

Buffalo Tales

JULY/AUGUST 2009

KEARNEY'S POPULAR MAYOR: MR. W. H. "BILL" KNAGGS

Chief among those who had a great deal to do with the early history of Kearney and Buffalo county is our esteemed mayor, W. H. Knaggs. Though born in England there is not a more thorough American, in spirit, than he. He was born in London, England in 1854 and came to this country with his parents when but a boy of 7. The family came directly from London to the Sydneham ranch which was located seventeen miles southwest of Old Fort Kearney.

The trip from New York to St. Joseph was made by rail. That was the western terminus of steam cars at that time. From St. Joseph they traveled by boat up the Missouri river to Plattsmouth and from there to Old Fort Kearney they traversed the plains in a "prairie schooner", finally arriving at Sydneham ranch, October 25, 1862. The Sydneham ranch was then the only inhabited place near Fort Kearney. The chief occupants of the plains being unfriendly red-skins, buffalo and other wild animals. This area was then known as the great American desert and well it looked it for there was no vegetation but wild



Mayor Knaggs lays the first brick
Buffalo County Historical Society Collection

games and weeds, with the distant sand hills the only obstacles to light the horizon.

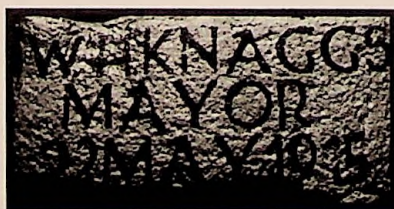
The family remained on the ranch until 1863 when Mrs. Knaggs, mother of the pres-

ent mayor, was appointed hospital matron at the Fort, and the senior Knaggs assistant postmaster to H. W. Sydneham. They remained at the Fort nine years, moving back to the ranch in 1872, where a tract of land was homesteaded and the cattle industry engaged in. Three years later, W. H. Knaggs, jr., then having grown to young manhood homesteaded a tract near that of his father, both being located in what is now Phelps county. In connection with the development of Phelps county it is well to state here that Mr. Knaggs had the dis-

tinguishment of helping to lay the first section line road in the Platte Valley, which was made in Phelps county in 1875.

Considerable romance is interwoven in the past of our mayor, entirely typical of the

frontiersmen who invaded these parts when the redman and buffalo reigned supreme in the Platte Valley. While he never participated in



This is an actual brick from the streets of Kearney. It is painted as the original brick was that was given to Mayor Knaggs. He laid the first brick on May 23, 1915 for the first paved street in the city. This copy was made by his grandson, William H. Knaggs in August, 2009.

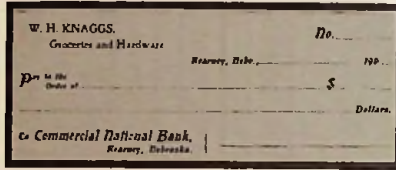
Buffalo County Historical Society Collection

any of the wars with the Indians, Mr. Knaggs distinctly recalls several hair-raising incidents in the conquests he, when a boy, witnessed between the redmen and the whites for the rights of the plains. During his early career Mr. Knaggs spent several months in Wyoming "punching" cattle and "bronco busting."

It was here that on several occasions the piercing war-hoops of the Indians sent him scurrying with his herds and rushed the blood curdling through the veins. During the time that he was thus engaged he witnessed several thrilling skirmishes participated in by the rangers and unruly redskins. Fortunately, however, he was never called upon to do battle with the savages and as a general rule was friendly with them (which, according to one of the first rules of safety in those days, was a mighty nice thing to be).

Mr. Knaggs, while on the homestead met with emphatic success in the cattle business until the hard winter of 1880-1881, when he lost all of his stock. Many thousand head of cattle were frozen or starved to death during the extended blizzards which were so furious and the snows of such depth that obtaining food was an impossibility. In the spring of 1881 he moved to Kearney where he served as deputy sheriff many

years and for a time was employed by W. Shramm, who was in the ice contracting business.



Check from W.H. Knaggs' Grocery Store
Buffalo County Historical Society Collection

the start and after a few years moved to his present location, which he owns.

While he does not own the largest store in town, Mr. Knaggs carries a complete line of groceries and has a large patronage which was built up through his honest dealings and by giving honest measure. Besides his store property, Mr. Knaggs owns an elegant cottage at 1619 Ave A, and also owns several lots in that section of town.



W.H. Knaggs' Grocery and Hardware Store-
W.H. Knaggs on right, W.H. Knaggs, Jr. on left
Buffalo County Historical Society Collection

He is the father of an interesting family of five children, four of whom reside at home, Lillie, 13, Marjay, 8, James, 6, and Julia, 13 months; the oldest is W. H. Knaggs, jr., who is married and lives in Kearney, being engaged in the confectionary business just across the street from his father and is one of our most enterprising young men.



Street Paving in Kearney
Buffalo County Historical Society Collection

At the request of his many friends in the first ward, Mr. Knaggs became a candidate for councilman and was elected at the spring election of 1907, being re-elected each term until last spring, when realizing in him a progressive official and a

boaster, his friends came to him and urged him to take up the candidacy for mayor. He was unanimously elected after a bitter fight, which created state wide interest. His activity while a councilman had won for him a larger following than his most enthusiastic friends had anticipated.

Mr. Knaggs is now often spoken of as the most popular mayor the city has ever had. While he as been in office less than half a year, Mayor Knaggs has more than proven his efficiency. He has fathered several matters that will ultimately mean more for Kearney than anything his predecessors ever developed. Through his untiring efforts the first street paving ever done in Kearney was brought about and just now he has negotiations on for paving a large area of the business section which have brilliant prospects for materializing within the next few months.

