

Buffalo Tales

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008

HOME ON THE LOUP RIVER (FREIGHTERS HOTEL) - PART II

BY MARY KENNEY

One of the fun things to do was slide down the banister when we were upstairs. We never walked, we slid down the banister because it was faster and more fun. One day we decided to get a cardboard box and sit in it and then go down the stairs. We wore out many boxes, but one day as I was going down the stairs something happened and I tipped over and went flying down the stairs. When I tumbled down the stairs I hit the stove. It made a gash on my forehead. It bled like crazy so we put pressure on it and the bleeding stopped. That was the end of sliding down the stairs in a box! I still have a scar on my forehead from that accident. Somehow we still found other activities to do that weren't so dangerous.

We used to go down by the creek and jump off the bank. The bank was 10 to 15 feet tall, but we were jumping in very soft sand. We would jump and then see how far out we could jump. We were having a great time but all good things have to come to an end. This time it was only my brother and sister jumping and we were seeing how far we could jump. I jumped out far enough that it knocked the wind out of me. As I struggled to get my breath, my younger sister came and pounded on my back. How she knew what to do is more than I can remember but I was finally able to breathe. Because of my sister I was able to be revived.

Picnics were a fun part of the summer months. We packed ourselves dill pickles and mustard sandwiches and headed for the pasture where there were trees. This was not very far from the house but those sandwiches were tasty and the pickles were the ones that Mom had canned. She could make the best dill pickles in the whole world. When we were in the pasture we would pick Mom flowers, they were the little red moss roses and take them home to her. She always appreciated us bringing her flowers.

Speaking of chores, we each had our chores to do and nobody tried to get out of doing them. One of the chores was to milk

cows. Our milking was out in the open. We walked up to the cow and squatted and milked her. Our cows all had names and they were very tame. We each had usually two or three cows to milk. Some of them gave a whole bucket of milk and others were not so generous. One of the cows that I liked to milk was named Blackie. She was one who gave a whole bucket of milk and was an easy cow to milk. Some gave their milk slower and we had to pull on their udder harder and longer. Sometimes the cats were nearby and would come for a drink. That's when we squirted milk in their direction and the cats would drink. It was a waste of milk, but it was fun to feed our pets at the same time. With the milking came the separating and washing of the cream separator. It was no fun washing the disk. I can't remember how many disks there were in the bowl but enough! In the earlier days we had a hand cranked cream separator. Later we got an electric one but the crazy thing still needed to be washed daily. I felt like I washed it forever. I am sure that my sisters thought that they did the same.

School days were spent at Prairie Rose School. Sand Puppy was another name of our school which was about 2 ½ miles from home (the school had two names). I can't remember some of my teacher's names and others I remember to this day. The ones I remember were the ones who really made school fun. I attended there for eight full years. In those days we had to take a test before we could go to town to high school. The worst part of school was that there was only one other person going to school besides my own brothers and sisters. We still had fun playing games as the teacher usually came out to play with us at recess. Handy High Over was the best game! This was throwing the ball over the school (which was a one room building) and if you caught the ball as it rolled down the roof you would run around the building and try to catch a person before he could run around on your side of the building. If you caught

them, they were on your side.

We went into town for high school. It was common for people to stay with other families while going to high school. My first year I stayed with my sister in an upstairs room of a family we knew. We cooked for ourselves. We had a little oil burner to heat and cook our food. We didn't have a refrigerator and we carried our water. We also carried the garbage out to the alley behind the house. The second year we had another sister attending high school so the three of us slept in one bed and cooked our own food. We always got along well. This house had forced heat so we were warm all the time.

During the third and fourth years of high school our little school in the country closed and all six of us attended school in town. This time we drove by ourselves until the weather got bad. I was the oldest so I was the driver and I thought I was really "hot stuff." As it got colder we rented two rooms in a house very close to school. The six of us stayed in those two rooms. I was a junior in high school and my little brother was in kindergarten. We carried our water, wood, and coal from outdoors. The garbage was always dumped in the alley. Paper items were burned in the stove. We were still using the oil burner. Those two years went by fast because we were very busy. Each one was responsible for caring for themselves. Even my little brother could fend for himself. I was the chief cook as my other sister worked downtown in the café every night until it closed at supper time. There wasn't enough room for two cooks anyway! We always ate well. There was a locker plant in town in which my folks rented space to keep frozen meat and take it home to thaw for our meals. There were two grocery stores in town that we could charge what we needed each day for food. Probably the hardest part of this situation was that our parents were leaving us in town and the littlest child was only five years old. It was hard for him to be away from his parents. Our folks usually came into town on Wednesdays to see us and check on how we were doing.

