



# Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

March-April, 1992

D. P. ASHBURN

by Leroy A. Walker

He was known as "D. P." Ashburn. His name was Dillon Prosser Ashburn but no one knew him by that name. It was always "D. P." He was born in Lordstown, Ohio on August 24, 1840, and married Emily Brown on August 2, 1862 at Warren, Ohio.

D. P. was a member of the Gibbon Soldiers Free Homestead Colony that came to Buffalo County on April 7, 1871. The Colony has been in Gibbon only 50 hours when D. P.'s true nature was put to the test. The Colonists were still living in the railroad cars and a blizzard came up quickly. An imminent birth caused a need for privacy in the Dr. I. P. George family. The family moved into the car where the single men were riding out the storm. The single men moved into a stock car where the cattle and horses of D. P. were tethered. As there was not room for both men and livestock, D. P. tied his horses and cows outside in the blizzard. The George baby, the first baby to be born in the new community, was named Gibbon George.

Most of the new Gibbon settlers were farmers. One farmer with wife and three children had no farm machinery and no horses. He had only \$20.00 in his pocket. D. P. loaned this farmer both machinery and horses. Soon the farmer had a new sod house and his fields plowed, and still had the \$20.00 in his pocket. (This poor farmer was J. M. Bayley, grandfather of the writer.)

D. P. donated six acres of land from his pre-emption claim for the original Riverside Cemetery at Gibbon. It is in a beautiful setting and has been added to since. After the grasshopper years, D. P. held several different jobs. At one time he was an express messenger on a U.P. mail train from Omaha to Colorado. At the Colorado end of his run he would go into the Colorado forest, select small evergreen trees and bring them back to Gibbon in tin cans to replant at Riverside Cemetery. Some are still growing today. D. P. was the first chairman of the Gibbon Cemetery Association organized in 1876.



Dillon P. Ashburn



Emily Brown Ashburn

## WITH THE SOCIETY

At the annual meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society held on April 5, 1992, new directors elected were Floretta Sullwold of Elm Creek and Larry Nansel of Kearney. Reelected for a second term as director were Phillip S. Holmgren and Glen Wisch, both of Kearney. Terms of all directors are for three years. The term of office starts on June 1. At the first Board of Directors' meeting following the annual meeting, officers of the Society will be elected. They also will take office on June 1, for a term of one year.

Certificates of appreciation were presented to Mike Stauffer and Chad Anderson, directors going off the Board, and to Wally Boden who was in charge of the crew that painted the train engine, to Don Richmond for painting buildings on the museum grounds, to Doug Osler, local representative of Modern Woodmen of America for repair of the ramp on the west end of the depot.

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**RAISE THE ROOF** Campaign. May is Memorial Day month. Buy a shingle as a memorial—\$5, \$10, \$25, \$50, or \$100. Send to Mardi Anderson, Treasurer, P. O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848. Names will be noted on a donor board at the log cabin.

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## NEW LIFE MEMBERS

Vincent and Ruby Wolford . . . . . Kearney

## 1992 SUPPORTING MEMBERS

|                                       |         |  |                  |
|---------------------------------------|---------|--|------------------|
| James and Ylonda Anderson . . . . .   | Kearney | Ruth L. Schini . . . . .               | Kearney          |
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| Dr. and Mrs. Joel Johnson . . . . .   | Kearney | Edgar King . . . . .                   | Gibbon           |
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As a person living on the Nebraska prairie, he missed his spring greens. Back in Ohio they used dandelions for greens but there were no dandelions in Gibbon, so D. P. ordered an ounce of dandelion seed and planted them for his greens. Don't blame D. P. for your dandelions — they would have come anyway, and it is still possible to buy the seed.

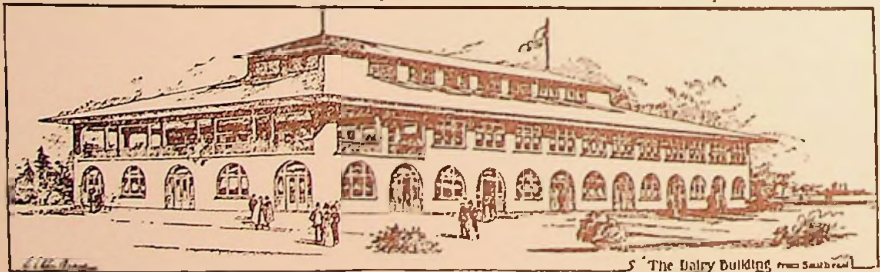
D. P. was the first undertaker in Gibbon, which was a service to the new community. He built in 1879 the first grain elevator in Gibbon for the purchase and shipment of grain. He became postmaster in 1889, serving for four years. Soon after he became postmaster he shortened the Sunday hours to 9:00-11:00 a.m. and 4:00-5:00 p.m. The newspaper reported that the new postmaster had the postoffice "handsomely papered and otherwise fixed up." He was a house painter and did plastering. Even while he was postmaster he painted the college buildings inside. A news item in 1892 reads, "The M. E. Church has been repainted inside and out (three coats on the outside). The work was done by D. P. Ashburn."

