



# Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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## ROOTS OF BUFFALO COUNTY: THE IRISH - Part II

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

When the Soldier's Free Homestead Colony arrived at Gibbon switch, on April 5, 1871, a few settlers had preceded them. One of these was John Reddy, "...a fiery Irishman", according to Margaret Cary Tunks. "He had red hair and a red beard, and he had left Ireland because he was a Fenian—one of the group who were rebelling against the ruling English". John was born in Rosse's Point, County Sligo on May 25, 1846. Coming to America as a young man, he made his way to Dunlap, Iowa, via New York and Vermont. He came to Nebraska with a Union Pacific crew, and bought a farm, from the railroad, near the east edge of Gibbon.

Returning to Dunlap, he married Mary Lehan, a native of County Cork, Ireland, who had come to America with an older brother at the age of nine. The couple returned to Gibbon, and John continued to work for the railroad until he could make a living on the farm. Mary had been educated in a convent in Salem, Massachusetts, where she had learned needlework. "When she died in 1934, she left many, many examples of lace, tatting, and linen work which she had managed to finish while raising seven children on a Buffalo County farm," Mrs. Tunks stated. Of the Reddy children, Belle married Earl Tunks, who was active in the real estate and insurance business in Gibbon and Kearney for many years. Their son, Dr. Lehan Tunks of Seattle, Washington survives.

William Brady was born on Christmas Day, 1838, in Ulster, Ireland. Coming to America, he farmed near Argyle, New York for some time. He married Mary McGowan, also a native of Ireland, on Valentine's Day, 1866. In 1871 the family



Harrold House  
1872 - 1973  
(Continued on Page 3)

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Trails and Rails Museum Phone . 234-3041 If no answer, call 236-5566 or 237-7858.

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**WITH THE SOCIETY**

New officers of the Buffalo County Historical Society are Marian Johnson of Kearney, president; Henrietta Rhany of Gibbon, vice-president; and Alice Howell of Kearney, secretary. 3-year directors elected were Leonard Silver, Chandler Lynch III and Mrs. Paul Steinbrink, all of Kearney. Directors remaining on the board are Opal Reese of Pleasanton, Barbara Saum of Elm Creek, Pauline Nichols of Gibbon, Carl Oran, Glen E. Wisch and Philip S. Holmgren, all of Kearney. Maxine Schroeder of Shelton will remain on the Board of Directors as past president, and Viola Mueller will continue as treasurer. New officers and directors will take office on June 1.

The Trails and Rails Museum opens for the summer season on Saturday, May 28. Mardi Anderson is the museum director. The museum's clothing collection, plus other clothing items on loan, will be featured during June.

Volunteer aides are needed at the museum. Please call Mardi if you have some afternoons to help.

Thanks to the many contributors who responded to our fund-raising appeal. Your gifts are deeply appreciated.

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**NEW ANNUAL MEMBERS**

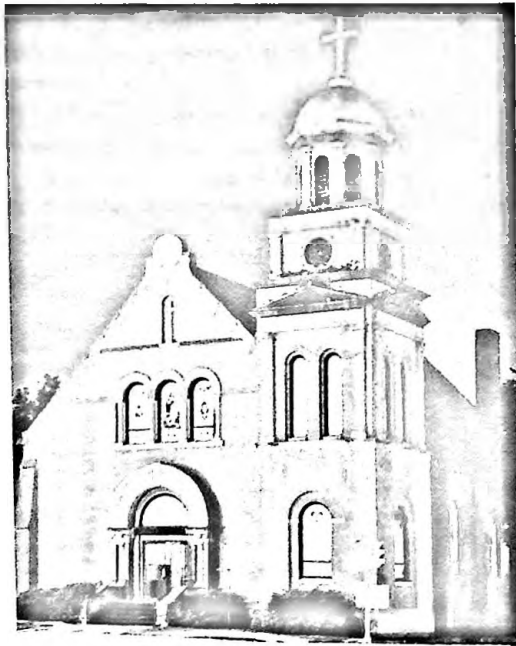
Alma Harder ..... Gibbon  
Emma Harder ..... Gibbon  
Wilma Harder ..... Gibbon

