



# Buffalo Tales



Volume 22, No. 3

Buffalo County Historical Society

May-June, 1999

## RAVENNA AREA CEMETERIES

### PART I — *Ravenna Municipal*

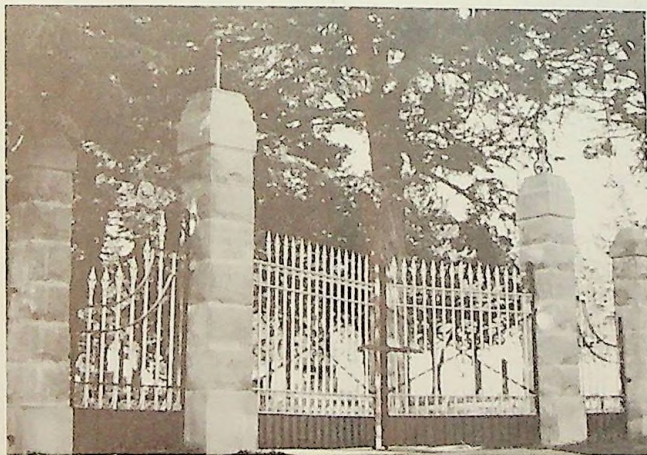
by Valerie Vierk

There are several cemeteries in the Ravenna area: Ravenna Municipal, Majors, Sweetwater, Sweetwater Norwegian Lutheran, St. Joseph's, St. Wenceslaus, Moss, Sodtown, Dow and Burgess. There are probably some other tiny, lesser known ones. Horak is three miles north of Ravenna but is in Sherman county, as is the Norwegian Trinity Lutheran Evangelical near Hazard. Space limitations will only allow a discussion of Ravenna's Highland "old" section, Mt. Calvary, Moss and St. Wenceslaus.

The Ravenna cemetery, as it's commonly called, (municipal) is located one-half mile west of Ravenna. It is the largest cemetery in the area. There are three sections, the "old cemetery" part and Mt. Calvary that lie north of the road, and the "new cemetery," that lies south of the road. Officially, the old cemetery is named Highland, and the new Highland Park. Bordering on the north of Highland lies the Catholic cemetery, named, "Mt. Calvary."

In May of 1888, a plot of approximately five acres was sold to the incorporated village of Ravenna for \$200.00. This was named Highland. In 1904 an adjoining three acres to the north was acquired by the village for \$120.00. This was named Mt. Calvary. In 1915 the village purchased ten acres that lay south of the original plot for \$2,000. This became known as Highland Park.

Although Highland originated in 1888, several graves show earlier dates of death. This is because these graves were moved from neighboring smaller cemeteries and from



Highland Cemetery Main Gate in Ravenna

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PAST PRESIDENT:

The Annual Meeting in April was well attended. Four new people were elected to the Board of Directors for three-year terms: James R. Ganz, Sr., Robert W. Goldenstein, Larry Nansel and Bertha M. Scheetz, all of Kearney.

Directors going off the Board were Wilma Harder of Gibbon, Helen Kinnaman of Amherst, Margaret Hohnholt and Dick Ikenberry, both of Kearney.

At the May Board of Directors meeting Larry Nansel was elected President; Jack M. Homer, Vice President; Janeen Vokoun, Secretary; and Mardi Anderson, Treasurer. Their terms of office are for one year.

I want to express my appreciation to all of the Board members, all the Historical Society Members and the Museum Director, all of whom have volunteered many hours working at the museum this past year.

Thank you!

—Wilma Harder, Past President

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A new Publications Committee is being formed to take care of the bi-monthly *Buffalo Tales*, newsletters, and the publication of *Tales of Buffalo County*. Two people have volunteered to serve, and two more are needed. If you want to see our publications continue, please consider serving on this committee.

Contact Alice Howell at 237-7858, or any of the officers of the Society for more information.

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Member input is needed on tours and programs to be sponsored by the Buffalo County Historical Society. Please contact your officers or directors if you have any suggestions. The tour to Dancing Earth Lodge at Wellfleet and historical places in North Platte on May 1 was an interesting experience and very well planned by Ed Anderson. Let us know what you would like.

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During the months that the museum was closed, a crew of members working on Buffalo County Archives met on most Mondays to update and file material in our archives. Several family genealogies have been received, and these require card indexing. Many old and loose newspapers of the county have been scanned for death notices and marriage records, which have been noted and filed. Visitors who have dropped in for information are usually from Buffalo County, but some have been from other states looking for old family records. Having Buffalo County on the internet has brought in many inquiries, all of which require answers and more card filing. Historical archives are an important part of the offerings of the Buffalo County Historical Society.

