

Buffalo Tales

September/October 2014

History of the Church of the Brethren of Buffalo County, NE By Helen Steinmeyer

In the fall of 1880, the Moses Snavelly family arrived in Buffalo County settling on a farm six miles northeast of Kearney. The Olney and S. M. Forney families and Jacob Kimmel followed in March of 1881. Mrs. Snavelly and Mr. Forney were brother and sister. Jacob Kimmel was the father of Mrs. Forney. The Forneys moved onto a farm eight miles north of Kearney.

On May 28, 1881 twelve people met at the Snavelly home to organize a German Baptist Church. The group agreed to hold worship services at Mack School which was near the Wood river; therefore, it became known as the Wood River Church. They planned to reach out twenty miles in all directions. People attended from many miles and S.M. Forney traveled unknown miles holding worship services in rural schoolhouses. His remuneration barely paid for the axle grease for his buggy wheels.

By 1895 the Wood River Church was large enough that it divided. The Wood River group would be responsible for the area south of the south Loup River and the area north of the south Loup river would be the responsibility for people living in that area. A new church was organized in the Northwest corner of Buffalo County by S.M. Forney that met at the Elder Grove School. A local young farmer, Will McClellan, married Susie Forney, one of Mr. Forney's daughters. He was called to be the pastor of this new church. Another Forney daughter, Nancy, had married Ezra Fread, a civil war veteran who had taken the last available homestead in Buffalo County. The Freads became pillars in the new church. A church building was built and dedicated on June 18, 1916, and it was named the South Loup Church of the Brethren. When Will McClellan retired from farming, Lewis Albrecht became the minister.

In 1897-98, the Wood River Church decided to establish mission work in the town of Kearney. They wanted to be south of the railroad tracks and near the center of town. At first they met at a house at 16th and Avenue H. The main purpose was to provide physical culture for the boys and day care and nursery for the girls. Mary Frantz, Hattie Netzley and Carrrie Barkdoll from Batavia, Illinois came to work in the mission. Ira Snavelly, son of Moses Snavelly, had been attending Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and he came back to help in the mission. Later Carrie Barkdoll left and the Nebraska District asked Virginia Wine from Osceola, Nebraska to come to Kearney. Eventually, Ira Snavelly and Virginia Wine married.

Since 78 people attended the love feast in the summer of



German Baptist Church of the Brethren was built in Kearney in 1898. It was originally located at 18th St and A Ave in Kearney. It is now located at the Trails & Rails Museum.

1898, the church decided to buy seven acres at 18th street and Avenue A. This would be ample room for a church building and for the horses and buggies as no one drove cars. The new church was dedicated in 1900 and had cost \$1165. Early in the 1900's the German Baptist denomination divided into three groups. The most strict group remained German Baptist, the most modern became the Brethren Church and the middle group became known as the Church of the Brethren-thus, this group became the Kearney Church of the Brethren.

Ira C. Snively was the first pastor assigned to the Kearney Mission; pastors who served down through the years were Amos Nickey, John Wright, Paul Nickey, J.J. Tawzer, Will McClellan, L. M. Albrecht, S.E. Thompson, C. E. Trombly, Samuel M. Forney, Bruce Flora, Foster Myers, and Dwight Oltman. Church records tell of organizing Sunday School, weekly Christian worker's meetings and an active youth group. The largest attendance was in 1927. The Kearney church hosted the Nebraska district meetings in 1905, 1921, 1936 and 1954. The Kearney congregation was discontinued when the district merged with Kansas in 1963. When the Salvation Army purchased the building and land for their expansion, the building was moved and stands today at the Trails and Rails museum.

Speaking at the 25th anniversary of the South Loup Church, Arthur Binder said, "As a child when they saw the two horse buggy passing our place we knew it was Saturday afternoon and Elder S.M. Forney was on his way to hold services at the Elder Grove church."

The South Loup congregation continued to grow and was very active. The two room cottage that served as the parsonage was attached to the north end of the church building to provide

more Sunday school rooms. Following Lewis Albrecht as pastor was Galen Barkdoll who had married Bernice Snavelly. They served from 1927 through 1935; James Ward, Samuel Forney, Foster Meyers, a returned missionary Goddard ,and workers from the Back to the Bible in Lincoln, NE served at various times. Family names connected with the church through the years were Royle, Saunders, Cherry, Fread, Reitz, Ward, Berkheimer, Wing, John Kelly, Arthur Binder, Goddard and Hughes.

