



Buffalo Tales



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THE BLACK FAMILY

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

Among the land-seekers who came to Buffalo County in the mid-seventies were three brothers from Mt. Pleasant, Iowa — Captain Joseph, Charles C. and Samuel R. Black; also, Joseph H. Black, probably a cousin.

Captain Joseph Black

Captain Joseph Black, the first to arrive, was born April 23, 1834 in Greenbrier County, Virginia. The family moved first to Illinois, then to Henry County, Iowa where Joseph attended Howe Academy in Mt. Pleasant.

He enlisted in the army at the outbreak of the Civil War and was elected Captain of Company K of the 51st Illinois Infantry. The company fought in a number of the early battles of the war, including Shiloh and Memphis. Black left the army in 1863 to care for his brothers and sisters after the death of his father. After he married Ellen Updegraff in 1865, he farmed and later established a store in Mt. Pleasant.

In 1875 he brought his growing family to Buffalo County where he bought "Patterson Island", later known as "Black Island", where he farmed and raised cattle. He also operated a large ranch on the South Loup.

Mrs. Black recalled that on the night she arrived a hot wind was blowing so hard that she lost her hat, and never found it. She said in those early years her greatest fears were of "the drunken Texas cowboys. Sober they were all right but drunk . . . they proceeded to shoot up the town and terrorize the citizens."

Captain Black was in the mercantile business in Kearney from 1885 to 1888. He was treasurer of Buffalo County in 1880 and was elected mayor in 1884. He was appointed by the County Board of Supervisors to superintend the building of the new courthouse, which was completed in 1890. He was a member of the county board from



Black Celery Farm, which appeared in *Country Life in America*, 1907.

WITH THE SOCIETY

WAGONS WEST 1992. Sunshine and beautiful weather smiled on our Wagons West Celebration June 12-13. Colorful square dancers, with Marshall Poole as caller, and an ice cream social were enjoyed Friday evening. Bluegrass bands *Turtle Creek* and *Rough Around the Edges*, Aurora, Colorado's *Hoofin' High Country Cloggers*, our own Jim Cudaback at the organ, and *Prairie Home*, a local history play, were all enthusiastic crowd-pleasers on Saturday.

Under David and Margaret Clark's direction, Arthur Hansen's play about the Boyd Ranch and Buffalo County's first county seat at Nebraska Center was performed in a professional manner by students at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Music was provided by the Platte Valley Flats of the 1733 Kearney Barbershop Chorus. Our thanks to all of these performers, as well as to all other volunteers and donors who contributed to make Wagons West 1992 a hand clapping, toe tappin' fun time.

HISTORICAL MARKERS. Two historical markers have been erected in Buffalo County this year. On April 5 a Fort Banishment marker was dedicated one and a half miles east of Ravenna on Highway 2, commemorating this short-lived military outpost of Fort Kearny built in 1865 to protect workers on the railroad as its line was built westward. The marker was erected jointly by the Ravenna Genealogical & Historical Society and Nebraska State Historical Society.

On Saturday, June 20, at 2:00 p.m., a marker was dedicated at the site of the Boyd Ranch on Highway 30 at the west edge of Gibbon. The Boyd Ranch was established as early as 1858 as an outfitting and supply station for travelers on the Platte River trails. The first post office at Nebraska Centre, which was the first county seat of the county, was established at the Boyd Ranch on July 29, 1859 and continued until 1868. James Boyd, proprietor of the ranch, assisted in the grading on the Union Pacific Railroad built through the county in 1866. He later moved to Omaha where he was elected Mayor, and in 1891 was elected Governor of Nebraska.

This marker was erected jointly by the Shelton Chapter D.A.R. and the Nebraska State Historical Society.

MEMORIAL GIFTS have been received:

In memory of Martha Henning, from Paul and Mitzi Steinbrink.

In memory of Cary and Nye families from Margaret C. Tunks.

In memory of Nina Frank, Laverne McMullen and Leonard Silver, a new steel file cabinet for the Archives Center has been received from Catharine Bahnsen.

"RAISE THE ROOF." A total of \$2,380.00 has been received for shingles for the log cabin from the following members and friends:

Mary Snow	Mrs. E. D. Austin	Verta Miller
Janet Eickmeier	Pete Kotsiopoulos	Delbert and Arelene Kahle
Margaret C. Tunks	Gene Hunt	Dr. and Mrs. R. C. Rosenlof
Glen Wisch	Mrs. Lester Warren	Warren and Mable Messman
Philip S. Holmgren	Mrs. Wayne Reynolds	Floretta Sullwold
Howard Kolbo	Catharine Bahnsen	Carl Spelts
Alice Howell	Helenmarie Murphy	Mardi Anderson
Mr. & Mrs. Norris Kuebler	Dora Day	Dobytown Kiwanis
Robert Sorensen	Sam Matheny	Sullwold Farms
Mr. and Mrs. Vance Nielsen	Jeanette H. Nickel	Chan and Susan Lynch III
Jeff Jorgensen	Harold and Alyce Arp	John and Margaret Bliese
Evelyn Cullen	Josephine Bissell	Mary Q. Nye
Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Reich	Dorothy Bond	Dwight and Lois Adams
Dr. and Mrs. John Bancroft	Hazel Karner	Mr. and Mrs. Martin G. Maul

1903-1904: was on the school board for eight years, serving as president for three years, and was on the library board for twenty years. He was a state Senator from 1885 to 1888.

