



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

July-August, 1989

ROOTS OF BUFFALO COUNTY—THE GERMANS AND AUSTRIANS Part II

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

The trickle of Germans into the area had become a steady stream in the 1880's, spreading over the entire county. One of the first in the Ravenna area was William Stark who came to America in 1862. He grew up in Grand Island, and in 1880 homesteaded three and one-half miles east of Ravenna, later adding railroad land to his "Short Creek Ranch." In 1880 he married Frederica Krehmke who came to America with her parents in 1873. The couple had ten children. The Stark property is now owned by the fourth generation of the family, Mike and Don Hervert.

Sophia Pingel, born in Mecklinburg, came to America with her parents in 1857 in a sailing ship—a trip of seven weeks. After living in New York City and Buffalo, New York, the family moved to Appleton, Wisconsin where Sophia met and married Fred Rohrbach. Fred served under General Sherman during his march through Georgia in the Civil War. In 1878 the Rohrbachs took a homestead in Gardner Township. When the surveyor informed them that their sod house was in the middle of the road, they built another in the center of their land.

When a prairie fire came through they threw water on the sod house and stayed inside until the danger was past. Several years later they built a two-room frame house with an attic. Dances were held there, with all the neighborhood invited, and a fiddler providing the music. The Rohrbach's great grandson, Bruce Muhlbach, now owns the homestead.

John Thiessen, born in Windberger, came with his parents to Grand Island at the age of twelve. After his marriage to Anna Schrader the couple moved to Hampton where John worked as a blacksmith. In 1886, hearing of the new town of Ravenna, they moved there, where John set up his shop, which later became a garage. He served in various city positions and was also mayor.

(Continued on Page 3)



Thiessen Garage

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 Burgland; Treasurer, Philip S. Holmgren. Directors: Frances Link, Barb Avery, Edna Hehner, Viola Livingston, Jim Cudaback, Michael Stauffer, Glen Wisch, Chad Anderson, Colleen Parker, Chandler Lynch III. Publications Chairman: Alice Howell.

Trails & Rails Museum 706 West 11th Street (308) 234-3041

WITH THE SOCIETY

Join us for Fall Fun Day at the Museum on September 17, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. A horseshoe tournament and other events are planned. Watch the paper for more information.

Forty members traveled to northwest Nebraska for four days in June. Visits were made at the Loup County Museum at Taylor and the Cherry County Museum at Valentine. We also visited Caroline Piŕer Sandoz' home where much of Mari Sandoz' memorabilia is kept, plus many other things not on the agenda. It was a fun-filled, informative trip.

A one-day trip is planned for October 1. We will travel to Missouri Valley, Iowa to the DeSoto Bend area where the *Bertrand* was raised from the Missouri River. All supplies and equipment are on display. We will return to Fremont to ride the Fremont & Elkhorn Valley train to Hooper and back, stopping in historic Hooper for an hour. Cost \$30.00 for bus fare and admissions (including train trip). Reservations are due by September 7. Call 237-7327 for more information.

THANKS to Marian and Hal Johnson for new curtains in the hotel; to Sharon Wisch Mason for the cook stove in the hotel kitchen; to Jack Erickson of Kearney Floral for the flowers in the flower beds.

Work is being done on the church; contact a member of the board if you can help. Fencing will soon be put around the entire grounds; the land to the south is being leveled. In order to better care for the grounds and for fire protection, the water line has been extended.

Our historical society was well represented in the Kearney Art Festival, July 7-9. The *Dobytown* play—our 1989 *Wagons West* production—was well attended on July 7-8 at Harmon Park Sonatorium. Thanks to director Jim Williamson, assistant director Susan McFerrin, and the cast; also to Catharine Bahnsen and Alice Howell for adapting the 1967 musical to our use. The play was repeated at Bandshell Park in Minden on July 20 at the request of the Minden Chamber of Commerce. Alice Howell was chairman of this *Wagons West* event.

Thanks also to Chan Lynch, Susan McFerrin and Mardi Anderson who led over 150 people on walking tours of Central Avenue on July 8. This was a joint project of Kearney Centre Association and the historical society for the Art Festival. Brochures for this walking tour are available at Trails & Rails Museum, Chamber of Commerce, and Museum of Nebraska Art.

In the downtown window display contest, Ruter's won first place for a window decorated by Susan McFerrin, using period dresses and accessories from Trails & Rails Museum.