Teenagers visiting from Holdrege could not understand how human beings could live in such up and down country as in the South Loup area and when teenagers from there went to Holdrege they exclaimed "How could anyone ever decide to live where everything is flat and drab. You can't even find a stone to throw at a cow."

With the depression years, poor economy, drought, and fewer people due to larger farms, the congregation was dissolved by the district in 1962. The church building still stands today and has been remodeled into a home.

We, of this present generation, owe much appreciation and thanks to the efforts of these pioneers who were so faithful in providing places to worship and teaching Christian values that have anchored our hearts and souls in the Bible.

About the Author

Helen Steinmeyer is the great granddaughter of S.M.Forney. Most of this information came from the minutes of the Kearney church as Ms. Steinmeyer read through the books at the Trails & Rails Museum. She also gathered some of the information from her own family history.



Explore the Holocaust



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(Picture and ad submitted by the UNK History Department)

2014 Calendar of Events

All of November: Christmas Decorating (during regular business hours)
First two weekends in Dec. (Dec.6/7 and Dec. 13/14) from 1-5 pm:
 Open to the public: 27th Annual Christmas Tree Walk *** Saturday, December 6 from 12-1pm: Members Only Preview of the 27th Annual Christmas Tree Walk***-check out dozens of trees decorated by area not-for-profits that tie their mission into this year's theme. Each theme is announced at the end of the current year's Tree Walk.

Education notes:

Listen to Mardi Anderson on KGFW 1340 AM at 9 am on the last Friday of each month for a fabulous story about Buffalo County!

Fabulous Fridays are held on the 2nd Friday monthly at 2 pm. Locations vary, so check the web site.

January: Friendship Quilts

February: Dowsing

March: Jacob's Sheep and Spinning

April: Early Electricity in Buffalo County

May: Aprons - Now and Then

June: One Room Schools

July: Early Kitchen Utensils

August: Horse Shoeing

September: Apples

October: Old Time Musical Instruments

November: Hand Corn Husking

December: Christmas Traditions

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 68848

(308) 234-3041 www.bchs.us bchs.us@hotmail.com

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

We appreciate your support!

Director's Report

-There were four events just this past Friday and Saturday that BCHS was involved with: 1. BCHS had a great crowd for the Fabulous Fridays with the Apple Cider making topic. 2. We had a booth at the Family History Expo and sold two books there and answered lots of questions about research. Holly, the main organizer of the Expo, is from Utah. She pulled me aside on Saturday and asked if she could work with me more to plan next year's Expo. I agreed to help! 3.

The Quilt Show went well. I heard a lot of good feedback. 4. The Walk in the Cope Shoes went well, but I wish it was on a less busy weekend. Our volunteers were pretty maxed out. The nursing homes that did participate with us were hoping for more volunteers. That shows a need, for sure.

-The Communications Dept has a class offered through Dr. Messersmith. She wants her students to work with the community. This semester's project is for the students to create a tutorial on how to do before/after pictures using our photos from around Buffalo County. They can then be used for Buffalo Tales, hopefully. The students will take scans of BCHS pictures to locations around the county and recreate some of them. Then, they will write what they know about the picture (when it was taken, who was in it, etc.) and then, write what they know of the current area (how has it changed, etc.).

-Professor Wells' class will be 'concentrating on the Kearney Army Air Field and Kearney/Buffalo County during World War II'. He has five students and a grad assistant, so far, lined up to help. They are working with scrapbooks and 'The Duster' to preserve it and digitize the information.

-The Thompson Scholars are working on creating a business file in the archives by using old, duplicate newspapers. They will be indexing and cutting out ads (and/or copying the reverse sides). Then they will move on to the yearbooks and looking for business listings (sponsors). We put a note on Facebook requesting old newspapers. There are about 20 students that will each put in 5 hours.

Be our friend on Facebook: "BuffaloCountyHistoricalSociety"

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Katherine Wielechowski, Editor

2014 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

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Trails & Rails Museum

Buffalo County Historical Society

710 West 11th St. P.O. Box 523

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