As the town grew, wanting to get away from "the noise and rush of the town", they built a home at 2004 4th Avenue. The Blacks lost several children in infancy; those who survived were Nellie (Miller), Alice (Turney), Katherine (Schars), Nancy and Frank. Captain Black died February 19, 1912.

Charles C. Black

Charles Black taught for a time in Iowa before going to Colorado where he was in the mercantile business in Pueblo and Canon City for a time. Coming to Buffalo County in 1876 he purchased a relinquishment on Long Island, near Joseph's property. He added other properties from time to time and also had a timber claim of eighty acres northeast of Kearney.

In 1877 he married Elizabeth Chesley originally of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. She opened a millinery shop in Kearney in 1876, which she sold after her marriage. The couple spent their time developing the wild land, and later raised and fed cattle. Mr. Black was very active in agricultural circles until his death in 1889 at the age of forty-one. Mrs. Black remained on the farm until the house burned about a year after her husband's death. She moved to Kearney, raised and educated her seven children and continued to manage her property "displaying excellent business ability and executive force." Her home for many years was at 202 West 28th Street in a house that was torn down last fall (1991). Of the Black children, Beulah died at the age of twelve, the others were Adah (Hamer), Dort, and Ruth (Todd). Susan and Donald (twins) were less than two years old when their father died. The oldest child, Adah, married Thomas F. Hamer,¹ son of F. G. Hamer, Kearney's first attorney. The couple had three children when Adah died at the age of twenty-nine. Their grandmother raised them in addition to her own children. Robert Black Hamer, who followed in his father's footsteps, was a prominent attorney in Omaha.

Samuel R. Black

Sam Black followed his brothers to Kearney where he was listed as a butcher with his son Fred in the Black and Son Meat Market at 2008 Central. He lived at 1421 Avenue C with his wife Emma and sons Fred and William. Fred and Sam were listed in 1891 as stock dealers. Little else is known of the family except that Sam went to Thomas County. He died December 1, 1912 at the age of seventy-one and is buried in the Kearney Cemetery.

Joseph H. Black

Joseph H. Black, apparently a cousin, also had land on Long Island where he operated the Island Dairy with his sons J. Henderson and Harry I. About 1882 he began experimenting with a small patch of celery. This operation increased to the point where in 1894 he was shipping 150 to 500 pounds of celery a week. The variety used was "White Plume" which measured thirty-six inches in height. There were twelve stalks in a bundle, which weighed fifty-four pounds. Other growers who became interested were Fred Robertson, M. M. Garvin, Bill Keller, Charles W. Hull (at one time mayor of Kearney), William Didricksen and others. For a number of years in the 1890's, fifteen to eighteen carloads were sold annually through a Kansas City commission firm.

Mr. Black eventually turned the celery operation over to his four sons. Ralph Cunningham went to work for the Black Brothers in the fields for a dollar a day.² He was later promoted to driving a buckboard, hauling the plants from the green-

house to the fields, for which he received two dollars a day. Harry and LaVerne Black were foremen in the fields while Cyrus took care of the greenhouse.

The fields were pictured in 1907 in the magazine *Country Life in America* as part of H. D. Watson's 1733 Ranch. When Mr. Watson persuaded the magazine to do a story about his "vast holdings", Gene Stratton Porter³ was sent to interview him. In the words of Maud Marston Burrows, "he whirled Mrs. Porter from place to place -pointing out properties which had no connection with the ranch, including the George W. Frank House, Juan Boyle and Spenser houses, sugar beets raised on State Industrial School fields and "Mrs. Black's" celery farm."⁴

Less stringy varieties were developed in other parts of the country. When the national companies which bought Platte Valley celery started raising crops on their own land, production in this area gradually stopped.

Joseph H. Black died September 15, 1899. His wife Isabella lived at 1418 8th Avenue for a number of years. Harry and Frank Black were owners of the Black and Kuhn Brothers Foundry which later became the Kearney Foundry and Machine Shop. Harry Black owner. Mrs. Black died in 1922.

In his recollections of the celery farm Ralph Cunningham wrote: "in between times Cy and I played catch back of the barn." Baseball was one of the many interests that occupied Cy's life. He began by coaching Kearney boys, was an amateur baseball manager and later a scout for the St. Louis Cardinals. He is credited with discovering baseball-great Richie Ashburn.