My Dad was a very hard working person who would do anything for his family. He loved horses and always had a team or two of horses on the farm. He did some work with the horses but tractors were also used. When he came home from a full day on the open tractor he would have dust all over him. There were no cabs on the tractors in those days. He

would come in and wash up at the sink and have his meal with the family. I sometimes would stand on his chair and comb his hair for a long time while he read the paper. When I was small, I remember him doing acrobatic stunts with us after we ate. I would stand in his hand for several minutes without falling. He would lift us and swing us around until he was worn out. He always gave a lot of encouragement to us and we had lots of fun. We did this until we wore him out and one day we got too heavy for him to lift. He was always telling us to do our very best at whatever we did. One year the three older girls were going to a spelling contest in Miller, Nebraska. We studied each night on spelling and Dad would give us a spelling test to see if we were improving. We did improve and when the day came for the spelling contest the three of us won our grade level. We were rewarded for our effort and each of us got a gold heart bracelet from our parents for winning.

World War II was going on while I was growing up. The thing I remember the most was the formation of the planes that flew over our farm. There would be twenty or so planes in each formation and we would always wonder about the many soldiers that were in those planes and where they were going. There was an airbase in Kearney and it was very busy in those days. Often when the planes flew over our house they would be in a formation of two groups flying together at the same time. We would stand and watch them until they flew out of view. I also remember at certain times there would be a black out and all lamps were to be blown out. We would sit in the dark. I understand that then the enemy could not locate us in case they invaded our country.

My Grandmother Eckhout lived alone seven miles by road but if you crossed the river it was only about a mile. We both had big barns and lots of pigeons roosted there. While we were outside playing one day we saw a pigeon with a clip on its leg. Pigeons were used to send messages during the war. We watched it for a long time and then it flew away. Our cousins were staying with our Grandmother across the river and later called to tell us that they saw a pigeon which had a clip on her barn. We drove over to see it hoping that we would recognize it as being the same pigeon as the one that was on our barn. We couldn't tell if it was the same but remember that we thought it to be a very special bird that could carry a message and wondered what

the message said. We thought it had to be something to do with the war.

Some prisoners of war were housed in Nebraska. We were in Grand Island one day and Dad drove by the camp. I remember the very high fences and the men looked lonely walking in the yard. I don't remember how many were imprisoned there.

During the war food was rationed. We were without many different kinds of food. The one that I remember the best was sugar. There were very few pies and cakes in those days because sugar was very hard to get and when you did it was only a small amount.

When World War II ended we were in Amherst getting groceries and I remember that Floye Bleschnew came running out of the store to tell us the war was over. She was ecstatic! Of course I can't remember the war starting but I sure do recall the people and the happiness when it war ended. It affected the young and old alike as many lost a loved one during the war.

Santa's Visits

Christmas was always a big time for us! We would write the list like all children would and send letters to Santa. We had a big time waiting for Santa to come. He usually came in the dining room and left lots of things that we needed. We were always waiting for the one big item that we wanted and we usually received several smaller things. There was always candy and nuts along with the toys.

Mom always said that when we were eight years old that would be the last time Santa would bring us a doll. So, each year we got a doll for Christmas and then on our eighth year we got a very special doll that had hair. That doll was not to be played with but to be held and treated with care. I still have my doll! She is very beautiful and at one time if you would tip her to the left she would say "Mama" and if she were tipped to the right she would say "Papa". The memories of holding her still are in my mind of how precious she was and still is today.

When I was about seven, my big present was asking Santa for a suitcase to keep my doll clothes in. Christmas did come and go and I didn't get my suitcase. I was a basket case! I thought I had been a good girl! I must have made my emotions plain as day because a few days later Dad came into the house carrying a little suitcase saying Santa must have lost it out

in the pasture as he was hurrying from house to house. You'll never know how happy I was to receive that suitcase. As I said, Santa always came to the dining room and this one particular year Mom sent my younger sister into the bedroom to get something and she came out white as a ghost! She never said anything so Mom sent me into the bedroom to get whatever she needed but I was shocked also. All the toys and Christmas items were in the bedroom. I thought that Santa just didn't get the toys moved to the dining room. So, I went back into the kitchen and never said a thing. If you remember the house is dark and we were wandering around trying to do things in the dark. The third time is a charm and Mom sent the next person – my younger brother – to the bedroom. The roof nearly went off the house with him screaming and yelling that Santa had come! The switch of rooms where Santa came did not make a difference. As I said before the dining room was always decorated with ropes and tinsel and a cute little tree. We didn't have any lights because we didn't have electricity. The neighbors down the road about two and a half miles got electricity just before Christmas. It was sad for us to drive by their place and see lights on their tree and ours was dark. The day finally arrived and we did get to have lights on the tree in 1953. It certainly made our Christmas even more cheerful!

