



# Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

January, 1989

## A VIEW OF KEARNEY IN 1888

by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

1888 found Kearney on its way to becoming the Minneapolis of the West. The year began on a note of confident optimism, and ended in a frenzy of activity. Land was plentiful and it was cheap. In the search for prosperity, opportunities seemed unlimited. As the population grew, the hustle and bustle of the town builders was evident everywhere.

A review of the City Council minutes and the local newspapers of the year reflect the growth of the city. Kearney was a city of the third class, with three wards, Ward 1, south of the railroad, Ward 2, the northwest section, and Ward 3 the northeast section. Its over-5,000 population qualified the city for designation as a city of the second class but there were requirements other than population. The matter was addressed by the City Council early in February when an ordinance was passed asking that a census be taken so that Kearney might be registered and have the advantages of a city of the second class.

The *Kearney New Era* of February 15 explained the situation in an article headlined "Still Moving On":

The rapid growth of Kearney within the last three years has called for more adequate means of city government than is now in vogue . . . The requirements to make this a city of the second class . . . can easily be complied with. The population will have to be duly ascertained and certified by the Mayor to the Governor, upon receipt of which he shall issue a proclamation declaring this a city of the second class.

. . . The statute regulating governments of cities of the second class

(Continued on Page 3)



First Kenwood School, 1888

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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 Cudaaback. Publications Chairman: Alice Howell.

Trails & Rails Museum

706 West 11th Street

(308) 234-3041

### From the President:

Once again I want to thank all who contributed, worked, and helped in any way during the Christmas Tree Walk at the Trails and Rails in December. It was through the efforts of so many that it was such a success. I am still glowing over how so many of you just walked in and said "Can I help" and when I or someone said "Yes, we need this done", you did it. Others asked if they could add a bit or more decoration, here and there and this added to all the fun. Thanks a lot!

The tour to Crawford is filled at this time but if you are interested, you could get in touch with any of the committee and be contacted if anyone has to drop out.

Have a good New Year!

—Margaret Hohnholt

**Mark Your Calendar:** February 26, 2:00 p.m., Historical Society meeting in Shelton. Details in February issue.

### NEW LIFE MEMBERS

Jane Ayres, Kearney

Robert S. Ayres, Kearney

Margaret H. Daggett, Scottsbluff

Perry Holmgren, Orleans

Leonard & Dee Skov, Kearney

Robert & Patricia Sorensen, Kearney

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Varley Grantham, Orlando, FL

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Harder Family, Gibbon

L. F. Haug, Shelton

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Dale Link, Ravenna

Frances Link, Ravenna

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Wilma Larsen

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Paul & Mitzi Steinbrink

Mr. & Mrs. Elmer Wiles

Eva Y. Austin

Mr. & Mrs. Ed Denison

Jack & Joan Erickson

Jerry & Lois Ildt

Otto & Elma Lohrenz

Mary Q. Nye

Dr. & Mrs. R. C. Rosenlof

Emil & Dorothy Tollefsen

Marian Wisch

\*all of Kearney

say that all cities of this class shall not have less than four and not more than six wards, each consisting of an election district. This would naturally divide the city into four wards, which will . . . be a great advantage in regard to schools that are now crowded beyond their capacity.

The City Engineer shall have charge of all work within the city limits. This will make a uniform appearance of yards and buildings, which at present is sadly to the reverse. A Street Commissioner will have entire supervision over construction of sidewalks, sewers and drains.

The Council shall have authority to levy a special tax . . . for . . . curbing, paving, macadamizing or otherwise improving such street or alley. The result of the above would be better streets and each property would have a good sidewalk in front of it. The sanitary condition . . . is anything but inviting and cannot be remedied until some means are adopted whereby a system of sewerage can be put in. Under present city government no law is provided . . . for such a public improvement nor . . . for raising bonds to pay for the erection of public buildings.

Such is the state of affairs of the government of Kearney. In other words, the Midway City has outgrown her swaddling clothes and demands to be dressed up as she deserves.

The census was taken, was certified to Mayor C. B. Finch and Governor John M. Thayer. At the Council meeting of February 29 the proclamation of the Governor was read, declaring Kearney to be a city of the second class.

