



Buffalo Tales



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ANNEVAR — RAVENNA'S PARTY FOR CENTRAL NEBRASKA PART I

by Valerie Vierk

Ravenna's first summer celebration, Annevar, dubbed "Ravenna's party for central Nebraska," was first held on August 15-17, 1923. It has been held every year since except for the war years: 1942-45. Annevar is, of course, a take off on Aksarben, which is Nebraska spelled backwards. It just so happened that Ravenna spelled backwards created a word that could be pronounced, and the name stuck.

The first Annevar came about when some of the city leaders felt that they'd been "shirking a little" in providing entertainment for central Nebraska. Considering the size of the town, approximately 1,500, this shows the leadership qualities of the people of the small community to feel this obligation.

That year the Odd Fellows of Nebraska were holding their district picnic in Ravenna and the city organizers decided to incorporate this into a three day event for the town. A soliciting committee canvassed the town and raised \$1,200-\$1,500. The businessmen always contributed heavily to this fund, and the intent always was to have a "free" celebration i.e. free stage shows.

Many events delighted the spectators. Garver's Flying Circus, featuring pilot Garner and his flying partner, Paul Duncan, the "Thrill Master" held the crowd's attention. Mr. Duncan performed wing walks, trapeze stunts under the wing, hung by his teeth, his toes, by one hand while flying low over the crowd, and then performed the grand finale, "leaping off into space, trusting his parachute" from 5,000 feet.

Pilot Garver performed tail spins, ten loop-the-loops in succession and a



**Bill Flack, Grace Taylor and Myrl (Mahoney) Pesek
with "Matched greyhounds" Circa 1927.**

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

July 29—I have just returned from a building committee meeting for the Historical Society.

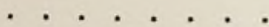
Tonight we met with representatives from two different building companies. We told them we were interested in a building 72'x90' built on the Trails & Rails Museum grounds. Our request is for them to present plans for a multipurpose museum display building. One that meets all city codes and to be compatible with the other buildings on the grounds. From this they are to give us a "budget figure" for us to work with and have it back to us within the next two weeks.

We also talked about the possibility of hiring a carpenter, buying the material and build the building ourselves with volunteers.

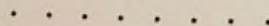
We continue to receive historical items for the museum, but at the present time there is not a place to display them.

We have also received some sizable donations for a new building. I hope our members would keep the museum in their minds for bequests and donations in the immediate future. Just contact any of the board members for any information.

Thank You
Larry Nansel, President



MEMORIAL GIFTS RECEIVED in memory of Chandler Lynch, include Donna Foster, Vaughn and Judy Plock, Mel and Phyllis Sayer, Midtown Business Center, American Legion Post #52, Kearney Cosmopolitan Club, Business Professional Credit Management, Dr. Melvin and Dorothy Zichek, Philip Holmgren, Alvie and Ruth Payne, Merchants Check-Rite, Tim and Nancy Norwood, Dale and Wilma Ingram, First National Bank of Kearney, Eugene and Nellie Hunt, Carl and Bernice Oran, John and Mary Haeberle, Virgil and Janice Salestrom, Catharine Bahnsen, Warren and Mable Messman, Vincent and Ruby Wolford, Reinhold and Joyce Ehly, Ruth Denison, Robert and Melva Goldenstein, Dale and Maryelaine Cushing, Alice Howell, JoElla Gillespie, Henry and Margaret Hohnholt, Roger and Susan Jasnoch, A. B. Kriz, Glenn and Jean Isom, Carl and Edna Spelts and June Koeppel totaling \$655.00.



NEW LIFE MEMBER
Harold F. McClure, Kearney

stunt called "the falling leaf." He also gave rides for \$1.00 a minute. That year he also performed a humanitarian act. Miss Helen Goehring of Ravenna was in the plane, ready to go for a joy ride when a distraught man, Mr. Hanson of Arcadia approached the pilot, saying his son was seriously ill in the Grand Island hospital and he had missed the last eastbound train out of Ravenna, #40. Pilot Garver quickly agreed to fly the father to Grand Island, with Miss Goehring still aboard. Thus, the young lady received a sixty mile ride for the price of a dollar!