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NEW LIFE MEMBER

Mrs. Charles Oldfather, Lincoln

NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Marie Reiter, Kearney  
Paul and Marilyn Young, Kearney  
Dottie M. Campbell, Kearney

Marge Lauer, Holdrege  
Beverly J. Thomas, Wood River  
Shelley L. Bush-Goins, Salt Lake City, UT

burials on private property, as used to be the custom. In June 1889, three Civil War veterans were moved to Highland.

Charles Dudley Smith, aged sixteen, who died in December 1886, was the first person buried in Highland. (Obviously he was buried before the cemetery was "officially" designated.) He was the son of Erastus and Mary Smith, the first settlers in the Ravenna area. In August 1889, the *Ravenna News* reported that a beautiful and expensive Scotch granite marker was placed on Charlie's grave. An iron picket fence was also erected to protect the grave. The fence no longer exists but the family marker is an obelisk about eight feet in height.

The May 7, 1909 edition of the *Ravenna News* reported that 800 feet of iron fence would be erected around Highland. Today (1999) the original ornate iron fence still stands. It runs along the south and east side of Highland. The large, also ornate, main gate opens on the south. Two smaller pedestrian gates open on each side of the main entrance. On the east, steps lead up to another smaller gate. When entering this cemetery through these gates, one gets the feeling of stepping back in time.

In the early 1970's a Ravenna youth, David Shipp, undertook the considerable task of painting the entire fence for his Eagle Scout award. The city provided the silver paint and David labored a month to complete this project. In the mid-1990's Lester Dean Duncan, the sexton, painted the fence again.

In the mid-1970's the *Ravenna News* carried a shocking picture of a deer that had become impaled on the sharp spikes when attempting to jump the fence.

Rows of red cedars are planted in Highland, reminders that considerable thought and planning was involved in the early years. They are now large and give a "green cathedral" effect when walking under them as the author's mother says. Some visitors are comforted by the sound of the breezes sighing through the cedars, while others find the sound discomfoting.

In the northern part of Highland stands an equipment shed that is decorative and reflects an older architecture. An old supply tank also still remains. It is in this area that the annual Memorial Day services are held each year. A white statue, a small replica of the obelisk Washington Monument, honors the veterans and it is here that a basket of flowers is placed each Memorial Day. From behind the shed wafts "Taps" after the firing of the rifles.

Each year also, the entire roll call of the deceased veterans from Ravenna is read by a VFW member. As a Girl Scout listening in the late 1950's, the list was shorter and few names were familiar to the author except an uncle, Wilbur Nolda, who was killed in Korea. Now the list takes much longer and many names are known. Each year also, the local Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts decorate the veterans' graves with poppy sprigs entwined around a small white cross.

An outstanding monument memorializes Ferdinand Jelinek, who died in action in WWI in France on September 29, 1918 at the age of 27. A picture of him in his uniform is preserved behind glass on the monument and makes his story more vivid. Above his head are engraved crossed rifles, crossed flags, and crossed olive branches. In the center is the hat of the WWI uniform. The death of this young man was even more heartbreaking for his family because they waited from October to late February to learn if he was a prisoner of war or had died in action. The *Ravenna News* carried letters to his family in which Ferdinand wrote: "They say we have 49 chances out of 50 of

seeing home again, so don't worry." The February 14, 1919 edition of the *News* carried the headlines, "He Sleeps in Flanders Fields." The young man from the prairie had been buried in France on October 11 of the previous year.

In this same period, the family of another Ravenna veteran, Hubert Pesek, was stunned to learn that he was alive and had arrived in Virginia in fair condition. He had been reported killed in action in France in November.

In the early 1990's the Ravenna V.F.W. and Legion Post erected poles to fly large flags on Memorial Day for deceased veterans. Their names are written on their flag. This "Aisle of Honor" located in the new cemetery is beautiful to behold, especially when a breeze unfurls all the flags. Additionally, with the graves decorated, the cemetery on Memorial Day resembles a large, colorful garden.

Many graves of children lie in Highland. Some of these have lambs carved on them, a common practice in the early part of this century. It is an entirely fitting symbol.

