

# Buffalo Tales

November/December 2018

Buffalo County Historical Society

## The Veterans of World War I Inc. Part 2

At the center of all barracks, "the Commander is the highest elective officer of the barracks and is more than just the presiding officer of the meetings." Once the Commander is elected, he then held elections for other positions and appointed appropriate members to specific duties. At the inauguration meeting, a coded ritual inducted an officer to their new leadership positions. Underneath the officer positions, various committees were then created to organize entertainment, finances, and memberships; all of which occurred during a meeting. Knowing how to conduct a meeting is just as important as the information passed on to fellow "buddies." According to the national VWWI, meetings should last no longer than two hours and conduct business similarly to that of the national branch for state and national conventions. From beginning to end, the Commander has control of the meeting and follow an order for his fellow officers to carry out business.

The first couple years of Buffalo and Hamilton County Barrack indicate a lack of organization, record keeping, and clear political mission in their local communities. In Buffalo County, Delmer Landis took charge as the first commander, serving a one-year term, however, the few early reports revealed that these meetings were primarily social gathering of World War I veterans with a minimal political mission. Most of the financial reports by the Quartermaster included expenditures for coffee, kitchen supplies, food, attire, stamps, and membership dues to the State Department as well as the National branch. In many cases, the Barracks would simply meet to have dinner or spend funds for entertainment purposes. Of course, a few funds were set aside for travel expenses to state department and national conventions, but the bulk of the group's expenditures were meant for the Buffalo County Barracks and various veteran holiday celebrations in the surrounding community.

In organizing the Buffalo County Barracks mission, Arthur Crosby, Chris Hansen, and the Women's Auxiliary were important members for success. By 1967, the Buffalo County Barracks became much more organized under Crosby as Commander. Not only was Crosby's success attributed to his leadership among members, but also to his wife Irma who served as the president of the Ladies Auxiliary. Both groups focused their efforts in establishing a name in the Kearney community. Between the Buffalo County Barracks and the Ladies Auxiliary, these two organizations closely aligned their events with one another for fundraisers, dinners, bingo, Memorial Day parades, Veteran's Day celebrations, and many other social events. In many cases, both groups held conjoined meetings and featured in the same pamphlet for officer inauguration rituals. The Mr. and Mrs. Crosby duo as the leaders of the Barracks and Auxiliary, both could rely on one another for support in community events and do more throughout the community together rather than on their own.

Hansen's role in the VWWI was limited by his job as the local post master and his other duties to the VFW. While Hansen was the last surviving World War I veteran in Buffalo County, Hansen's role as the postmaster provided a direct access to the post office. Writing to local Congressmen, national officers, and other members kept the group actively engaged socially and politically. While Hansen served during World War I, he also served overseas during World War II as a mail specialist in the Navy. Just weeks before the end of World War II, German forces captured Hansen and a handful of other Americans. His prisoner of war status quickly spread throughout Kearney and made headlines in the local newspapers. A lifetime membership in both the VWWI and the VFW celebrated his contributions during both wars, however, much more of the community recognized Hansen as a hero for his military service during World War II.

In 1959, the United States Printing Office published a study on "The Nature and Feasibility of War and Deterrence," prepared by Herman Kahn and presented by Hubert Humphrey, highlighted the importance of national security against communism. Not only was the "arms race" deeply concerning for many Americans, but also the constant threat of attack from "within" equally deserved attention. The threat of communism would not only shake the foundation of the United States, but topple the ideals of private property and democracy. Public Law 85-530 in Section 3 subsection 7 states that the Veterans of World War I were,

"To fight to the utmost all those alien forces, particularly forces such as communism, whose objectives are to deny our very existence as a free people."

Specifically, the Hamilton and Buffalo Barracks remained true to the ideals laid out in 1958. At the forefront of national and local barracks, "Americanism" remained a strong part of the message to promote patriotism in local communities. While this core value often translated into public patriotic events, the VWWI was not alone. In many cases at the Buffalo County and Hamilton County Barracks, sought the Women's Auxiliary as an equally important institution working together. Not only did these women attend meetings, take minutes, and keep records, but also an integral part of both local barracks and the national organization.

