

# Buffalo Tales

July/August 2017

## District 65: Memories from a One-Room Schoolhouse in Rural Buffalo County (Part 1)

One room schoolhouses are a resilient, traditional, and established part of American history. These schoolhouses scattered across the United States, sometimes even only being a mile from the next schoolhouse, such as in the Divide Township in Buffalo County, served thousands of rural children. In 1980, Nebraska hosted about "three hundred of the nine hundred odd one-room schoolhouses" still in operation in the United States. The twentieth century was not kind to schoolhouses in Nebraska, with communities fighting to preserve their independent districts. Ravenna, Nebraska's School District #65 was not immune to the pressures of consolidation, but the families of the district fought hard to preserve their schoolhouse and prevent consolidation.

Before the District #65 schoolhouse was located where it is today, it was called District #24 and it was located two miles north of Riverdale, on the land of Joseph Loeffelholz, now owned by his son, Bernard Loeffelholz. Although it had served the district since 1894, the original schoolhouse burned down due to a lightning strike in 1920. A new schoolhouse was then funded to continue serving the area and it is this schoolhouse that later served the students south of Ravenna in District #65. Liz Lockhorn, who attended from 1949 until 1957, remembers the simple, white schoolhouse as having a large chalkboard that lined two walls, a gas heater, very poor electricity, a basement with no stage, and a large cloakroom immediately to the left when one enters through the front doors. Since the schoolhouse lacked indoor plumbing, there were no bathrooms inside; instead there were two outhouses in the schoolyard, one for girls and one for boys. Students also had to share a dipper and crock to be used as a water fountain. By 1957, however, the student body had decreased to only nine pupils and the next year District #24 shuttered its doors. The remaining pupils were sent to school in Riverdale and District #24 ceased to exist with the schoolhouse sitting vacant for two years.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the number of rural schools declined as a result of cultural changes within American society. With the growth of the automotive industry, society changed into a more mobile, efficient, quicker society. Furthermore, as the American family became smaller with the mechanization of farm equipment and as other "changes in farming practices, the trend toward fewer farms, and increasing opportunities in urban areas,"

rural schools saw their rosters diminishing quickly. In 1959, Buffalo County was not immune to the widespread decline of rural children and one-room schoolhouse enrollment.

As a result of the "[seventy]-odd districts in [Buffalo] County," the topic of district consolidation was discussed among school leaders in the county. In fact, only one percent of American school aged children went to one room schoolhouses in 1960. For Ravenna's District #65, this meant that it would be consolidated with two other area schoolhouses, Antelope Hall (District #106) and District #98. Another one room schoolhouse that was in close proximity to District #65 called District #45 was later consolidated with the other three schools to create the district that remained until 2006. With the inclusion of more students, the school needed a more central location and more room to accommodate the sixteen pupils included in the new district.

On January 9, 1960, in response to the immediate need for a new schoolhouse and the pressure of finding one before spring planting, the town of Ravenna hosted a special election to vote to extend \$10,000 worth of bonds to purchase land and then to fund a new school building. On December 3, 1959, the District #65 school board members, Leonard Kriha, Donald Muhlbach, and Marvin Bassnett signed the Agreement of Sale for the vacant schoolhouse that was once District #24. According to this document, the schoolhouse sold for the sum of \$1,700 and would need to be moved on or before April 1, 1960. It was decided the schoolhouse would sit ten miles south of Ravenna, on Pawnee Road in Schneider Township 11, Section 12, southeast, southeast corner. The district purchased the land from Frank and LaFern Hervert for the sum of \$195 on March 31, 1960. In addition to the purchase price, it was listed within the deed that upon the closure of the school, the land would be returned to the grantor or successor of the Hervert family upon repayment of the \$195. Mild structural changes were made to the building such as the removal of some of the windows and the addition of indoor bathrooms. The girls' bathroom was fashioned out of half of the large cloakroom that was to the left when you entered from the front doors, with a boys' bathroom constructed in the basement. A full, finished basement, a cement stage, central heat, a water fountain, and improved electricity were all added before the students arrived in the fall of 1960.

