



# Buffalo Tales



Volume 11, No. 8

Buffalo County Historical Society

September 1988

## THE NEWSPAPERS OF KEARNEY

### Part I

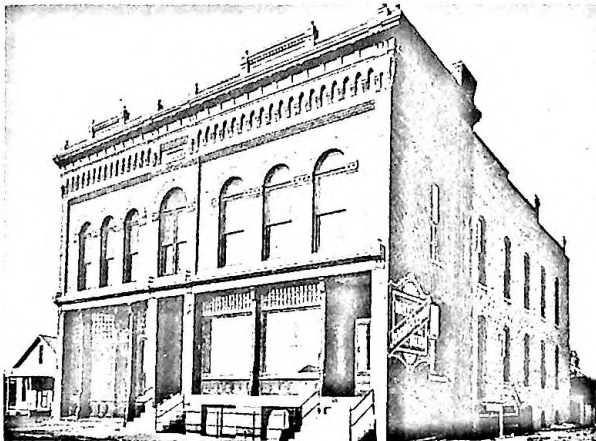
by Margaret Stines Nielsen

From its earliest days, Kearney has been served by one to seven daily and weekly newspapers. The *Kearney Junction Times* first appeared on October 12, 1872 with Mendel, Clapp and Cunningham as publishers. Lyman G. Cunningham, a Civil War veteran, graduated from Iowa Wesleyan College in 1870, worked on the *Sioux City Journal*, then homesteaded on a farm near Riverdale in 1872, where he was joined by his bride, Mary Clapp. He began soliciting advertising and subscriptions for a paper but the press he ordered was delayed and the first issues of the *Times* were printed in Albia, Iowa. The front page of the original issue, dated October, 1872, is devoted to advertising and a statement of its goal: "the greatest good for the greatest number."

Cunningham constructed a two-story building on Smith Avenue (present 24th Street and 5th Avenue) which would serve as the first school, the first meeting place for the Presbyterian and Methodist churches and, on Saturday nights, the Philomathenus Literary Society. The paper was published daily from 1874 to 1876 when it was leased to A. C. Edwards who named it *The Gazette*. Berger and Julian took over the lease in 1878, renaming it the *Nonpareil*. In 1880 Cunningham regained control of the press and began publishing the *Kearney Weekly Journal*. When fire destroyed the building, he built a brick structure which still stands at 15 West 23rd Street.<sup>1</sup>

On February 3, 1873 the Central Nebraska Press was established, with Webster Eaton as proprietor. Samuel C. Bassett says of the *Press*:

In the days of the founding of . . . Kearney Junction it was generally



**Kearney Junction Times Building, 1872; later Buffalo County Journal.**

(Continued on Page 3)

**BUFFALO TALES** is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization, whose address is P. O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the history of Buffalo County and its people. Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Basic Membership .....	\$10.00
Institutional Membership .....	\$15.00
Supporting Membership .....	\$25.00

Life memberships are \$100.00 for an individual; \$150.00 for husband and wife, jointly.

Officers and Directors: President, Margaret Hohnholt; Vice-President, Merlin Berglund; Secretary, Colleen Parker; Treasurer, Philip S. Holmgren. Directors: Frances Link, Barb Avery, Minnette Steinbrink, Edna Hehner, Alice Howell, Robert Stubblefield, Viola Livingston, Chandler Lynch III, and Jim Cudaback. Publications Chairman: Alice Howell.

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Trails & Rails Museum	706 West 11th Street	(308) 234-3041
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## WITH THE SOCIETY

### A Message From Your President:

The Trails and Rails Museum is closed for the season, except by appointment. We feel that we have had a very successful season. I believe you all agree that Becky and Kay were excellent guides and did many things for the Society and the Museum. They offered many good suggestions. Kay and Becky, we really appreciate you.

We appreciate all of the many fine volunteers who have given freely of your time. Many suggestions have come from you and we try to use as many as possible. This is the thing that makes our Museum and Society successful — everyone working together for a great cause.

A Fall Fun(d) Day is planned for September 18 from 1-5 p.m. The Historical Society and the Buffalo Ringers are planning a fun day for all the family.

