



Buffalo Tales



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e-mail: bchs@bchs.us website: www.bchs.us

A Town on the Move: From Armada to Miller

By Heather Stauffer

Our state will climb upward in the galaxy or the union rapidly, and will be one of the brightest stars there in. Great is Nebraska.

The above quote from an 1890 Armada, Nebraska, newspaper captured the excitement of westward expansion that brought settlers to Buffalo County during the late 1800's. Aspirations were booming during the late nineteenth century for the future prosperities of small towns in northern Buffalo County, and the success of each was no doubt always in the minds of the residents.

Armada Township is in the northwestern corner of Buffalo County, and was settled by western migrants as early as the 1870's. The first settlements appeared in the township in 1873. The name "Armada" first appeared in the early 1880's when the post office moved into William Craven's new general store. A school was built in the new town in 1881.



The First Miller Bank
(circa 1890's)

From the Society

EVENTS:

The World War II display held on October 1st went very well. We had a large turn-out and a lot of memories were shared! Thanks to all that helped donate displays.

The Quilt Display also had a wonderful attendance and will continue until October 28th during regular business hours. We have quilts on display in all of our buildings including the caboose!! Two buildings contain quilts on loan from Buffalo County citizens and some Buffalo County Historical Society quilts are seeing the light of day for the first time all year!

Remember, our Christmas Tree Walk is right around the corner!

BOOTHS:

Buffalo County Historical Society had a booth at the Tri-City Arena's Take Your School by Storm event held October 12th. There were approximately 1,200 students attending. They enjoyed playing the hoop-and-stick game, gunny sack races, and the ring toss. We also passed out the new game piece...a fill-in puzzle. Correct entries will be entered to win a prize!

We would like to thank Lind Eye Care for sponsoring our booth at the Prime Senior Festival. What an amazing crowd!!!! We passed out the new game pieces, volunteer opportunities sheet, and the new 2006 Calendar of Events along with our brochure. We also gave pamphlets out for Lind Eye Care!!!!

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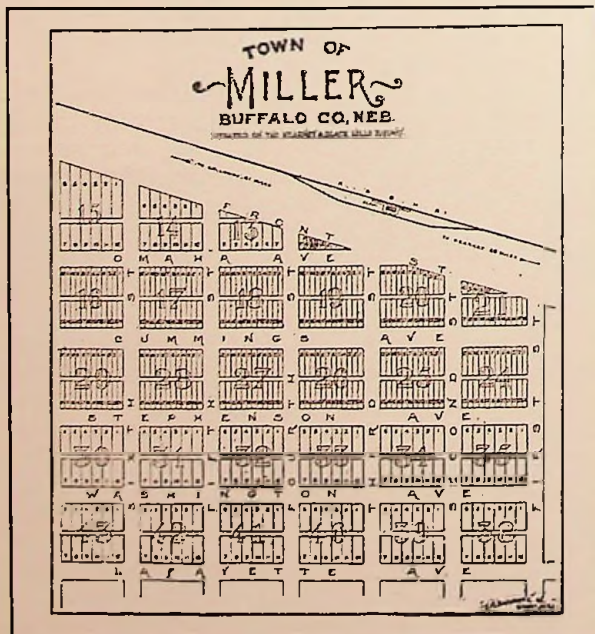
In 1886, forty-four students attended the school, and by the winter 1889-1890 semester, enrollment rose to eighty-five. In the mid-1880's, Armada boasted a livery barn and a two-story hotel, and while it had no established church buildings, church groups were present. By the spring of 1890, the town grew to include two banks, two hotels, four general stores, a harness shop, a hardware store, two drug stores, one jeweler, a photograph gallery, two meat markets, a millinery and dress shop, two buggy shops, an implement shop, three blacksmiths, a windmill shop, two livery barns, a furniture store, two shoe shops, a barber, a newspaper, and three doctors. Town population reached 250 persons by the winter of 1889-90. According to United States Census, at the turn of the century, the majority of those living in Armada Township were natives of the Midwest, mostly from the states of Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa, and in Europe, generally from Germany. The town appeared to have a lot of potential, but what it did not have, which was a key factor for expanding towns, was easy access to a railroad. When the railroad *did* arrive, new issues arose for the townspeople that meant drastic changes for their town.

