



Buffalo Tales



Volume 17, No. 3

Buffalo County Historical Society

May-June, 1994

REMINISCENCES OF RALPH M. GRIMES

Editor's Note: In December of 1932 the Kearney Daily Hub printed a letter sent to it by Roy Bernard of Long Beach, California. Bernard had been in the newspaper business in Kearney and the surrounding area and he compiled this letter from conversations he had with 90-year old Ralph M. Grimes. The following are excerpts from that letter. Several days before this letter appeared in print, a notice had appeared in the Hub reporting the death of Mr. Grimes.

—Philip S. Holmgren

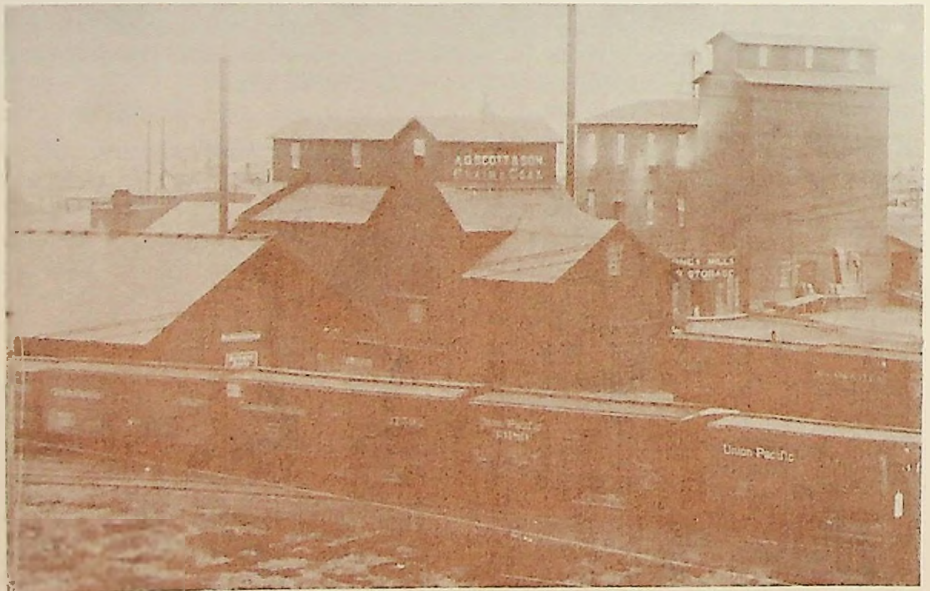
Ralph M. Grimes is a Civil war veteran, having enlisted at Colesburg, Iowa, October 4, 1861, as a member of Company H, Twelfth Iowa. He was mustered out October 18, 1865, after serving four years and fourteen days.

Following the war he returned to his home in Iowa, and later was sent to Lowell, Nebraska, as agent for the Burlington railroad. At that time Lowell was the county seat of Kearney county, and the United States Land Office also was located at that point.

In the fall of 1872 Mr. Grimes was transferred to Kearney as agent for the Burlington, when this railroad was building west, and had reached that point, thus forming a junction with the Union Pacific.

Mr. Grimes relates that the day he reached Kearney all of the Platte valley west of that point had been swept by a prairie fire, and upon his arrival to take charge of

(Continued on Page 3)



Early Railroad Yards. Note first Burlington Depot

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

This letter is my last official act as President of the Buffalo County Historical Society. The last three years as your president has not only been a great experience for me, but it has provided me with many wonderful memories. I know that I join so many past presidents when I say "thank you" for the show of confidence in a vital and active organization. Had I not had the full support of a very capable Board of Directors during my terms in office I would have been lost. I look forward to serving under Larry Nansel, new president of the Buffalo County Historical Society, for the next two years as an active Board member.
—Susan C. Lynch, Past President

Volume I, *Tales of Buffalo County*, is being reprinted and should be available for sale by July 1. Cost will be \$10.00 plus tax to Nebraska residents. Mail order postage and handling will add \$1.50.

The Lincoln Highway Association caravan from Blair, Nebraska to the Nebraska-Wyoming border stopped in Kearney overnight on May 13. On the morning of the 14th, Trails & Rails Museum hosted the group to breakfast on the museum grounds.

The Archives Department of the Buffalo County Historical Society is rapidly taking shape in a part of the church building. The first half of the probate records are now alphabetized and filed, and we are now ready to start on the second half of those records. The master file is now being made ready for public use. Stop in and see what we have.

Trails & Rails Museum opened on May 28 for the summer season. Exhibits in the log cabin relate to the westward trails. In the church are railroad displays. The old Opera House curtain has been partially unrolled for viewing in the depot.

Glen Wisch Construction was awarded the contract for building a new wagon barn on the museum grounds. Construction will start late in June. When completed the barn will protect our wagon collection and will also provide exhibit and storage space.

MEMORIALS RECEIVED:

Dr. and Mrs. R. L. Link in memory of Ruby Link
Dora Day, in memory of Lester Davidson

NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Murl PattersonKearney Mrs. Wm. A. LynnGibbon
Tanya SpauldingKingston, NH

