



Buffalo Tales



Volume 21, No. 4

Buffalo County Historical Society

July-August, 1998

REUNION OF THE CLASS OF 1937

by Emma Jane Wilder

When the High School Class of 1937 held its 60th Reunion last year (1997), a variety of unique stories began to surface. Not only were the recollections fun, but the difference between 1937 and 1997 was quite revealing.

In 1937 Kearney had an area of 4 sq. miles; by 1997 our area has doubled, covering 8.4 sq. miles. In 1937 our population was 8,575; today it stands at approximately 25,995 and continues to grow.

Because much of our community activity involved the downtown area, we focused there for much of our discussion. As you read you will discover what life was like for some teenagers in 1937.

During the 30's our day started at 8:00 a.m. with the whistle from the Kearney Laundry.

There were recollections of the Old Opera House when **Merwyn Henderson** told us of staying in his brother's apartment on the top floor of that building when it looked too cold and blizzard-like to go back and forth to the farm on school days. You would ascend to the top floor in a small cage-like elevator run by an operator. The Opera House was razed in 1954.

In 1926 **George Mitchell's** father, Charles, bought a small building just north of the Post Office and started the first Hamburger Inn there. You could purchase a hamburger there for 5¢ each or 6 for 25¢. His motto was "Buy 'Em by the Bag". A few years later he opened a Root Beer stand next to the Inn and offered curb service.



Central Avenue, late 1930's

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

The Buffalo County Historical Society has been busy this summer. The Building and Grounds Committee met and furnished a list of items in need of repair—the L.C.L. Cart, Baggage Cart and the floor of the Express Wagon. These are only a few of the 23 items listed. If any member of the Historical Society would be willing to volunteer some time and energy to these projects, contact Merlin Burgland, at 308-237-3007. Thank you for any assistance you might give to this committee.

A special meeting of the Board of Directors and some of the New Building Committee was held on July 30, 1998. Mrs. Margery Lauer, Executive Director of the Kearney Area Community Foundation, explained to the group the services available through a Shared Staff Program. A vote was taken after discussion, and it was decided to use the Shared Staff Program for our drive for funds for the new building.

Wilma Harder, President

.

The Board of Directors has filled two vacancies on the Board because of resignations. Dick Ikenberry of Kearney will finish the term of Mark Hadenfeldt and Dora Day of rural Kearney will complete the term of Dale Wright. Welcome, Dick and Dora!

.

Membership Chairman Mitzi Steinbrink reminds members that 1999 memberships purchased after September 1 include the last two 1998 issues of *Buffalo Tales* as a bonus. This Q125 year is an ideal year to consider gift memberships.

.

Buffalo County Historical Society will host a meeting on Sunday, September 20, at 2:00 p.m., in the church on the grounds of Trails & Rails Museum, 706 West 11th Street in Kearney. The program will be given by Vince Wright of Kearney entitled "The Station," a slide presentation with narrations featuring old railroad stations and other buildings.

Ed Anderson is chairman of the Meetings & Tours committee of the Society. Meetings of the Historical Society are open to anyone interested in local history. There is no charge.

.

The summer season of Trails & Rails Museum will end on Sunday, September 6. After that date the museum will be open by appointment or for special events.

The 1998 Christmas Tree Walk will take place at Trails & Rails from December 5th to December 13th.

.

Watch for your Historical Society's float in the Q125 Homecoming Parade on Saturday, October 17.

.

1998 NEW BASIC MEMBER
Leslie Stevens, Kearney

At the Grand Opening he hired Bob Dean to lead a small band of High School students to play music to advertise the opening and attract people to it.

At this writing the old Post Office at 2401 Central Avenue has become the official home of the Nebraska Art Collection. But it is interesting to note that when the Nebraska Art Collection Foundation purchased it from the Federal Government in 1986, they paid \$125,000.00 for it, which is the identical amount that it cost the government to build the building in 1911. The later renovation and addition to the building cost Nebraskans \$4,300,000.00.