By 1890 the Kearney & Black Hills Railroad (K. & B.H.R.R.) began building a line through the Wood River Valley to connect Kearney with Callaway in Custer County. Armada was situated on the north side of Wood River and its citizens must have believed that the railroad would drive through their established town. During the summer of 1890, however, the K. & B.H.R.R. built a depot on the south side of Wood River,

half a mile from Armada. The railroad's land company platted a new townsite. The new town on the south side of the river was named "Miller" after Dr. George L. Miller of Omaha, a man who was "greatly interested in the establishment of the railroad."

At that time, Armada had over 200 inhabitants and was growing steadily. The problem for Armada was that while it was developing on the north side of the Wood River, the K. & B.H. Railroad decided to build following the southern edge. The track followed the river and passed by, but not through, Armada. The new townsite of Miller was owned by Hancock Land and Improvement Company, which, in early June of that year, gave Armada home and business owners first pick at lots and deeds in Miller before opening them to the public. The Hancock Company even proposed to move the buildings free of charge. The July 10, 1890 issue of *Armada Watchman* reported, "Quite a number of people drove over to Miller on the Fourth and admired the natural beauties of that place. We invite them to call again in about thirty days. They can then buy anything they want in Miller, even down to a newspaper."

Sentiments for Armada ran deep, and the proposal to move the town to Miller was hotly debated. In the July 10, 1890 issue of the *Armada Watchman*, one source posed the question, "Have you ever stopped to think how lonely Armada will look when all the buildings are moved, which are under contract?" They very next issue, which became the *Miller Union* in the timespan of a week, printed a more positive outlook, promoting the new town by stating that since Miller was starting with over 100 people and well-established businesses, "it is sure of an immediate rapid growth." The *Miller Union*, as the following quote



Promotional Information from The Miller Union.

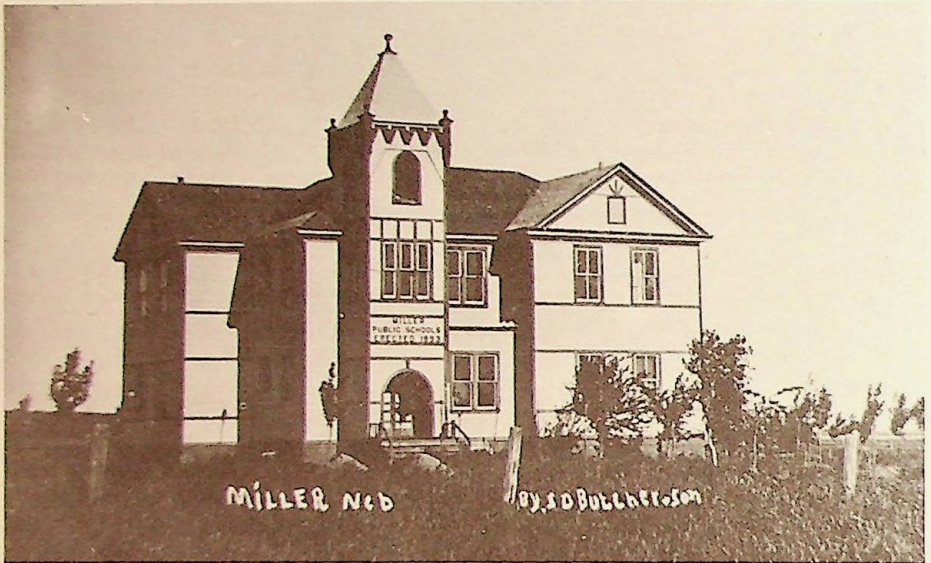
reveals, began promoting the new town's interests.

Controlling, as it does a trade of nearly forty miles in all directions, it is with the coming of the railroad [that Miller is] bound to be the commercial center of this vast agricultural country, and will be the principal grain and stock shipping point of this rich valley... The Kearney & Black Hills R.R. will furnish easy access to good markets; and when it is extended to Wyoming, will open a field in which the products of this valley will find an immense sale.