One of these children is little Henry George West, who lies just east of the main gate. He was born October 12, 1909 and died January 23, 1914. This marker, too, holds his picture behind oval glass, a beautiful dark-eyed, dark-haired child. *Ravenna News* tells the story of how the little boy fell from a load of cobs, but wasn't believed seriously injured. Several days later his stomach was swollen, but he reported no pain. When this condition didn't improve, he was taken to Omaha where a physician determined that his appendix was arranged abnormally, which caused it to rupture. Strangely, the child experienced no pain even at this late stage. The doctor said this abnormality was only the second case in history. (This condition was determined to have nothing to do with his recent fall.) Little Henry was reported to be in hopeful spirits and voluntarily repeated "The Lord's Prayer" and "Now I lay me down to sleep," in the time just prior to going into surgery. As he was the only son of the West family who operated the West hotel, many in town knew him and mourned him.



Marker of Ferdinand Jelinek  
WWI Veteran

Another unique and poignant marker in Highland is that of twins Freddie and Ernest Wilke, who were born August 14, 1893. Ernest died September 19 and Freddie followed on September 28 of the same year. On their marker are two separate hearts that are touching.

The marker for Doris Bachkora, born October 12, died December 31, 1922, carries the carving of a slain dove, a grim but accurate symbol of a child's life cut short.

Erma Leota Wheeler, born August 18, 1910, died May 6, 1913, has a lamb upon her marker, but it is a peaked-faced lamb, which gives an even more poignant effect.

But the grave of James I. McDonald is perhaps the most thought provoking. For nearly a hundred years little Jimmy lay totally alone at the far western edge of Highland, down a little hill from any other graves. He died on April 10, 1888 at the age of 1 year, 8 months and 25 days. The inscription below the dates is no longer readable. The outline of a lamb is carved within the sandstone marker. Author could not obtain information as to why this grave lies so isolated from all others except that of Albert John Ruthstrom, who was buried a few feet from Jimmy in 1983.

Georgie Wiseman, whose marker also has a lamb, was born on March 21, 1907 and died the next year on her birthday.

The above mentioned childrens' graves are scattered throughout Highland, but in the early years a section was designated for babies. This was located in the northeast section of Highland, just south of the Mt. Calvary gate. Author remembers seeing these graves that were marked by metal stakes with names in a little square marker behind glass. These rude markers no longer exist.

Mt. Calvary has a main gate on the east with the name inscribed in an arch overhead. A fence of a different design extends northward from the gate. This is a round metal painted silver. In the early 1960's the Ravenna Catholic parish erected a life-sized statue of Jesus on the cross which stands at the center of the northern boundary. This has provided an inspiration for many who come to visit the graves of loved ones. In Mt. Calvary lie some very old graves; also many new ones as burial sites are still available.

NOTE: Part II will appear in the July-August issue. Sources will follow Part II.



Marker of Freddie and Ernest Wilke, Twins

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- Basic Membership ..... \$15.00
- Institutional Membership ..... \$20.00
- Supporting Membership ..... \$30.00 +

Life memberships are \$150.00 for an individual; \$200.00 husband and wife.

*Directors*

Term expiring June 1, 2000: Minnette Steinbrink, Susan Underhill, Pauline Wells, and Dora Day.

Term expiring June 1, 2001: Edward Anderson, Wilma Larsen, Janeen Vokoun, and Jack M. Horner.

Term expiring June 1, 2002: James R. Ganz, Sr., Larry Nansel, Bertha M. Scheetz, and Robert W. Goldenstein.

*Officers (1 year term)*

- President ..... Larry Nansel
- Vice President ..... Jack M. Horner
- Secretary ..... Janeen Vokoun
- Treasurer ..... Mardi Anderson

**TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM**

Although Trails & Rails was officially closed from Labor Day to Memorial Day, there were many special appointments for visitors to tour the museum. In late April students in the 4th grade of Kearney Public Schools spent a day of living history at the museum, and in May classes from the surrounding area visited. More than one thousand students and teachers took part in our spring school program.

Clean-up day on May 8 saw many volunteers pitching in to get the buildings and grounds ready for the May 31st summer opening. Guides have been hired and we're now ready for a busy summer.

The highlight of the annual Wagons West event on June 6 was the dedication and opening of the Boyd House on the museum grounds.

Don't forget Collection Day on July 15th. If you have a collection you would be willing to share, let us know. Also, remember Living History Day on August 16th.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

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

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