Our Fall Tour is planned for October 2nd to Nebraska City. We will leave Kearney at 6:00 a.m. and travel via a Good Life Bus. For \$35.00, you will receive transportation, coffee break at York, lunch at the Elks in Nebraska City, admission to all buildings, and a tour guide to go with us. We will also have a tour of historical Nebraska City. For more information, call 237-7327. We must have reservations by September 17.

A Big Band Dance will be held on November 19 at the Kearney Armory sponsored by the Buffalo County Historical Society. Harvey Larsen and his 11-piece band will furnish the music from 8:00 p.m. to midnight. Admission fee will be \$3.50 per person. This will be a return engagement of the popular 40's dance held during the Kearney Army Air Base Reunion.

As in past years, new 1989 memberships can now be purchased and will include the September, October and November/December, 1988 issues of *Buffalo Tales* as a bonus. Urge your friends to join the Buffalo County Historical Society now. Or this is a fine opportunity to give a gift membership!

Margaret Hohnholt

*New Basic Member*

Howard L. Kolbo . . . LaHabra, CA

*New Supporting Member*

Jeanne Erickson Johnson . . . Gowanda, NY

understood that the owners of the townsite and the promoters of the town donated to "Web" Eaton a considerable number of city lots to establish a newspaper, daily and weekly . . . "Web" Eaton . . . was a very shrewd politician; he secured by appointment, political preferment, and left the management of the Press largely in the hands of his brother Rice Eaton. . . . Under his management the Press soon secured a state wide reputation . . . and exerted a large influence.

On March 18, 1879 William C. Holden took over the *Press* introducing an era of muck raking which lasted for nearly ten years. Bassett wrote that Holden "seemed to take delight in general attacks on individuals and it would have occasioned little surprise had he been killed by some whom he attacked"

Only one copy of the papers published during Holden's tenure was found, that of March 19, 1881. In a vitriolic story titled "Wonderful Heroism" Holden wrote that Constable Hage and Policeman (?) Cutting went to Denver "armed to the teeth" in pursuit of David and Mrs. Allen, indicted for perjury. Denver police had been alerted to "this dangerous pair" and they were jailed "until Hage and Cutting could take in the Palace and other places of high-toned resort." Returning to Kearney, they were met by Sheriff Seeley "with an excited posse" who took the Allens to "the hog pen known as the Buffalo County Jail . . . that something rotten has existed in the sheriff's office we have no doubt."

Mr. and Mrs. Allen had testified to some of those activities including prisoners who were "spirited out through the keyhole of the jail." The Allens posted bail, provided by eleven well known citizens, and returned to Denver. Holden charged that the indictment was Sheriff Seeley's means of getting revenge.

Holden also took a jab at a competitor:

The *Nonpareil* is again charging Ayer with having been a thief in the Clerk's office . . . Mr. Ayer stands 1000% higher than his accuser as an honorable man and gentleman.

Although J. J. Saville, editor of the *Western New Era* had stated that "personal journalism is . . . cowardly . . . when an editor attacks an individual through its columns," this did not prevent him from printing a long letter titled "*The Prostitute Press*" written by "Gillespie."<sup>2</sup> The writer tells of an encounter between Holden and

an emigrant we were recently trying to sell Kearney real estate . . . Kearney is not so vile as represented and the *Press* is not exactly in the line of respectable journalism . . . The loud editor . . . all ablaze unbolting his smut



**New Era Standard Office, 1904.**

geyser for full half an hour . . . We should rather pity the unfortunate man who has so little regard for decency . . . as to issue a paper that wears not a fig leaf of shame.

In discussing Holden's attacks on individuals, Bassett writes, "in some cases the provocations were great and the parties guilty as publicly charged, but the *Press* under Holden's management lost public . . . influence and support."

Another newspaper of the time, equally adept at name-calling, was the *Nonpareil* under the ownership of B. H. Goulding. Goulding, a lawyer, came to Kearney in 1874 and began selling farm implements. In 1880-81, he bought the *Nonpareil* from Berger and Julian.