After an iron bridge was constructed over the Wood River the people of Armada realized that it did not make sense to travel a mile to get to the depot in Miller; change was necessary. The transition made sense, but even so, the matter of moving the town was highly controversial. Those wishing to stay in the old town were very skeptical as to whether the developers would stick to their word. As a last desperate attempt to thwart the move, some Armadans formed a barricade on the outskirts of town. Pioneer spirit won out, however, and on the morning of Saturday, July 12, the barricade was removed and Armada's buildings were moved en masse to the new town site. The First Bank of Armada was one of the first businesses to make the move by changing to The First Bank of Miller. According to Miller Area Heritage, during that summer, fifty-two of Armada's businesses and residential buildings moved across the river, as well as most of the 250 people. Although not in favor of moving to Miller, the editor of the *Watchman* eventually succumbed to pressure, writing that the move is in the "best interest of most involved." Updates were printed weekly in the *Armada Watchman* and the *Miller Union* of the progress in Miller. The Miller newspaper was even perhaps used as a lasting reminder of the bridge between old and new towns. The *Miller Union* reminded those on both sides of the river that "United we stand; divided we fall."

Miller was incorporated in 1890 and the post office established on July 25 of that same year. In the months preceding the incorporation, the site was mapped out and advertised in area newspapers. The building of each new business was also covered by the local paper. A town lot was even given away to a couple that agreed to get married in public. Covering all important events, especially those concerning the railroad, the paper noted dutifully when K. & B.H.R.R. Chief Engineer Cox "placed the depot stake on Miller at the head of 4th street" in July, 1890.

The railroad was only part of the growing process. Attracting additional businesses was key to building a viable community. One way to do this was to seemingly sell the area as a place where the sky was the limit. The local newspaper boosted the town with quips like "We have a most beautiful townsite, surrounded by a fine farming and stockraising country, and all the men who are opening up in business here, are live, energetic business men, and will work together in union for the upbuilding of this place." "Miller can support handsomely a bakery and a furniture store," added another report. "If you are looking for a location don't fail to look the town over." In July of 1890, the local newspaper, *The Miller Union*, in its first edition in the new town, captured the aspirations of the new site and the hopes for the future. "The



Miller School Building

past has shown," stated the paper, "that a good town can be built about the distance that Miller is from Kearney....We make a prediction that within one year there will be a population of one thousand people in the banner town of the Wood River Valley."

The *Miller Union* continued to promote the townsite, reporting on the town's progress and its potential. "The Bank of Miller is rapidly nearing completion," boasted the paper in one of its first issues. "Miller is more talked about in Kearney than any other town on the Black Hills road." The paper also regularly reported on those who chose to move from Armada to Miller. "Monday morning," wrote the paper, "the house movers will begin moving Smith's hotel from Armada to this place. While Mr. Smith's house is being moved he will serve meals in the Hank Hawk building which is now being moved." In trying to attract potential residents and businessmen from Kearney, the *Miller Union* wrote that "Kearney may boast of her beautiful lake and fine drives, but we would just invite her citizens up to Miller, to take a view from corner of Washington Avenue and 5th or 6th street, and drive down Cummings Avenue once, and see what they think of our scenery and drives."

Although the town did not reach 1,000 people in its first year, it did grow. The Methodist, Episcopal and United Brethren Churches both were chartered in 1890 with twenty-five to thirty members and both built buildings three years later. School District No. 57 was organized in 1890 and a school was built in 1893. Still increasing, the town bustled into the new century. The town sported different clubs, lodges, and women's temperance groups, and prided itself for being a part of "the finest farming lands in the West."

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Dr. Mark R. Ellis, Editor

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CONSTRUCTION UPDATE:

We now have construction crews working on the new livery barn site and the depot renovation project. The concrete pad is already poured for the livery barn and framework will be started shortly. The duct work in the depot basement is being insulated and there are some bricks being temporarily removed to provide water access for the new fire sprinkler system and to help get the ramp ready to be ADA compliant.

PROGRESS, PROGRESS, PROGRESS!!!!

11th Street construction is still a bit behind schedule. The city will make a decision in approximately 4 weeks whether or not they will continue up to our driveway this year or wait until spring. We will keep you posted.

Trails & Rails Museum 710 West 11th Street (308) 234-3041

Buffalo County Historical Society
Box 523 • Kearney, NE 68848-0523

Return Service Requested

Emma Jane Wilder
 21 W 26th St
 Kearney NE 68845

68847+4442-21 C004