For some reason my older sister and I were up in the spare bedroom snooping and walked into a closet where we found lots of things stored at the very back. This closet is very long and dark and a good place to hide gifts. We then realized the truth about Santa, but we played along for the younger ones.

The Gate

We lived about a half mile off the main road and the house was back another half mile in the pasture. In the pasture, the milk cows were pasturing year around which meant there would be a gate to open and shut each time you drove in or out. This was not much fun. It was a chore that regardless of seven children or not ON ONE wanted to get out and open the gate. The gate was not hard to open, it was just a chore, which no one wanted to do. During the daylight hours the question was asked, "Who opened it last?" so then we would go to the next person. Even the youngest child did not get out of opening the gate. When it got dark it was a more

difficult job to do. As we got closer to the gate everyone would act or pretend that they were asleep. When Dad yelled a name, that person would be poked (by several siblings) to get the gate opened. It wasn't so bad when the car headlights were shining on the gate, but as the car drove through the opening you were in the dark, trying to get the gate shut as fast as you could. You would drop the chain that went around the post to keep the gate shut and I thought about a coyote or some other animal that might scare me. Needless to say as the children grew up and left home a cattle gate was put in place of the old one. If you are not familiar with a cattle gate, they are made of steel so when the cattle walk close to the steel slats the cattle will know they can't walk through.

Moving the Barn

One activity on the farm was moving the barn from the Hakel farm to our farm. This was done in the middle of the winter. They sawed through the thick ice in the river and pulled the large blocks of ice out of the way. In this opened area they pulled the barn through the river. As the barn came down the river bank it began to rock from side to side and one would have thought it was going to crash. The movers, Bob and Lindy Carmen knew what they were doing as they pulled the barn steady, straight ahead and finally the barn stopped rocking. It finally came to rest close by the house and it housed many animals for years to come. People came from around the country to watch the barn being moved through the river. Everyone clapped when the job was done!



← Mary Kenney



Mary Kenney and her husband Perry.



"From left to right: Sisters: Neomi (Eckhout) Hascall and Mary (Eckhout) Kenney."

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 68848-0523.
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Dr. Mark R. Ellis, Editor

2009 Annual dues, payable January 1, are.

Individual	\$35.00
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We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.

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2009 BUFFALO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- April 19, Sunday (from 1-3 pm): BCHS Annual Meeting
- May (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Mrs. David Anderson born May 11, 1849 (2009=160th)
- May 30, Saturday: 24th Annual Wagons West Celebration
Music from 10-7 pm and Exhibitors from 10-6 pm
- June 14, Sunday: 2nd Annual 1/2 Marathon: Buffalo County Stampede reg is at 6 am-race begins at 7
- June (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Mrs. William Nutter born June 16, 1835 (2009=174th)
- July 3, Friday, (from 9-10:30): Members Only Night (watch city's fireworks)
- July 23, Thursday (from 6:30-9 pm): 3rd Annual Trivia Contest
- July 30- August 29: Smithsonian Harmonies
- August (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Ms. Fannie Graves born August 1885 (2009=124th)
- August 15, Saturday, (from 10-3 pm): 5th Annual Genealogy Open House with spotlight on One-Room School w/ a picnic!
- October (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Maud Marston Burrows in 1864 (2009=145th)
- December 4, Friday (from 6-8 pm): Member's Only Night: 22nd Annual Christmas Tree Walk
- Dec. 5 through Dec. 13 (from 1-5 pm daily): 2nd Annual Christmas Tree Walk, Open to the Public
- ***Special Night: Friday Dec. 11 from 1-7 pm: Public Official Lighting at 6:30 pm
- December (Date/Time TBA): Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Sarah Oliver born Dec. 1, 1832 (2009=177th)

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.us@hotmail.com or sending them to our post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523 Kearney NE 68848.

We appreciate your support!

Director's Report

I cannot believe that 2008 is winding down! The Trails & Rails Museum is bustling with activity while not-for-profit groups are decorating their trees and the staff and volunteers at the Museum are decorating all nine buildings!

The grounds look so festive and the people that come to the property are instantly put into the Christmas spirit. It will be great to see you each at the 21st Annual Christmas Tree Walk with a theme of "North Pole Party".

Who will win the "Penny Wars" this year? Will the champs (Central Nebraska Woodcarvers) ever be beaten? The 'war' is on and the trash-talking has already started. I have had rumors that the penny-saving has been going on all year, so this should be a very exciting part of the Walk.

2009 is right around the corner and we have several special events planned. Please let us know if you have suggestions and/or are interested in chairing an event or volunteering to make it run smoothly.

If we don't see you before then, please have a Happy New Year!

Sincerely, Jennifer



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