**NEW LIFE MEMBERS**

Mr. & Mrs. Dave Martin ..... Kearney  
Pamelia Long ..... Kearney

came to Gibbon with the Homestead Colony. When the Colony held their drawing, William drew lot number one, and he chose a quarter adjoining Gibbon. Shortly after that, his luck ran out. While Brady was getting clay for bricks for the county courthouse at Gibbon, the clay bank caved in and buried him. When he died at the age of thirty-three, on September 14, 1872, he left his wife and four children. Mrs. Brady remained on the homestead and proved it up in her own name. In 1882, Mrs. Brady married S. R. Traut and they continued to farm. After Traut's death, she moved to Gibbon in 1903. She was a charter member of the Presbyterian Church and was one of its most loyal supporters.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin Slattery are believed to have been the first inhabitants of what is now Kearney. Mr. Slattery, born in Ireland, was a section foreman for the Union Pacific and helped to build the section house they occupied in the midst of a prairie dog town. The only people Mrs. Slattery saw were two railroad workers, Indians and emigrants who passed by on the Mormon trail. When one O'Brien, section foreman at Wood River Center, fell backward off a hand car, and was killed in 1867, Mr. Slattery was offered his job. Mrs. Slattery, with a "heart hunger for people of her kind" was glad to make the change, although the roadmaster implored them to remain. He was convinced that within a short time, a town of importance would be located where they were.



St. James Catholic Church  
1911 - 1980

Photo by Gene Hinrichs

Although Simon Murphy was born in Marcellus, New York, he spent some time in Ireland. Returning to this country, he enrolled in Oberlin College, in Ohio in 1853, then taught at St. Paul's Catholic School in Valparaiso, Indiana for five years. There he married Ellen Harrold, a native of Ireland. The couple came to Lincoln, Nebraska in a covered wagon in 1868, where they farmed before moving to Kearney in 1872.

He built the first hotel in the little village in a little over a month and named it Harrold House in honor of his wife. Later it was known as the Beckett House. The couple had four children. In 1876, Murphy was elected county surveyor, a position he held for a number of years. He was also the first town (then city) engineer of Kearney and held that position for many years, laying out the Kearney cemetery and surveying several additions in the course of his duties.

Among the early settlers of the Kearney area were a number of Catholics, including some Irish, with names such as Shannon and Casey. Mass was not said on a regular basis until 1876, first in a print shop, then in the hall above the L. R. More building. In 1881, Father P. J. Boyle became the first resident priest. In 1883, property was bought on Avenue A, between 18th and 19th streets, where a church and rectory was built. However the town was moving north and a property was obtained at 26th Street and 6th Avenue in 1884. Because members of the parish had limited means, a basement was roofed over, using wood from the old church until such time as the church could be completed. In 1905 the property at 24th and 1st was purchased from the United Presbyterians, and the church located there was used for a few years, until a new church was completed in 1911. On March 8, 1912, the northwestern part of the state was formed into a diocese, with Kearney as the residency for the Bishop. The Most Reverend James A. Duffy was installed in the Kearney Cathedral on April 24, 1913. At the suggestion of Bishop Duffy, the See was moved to Grand Island in 1917, because that city had better resources, and, at that time Kearney had only sixty-five Catholic families, "and not all of them were practicing Catholics."

Michael Ryan, born September 29, 1819, and Mary Brazil, born May 5, 1828, were married in Tipperary, Ireland. They came to this country with eight of their twelve children, settling in Axtell about 1878. It is believed that one child died in infancy and another died and was buried at sea. Two daughters, Mary and Bridget, had preceded them to America. The Ryan family first lived in a dugout, then in a two-story house built of pre-cut lumber. Michael received his homestead patent in 1895.

On coming to America, Mary and Bridget Ryan had worked as domestics in Chicago for a time, then went to Mendota, Illinois to be with relatives of their mother. There Mary and Richard Shanahan were married in 1871 and shortly afterwards came to Nebraska, homesteading eighty acres in Phelps County. Bridget Ryan, who had married Dan Laughlin in Chicago, will follow her sister and parents to Nebraska, moving to Kearney about 1879. Subsequently Dan was killed in a cave-in on a dredging operation for the Kearney Canal, leaving Bridget with eight children. Mrs. Laughlin moved to Axtell to be near her family and took in washing to support her children. When they were grown, she moved back to Kearney. It was said of her, "everyone loved her. She never had an unkind word for anyone, and always had her rosary in her pocket".

