



Buffalo Tales



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The Love Letters of Bertha Alice Haug and Ora Oscar Hayman

How often have you considered cleaning out that closet, or attic, the back room back room in the barn, or those trunks in the cellar? It seems a tedious task that can wait, but sometimes it brings surprises. As Richard and Deb Schroeder made preparations to clean out for an auction the Shelton home of Richard's grandparents, they made a wonderful discovery, which we will be sharing with you. What they uncovered was a packet of over eighty love letters exchanged between Bertha Alice Haug and Ora Oscar Hayman over the year 1904. Richard's cousin, Carolyn Brown, of Vienna, Virginia, has transcribed and indexed these letters and composed an historical introduction to the family history.



Bertha Alice Haug (1881-1963) was a young twenty-two year old teacher in the Holdrege public school system in 1903. Among the other boarders she met at the Beardsley Boarding House was the principal of the Holdrege Business School, twenty-six year old Ora Oscar Hayman (1878-1966). The couple fell in love and planned on marriage. Bertha's mother, Sarah (Oliver) Haug, wishing to insure that the young couple was not rushing things, requested that her daughter

return to the family farm, located between Shelton and Gibbon, for a year prior to any ceremony. The couple consented and over 1904 sustained their relationship through these letters. Starting with this edition, *Buffalo Tales* will offer selections from this collection. In this first installment letters travel between Shelton and Omaha in February of 1904.

Letter #4 Mailed: Wednesday, 02/24/1904

Shelton, Neb.

**Mr. O.O. Hayman,
General Delivery, Omaha, Nebr.**

My dear Boy:

In this epistle you may find written some very strange things before you reach the End but please do not get surprised. Just take into consideration the fact that I am not accustomed to writing to boys and you will understand why I am not able to entertain them better with my letters.

I think I must begin at the beginning and tell you of all of the events which have happened to us poor creatures since leaving the lovely city of Holdrege.

Monday morning we arose bright and early about 7:15 and arranged our locks, etc. and after trying to eat a hearty breakfast, set out toward the depot.

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WITH THE SOCIETY

A Note from the President:

I want to give you an update on several things from the last issue of Buffalo Tales.

First, the progress of the gazebo at the museum. We contacted Keith Gress at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center and have made arrangements for the boys at Bryan Cottage to build the gazebo. This will be a spring project for them and we are already seeing progress. A couple days ago when I was there, the footings were being prepared to pour the foundation. We hope to have it all completed in six weeks.

At the Annual Meeting last month we elected two new members to our Board of Directors. Wilma Harder from Gibbon and Paul Brodine from Kearney. I am looking forward to working with both of them.

The news conference, to inform the public about the proposed new exhibit building at the museum, on April 26th went off without a hitch. The exposure has been great and we are still working on details for the fund-raising drive. We'll have more on this as the weeks go by.

The Open House for Margaret and Henry Hohnholt was a great success and we thank so many of you for coming. We will still be seeing them both as they continue working at the museum.

Hoping all of you will do some volunteering at the museum during the summer, there is always something to do and we will appreciate your help. Give us a call. Have a great summer!!

-Larry Nansel, President

Historical Vignettes

A vignette is a short scene or incident. Historical vignettes are like short poems or story fragments that may seem incomplete but suggest an internal story or a micro-history that can be appreciated for their own value to inform or amuse while they may also inspire consideration and reflection of larger themes and events.

Historical Vignette: George T. Harr

by Lana M. Greene

UNK Senior - Seward, NE

Weathered marble is all that's left on a once elaborately decorated headstone that marks four lives scarred by tragedy.

The holiday season was in full bloom December 9, 1904. The Kearney Hub contains many advertisements of local stores which had their Christmas best displayed for all to see and purchase. The newspaper sported articles about Santa Claus. Holiday cheer seemed to spread throughout the community.

Resounding joy, however, was not to last that day for one family.

Far away from the festive decorations of downtown Kearney, near the southwest corner of town, gunfire sounded, a woman screamed and a 38-year-old Kearney man was lying face down in a pool of blood. George Harr's life was taken by his own hand.