Specifically, the State VWWI Americanism Chairman recognized the Hamilton County Barracks as one barrack with "outstanding merit and service" to their local communities. Having to rely on the records of the Women's Auxiliary, celebrating holidays like Christmas, Fourth of July, Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, and Armistice Day were of great importance for many members. On Friday November 18, 1960, the Aurora News-Register reported that the Hamilton County Barracks observed Armistice Day "with a covered dish supper at the Legion Hall last Thursday." All VWWI members and their wives were welcomed. Table decorations were also particularly important at the event, which included the World War I emblem of a shield and poppy with flags. Not only did VWWI get together have dinner with each other at meeting halls, but also made a significant effort to celebrate the lives of veterans and sailors in the retirement homes. Occasionally the Hamilton County Barracks visited the veterans home in Grand Island, Nebraska. For George Washington's birthday in 1961, the Hamilton County Barracks and the Women's Auxiliary organized a special program commemorating the first president. In the chapel building, an hour-long meeting included, the Pledge of Allegiance, a prayer by George Washington, various songs and hymns, and a short skit entertained VWWI members and fifty other veterans in attendance. Following the program, Mrs. Killion and Mrs. Ellison brought homemade cakes and drinks for a social hour.

Other than VWWI and Women's Auxiliary continued support for the veteran's home in Grand Island, members continually reached out to the community for their support in maintaining a patriotic spirit among the American people. By 1964, a several leaders emerged as the faces of the local chapters. The Americanism chairman from the Women's Auxiliary, Louise Peard and Jessie Westlake, occasionally spoke at meetings about the importance of not only engaging with one another, but also including the younger generations was imperative for the nation's future. Not only did she speak at many of the meetings, but also in charge of contacting the local newspapers about events and activities sponsored by the VWWI and Women's Auxiliary. One key aspect of Americanism according to an article published in November 1963 in the Aurora News-Register, is extending the knowledge of the elder generation to the next up and coming generation of men and women. Important characteristics of obedience, freedom, and Christianity made productive members in society. Starting in 1963, the VWWI and Women's Auxiliary held special programs in the High School auditorium for Armistice Day.

While the civic duties to promote "Americanism" was one of foremost important missions of the VWWI Barracks in Buffalo and Hamilton counties, they both engaged in political discussions to secure veteran's rights at a national, state, and local level. As per Public Law 85-530 Section 3, subsection 2, the VWWI were,

"To cooperate to the fullest extent and in a harmonious manner with all veteran organizations to the end that the best interests of all veterans of all wars in which the United States of America had participated, and the widows and orphans of deceased veterans of such wars may be best served."

Among all the important political battles, one of the most highly discussed political actions taken by the local VWWI barracks involved securing farm land in 1975 for the veteran's retirement home in Grand Island, Nebraska. State Senator Ralph Kelly of Grand Island

introduced Land Bill, LB, 207 as an attempt to acquire a fifty-year lease for a municipal golf course between the Department of Public Institutions and the City of Grand Island for about 200 acres of farm land used by the Nebraska Veteran's Home.

At the VVWI state department convention of 1975, in Kearney, LaSalle Whitehead, the State Department Legislative Chairman, the Buffalo County Barracks, the Hamilton County Barracks, and the Hastings Barracks starkly opposed such an agreement. If a golf course was built, not only does the Veteran's Home risk farmland for a potentially failing enterprise, but the retirement home must acquire an alternative food source. At the state convention, LaSalle took on a prominent role in saving the farm land. LaSalle reminded his fellow buddies in previous years about Resolution Four where, Donald Elrod, introduced LB 128 as a bill only requesting 12.85 acres from the Nebraska Veterans Home for a Youth Center. At the public hearing for LB 128, no one opposed setting aside land for a Youth Center, however, Elrod in a last-minute decision included an additional larger tract of land for a junior college in LB 128. The additional land for a junior college never made it into the final bill. The original 12.85 acres of land originally requested transferred to the city of Grand Island, which no longer had an interest in building the Youth Center. Having used history as a political tool, LaSalle even called on Nebraska Governor Exon to facilitate a fair deal if both parties continued agreed on a purchase rather than a lease.

A few years later, a continued political relationship between the two-local barracks and the government set out a precedent against anything "un-American" by the group's standards. Blending the ideals of Americanism and the important mission to preserve veteran's interests, the Department convention of 1977, both barracks heavily criticized President Jimmy Carter's soft stance against draft dodgers and communism. Other important topics of interest included news from Congress and Nebraska legislature about possible bills regarding veteran benefits and pensions. While the VVWI primarily engaged in social activities in their respective communities and utilized the organization as an emotional support system to meet others World War I vets, members participated in local politics to secure their rights and future veterans.

