I viewed his vines and crops in general. I measured one vine which covered completely 14 x 11 feet on the earth all well laden with fruit; this is only one of many similar which are growing. In one draw I also noted that his corn was extra, and for curiosity's sake I took one stalk which measured eleven feet, ten inches, weight, including one ear, nineteen pounds.

Corn in every direction is good; hay is light; potatoes almost a failure; melons plentiful; cabbages none; a great increase in fowl everywhere.

—Grand Curiosity

My Sanctum, September 30, 1886—First frost of the season the night of the 27th. Overcoats in use on the 26th inst. Wild geese plentiful and chickens scarce.

A few days ago I had the pleasure of visiting the new village of Odessa which will be booming before long. The U.P. railroad has placed a station house here which will be finished in a short time. The elevator is doing a rushing business in all sorts of grain

Buffalo County Historical Society

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Kearney, Nebraska

under the able management of Mr. Lynch. The new school in Odessa is opened and taught by Miss Tuft of Kearney.

I had the pleasure recently of spending two hours with M. A. Williams, postmaster of Riverdale. As I passed around his granary and corn cribs I noticed that he is a genius. They are so constructed that when grain is required, by moving a slide the quantity you need moves to the several boxes without labor. He has about five acres of sugar cane and owns a mill and pans by which he works his cane up into fine syrup. My visit was brief, part of the time being occupied by myself and Button partaking of the goodly things which he has in abundance for man and beast to eat.

—Grand Curiosity

October 23, 1886—Beautiful weather; threshing all done; ground very dry; no sickness to report; farmers commencing corn picking. Rumor has it that cholera is destroying hogs north of Kearney.

A cemetery association has been formed at Dove Hill. A board of trustees was elected whose names are as follows: A. J. Crossley, John McConville, Geo. A. Mancer, E. Richards and James McKittrick, secretary. A. J. Crossley gave one acre of land for the purpose . . . The spot is very desirable, being dry, upon the table land and six miles from Kearney.

Mr. McCaul, mill owner at Elm Creek, is sending flour and feed by the carload into Kearney. I had the honor of forming an acquaintance with Mr. James Kearney, of Buda. He is a good agriculturalist, farms 300 acres and keeps a large stock of cattle and hogs. He is a justice of the peace.

A few days ago I shot five wild ducks at one shot. Who can beat that?

—Grand Curiosity