One issue in the spring of 1881 was chiefly devoted to the Democratic County convention, in which Goulding accused "The Ring" of being "carpet-baggers".

James Van Sickle bought whiskey last Saturday and used it to influence the Ring convention . . . If the Ring Ticket is elected Buffalo County will wait a long time before it sees the money that has been taken from the treasury.<sup>3</sup>

The Ring candidate is "a U.P. supernumary . . . a carpet-bagger . . . The Ring convention was a little talk, much whiskey and a good deal too much railroad aristocracy.

Even the staid *Buffalo Journal*, in its issue of April 4, 1881, attacked Goulding:

The *Nonpareil* man flipped coppers to ascertain on which side of the political fence he would heave himself. Since the coin was borrowed from the Webb faction it naturally landed a little that way . . . Goulding (who called the temperance ticket an old woman's ticket) put on a red ribbon when a Temperance reformer came to from Chicago. He and the Temperance disorganizer John Seaman, shook hands over the bloody chasm . . . then worked like Turks for whiskey at command of the saloon keepers.

Finding the *Nonpareil* "not remunerative", Goulding sold it in 1883 and entered the insurance business in Lincoln. At least one Kearney man admired his colorful writing: in 1887 H. D. Watson brought him back to Kearney to write promotional dispatches for Kearney and "its great water power" to be sent to eastern newspapers. Goulding also sold himself on Kearney's prospects; he went into real estate during the boom days.

The *Western New Era* was first published by Dr. John J. Saville, a surgeon during the Civil War. He practiced medicine in Sioux City, Iowa for a while before coming to Nebraska as Indian agent at the Red Cloud Agency. In 1877, he entered a tract of land on the former Ft. Kearny military reservation, where he farmed and continued his medical practice.

According to Bassett, the *Western New Era* was established to promote the interests of W. E. Dorsey, a candidate for Congress. In the first issue, Dr. Saville wrote of his choice of the name: "To Buffalo County a *New Era* is at hand when farmers will no longer be the victims of corrupt rings." While Republican in politics, the editor advocated that "they properly adjust the relations of capital and labor." As for the Temperance Party, he had "little stock for a large part of the arguments of many temperance advocates."

A history of Buffalo County, published in the first issue of the *New Era* on August 6, 1880, said of the county seat battle between Gibbon and Kearney, "the contest degenerated into a scrimmage for county funds between the two banks." It was the "cause of bitter factional strife that yet curses the county. During the fall election we propose to throw some light upon the subject for the benefit of farmers."

In 1884 the Rhone Brothers took over the *New Era* with F. S. Rhone as President and Roy W. the editor, and the name became the *Kearney New Era*. They took a bold step on February 2, 1886 when they allowed the Methodist Ladies Aid to issue a "Women's Edition." The temporary staff congratulated the editor for entrusting the paper

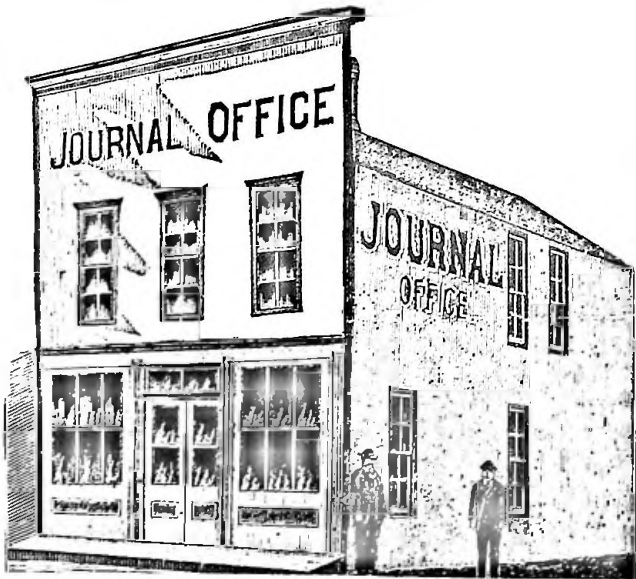
to "those who know little of publishing . . . If this effort demonstrated that women are fully competent to edit a newspaper they hope sometime to present another." The paper contained a history of Kearney churches and an "appeal to voters to make every effort for the suppression of saloons and gambling haunts for coming years." Also included was a report from Maud Marston about a Girls Club in Chicago.