Naida Gross, the teacher from the original District #65, was appointed as the teacher at the new schoolhouse. Mrs. Gross lived about a mile to the east from the location of the new schoolhouse and was married to a local farmer with children. Gross was notable in District #65 history as she was the only teacher to have a lifetime teaching certificate, which meant she was not required to continue her own education in order to remain a Nebraska certified teacher.

In terms of the school day, District #65 operated much like



other rural schools at the time, class began promptly at 8 a.m. and went until 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, for 180 days with an allotment for five snow days. The day included a thirty-minute lunch period and then two fifteen-minute recess periods, one in the afternoon and one in the morning. Students were taught lessons in math, science, world history, geography, American history, English, music, art, and map reading. These lessons, created and organized by the teacher, did not follow a state mandated book or regulations. The art of teaching focused more on the senses, the physical senses and the mental senses, making sure every student understood, with all their senses, each lesson that was taught before moving on.

Although education and learning were most important at District #65, schoolhouse fun was necessary to complete the experience of its students. With Gross came the old District #65 merry go round. The merry go round is unique in the fact it has a wooden circle connected by metal pipes centered on a metal pipe stuck in the ground with a cement block securing it. School kids would stand in the middle of the merry go round and run, spinning the kids that were sitting on the wooden piece. A catchers' stop was also brought to the new schoolyard. In last half of the twentieth century, most rural schools organized a softball team that played other rural schools in the area and although there were no competitions or district finals, the game of softball was played for fun and thought to create a stronger community between the small, rural schools. Added in the coming years to the playground were two swing sets, both bought from schoolhouse auctions in Nebraska and a wooden teeter-totter.

### Letter from the Previous Editor

Dear BCHS family and friends,

I am sad to tell you that this is my last issue of Buffalo Tales as Editor. I have had a wonderful 8 years compiling and writing stories for Buffalo Tales and I cannot tell you how much I have learned about Buffalo County from the stories that were sent in. The Buffalo County Historical Society and Trails & Rails Museum is a wonderful community to be a part of and I will miss it dearly as I move on to the next chapter of my life.



Meredith Underwood will be taking over for me as Editor and I know she is excited and looking forward to working on future issues of Buffalo Tales.

Thank you for welcoming me with open arms and for teaching me about your rich history.

-Katherine Wielechowski

**2017 Calendar of Events**

**Prairie Blacksmith Association's Fall Conference**-Date  
TBD

**30th Annual Christmas Tree Walk:** First two weekends in Dec. (Dec.2/3 and Dec. 9/10) from 1-5 pm, open to the public: \*\*\*  
Saturday, December 2 from 12-1pm: **Members Only Preview** of the 30th Annual Christmas Tree Walk.

**Education notes (see website for additional details):**

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

\***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!

\***Join the Trails & Rails Museum Blacksmiths** (time/dates TBD) to learn about blacksmithing and/or possibly join in the fun!

\***The Archive Department** will be open on Mondays from 1:30-4 year-round or by appointment.

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

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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**

-We have had a very positive response about the wedding contest. Folks love the idea of a fun way to preserve our past and talk up the county's history. We are looking forward to installing the displays the volunteers and staff have put together for the new building.

-We have had over 2000 guests with the Passport so far, and the virtual number for July aren't in yet. The 2000 include both in person and virtual. The majority of those are from outside of Buffalo County.

-The Nail Contest was a big hit and the judges encouraged us to do it again. I asked the two sponsors if they were willing to sponsor again and they did! Thus, we continued the contest for next year and have changed it up a bit with age divisions instead of categories.

-The sneak peek on Wednesday, July 12 was well attended with over 30 members in one hour. All were super pleased with the building and very excited for their opportunity to see the walls actually up.

Be our friend on Facebook: "**BuffaloCountyHistoricalSociety**"

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**A Huge Thanks to our Silver and Gold Engineers  
for their support of the BCUS/Trails & Rails Museum**  
(Contact Trails & Rails Museum for more information on becoming an Engineer)

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Meredith Underwood, Editor

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**Trails & Rails Museum**



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