Mayor Knaggs is a man of his word. When he promises to do anything, he does it. His message to the people when he was inducted into the office is inviolate with him and his determination to deliver every promise made is plainly demonstrated by the deep interest and the concentrated action he has manifested along the proper lines.

This article and photographs were donated to the Buffalo County Historical Society by William Henry Knaggs, a descendant of W.H. Knaggs who now lives in Ohio. Mr. Knaggs wrote the article using information he found in Kearney newspapers about his grandfather.

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Did You Know...?

...that Jim Ball was the last agent to serve in the Shelton Depot. He worked in the depot from 1962-1974.

See your words in print!
What is your favorite memory of...the drive in Movie Theater? Did you see a movie that changed your life or simply thought the popcorn was the best in the world? We want to know!

E-mail us at:
bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com

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August, 2009: at the Trails & Rails Museum!

New Harmonies

CELEBRATING AMERICAN ROOTS MUSIC

Brought to you, in part by:



Smithsonian
Institution



Nebraska
Humanities
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Buffalo County Historical Society

Trails & Rails Museum is owned and operated by the Buffalo County Historical Society
710 W. 11th St. PO Box 520, Kearney, NE 68848-0520
www.bchs.us bchs@bchs.us (308) 234-3041

"TUESDAYS UNPLUGGED"

Live music that will get your toes tappin'!

August 4, 11, 18 & 25

6:30 pm at Trails & Rails museum
Pilgrim Classic Country
Saturday August 15 6-8 pm

Featuring

Mike Adams
Karen Earhart from California
Craig Link
Terry Sinnard from Minnesota

Guest appearances

Milt Myers, pedal steel guitar
Cristina Seaborn, fiddle

"WILD SCIENCE THURSDAYS"

At Trails & Rails Museum by Edgerton Explorit Center from 9 am-noon each Thursday listed below!

June 4

Blood, Guts, and Boogers

June 11

Rockets, Robots, and Rovers

June 18

Gizmos and Gadgets

June 25

Speed: the science of things that move fast

July 2

Catapults and other projectiles

July 9

Earth Extravaganza: Worms, Rocks, & Recycling

July 16

Tornados, Temperature, & Polar Bears: all about weather

July 23

Dino Day: Paleontology 101

Location:

Trails & Rails Museum,
710 W. 11th St., Kearney, NE

Presenter:

Edgerton Explorit Center
(based in Aurora)
www.edgerton.org
(402) 694-4032

Target age for attendees:

children enrolled in K-6 for the 2009/2010 school year.

Fees:

\$20 per session for non-members
\$15 per session for members of either BCHS or Edgerton Explorit Center

Sign up for all sessions and receive a discount (contact Lyn for more details). Fees include a snack, hands-on discovery, a history connection session, a take-home item, & tons of fun!



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

Katherine Wielechowski, Production Manager

2009 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Individual	\$35.00
Family	\$40.00
Institutional Membership	\$50.00
Supporting Membership	\$75.00

We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 2010: Jim Cudaback, Janice McGregor, Sharon Mason, Jolene Ward

Term expiring June 1, 2011: Dr. Mark Ellis, Sharon Martin, Duane Muhlbach, Barb Riege

Term expiring June 1, 2012: Mary Kenny, Janice Martin, Dan Speirs, Garry Straatmaan

Officers (1 year term)

President	Sharon Mason
Vice-President	Barb Riege
Secretary	Janice McGregor
Treasurer	Jim Cudaback

2009 Buffalo County Historical Society Calendar of Events

Friday, January 2 from 3-4 pm: Girl Scout Cookie Train exhibit

Saturday, February 21 from 2-5 pm: Cake Fundraiser

Sunday April 19 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)

Saturday, May 30: 24th Annual Wagons West Celebration- Music from 10-7 pm and Exhibitors from 10-6 pm

Sunday, June 14: 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 16th, 1835 (2009=174th)

Friday, July 3 from 9-10:30: Members Only Night (watch city's fireworks)

Saturday, July 11 from 10-6 pm: Family Farm Days

Thursday, July 23 from 6:30-9 pm: 3rd Annual Trivia Contest

AUGUST—dates and special correlating events TBD: Smithsonian Harmonies

August Date/Time TBA: Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Ms. Fannie Graves born August 1885 (2009=124th)

Saturday, August 15 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)

Friday, Dec. 4 from 6-8 pm: MEMBER'S ONLY preview of Christmas Tree Walk

Sat. Dec. 5 through Sun. Dec. 13 from 1-5 pm daily: Open to the public: 22nd Annual Christmas Tree Walk***Special Night: Friday Dec. 11 from 1-7 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!

PO Box 523, 710 W. 11th St., Kearney, NE 68845
(308) 234-3041 www.bchs.us bchs@bchs.us

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

-Sorensen group built a very nice ramp that is now attached the church building. It is not permanent and he built it so we can dismantle it in five pieces to store it. Gary and his crew did a marvelous job. If you see Gary, please tell him THANK YOU!

-Kate Benzel, a UNK English professor, wrote a Nebraska Humanities Council grant on behalf of BCHS for a Pilgrim Program (a concert that will be at Trails & Rails Museum in August to correlate w/ the Smithsonian Event). This grant was awarded the full \$1500 asked for.

-Kaitlyn has been working on gathering addresses for the authors of our Buffalo Tales. We will send a letter to all previous authors (or their relatives, if deemed possible) asking them to sign over the rights of their work to BCHS. All future Buffalo Tales will have a signed agreement prior to the printing of the newsletter. Mardi Anderson has also helped with this process and we appreciate her time!



Trails & Rails Museum
Buffalo County Historical Society
710 West 11th Street Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848-0523

Visit us at
www.bchs.us

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