At a series of adjourned Council meetings on March 2, 3 and 5, an ordinance was read and duly passed dividing the city into four wards. Wyoming (Central) Avenue was the division line north and south, and Eleventh (22nd) Street, east and west. The southeast portion would be First Ward; the southwest, the Second Ward; the northwest, the Third Ward; and the northeast, the Fourth Ward. Two councilmen would be elected from each ward. A city election on April 3 resulted in the reelection of Mayor C. B. Finch. In his inaugural address at the Council meeting of April 5 he recommended the erection of a city hall, and also recommended that all wooden awnings and hitching posts on Wyoming Avenue be removed, walks be made uniform width and on the same grade, and the street paved with asphalt or cedar blocks. Minutes of the Council throughout the year reflected the street improvement recommendation.

Other significant actions of the City Council were (August 13) changes in naming and numbering streets; call for a special city election on August 16 to vote on



**G. H. Cutting Residence**  
823 West 22nd Street



**John J. Bartlett Residence**  
1402 9th Avenue

(1) \$55,000 to aid in the construction of the railroad of the Nebraska Southern Railway Company to Kearney, and (2) the issuance of \$25,000 in bonds of the city to construct a city hall. Both votes carried by a large majority. On September 10 the "altered and amended" plans and specifications of George W. Frank, Jr. for a new city hall were adopted, with the provision that "the same could be built for \$19,000.00." The impressive 2-story building with clock tower served the city from 1888 until replaced by the present city hall in 1939. The proposed railroad was never built.

An ordinance of December 10 granted permission to the Kearney Street Railway to operate its railway by electric motors, and to have at least four miles ready before September of 1889.

Between January and December, 1888, salaries of city officials were at least tripled, some increased even more: the mayor and city clerk from \$25.00 a quarter to \$75.00 a quarter, city treasurer and councilmen from \$12.50 a quarter to \$50.00 a quarter. A city marshal and two policemen (one daytime, one nighttime) looked after law and order in the city.

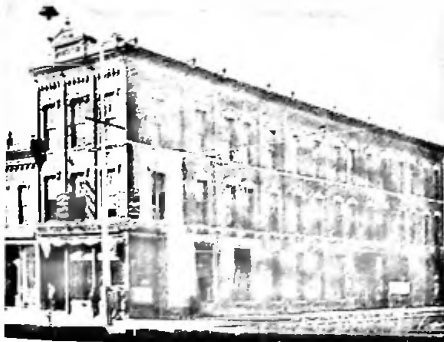
Growth of the city was also reflected in the construction of new brick downtown buildings and new homes, both modest and spacious, that were started or completed during the year. Bonds for the erection of the new courthouse were filed on January 7, with W. T. Scott the contractor.

An informal opening of the Midway Hotel was held on February 15, "the largest, most complete and best furnished hotel between Omaha and Denver," stated the *New Era*. Construction on the 4-story, Gothic style building had commenced late in 1886. Cost, including furnishings, was between \$50,000 and \$60,000, of which Kearney citizens had contributed the sum of \$15,000 to the builder, J. L. Keck of Cincinnati, Ohio. Dr. Orison S. Marden would arrive in Kearney late in the year to become proprietor of this impressive hostelry.

Four more brick business houses were built or started on Wyoming, now Central, Avenue. The 2-story Moore-Jones store building on the east side of Central between Railroad and 21st Streets was the first completed in 1888. The second floor was fitted for offices. (Location is probably 2013 Central). The M. A. Leach building (2004 Central) was a 2-story structure housing the Brunswick Hotel. A second floor iron balcony across the entire front of the building was an unusual architectural feature.

The 3-story business house of C. H. Miller at 2122 Central was well on its way in 1888. It would become the new quarters of the First National Bank which had outgrown its location at 2001 Central. The frame structure of the Hamilton Loan & Trust Company (2119 Central) was moved to make way for their new 2-story brick structure with a Colorado sandstone front.

"The most complete livery barn in this part of the state," is the description in the *New Era* of the large barn of J. L. Keck. Located on the southwest corner of the



C. H. Miller Building, 1888  
2122 Central Avenue

Midway Hotel block, the lower part of the structure was for the storage of buggies, harness rooms, and stalls for horses. The front half of the upstairs would house offices, with the remainder used for a loft.

The number of new homes built is not known but there were many, as evidenced by the population increase and the platting in 1888 of East Lawn Addition and Kearney Land & Investment Company's Choice Addition to the city. The history of a few homes has been researched, and the *Kearney New Era* of August 18 describes both business houses and residences.

The Queen Anne Victorian style home of John L. Barnd at 320 East 31st Street is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Built of pressed brick covered with clapboard, it has fifteen rooms, three fireplaces, a "wrap-around" porch and two balconies.