He was also an avid hunter and later became a guide, taking his baseball friends and others to hunt on his land on Crescent Lake near Oshkosh, Nebraska. Not surprisingly his dogs were called Richie Ashburn and Satchel Paige. He made duck and goose calls and his lightweight decoys are collectors' items today. They were made by pouring melted celluloid into iron molds which were cast in Denver. They were put together with burlap and wire mesh. When Cy had decorated them they were very effective in attracting wildfowl, although to the human eye they did not look like



Portion of 1907 Kearney map showing Black farmlands on Long Island south of the city between the North and South Channels of the Platte River.

much close at hand.

Cy married Bessie Snowden, first Bursar at the Kearney Normal School. The couple lived in the three-story mansion at 1404 10th Avenue, built by Andrew Snowden. Bessie's father, who was a stock buyer. Next to the house was a small building used as a studio by Cy, who was also a painter in oils and watercolors, mostly of wildlife. Solomon D. Butcher photographed some of the wildlife pictures and made postcards from them.⁵

It is said that Cy drove Bessie to work at the college in a horse and buggy, and on his return he drove the team into the large carriage house on the property, leaving it hitched until time to return to the college.

Cy was a professional taxidermist. The Biology Department at the University of Nebraska at Kearney has some of his birds. He also kept birds as pets, including a crow with a split tongue which could talk. Small boys were especially drawn to his place. Margaret Hohnholt, a neighbor, said her son Larry carried papers and when collecting on Saturdays he might spend half the morning there.

After Cy sold his home to Mr. and Mrs. Marian Marrow, they allowed him to stay on in the studio. He died July 3, 1962.

Although the Black family left the area, generations of Kearneyites remember Black Woods (on the island) as a favorite picnic spot.

NOTES

1. Tom Hamer was attorney for the Union Pacific for many years.
2. Ralph Cunningham wrote in *Where the Buffalo Roamed* that his first job was working in the celery fields of Fred Robertson from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. for 25¢ a day. This did not include the hour it took him to ride to the fields and another hour back. He worked "for exactly six weeks."
3. A popular novelist and nature writer.
4. Mrs. Burrows wrote "Mrs. Porter was exceedingly disturbed, declared that her literary reputation was at stake . . . thru an attorney here forced Watson to make a settlement . . . for damages."
5. Mr. and Mrs. Marian Marrow donated one of Cy's paintings to the Museum of Nebraska Art

SOURCES

S. C. Bassett, *History of Buffalo County*, Vol. II; *Where the Buffalo Roamed*; Maud Marston Burrows Scrapbook; *Country Life in America*; January, 1907; Standard Atlas of Buffalo County, 1907; Kearney City Directories, 1889 to 1906; Buffalo County Cemetery Inscriptions, compiled by Ft. Kearney Genealogical Society; letter and phone interview with Dr. Larry Peterson, phone interviews with Rosa Marrow and Virginia Schars, Omaha, letters from Mrs. Sid Snowden and Melva Snowden Roberts; interview with Ward Minor.



Andrew Snowden-Cy Black House, 1404 10th Avenue, taken in 1912.
(Photo loaned by Mr. and Mrs. Marion Marrow)

TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

Trails & Rails Museum opened on Memorial Day. In the past four weeks we have had visitors from several states and some foreign countries. Summer guides are Jennie Schug, Kori Else and Sally Dier.

We are all spruced up for our guests. Howard Kolbo has supervised the finishing touches on the engine which was painted last fall. The trim is being put on and the numbers have been painted. It looks sharp. Henry Hohnholt has trimmed the trees along the parking. Glen Wisch and his crew have reset the bricks of the platform south of the depot, completed the sidewalk from the schoolhouse to the church, and have built a board walk from the church to the log cabin. The guides have been cleaning and polishing, plus greeting and guiding our guests.

The Q125 quilt show is up in the church. Marian Brown assisted us on this project. The special display in the depot this year is of old-time medicine. Articles have been loaned by the Vance Niensens and the Hohnholts, along with those from the Society's collection.

The Archives Center in the church is taking shape. Volunteers will be there on Monday afternoons and at other times by appointment. Call Thelma Lyons (237 5744) if you are interested in genealogy or family history. Call Alice Howell (237-7858) or Mardi Anderson (237-7339 evenings) on local history.

Mary Elizabeth and Anne Marie Bosshardt have planted a heritage garden by the log cabin. This is a 4-H project.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Museum Director

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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.		

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 1993: Alice Howell, Elmer Holzrichter, Susan C Lynch, all of Kearney; Viola Livingston of Gibbon.
 Term expiring June 1, 1994: Howard Kolbo, Mardi Anderson, Lois Rahmann, all of Kearney; Jim Cudahack of Riverdale.
 Term expiring June 1, 1995: Glen Wisch, Philip Holmgren, Larry Nansel, all of Kearney; Floretta Sullivold of Elm Creek.

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