George T. Harr was born July 1, 1866. According to the Kearney Hub, Harr led a simple, yet comfortable middle-class life.

He was the local manager of the Beatrice Creamery, which was situated between 22nd and 23rd streets along First Avenue in Kearney. Area farmers came to the creamery with their milk and eggs. In turn, the company would pay the farmers cash for their goods outright and use those goods to make cheese, butter and other products.

According to Stan Winch, 73, farmer from Roca, Nebraska, creameries were a profitable business at the turn of the century.

Harr's personal monetary gains from the business, are exemplified by the home he shared with his wife and five small children.

The Kearney City Directory of 1904, place the Harr family at 1702 Third Avenue, Kenwood, the name for an old southwest area of Kearney. The home still stands in the same location today. However, overgrown vines and weeds almost completely disguise the porch from the road.

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There we met a young man who was on his way to Lincoln. Besse and I were both quite charmed with him. I won't tell you his name because it might make you jealous of him, just a little, (don't you know). He went with us as far as Kenesaw and carried our suit-cases out for us, etc. I talked with him most of the way to Kenesaw, (you don't care, do you?). Well, (my favorite word) I don't remember much that happened but if you are not already getting weary of this I shall try a little longer. At Kenesaw we took the freight for Kearney and arrived there about 12:30. Besse phoned to her brother and he came in and helped her while away some of our time.

Bye the way I forgot to tell you that Besse met on the way to Kearney a brakeman, an old friend of hers and they talked over old times while I looked out of a window at the beautiful scenery and calmly listened to a homely old traveling man explain to another that he was not married. Then he smiled at me. I wondered if he thought I looked like I was anxious to _____ oh well, it doesn't make any difference what he thought. On that same car was a sailor lad, or at least a lad who imagined that he would like to be a sailor. He wore the costume and in a gallant manner carried our suit cases for us. At first I thought he must be a part of the service. Ichabod Crane also came with us to Kearney. I hope I may see him again some day. The look of wisdom that shone through his glasses was truly marvelous. He wore also a becoming fur coat and cap. They say he has changed his occupation somewhat and is now a music teacher but he still looks much as he must have looked when Irving told us about him. He seemed to be smitten on a middle-aged lady who sat in front of him. I think I must now leave these friends and stroll on to other, if not greener pastures.

We were supposed to leave Kearney at 2:40 and Besse and her brother strolled around the city to see some of the sights while I stayed in the depot and rested. Besse tells me that they saw the site of the new Normal building and that they are hauling bricks, etc. there at present preparatory to building.

They were so pleased with us in Kearney that they kept us there until 5:30 and then we departed on what they called the hog-train. It was not at all misnamed. Papa met us at Gibbon and we came out home, ate our supper, washed the dishes and immediately went to bed. Yesterday morning we arose at 9:30 and Besse read all day while I lounged around. Mamma would not let me go outside yesterday on account of my sore throat. She was afraid I might get sick. So she doctored me so much that today I am all right again. You need not get frightened. It isn't diphtheria (*sic*) although my throat has big white spots on each side.

There was an opera in town last night. The Columbia Opera Company played Dorothy but mamma would not let me go.

We sauntered out in the morning air (Besse and I) and viewed the country. I showed her the house where I am going to live some day (No) and she thinks it is charming. It is on one of papa's farms and has either 2 or 3 rooms. I think perhaps there is a cellar too. Isn't this letter interesting? I am just beginning to wonder how much I could write about nothing if I tried terribly hard.

Papa has gone for hay this morning and Besse and I will go out this afternoon and watch them lift it up into the loft with the big hay fork. We will be quite good farmers when we return.

We shall go to town this afternoon if mamma does not conclude it is too cold for us. Yesterday was just like a summer day and today is only a trifle cooler. I think I must stop talking as Besse is waiting for this pen.