The Ryan's youngest child, Michael, born in Limerick, Ireland in 1872, farmed the homestead when he was a young man. He married Ellen Bamrick in 1900, and the couple had four girls and two boys. In 1909, the family moved to Kearney, where Mike managed a billiard parlor for a time. He then became a custodian at the Opera House, where he worked for forty years. His children were admitted free to the gallery, where they could stare down at the gilt decorated boxes with rose velour drapes, and at the women in their beautiful gowns and furs. "Maggie and Jiggs" seemed to impress them most. Other shows were Sousa's band, "Madame Butterfly",



Opera House Elevator  
Mike Ryan, at right

and "Uncle Tom's Cabin." The show which taxed the opera house crew to the utmost was "The Garden of Allah" with 100 humans, horses, donkeys, and nine camels, along with properties which filled seven railroad cars. A hoist at the back of the building could take up most of the animals, but even one 1600 pound camel was far beyond its load limit. The camel had to be coaxed up the stairs, and after the show, lowered with a block and tackle. Of the six Ryan children, three daughters survive, Eileen Cavanaugh, Edith McGahn and Ethel Friend.

The village of Saint Michael, in Cherry Creek Township, was established by the Lincoln Land Company on February 18, 1887. Sources differ as to whether the town was named for Michael Kyne or his brother-in-law, Michael O'Connor. In an effort to verify which was correct, the author wrote to the **RAVENNA NEWS**, and asked for assistance from the readers in that area. From the responses received, it seems likely that the village was named for Michael Kyne as he donated the land on which it was located.

One of the letters I received was from Blanche Hervert of Ravenna, a granddaughter of Michael O'Connor. The following account of the Kynes and O'Connors is based upon her letter.

The Kyne brothers immigrated from Balinrobe, County Galway, Ireland and settled twenty miles west of Grand Island in 1874 or 1875. They were young men in their mid-twenties. Michael Kyne married Mary Halstead in 1876 at Grand Island. It is thought they first met in New York when Michael arrived in this country. Eight children were born to them. Michael's land, mostly bluffs and lakes suited for grazing, lay along the Buffalo-Hall County line. The bluffs were called Kyne's Bluffs and, when the town was established later, the name Kyne's Bluffs was suggested for the village.

Anthony Kyne acquired land west of Michael's which was level and more suitable for farming. He married Bedelia Burke and they became the parents of ten children.

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The Anthony Kyne family were charter members of the first Catholic Church established in Ravenna; there being none in St. Michael. The Kyne home on the west edge of the village was operated as a hotel for a time.

Mary Elizabeth Kyne O'Connor, sister of Michael and Anthony, came to the area in 1884 with her husband, Michael O'Connor, and six children. They located south of the Anthony Kyne farm, one mile from the village when it was established. Through pre-emption, a homestead, a tree claim and purchase, O'Connor came to own much of the pasture land south of the village. Michael O'Connor became St. Michael's first postmaster and also served as mayor for many years.

Sheep raising was the largest industry in the area at the time. The meadow lands along the South Platte River were ideal for this activity and were much like the home land of the Kynes and O'Connors. Later, cattle raising was predominant. The village of St. Michael was a shipping point on the railroad for livestock, alfalfa hay and grain over the years.

#### *Author's Note*

Time and space prevent listing more of the Irish-born families who came to Buffalo County. I gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following: Floyd Conroy, Mary Fitzgerald Worthin, Mr. and Mrs. Matt Broe, Nell Hurley Carter, Margaret Hurley, Margaret Cleary Connors, Father Hugh Spanel of Elm Creek, Father James O'Kane of Kearney, Margaret Cary Tunks, Ethel Friend, Blanche O'Connor Hervert, Mr. and Mrs. Herman Wilkens, and Opal Schuett.

#### *SOURCES*

*Tales of Buffalo County*; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*; S. C. Bassett, *History of Buffalo County and its People*; Biographical Souvenir, *Buffalo, Kearney, and Phelps Counties*; *Where the Buffalo Roamed*; Perkey, *Names of Nebraska Locations*; Paige Carlin, *End of an Era*; and the "Ryan Family History", compiled by Jean Ryan Roberts of Axtell. Correction: to "The Irish, Part I". The Mat Hurleys had five daughters and two sons.

**IS THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN YOUR WILL?**