Tower Hill overlooking the city was the site chosen by W. C. Tillson for his new residence on 19th Avenue north of the canal. George W. Frank, Jr. was the architect of the 15-room mansion built of brick with Colorado sandstone trim. It was used for many years as the Kearney Country Club home, but has since been razed.

The home of G. H. Cutting at 823 West 22nd was said to be "among the largest" of Kearney. A barn "of the latest model" was also included in the description of this spacious residence.

The largest concentration of home building took place in the section now referred to as "Old Kenwood." Of the nine houses built in 1888, eight are still standing and have now passed the century mark. The ninth was destroyed by fire sometime ago. There would be several more houses built in this addition in the following two years.

Old Kenwood is a historic neighborhood in southwest Kearney, a development of the Kearney Land & Investment Company. Several stockholders of the company chose sites for their new homes in the area to be built in 1888. Six were built on 8th Avenue, and three on 9th Avenue. The company also built the first Kenwood School, a 2-story brick structure with cupola, and deeded it to the city on February 17, 1888. It also developed Riverside Park at the south end of 8th Avenue between 11th and 13th Streets, but the park was never included in the city park system and has now reverted to a residential area.

Henry G. Wiley, secretary and general manager of the company, appeared to be the prime mover of the development. His was the first home built at 1418 8th Avenue, followed by H. B. Bicknell, 1406 8th Avenue; Homer J. Allen, 1506 8th Avenue; H. Fred Wiley, 1518 8th Avenue (since burned); Everett C. Wiley, 1606 8th Avenue; L. H. Smith, 1618 8th Avenue; C. E. Hanson, 1320 9th Avenue; C. H. Maddix, 821 West 14th Street, and John J. Bartlett, 1402 9th Avenue. The homes were spacious. Each was set on a full half or quarter block of ground, had large porches, were two-story, 10 to 14 room structures, some with steeples, several with decorative stained



**John L. Barnd Residence  
320 East 31st Street**

**Buffalo County Historical Society**  
**Box 523**  
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glass. While the architecture of each house differed, the interior design was similar. Generally each house was entered through double doors to a good sized reception hall. Folding double doors would divide the hall from the parlor, or the parlor from the sitting room or dining room. Their fireplaces were beautiful, many had them both upstairs and down. All had bathrooms, furnaces, closets; sewerage, gas and electric lights were provided for. The cost varied from \$3,500 to \$5,000 with the exception of the Bartlett House, which was around \$30,000 because Mr. Bartlett imported much of the material for his home from England and other countries in Europe.

Businesses incorporated during the year were Kearney Brick Company, Kearney Canning & Pickling Co., and Western Engineering Co. Investment companies organized were Bunnell & Eno Investment, Midway Land Company, and George W. Frank Improvement Company. New loan companies were Mutual Loan and Investment Co. of Kearney, National Loan, Bldg. & Protective Union, and Midway Building & Loan. There were four newspapers. The new Commercial and Savings Bank started operation in the recently completed Hamer Building at 2201 Central, making a total of five banks.

The Kearney Board of Trade was replaced by the Kearney Chamber of Commerce, and promotion of the city and its opportunities was stepped up drastically. H. D. Watson came to Kearney and went into partnership with George W. Frank, and Mentor A. Brown arrived to take over the Central Nebraska Press and establish the Kearney Daily Hub. W. W. Barney started an abstracting business with Homer J. Allen in 1888 which has been carried on for more than a century by the Barney family.

The new year of 1889 found Kearney with capital flowing in, money easy, business rushing, a beehive of activity everywhere.

#### SOURCES

1888 City Council Minutes; *Kearney New Era* 1888 issues; *Kearney Daily Hub*, September 12, 1923, September 10, 1963; Kearney Centennial booklet. Photographs from the A. T. Anderson Collection.

#### NEW ANNUAL MEMBERS

<i>Howard &amp; Doris Beattie, Kearney</i>	<i>Antigone Kotsiopulos, Fort Collins, CO</i>
<i>Ivan Brodine, Elm Creek</i>	<i>Mary Miller, LaHabra, CA</i>
<i>George &amp; Marian Brown, Kearney</i>	<i>Marguerita Rudkins, (Supporting)</i>
<i>Jennifer Harvey, Berkeley, CA</i>	<i>Newbury Park, CA</i>
<i>June L. Krebs, Friend</i>	<i>Floretta Sullwold, (Supporting)</i>
	<i>Elm Creek</i>

**Please Note:** If you have not paid 1989 annual dues, this will be your last issue of *Buffalo Tales*.