Today is Wednesday. I suppose you are in Omaha. I wouldn't care if

you were in Shelton and coming out to see us today. I should really like to see you. Even if it was only Monday I said Good Bye. Enough for this time I guess. Have a good time and don't try to forget your little friend.

At home, Wednesday

Bertha

Letter #5 Mailed: Friday, 02/26/1904

Omaha, Neb.

Miss Bertha A. Haug,
Shelton, Nebr.

My dear little Girl:

It is needless to say I was glad to hear from you. In fact it was like getting money from home. If you ever received money from home in time of need, you can estimate my appreciation of your epistle.

Now for the trip. While acting as baggage-man for the two ladies at Kenesaw two other ladies had the audacity to occupy my seat. I still held claim to the seat because my overcoat was still hanging to one of them (not one of the ladies but to the seat). If they could have read my mind at that minute they would have absconded immediately. It was all I could do to restrain myself from taking a seat exactly between the two. The only reason for my not doing so was owing to the fact that one of them gave me a bewitching smile that changed my courage to fear. Seeing there was no chance to rouse the enemy, I immediately put out in search of another resting place, but to my horror there was nothing vacant except a seat near a charming lass. Putting on the airs of a Philadelphia Lawyer I approached her, and asked if the seat was taken. No Sir! "she said"! To make a long story short, we hadn't gone far when she told me that she expected to meet her intended at Hastings. After receiving such a shock I immediately became interested in reading the morning paper. The news became intensely interesting all at once. Silence prevailed. That and nothing more.

About noon hunger overtook me, and I departed for the diner. The oyster stew was the best I had eaten for a long time, but a little too hot. The roof of my mouth still shows the effect. After finishing dinner and having brushed my locks we arrived in Lincoln. Didn't stop there as it seemed better to stop on my way back, then brother would be off duty and we could have a better time.

Tuesday I visited my old friend Mr. Anderson. Truly he was tickled beyond (*sic*) recall. Talk about the love of David and Johnathan (*sic*) it is no comparison to ours. But all at once he shocks me by telling me that he is to be married the next evening at 8 P.M. and that he was to leave in a few hours for Central City. It never has been my lot see (*sic*) as happy a man as he. Indeed you would think he had just entered paradise. Oh joy! you could feel it in the atmosphere. They ever lived happy (*sic*) afterwards, and the next day it snowed (*sic*).

Wednesday Father and I visited Boyle's Business College. They have a splendid College. Still there are others just as good. I will ever feel grateful to Mr. Boyles for the pains he took in showing me through and explaining the courses and the manner of hearing recitations. I have taken in two Operas, and they were both the best I have seen for years. One impressed me because it corresponded to incidents in my own life. Will tell you more later. Fun fun fun that is the way the week has gone so far. Tomorrow I leave for Lincoln. Wish you could be there because I would enjoy dancing with you. How could I forget you now?

Your true friend,
Ora

Hub reports indicate Harr had been the manager of the creamery and a Kearney resident for roughly five years.

In those five years it appeared Harr was a well-known member of the community. On October 10, 1903, he joined the Loyal Mystic Legion and took out an insurance policy for \$2,000. He regularly attended the Baptist Church with his family. His funeral service was also noted as being "largely attended."

Harr appeared to have lived a quiet life.

However, what appeared on the surface, didn't tell the entire story.

The Hub reported Harr had been in Callaway, Nebraska, on a business trip the week of December 5, 1904, just prior to his death. Thursday, December 8, A.P. Salgren the district manager for the Beatrice Creamery and E.C. Shoppell, another officer of the company, went to Callaway to bring Harr back to Kearney.

Account books for the creamery had come up short. Salgren and Shoppell had sent for the general superintendent of the company, F.A. Leighton, to come to Kearney from Lincoln to go over the books and give Harr a chance to explain.

At home that night, the Hub reports that Harr, with a bottle of laudanum in hand, made the first attempt on his life. Due to the watchful eye of his wife, Mable, it was only an attempt. She took the bottle away. Even though, the opium-based pills didn't kill him, the dosage was enough to leave Harr in a daze, the Hub noted.