By far the biggest and most successful business venture of D. P. was his creamery business. He established the creamery in 1881 on the banks of the Wood River. It was a success from the start. The farmers needed a cash "crop", and selling cream to be made into butter was something all could do. The farmer was also given the opportunity to take back home an equal amount of whey which they could use for hog feed. At the height of this enterprise his employees were traveling many miles a day to gather cream, and he was producing 200 pounds of butter a day. He also advertised homemade ice cream for sale "delivered to your residence." When the Shelton Creamery failed, those patrons asked that D. P. take over their route. Aside from a creamery, D. P. also had a cheese factory.

D. P. soon became a leader and source of knowledge in the creamery world, giving talks locally, countywide, statewide and even nationally. In 1882 the local newspaper reported that "Our Farm and Dairy Department will be under the direction of D. P. Ashburn, Esquire, who has kindly consented to give through the *Beacon* the benefit of his experience to his fellow citizens in Buffalo and adjoining counties." Later, in 1885, the *Beacon* reported that D. P. Ashburn "has made arrangements with us for one column each week which will be entirely filled with matters of interest to the patrons of his creamery and all whom are interested in dairying."

He was on the Board of Directors of the Nebraska State Dairymen's Association in 1890, and in 1891 became state president of the group. Their convention was held in Gibbon in 1888 — a three-day meeting.

Prior to the World's Fair in Chicago in 1892, the World's Fair Advisory and Executive Board of the Columbian Dairy Association met in Chicago. D. P. was appointed chairman of the Dairy Cattle sub-committee — the only person from Nebraska on any committee. He was one of 21 men elected nationwide who built a 60' x 100' building in Chicago to house the dairy exhibit at the Centennial exposition.



Dairy Building at Chicago World Fair, 1892

Marketing of poultry and hogs were also interests of D. P. In 1889 this advertisement appeared in the Gibbon paper: "D. P. Ashburn will sell pure white or barred Plymouth Rock hens or roosters, one or two years old as preferred. Price — hens \$5.00 for 6 or \$9.00 per dozen, purchaser's choice. Roosters, \$2.00 each." This was not his only association with poultry, for in 1882 the paper reports that "at the last meeting of the Board of Directors of the Buffalo County Agricultural Society, Mr. J. H. Gilpin presented the society with a pair of Kentucky bred game chickens. The Board appointed D. P. Ashburn to care for and train the chickens for the next annual fair." (train?) His interest in poultry continued, for in 1894 we find reported: "Mr. D. P. Ashburn is giving considerable attention to chickens and has lately completed a large and comfortable hen house and has about 100 well bred Plymouth Rock hens which he is feeding with a view to egg production. All of Mr. Ashburn's arrangements for his fowls are on a large scale for this locality . . ."

Later in 1889, the Gibbon newspaper stated that "on October 24, S. C. Bassett and D. P. Ashburn shipped 30 inoculated hogs to Peoria, Illinois. The hogs will be placed in yards with hogs diseased with hog cholera. In case they are not effected (sic) with the disease, we understand parties have arranged to market and feed 30,000 hogs each year." No record appears that that occurred, but two weeks later this advertisement appeared: "I have 20 thoroughbred Poland China boars for sale at \$10.00 each that have been inoculated to prevent cholera. These hogs have not been over-fed to make them show well, but are in healthy condition. D. P. ASHBURN."

In 1904 he had an article in the *Gibbon Reporter* giving important hints on the selection of seed corn and how to produce it to improve the crop. In 1914 D. P. wrote an article for the *Gibbon Reporter* on how to preserve eggs for long-time storage by the use of liquid "waterglass". (The writer remembers that this method was used when he was a child. It worked well.)

In 1872 D. P. ran for the Nebraska State Legislature. His opponent was the well-known Buffalo Bill of hunting, and later, circus fame. When the election reports first came in, Buffalo Bill was declared to be the winner by a small margin. Then it was discovered that a batch of ballots had been sent to Lincoln, Nebraska instead of to Lincoln County. When the results of these ballots were added, the new winner was D. P. Ashburn. He served all of Nebraska west of a line on the east side of Buffalo and Kearney Counties, an area today that comprises 44 counties.

He took the bar examination in 1889 and passed it, becoming an attorney. He conducted cases for his clients in the District Court at Kearney as well as doing legal work in his Gibbon office. He successfully prosecuted a case against a Shelton saloonkeeper and his bondsmen for the widow of a man that "met with an accident" while he was "well loaded with hilarity". The suit was for \$5,000.00. The widow was given a judgment for \$4,800.00.

Aside from his office as Representative in the State Legislature he was elected to other public offices, first in 1871 as Justice of the Peace. At that time he also qualified as a Notary Public. He served on the Town Board of Gibbon and was elected to the County Board of Supervisors for at least four years. In 1889 he was chairman of the Bridges and Roads Committee. His pay as Supervisor was \$3.00 per day. He served on the Committee on Credentials at the Buffalo County Republican Convention in Kearney in 1890. He was elected in 1891 the first president of the Old Settlers organization in Gibbon (the Soldiers Free Homestead Colony). This group is still in existence.