During the 30's power could go out and the whole city would be dark. But **Mary Kappas Pallas** recalled a time when the power went out, but the Emporia Candy Kitchen at 2224 Central Ave. was the only business that had lights, because her father had the only generator in town.

No matter in what decade you grow up, teenagers will always demonstrate their ingenuity and wrestle with their new found independence. We were no different. One Saturday evening **Norris Swan** invited a few of his friends to their furniture store downtown for a poker game. Because there was some summer furniture in the store display window, including a table and chairs, and especially because of the excellent light in the window, they decided to play their poker there. Apparently it turned out to be quite a riveting game, for suddenly they were seeing the Sunday early church goers driving down the street — all of whom were as surprised to see them as the boys were to see the church folk. No doubt these good church people were wondering what was going on in Swan's window.

Most of our classmates worked either after school or on weekends to earn extra cash. One of those was **Ed Tollefsen** who in 1937 worked for the Kearney Ice Plant at 1925 Avenue A for \$1.50 a day, less Social Security. Being the new man on the job, it was up to Ed to run the 300 lb. cakes of ice through the scoring machine, the others would load 5 cakes to a truck. On his first day, by the time he was through, everyone else had left, leaving him with 3 cakes on the dock and 2 on the ground. How do you load a 300 lb. cake of ice from the ground to the pick-up?

It seems that Thursdays were his best days, because he delivered ice at Green Terrace Hall at the College that day.

In 1937 our own Kearney State Teacher's College had an enrollment of 2,000



Kearney Flour Mills and Ice Plant, 1920's
1925 Avenue A
(Stryker Photo)

students. Few, if any, of those students were foreign. By 1991, this College had joined the State University system, enrolling about 7,680 students in 1996, including over 300 students from 52 foreign countries.

A few of our classmates had families who had stores with "treat" counters. **Baumgartner's** Variety Store at 2301 Central Avenue had a candy counter. **Al** learned the hard way that too much candy can make you sick.

The **Lantz** Drug Store at 2121 Central Avenue had its treat counter as well. **Marcella** worked there as a Soda Jerk. She and her comrades would guess what their patrons would order as they walked through the door, and then prepare them on the spot. Of course, if their patrons didn't order their "usual", then the Soda Jerks would have to eat their mistakes. Marcella called it a "win/win" situation. Sodas, at that time, were 5¢.

Luckily neither **Al** nor **Marcella** had to frequent the hospital as a result of their sweet tooth journeys.

It is interesting to know that Good Samaritan Hospital had an organized medical staff in 1937 of 14 physicians. In 1997 there were more than 115 physicians on our hospital staff, representing approximately 24 specialties.

One episode that was unique and on the lighter side, **Mary Erdine Erickson Hogsett** told of a time in the 30's when her father, Doc Erickson, was on the City Council. It seems the Park Department was having trouble locating winter housing for the Park's monkeys. Doc volunteered to house the monkeys at the Kearney Floral Company's greenhouse at 2006 Second Avenue. One day someone left the cages open after feeding the monkeys, and with the vents open in the roof of the greenhouse, it was a natural exit for the monkeys and they took it. Frantically Doc called the Police and the Fire Departments to help find and corral the wayward monkeys. The result was that the Departments used their sirens for many minutes — and eventually the monkeys were captured. But! The sirens had alerted a nearby neighbor who had a stock of bootleg whiskey for sale. Thinking the sirens were announcing a raid on her house, she frantically poured all her liquor down every available drain in her house. Forever after, she blamed Doc for ruining her livelihood.

Hazel Holsten Stauffer tells us of a scary time that occurred back in the spring



**Kearney Floral Co. 2006 Second Avenue
(before Second Avenue overpass)**

(Stryker Photo)

of 1934, when severe dust storms were prevalent. (Often the dust in the air would be so thick you couldn't see across the street). It seems that one of these severe storms blew up during a school day. Both her father and Superintendent Burke were concerned about the students who lived on farms and how they would get home. Supt. Burke released all the farm students sometime between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m. in order to give them time to make it safely home. Unaware of Supt. Burke's decision, Hazel's father asked a neighbor to ride along with him to help drive the 2nd car home after picking up Hazel and her brother at school. (The family lived about 3 miles north of Axtell). On their way home, using Highway #10, the two students had to keep their lights on in order to see the highway, as, of course, did their father. After crossing the bridge, the two cars met in that black-out of a storm and didn't recognize each other. Although Hazel and her brother were undoubtedly relieved once they arrived back at the farm, their father must have still been in a bit of a panic after arriving at school and not finding his children there. His state of tension must have remained high until he could return to the farm to be sure his progeny were safe.