NEW MEMBER

Karl J. Anderson Amherst

The four sons of Conrad and Margaret Wedemeyer came together from Germany to Denison, Iowa, then to Colorado. Fred arrived in Ravenna in 1879, followed by Christopher, in 1883. Henry, who had married Wilhelmina Evers in Iowa, came to Ravenna about 1892. Diedrich and his wife Maria followed his brothers; they all farmed.

After Henry died in 1900, Wilhelmina raised her three sons alone until 1910 when she married Christopher. Her youngest son, Bernhard, married Minnie Rohde, whose family had come to Grand Island from Germany. Minnie's brother Herman was one of seven men sent to the county to organize Trinity Lutheran Church, Majors.

Louis Zimpfer met his future wife, Louise Krautter in Fort Worth, Texas. Louis moved to Ravenna in 1888, followed by Louise. They were married in Grand Island. The Zimpfers operated a confectionery store until Louis' death in 1904. Their six children were all born in the living quarters behind the store. After her youngest girl graduated from high school, Mrs. Zimpfer started a grocery store which was managed by her daughter Helen, 17, and son Charlie, 16.

A number of Austrians settled in the Pleasanton area in the late 1870's and 1880's. One of the first was Joseph Mauler, of Moravia, who came to the county in 1878, homesteading in Loup township. In 1879 he sent for his parents, two brothers, Frank and Albert, two sisters, Cecelia and Anna, and Rosa Plazer, whom he married in 1880. Joseph and Rosa had five children. After Rosa's death he married Philomena Pratcher, whom he had known in Austria. The couple had nine children.

Joseph's sister, Christina (Cecelia) married John Scheckler, who in 1876 had taken one of the first homesteads in the area. John's first home was a dugout by the lake which bears his name. By the time he married Christina in 1880 he had built one of the few frame homes in the area. They had nine children. After John's death Christina married another Austrian, Charles Klein. The Kleins had six children.

Karl and Rosa Kirschner of Weiss Kirchen decided to come to the Pleasanton area after receiving an enthusiastic letter from their friends, the Robert Seiferts. On July 3, 1878 a sizable group went aboard the ship *Lessing*: the Kirschners, their son Karl, his wife Aloisia (Matzner), their two daughters, and Julia and Robert Matzner. In October Karl, Sr.'s other children, Robert and Theresia (Tracy) came over with the Schickling family. After working as a butcher in Pleasanton for four years Karl and his son Robert took up a claim on the Loup River. The Matznors and Joe Schickling also homesteaded nearby.

Franz Jahn of Brownsven, Austria, sent his son, Alois, and his son-in-law, Joseph Hadwiger, to investigate the prospects in Nebraska. "Apparently the report was favorable". Franz brought most of his family to the Columbus area in 1882. Karl Jahn and Joseph Hadwiger came on to Pleasanton where they homesteaded.

After Anna (Jahn) Hadwiger died in childbirth her parents took two of her children, the other two stayed with their father.

In 1889 Joseph married Tracy (Kirschner) Matzner, who had five children by her marriage to Robert Matzner. Joseph and Tracy had five children.

Fred A. Mueller was a year old when his parents, Ludwig and Ida, brought him from Germany to Pleasanton in 1882. He later farmed with his father for a number of years. In 1905 he married Anna Schipman; they had four children. In 1909 they moved into Pleasanton where Fred was associated with the Farmers State Bank. When Anna died the senior Muellers helped Fred care for the children. The family later moved to Kearney, where Fred was state agent for an insurance company. He served on the City Council



**Fred A. and Anna
(Schipman) Mueller,
married June 8, 1905.**

and was elected to three terms in the State Legislature. He served on the council which organized the Unicameral, to which he was elected to five more terms beginning in 1939. In his later years he was associated with his son Eric in the Mueller Service Garage in Kearney.

Peter F. H. Schars came to New Baltimore, Michigan in 1852, with his parents. In 1879 he purchased a farm in Thornton Township. He served as sheriff of Buffalo County for two terms from 1883 to 1887; he also served two terms on the County Board of Supervisors. Peter and his wife Lydia had one son. They later moved to Kearney.