The Welterweight wrestling championship was held at the Pastime Theatre that year, with local wrestler, Charlie Pesek wrestling Ralph Ferris of Boelus. Charlie won the first and third falls, and was declared the winner. Charlie's older brother, John, who was already dubbed "The Nebraska Tigerman" put on "a fast exhibition" with his training partner, Stanley Pinta.

Not to be outdone, the Ravenna Women's Club sponsored the "Better Baby Contest" that drew seventy-four babies. Unlike the baby contests of later Annevars, where babies are judged on "cuteness", this contest seemed to be all business. The babies were weighed and scored, and Mrs. C. H. England, Director of the Division of Child Hygiene of the State Department of Health, supervised the gathering of data. The score cards were taken to Lincoln and the results were not known for two weeks.

As the float parades were held in the mornings, people would bring a picnic lunch and make a day of it. They were welcome to eat their lunch on the lawns of town.

The Kiddies Parade had its debut, and this continues to the present. It was two blocks in length, with 100 kiddies participating. One entry was a Red Cross ambulance on running gears of a little wagon with a mother cat and kittens riding within. Another entry was a doll buggy with bantam hen and chicks, "contentedly riding therein."

Another float parade was held, this representing various business interests of the town, with fifteen to twenty "handsomely decorated cars and trucks." First place went to the Burlington machinists and roundhouse employees who decorated a vehicle to look like a locomotive with a big bell ringing.

On the main street outdoor stage, the Larazolas, a trapeze act performed before "thousands of people." Also on the stage "Cactus Canyon" was performed under the management and direction of the American Legion. It was described as "a sort of burlesque on night life in gold camps of '49." The Ravenna News reported that "things moved with a whirl, with emphasis on the whirl."

Of course there was the carnival, always alluring, with one ride, the merry-go-round that cost five cents a ride. Band concerts, watermelon eating contests, sack races, water fights and ballgames rounded out the program.

And, of course, it had to rain the second day, but some activities were merely moved from the ball field to Yanda's Pavilion just south of town along the Beaver Creek.

The last night, Garver's Flying Circus gave a display of their night fireworks and Yanda's Pavilion echoed with a band and many happy feet danced over the 50 x 100 foot maple floor.

Annevar #1 was declared a success, as have each successive ones.

Annevar #5 (August 19 and 20, 1927) had good, cool weather. There was only one arrest, little drinking day or night but one concession man was considered "objectionable" and he was closed up early the first day.

The platform attractions were unusually good. The Miller Trio roller skated and

Ed Holder and his trained mule Ebenezer were especially popular. (The account didn't state what Ebenezer's repertoire included). The attendance for two days was estimated at 7-10,000 (low) as there were other celebrations in other cities.

In the heart of the Depression, Annevar was still held, and probably was most needed as a relief from the woes of the hot, dirty thirties. But in those days of limited transportation, and no television, people flocked to local celebrations in spite of the heat.

Annevar #12 was held August 10-12, 1934. The local newspaper stated "The Annevar has not been accompanied by quite as much hullabaloo as in some former years, because efforts have been made on the part of the community to minimize the expense of less important features in order to contract standard quality acts."

"Echoes of Broadway" a revue from the Pacific coast performed twice a day with changes of costumes. This was considered the biggest act ever booked at Annevar, but the afternoon performances had to be cut short because of the heat. Carnival rides were the merry-go-round, ferris wheel and glider.

"Greenslit's Gleanings," a weekly column of jokes and observations by Roy Greenslit of the local lumber yard, made a simple, but important statement, "Will have plenty of ice for Annevar." If the ladies wanted to look extra pretty for the celebration, Dorothy's Beauty Salon advertised an "Annevar Special" wave for \$2.00.

Annevar #13 (1935) featured "Farmer Burns" wrestling local athlete, John Pesek. John's eleven year-old son, Jackie, made his ring debut wrestling another local boy, Dale Bays, also eleven. The Ravenna News wrote: "Their feats were not exactly unprofessional."

Also that year, Mlle. Florence performed sixty-two feet in the air from an eighty foot flexible pole using no net. Since the pole couldn't be erected on the concrete on main street, it was placed on Rev. Randall's lawn one block north of the business district. Floodlights were used and spectators could see the act while downtown if they desired.