During the 20's and 30's, Kearney had a unique industry, called the R. E. Heacock Cigar Factory at 20 West 25th Street. **Bernice Grosh Oran's** father, O. F. (Babe) Grosh, was the foreman there. It employed 25 women. Twice a month Mr. Heacock and Mr. Grosh would call on customers from Broken Bow to areas in Kansas to sell their product. They made two kinds of cigars "Two Belles" and "Nebraska Blossom". During the late summer a few of them manned a booth at the Buffalo County Fair so that area residents could watch a couple of the women making cigars. The factory closed in 1935.

If the ghosts of former tenants in old buildings could tell us their story, it would make interesting listening. Such is a bit of the history of the building at 2313 Central, currently known as the Wort Building. It was purchased in November of 1906 by a Dr. Tupper Kirby, an osteopath, to use as his office and hospital. The second floor was turned into hospital rooms for his patients. During the time that Dr. Kirby had the building, he rented the two front office spaces. The space to the south was rented to my grandfather, D. Wort, for his office as a dealer in grain and automobiles and the space to the north was rented to the Oliver F. Brown Company, a printer and dealer in office supplies. By January 10, 1918, Grandfather had purchased the building from Dr. Kirby, paying off his mortgage and acquiring it for \$12,000.00. During the 20's and 30's people would come to my grandfather asking him for a place to stay. The result was that he converted the hospital rooms upstairs into apartments. To this day all the rooms upstairs are apartments, and the space downstairs is either retail or office space.

In the 30's, our day terminated at the 5:00 p.m. whistle from the Kearney Laundry.



Soda Fountain in an early Kearney drug store.

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.

1998 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

- Basic Membership \$15.00
- Institutional Membership \$20.00
- Supporting Membership \$30.00+

Life memberships are \$150.00 for an individual; \$200.00 husband and wife.

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 1999: Wilma Harder, Helen Kinnaman, Margaret Hohnholt and Dick Ikenberry.

Term expiring June 1, 2000: Minnette Steinbrink, Susan Underhill, Pauline Wells, and Dora Day.

Term expiring June 1, 2001: Edward Anderson, Wilma Larsen, Janeen Vokoun, and a vacancy to be appointed by the Board.

Officers (1 year term)

- President Wilma Harder
- Vice-President Susan Underhill
- Secretary Janeen Vokoun
- Treasurer Mardi Anderson

TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

Another season is almost over. Guides, one by one, are off to pursue their studies at various colleges and those going to UNK are helping at odd hours. They have been a very faithful group this year and we will miss them. Maybe they will be back to help occasionally and possibly next year.

It has been a good year, with many activities. Last week we had a Living History Fun Day which was quite well attended and plans are under way to expand and repeat it next year.

Work is continuing on the Boyd House. The outside has been painted and the inside is progressing on schedule. Our friend, Wendell Franz, who has been advising us, says we are on the "right track".

The tipi which is used by the Kearney Public Schools for their Living History Days and then left for us during the summer, will soon be taken down. It has been an interesting outdoor display on our grounds, drawing lots of interest.

Don't forget that the Christmas Tree Walk will be December 5-13. There is still room for a few more trees so if you know anyone who would like to take part, please let us know.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

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

Buffalo County Historical Society
Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848-0523
Address Correction Requested

JUL 1998

VIVIAN M BLOMEKAMP
1023 FOREST AVE
PALO ALTO CA 94301

Non-Profit Organization
Bulk Rate

U.S. Postage
PAID
Postal Permit No.
Kearney, Nebraska