The following morning, Harr, accompanied by Mable, went to the creamery to meet with Salgren, Shoppell and Leighton. The morning was spent poring over the books, trying to find where a possible error had been made, the Hub stated.

Then shortly after noon, the still confused Harr got up and stepped out the back door of the creamery office. Mable waited a few moments before getting up to check on her husband. The Hub said she followed him into a "water closet at the rear of the old laundry building, which stands just north of the creamery company's office."

Peering through the door, she could see her husband lying in a pool of blood; she fainted.

The Hub said Harr had shot himself; not just once, but three times in the chest..

According to Jim Dubas, manager of Dub's Sporting Goods in Kearney, the Iverson Johnson .38 calibre pistol Harr had used to kill himself with, was not a very large weapon—although three bullets were unnecessary. Dubas said one would have been enough to kill a man.

"The shells are about as big as your small finger in diameter," Dubas said., "It has about a two to four inch barrel, not very long...a .38 calibre is short and doesn't have much power, and even in those days you could reload as fast as you pulled the trigger. But I can't imagine getting three off in a row." He added, "You would think the shock from the first blow would have kept him from doing that, but apparently not."

According to the December 10, 1904 Hub article, the coroner concluded that two of the shots came very close to the heart and one actually penetrated it. Any of the wounds "was sufficient to have caused death," the coroner said.

According to the Hub, after the death of her husband, the 34-year-old widow, was left with two young boys, three small girls and no insurance money. The policy Harr had taken out a year before he died didn't pay due to the nature of his death.

Ten days after she buried George, Mable buried yet another family member. Her daughter, Georgia M. Harr, died December 19, 1904. She was three months old. According to Kearney Cemetery documents, the cause of death is unknown. The family held a private service at their home the following afternoon. Georgia was buried under the same headstone that marked her father's grave.

Kearney city directories made no mention of the Harr family after the little girl's death. George's origins, before he moved his family to Kearney, are unknown. There is no census record of him being in Nebraska prior to 1900.

According to Kearney Cemetery records, Mable Harr Sowle (George Harr's widow) died of cancer at the age of 63 in 1933. She is buried in a plot next to George and two of her daughters.

The final mention of the Harr family came in a 1942 issue of the Kearney Hub, with the death of George and Mable's second daughter, Birdice Alice Haney. The Hub received her death notice from her brother-in-law, Albert Haney, who was then a resident of Kearney.

Birdice was only four years old when her father, George Harr, died. According to her obituary, she married Billie Haney, an engineer who worked for the government, and moved to Montana in 1917. After 20 years in 'Big Sky Country' they came back to the Midwest and settled in Odessa, Missouri, where she died of arteriosclerosis on May 18, 1942, Haney and her husband had two sons, Dale of New York City and Donald of Montana.

The obituary also mentioned she was survived by two brothers who lived in Montana and one sister, who resided in Alliance.

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Dr. Roger P. Davis, Editor

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TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

Henry and I want to thank all of you who attended and helped with the wonderful reception at the Church on May 6th. We could not believe the big attendance and all of the calls and good wishes. We have enjoyed the activities of the Society in which we have participated. We have met so many wonderful people who have given so much to retain the history of Buffalo County. THANK YOU ALL!

During the past few weeks we have hosted many schools at the Museum. We have had about 725 students and sponsors. All of the 4th graders from Kearney Public Schools attended and many surrounding towns. Some we could not accommodate because of conflicts. Many volunteers helped with these projects and it took much time on the telephone making plans and organizing. Again, it could not happen without many dedicated volunteers.

We took part in KIDS EXPLORE and had a very good turnout. CASH WA DISTRIBUTORS was our sponsor. The Soil Sisters Garden Club also provided help with this project.

The Soil Sisters Garden Club will also be in charge of the Garden Club at the Museum this summer. If your child is interested call for more information and to register - Linda Schwarzl 237-5396 or Betty Jo Armagost 234-9738.

Our summer staff is nearly complete and we are looking forward to a great summer.

-Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

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