John Wolf, oldest son of John D. Wolf of Wittenburg, Germany, came to the county in 1879 from Iowa City with a friend, Gottlib Loenig. Arriving in Kearney, they made their way to the farm home of John Loewenstein whom they had known in Johnson County (Iowa City). The two friends worked on farms during the summer and fall, then contracted with the railroad to buy adjoining eighty acre claims. In 1880 John broke sod, built a sod house and married Maggie Henderson. During that year also, his parents, two brothers and a sister came to the county.

To find firewood they had to go to the Loup River, a trip of a day up and a day back. On one such trip John met the Olives, who were driving a herd of cattle to Kearney. The foreman asked John to pull over, which he did, without question. This was the crew which had earlier lynched Mitchell and Ketchum.

Of the eleven children born to the Wolfs, Daisy Siebke of Amherst survives. The Wolf farm is now owned by a granddaughter, Donna Kegley and her husband Glenn.

Philip Altmaier and his wife Gertrude (Amish) came from Hesse County, Germany, in 1852 with their infant son, Adam. The family lived in Ohio for about seven years before moving to Johnson County, Iowa. "Westward again", he homesteaded in Thornton township. Their son Adam married Mary Ruppenkamp in Iowa City before moving with his parents to Buffalo County, where they homesteaded near what is now Prairie Center. The couple had thirteen children.

The first post office in Prairie Center was established in 1875 and the last one was discontinued in 1902. There were two churches in the area, Havens Chapel Methodist and St. Marys Catholic.

From 1874 to 1890 a number of German Catholic families came from Iowa to the Prairie Center area. Names on the early church records were: Altmaier, Schmitz, Helriegel, Eckhout, Nober, Shovlain, Brucker, Brick, Meyer, Wenzlick, Zwiener, and Zimmer.

In 1881, four German families who had settled north of Amherst contacted Pastor E. Flack. With his help Fred Albrecht, Herman Fritz, William Sohrweid and John Thiede held the first services of Immanuel Evangelical Church, on March 7, 1882. In 1883 an organizational meeting was held at the home of William Sohrweid. In addition to those mentioned, others at the meeting were Gust Bergt, Ernest Hanneman, J. F. and Fred Hartman, William Luhr and Carl Ruch. In 1885 August Sohrweid offered a part of his



**Immanuel Lutheran Church,
1889-1972**

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tree claim for the building of a sod church, which was followed by a frame church in 1889.

The church served a large area for many years. In 1907 Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded in Amherst (*Tales of Buffalo County*, Vol. II). With the changing times members of Immanuel voted to join Trinity in 1970. The old church was torn down in 1972.

Long before women's liberation the three daughters of Christian and Barbara (Straehle) Lebherz left their home in Oberenstenfeld, Württemberg to find a better life in America.

The exact sequence isn't known but it's likely that their brother, Fred Lebherz, came over first to West Virginia, then on to Toledo, Ohio, where he worked in a piano and organ factory. After a year he moved to Peru, Indiana. At some time he changed his name to Lebhart.

Fred next moved to Kearney in 1882 where he was in the hotel and liquor business. He married Catherine Roeck of Kearney; they had three children. The family later moved to Cheyenne.

Wilhelmina (Minnie) came to Kearney in the mid or late 1880's. Here she met Fred Hartman, son of Jacob and Helene Hartman, natives of Stuttgart. The Hartmans had come from Hooper, Nebraska in 1883 to homestead north of Amherst. Fred and Minnie were married in 1891. They had nine children.

The oldest Lebherz sister, Christine Caroline (Carrie) worked in Peru and Indianapolis, Indiana before coming to Kearney in the late eighties. She worked in the George W. Frank home until her marriage in 1892 to August Taubenheim, a native of Saxony, who farmed near Amherst. The Taubenheims had four children.

Louise Lebherz probably came to Peru, Indiana while her brother was still there. She married Jacob Christian Walther in 1883; the couple had four children. In 1908 they moved to Amherst, as both of her sisters were living there. The Walthers had a meat market in Amherst for a number of years.

Frederica Voss Hopp brought her five children from Pomerani, Germany in 1875. The family worked in a dairy until 1879 when "Rica" moved to Buffalo County to be near her sister and husband, Wilhelmina and Chris Fisher. She took a homestead in the Amherst area and lived with her daughter and son-in-law, Augusta and John Mollard. Rica was much in demand for her skill as a gypsum plasterer. She moved to Washington state in 1912.

(Part III will conclude this series on the Germans and Austrians.)