While Congress charted the Veterans of World War I nearly half a century later, they were not forgotten. There is no doubt that the "Great War" started a new chapter for military tactics and technology that would translate into the lives of veterans upon their return home. Some of the atrocities of poison gas, disease, trench warfare, and many other aspects from World War I are burdensome. Upon their return home, World War I soldiers had to rebuild their former lives and started a revolutionary idea of "taking care" of the men who served their country, even when they volunteered. An idea challenged by a depression and a government forced to listen to the soldiers protecting what the government promised.

The three main points described who, what, and why the Veterans of World War I established themselves as national veteran's organization. As an older generation, World War I vets sought to distinct themselves from a younger generation of veterans from World War II and the Korean War. World War I vets engaged in primarily as a social activity in the local community or as platform to meet other World War I vets. Specifically here in Nebraska, the VVWI did not exclude veterans who did not deploy, but anyone who served on active duty from 1917 to 1918. Amidst all social activities and meet and greets, the VVWI also engaged in politics to preserve their immediate interests as an older generation of veterans, but also to maintain the rights of future vets. At the very least, members of the VVWI Buffalo and Hamilton Barracks sought an organization honoring their fellow war-time buddies in conversation with others who share their experiences.



\*\* A special thanks to a Buffalo County Historical Society Member for catching an error in the previous issue. Camp Funston, mentioned in Part I of "The Veterans of World War I Inc.", is located in Kansas (on the Fort Riley military reservation), not in Iowa. \*\*

## **Coming Events and Education notes (see website for additional details):**

February 29: Don't Come Event-This is the most amazing, fun event that you WILL miss. We send you an invitation about all the fabulous things that WON'T be happening and you absolutely will want to attend. but instead, you get to RSVP and then stay home and enjoy your family time. J

Sunday, April 14 from 1-3 pm: BCHS Annual Meeting-A great gathering of BCHS members to reflect back on the past year's accomplishments and enjoy an entertaining program while eating yummy food. The general public is welcome to join us for the program, too!

Pet Registry Contest: See the registration form for more details about this fun contest! Winners will be announced at the Wagons West Celebration.

Saturday, June 8 from 10-1 pm: 34th annual Wagons West Celebration-Live music, delicious food, exhibitors, demonstrators, archive researchers, kids' games, and contests. FREE admission/donations are appreciated. (+Packet pick up for the 1/2 marathon)

Sunday, June 9: 12th annual 1/2 Marathon/10K/5K: Buffalo County Stampede-reg is at 6 am-race begins at 7 (packet pick up will be at the Wagons West Celebration on June 8)

32nd annual Christmas Tree Walk: First two weekends in December (7th & 8th and 14th & 15th) and the week in between (9-13) from 1pm to 5pm. Thus, this is a nine-day event! \*\*\*

Saturday, December 7 from 12-1pm: Members Only Preview of the 32nd annual Christmas Tree Walk\*\*\*-check out dozens of trees decorated by area not-for-profits that tie their mission into this year's theme. The 2019 theme is "Eat, Drink, and be Merry". \*\*\*All of November: Christmas Decorating (during regular business hours plus open late on Thursday, Nov. 7 for decorating)

**Volunteers & sponsors are needed for these events. Please contact any staff or board member to help!**

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### **BCHS Museum Day Sponsorship**

*Announcing a new way to help support your Museum: "BCHS Museum Day Sponsorship". Honor and recognize a friend, family member, ancestor, special group or organization, or yourself, by sponsoring a designated day on the Buffalo County Historical Society calendar. Sponsorship can be a gift in the name of someone or some organization and is a great way to support the good work of the Buffalo County Historical Society. Contact the office for more information.*

*Please help us thank our December 2nd weekly sponsor, Younes Hospitality! We appreciate their support!*



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### **Director's Report—Jennifer Murrish**

We are winding down 2018 feeling very grateful. The Christmas Tree Walk had a new twist this year with being all inside the new Family History Center and it was very well received. People enjoyed not having to slip and slide between the buildings, even though we all do like the setting of the trees being in the old buildings, most folks were very understanding that we need to make sure it's a safe event for everyone and for the artifacts that we are good stewards of. The Give Where You Live event that was held December 6th was outstanding. We are truly humbled by the support that allowed us to come in second place. Please know that we are really looking forward to enhancing the museum by changing up the displays and revamping the old archives building into a new Textile Tales to preserve and share the history of artifacts that have been in storage for years. Thank you to each one of you for being members this year and for helping the museum continue to grow and prosper. Merry Christmas to each of you.

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**A Huge Thanks to our Silver and Gold Engineers  
 for their support of the BCIS/Trails & Rails Museum**  
 (Contact Trails & Rails Museum for more information on becoming an Engineer)

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Blake Weeder, Editor

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