D. P. was on the first school board when it was formed in Gibbon in 1871, the Colonists taxing themselves \$1,000.00 for the operation of the school. This action was illegal because none of the people had been in Nebraska long enough to be citizens,

but they did it anyway. In 1871 he was also elected director on the school board of School District #3, the only school at that time with a bell. It was known as the Bell School.

When the first high school building was proposed and built in Gibbon in 1884, D. P. was one of three members of the building committee. He helped draw up the requirements for the new building and was the one member of the committee put in charge of construction, probably because in Ohio he had followed the carpenter trade. This building, used as a school from 1884 to 1908, is still in existence. It is the present (1992) IOOF Hall, with Arleen's Cafe on the ground floor.

As a member of the school board D. P. presented diplomas to the twelve graduates in June of 1890, and gave a speech to the graduates. He contrasted their life with his school days, giving an insight into his life in Ohio. His school was a log house, with split boards for a floor: the seats were split logs with the flat side up, and without backs. The desks were boards fastened to the walls of the room. The pens were made of goose quills, the copy books of foolscap paper and stitched together at home, and the ink was homemade as follows: "boil the bark of soft maple and add copperas". Red ink was made from the juice of poke berries.

At the Washington Centennial observance in May of 1889, D. P. gave the main address on "The Advantage of American Citizenship," stressing "We", the people. Other miscellaneous events in D. P.'s life show who he was. In 1883 the Buffalo County Agricultural Society had an election to select the General Superintendent for the Buffalo County Fair. D. P. was elected. In the same year the Gibbon Prairie Fire Association had an election for President. D. P. was so elected. While most of the offices he held were elected ones, he did belong as a charter member in 1884 to the Gibbon Lodge #35 of the A.O.U.W. (Ancient Order of the United Workmen). His church affiliation is hard to determine. In 1890 he was on the Christmas program in the M. E. Church, but his funeral in 1918 was from the Presbyterian Church.

The predecessor to the Gibbon Public Library was a "Reading Room." It was opened to the public in 1886. An opening program was given which was in charge of D. P. He also gave an address at that time. The Gibbon Library today (1992) has a set of 95 volumes containing detailed records of the Civil War, a gift to the library from D. P. These indexed books are a good primary source of information on the Civil War.

One of D. P.'s most enjoyed gifts to the Village of Gibbon was a large platform swing which was located in Davis Park. The platform was about 6 feet by 10 feet and held four bench-seats, one bench-seat at each end facing the center and in the center were double bench-seats, back to back. Each bench-seat would hold four or five youngsters. The platform was suspended by four 2 x 4's attached to four tall telephone poles. Using this swing was a different experience for children and was fun.

In February of 1891 D. P. was on a committee to investigate a Normal School for Gibbon. When the Gibbon Opera House was formally dedicated on



Platform Swing in Davis Park, Gibbon

October 26, 1892, D. P. gave the opening remarks. In 1890 the "Gibbon Printing Co." was formed to continue publishing the *Buffalo County Beacon*. The company was made up of twelve local men, and D. P. was made president.

In 1890 D. P. had a telephone line installed from his house to his offices at the rear of the Post Office building. This was 12 years before the telephone company provided phones for all. At one time he put a dirt ridge around his garden area in the winter and had the village flood it for a skating pond. Later the school adopted the idea and the pond was on the school grounds.

Mr. and Mrs. Ashburn were the parents of six children who lived to maturity. They were Addie A. (Mrs. J. A. Rathbun), Joseph N. Ashburn, Cora N. (Mrs. F. C. Overton), Harry B. Ashburn, Albert A. Ashburn, and Anna E. (Mrs. A. M. George). Mrs. Ashburn died on May 30, 1906. D. P. died April 18, 1918.

D. P. was indeed "a man of diversified pursuits and manifold interests."

SOURCES

Letters from Bernice Mims, and Constance Phillips, granddaughters; F. A. Battey & Co., *Biographical Souvenir of Buffalo County*, 1890; Mabel Vohland, *Trail Dust to Star Dust*, 1971. S. C. Bassett, *History of Buffalo County*, 1916; Items from 92 issues of *Buffalo County Beacon* and *The Gibbon Reporter*.

**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. |         |

*Directors*

Term expiring June 1, 1992: Glen Wisch, Philip Holmgren, Mike Strauffer, all of Kearney; Chad Anderson of Amherst.  
 Term expiring June 1, 1993: Alice Howell, Elmer Holzrichter, Susan C. Lynch, all of Kearney; Viola Livingson of Gibbon.  
 Term expiring June 1, 1994: Howard Kolbo, Mardi Anderson, Lois Rahmann, all of Kearney; Jim Cudaback of Riverdale.

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Trails & Rails Museum

706 West 11th Street

(308) 234-3041

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