Japanese performers Osaki and Taki, acrobats also performed. The Heal Sisters, who were to perform in a 4-H singing concert, had to cancel because a piano could not be borrowed to accompany them.

A kittenball game was held between the Omaha Hotten Tots, a Negro girl team, and the Ravenna girls, but this author wasn't able to determine who won.

As for police activities, "a very tipsy gentleman had to spend several hours in the



Ravenna's 100th centennial combined with Annevar #60 (1986)

(Photo by Valerie Vierk)

cooler." The local paper also reported that in spite of legal liquor (Prohibition had just been repealed) intoxication was no worse than other years.

The August 23 edition of the *Ravenna News* declared Annevar a success, with the addition of \$100 in the black. The crowd was estimated at 10,000 to see the big show. This was considered much bigger than the previous year's crowd.

Annevar #17 (August 17-19, 1939) enjoyed three days of cool weather. Mr. Frederick, superintendent of the carnival, estimated the crowd and said it was the largest assembly he had seen during the current season.

Twenty floats paraded down main, led by the Rockville Band under the able direction of Frovin Rasmussen. The Omaha Cold Storage (known as the egg plant) used 6,000 eggs in their float. Bredenburg Co., the local Chevrolet dealer, displayed a 1902 Oldsmobile which received lots of comments. The Greenslit Lumber Co. and Farmer's Coop floats were "cleverly gotten up" and attracted much applause from the crowd.

On the stage, Schad & Co. presented "Baby Leroy." Professor Kirk's animal shows featured trained dogs, goats and a mule. The Flying Williards, a pair of triple-bar artists were among the best performers ever seen at the Annevar stage.

Dances at the City Auditorium and Finder's Hall (upstairs of the Big Onion) were well attended.

Annevar #18 (July 25-27, 1940) was moved ahead to escape the heat "but will be with us anyway. The Ravenna News stated the original purpose of the celebration: "It is not commercial in nature. It is offered in the hope that you will come and enjoy the program, relax and forget your troubles. That is why Annevar is free."

Ray Fredericks, a balloonist of forty years, was only able to execute one balloon ascension and subsequent parachute jump due to bad weather, but "that one was a beauty." And the balloon hung in the air long after the parachute had cut loose and landed. The balloon traveled over five miles before coming to earth. A Ravenna woman remembers her older brother, and other boys racing after the balloon, trying to be there when it finally touched down.

The Grand Theatre, formerly the Pastime Theatre, held continuous movies.

On the downtown stage, the Peerless Potters, an aerial troupe of seven, performed on a rigging forty feet high and seventy feet long. It was set up on the Methodist parsonage lawn, a block north of main street and was billed as the "best act of its kind in the country." It was announced that the troupe had signed at the San Francisco fair later in the summer. "The act was an exhibit of training and skill seldom seen at small town celebrations."

The Kress troupe, wizard acrobats, and Phyllis Jean, an acrobatic contortionist and high trapeze act, also performed.

The Kiddies Parade was a "half-mile display of kids in costume.

A flower show boasted two hundred different exhibits in spite of the "searing heat last week." The ladies counted seventy different kinds of flowers, which included thirty-six varieties of cactus. Rev. Chanowith displayed five dozen gladiolus and a dahlia bloom that was ten inches in diameter.

Saturday's attendance was estimated at 10,000-12,000. "Hardly standing room anywhere on the main street."

(Continued in next issue)

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Institutional Membership \$20.00
Supporting Membership \$30.00 +
Life memberships are \$150.00 for an individual, \$200.00 husband and wife.

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TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

After the hot, hot days we've had, it seems like a good time to visit the Museum and see the Collection of Dolls which will be inhabiting the church from August 6th through August 24th. We are excited to present part of a personal collection of 200 dolls.

It doesn't seem possible that the summer is two-thirds gone. We have been working on the grounds, the children's group has been meeting, there was a small wedding in the church on a very hot July Saturday, and a group of friends from the Mormon church rebuilt the ramp on the west side of the depot and repaired the merry-go-round, also on a very hot Saturday.

Come see what is going on and especially to enjoy the doll show.

— Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

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