The *Kearney Daily Enterprise*, described by Bassett as a sky-rocket, was established as a promoter of the Kearney boom. Kearney citizens had "raised a subsidy in cash and lots for a daily newspaper which should contain the A.P. dispatches and be a paper of some metropolitan pretensions." H. D. Watson accepted the subsidy and appointed William E. Smythe as editor.

Smythe became editor of the Medford, Massachusetts *Mercury* at the age of nineteen because his father had taken the advice of a Boston editor: "get him a place as 'devil' in a country printing office; hand him a copy of Parton's 'Life of Horace Greeley'; tell him to study politics and American history." After an ill-fated book publishing venture he came to Kearney and took over the publication of the *Enterprise* in association with Will Hall Poore and L. R. Britton.

The first issue appeared on June 24, 1889. By August 11th the staff announced they were publishing a ten-page paper: "We couldn't help it—the advertising was coming in so heavy." The paper recorded the rapid development of Kearney, along with its great expectations. On Sunday, December 22, 1889 the accomplishments of the past year were described in glowing terms. "12,000 souls" were said to be living in Kearney.

The *Enterprise* made its biggest scoop when it sent its society editor, Maud Marston, to Kansas City where she boarded the train carrying Nellie Bly back to New York from her trip around the world. Maud was the only reporter to interview her on this lap of her journey. Will Hall Poore, writing under the name of G. O. West, was widely quoted as humorist and satirist. On April 30, 1890 he wrote, "Lincoln is an abominable seat of corruption in these closing days of the legislature, or else there is six-footed lying on the part of the great Omaha journalist. Rosewater (editor of the *Omaha Bee*) gives a list of the men he objects to and tells why. It would take a 32-page souvenir to tell



Journal Building, 1890, 15 West 23rd Street.

Buffalo County Historical Society  
 Box 523  
 Kearney, NE 68848

Non-Profit Organization Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage PAID
Postal Permit No. 7 Kearney, Nebraska

why the public objects to Rosewater."

Smythe's downfall apparently occurred because of his flip-flop on the "prohibition amendment" as against local option, the cause of bitter dissension during the election of 1890. As reported in the *Crete Vidette*,

The prohibition party in Nebraska have secured the support of the Kearney *Enterprise*. The temperance people have subscribed for 10,000 copies for one year at \$1.25 per copy.

Apparently the prohibitionists weren't able to make good on delivering that many subscriptions. The *Hub* of August 21, 1890 reports that the *Enterprise* was about to come out against the amendment. "The information was based upon the statements of . . . Ed Roggen, chief swag dispenser of the brewers and distillers".

In the same issue an article titled "The Role of the Wrecker" reports that the *Enterprise* had dispensed entirely with the AP report — "no general news, no sporting notes, no congressional report, no markets." The *Hub* further states:

The *Enterprise* was recently reorganized with Kearney's four land companies at the helm . . . Smith destroys the influence of the paper . . . by selling out to the organizers of the whiskey campaign . . . Smith, the wrecker was brought up standing before the directors of the company, and the *Hub* understands . . . that the strings which bound him to the paper have been ruthlessly severed and that he steps out entirely.

Smythe became the editor of the *Omaha Bee*, much respected for his knowledge of irrigation.<sup>5</sup> L. R. Cunningham took over the *Enterprise*, publishing it as the *Journal-Enterprise*.

#### NOTES

1. The building, carrying the names "Cunningham" and "Journal Building", with the date, 1890 was for many years the Kearney Laundry and is now a restaurant.
2. James E. Gillespie was described by Nebraska historian Andreas as "lawyer and dramatic writer".
3. The trial of Van Sickle was called off. Though he was probably guilty of theft, it was agreed he was a victim of his friends. /
4. *Tales of Buffalo County*—Vol. I
5. His book, *The Conquest of Arid America*, republished in 1969, is considered a classic in the field.