NEW SUPPORTING MEMBER

Velma HazlettKearney

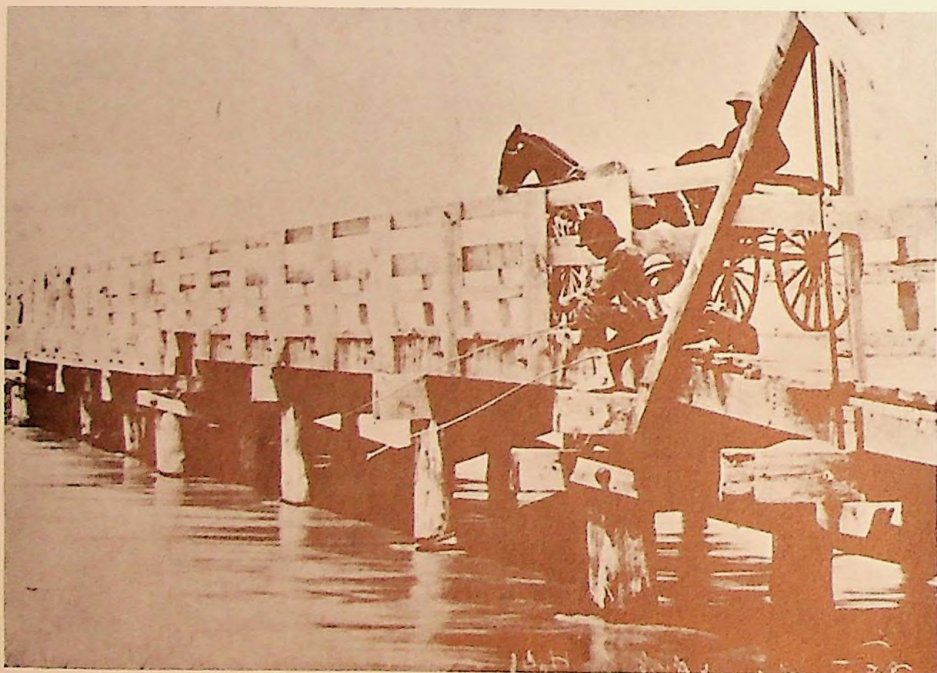
his new position a high wind was blowing and the air was filled with smoke, burned grass ashes, sand and dirt, and he thought he had come to the end of the world.

Mr. and Mrs. Grimes found lodging in a shack standing just south of where the Burlington depot now stands (Ave. A), this shack being known as the "Riley Hotel." A stove fire was going in the hotel, the stovepipe running up through a board floor, and soon after his arrival and during the high wind the floor of his room became ignited, but was soon discovered by him and the fire extinguished with a pitcher of water that happened to be in his room. So far as he has any record this was the beginning of the well-organized fire department Kearney now has.

Upon the arrival of Mr. Grimes in Kearney in 1872 he relates there were but few buildings on the north side of the Union Pacific tracks. E. M. Webb, better known as Captain Webb, had built a home on the corner of Central Avenue and Twenty-first street, where the Andrews building now stands. L. D. Grant also had erected a home where the State College now stands and which, at that time, was "way out in the country." Also there was a salloon (sic) on Railroad street.

At the time of his arrival in Kearney the Burlington railroad owned all of the ground south of the railroad tracks, and was disposing of its town lots as rapidly as possible. The Union Pacific had no depot and none of its trains made a stop at Kearney. The Burlington erected a depot upon its present site, and it was the intention of the two railroads to make Mr. Grimes their joint agent, but when the Burlington learned that he previously has been with the Union Pacific, different arrangements were made.

J. N. Keller was at that time agent for the Union Pacific at Buda, and as a result of the arrangement made, the Buda office was closed and Mr. Keller was sent



Wooden Bridge across the Platte

to Kearney, where he occupied the north half of the Burlington depot as agent for the Union Pacific, while Mr. Grimes occupied the south half of the depot as agent for the Burlington.

Within a short time thereafter the question came up of building a bridge across the Platte river south of Kearney so that the people residing on the south side of the river could get across to do their marketing and trading without encountering the dangers of quicksand. It was proposed that a bond of \$42,000 for this purpose be voted upon.

Mr. Grimes has by this time become a part of Kearney and was in favor of the bonds. He was waited upon by Burlington officials and not only requested, but commanded, to get out among his friends and acquaintances and work against the bonds, these officials stating that the bonds would make their taxes prohibitive if they carried. This Mr. Grimes refused to do.

At the election the bonds carried and the lumber for the bridge, in due time, was shipped to Kearney over the Burlington and unloaded. The people of Kearney were indignant because of the stand Burlington had taken against the bonds, and an injunction against the use of the lumber shipped over that road was served. As a result, the lumber laid in the yard for over a year before the injunction was dissolved.

Because of his stand for the bonds, Mr. Grimes lost his position with the Burlington and stepped over the other side of the depot as night agent for the Union Pacific, which position he held for two years.

On a certain morning as Mr. Grimes was walking downtown a friend stopped him



**Early Central Avenue scene looking north from railroad.
Note A. L. Webb building at 21st Street and Central Avenue.**

and informed him he had received the appointment as postmaster at Kearney. Mr. Grimes did not know that his name had been suggested and was not aware of the fact and would not believe his friend until he was shown a copy of an Omaha paper containing a special from Washington to the effect he had received his appointment. This position he held for eleven years.

In 1887, following his postmastership, Mr. Grimes was elected as treasurer of Buffalo County, although he did not seek the nomination and made but little effort during the campaign, however, he was elected by the largest majority ever recorded in the county up to that time. A Mr. Moon, residing at Shelton, a stranger in the county, received the nomination for county treasurer at the republican convention. While Mr. Grimes had always been affiliated with the republican party, he received his nomination by the combined efforts of the democratic and people's independent parties. He served one term as treasurer and was defeated for a second term.

During the early part of his residence in Kearney the village was having, at frequent intervals, considerable trouble with the Texas cowboys when they arrived from that state with a herd of cattle. At the end of their journey they were paid off and as soon as they received their money a trip to the frontier bar was made. After partaking freely from the "Cup that cheers" they would mount their ponies and proceed to shoot up the town. In 1887 a genuine street battle took place. The citizens and the sheriff had grown tired of dodging bullets for the entertainment of the cowboys.

Six of the cowboys arrived in town, proceeded to load up on "ad whiskey," mount their ponies and raced up Central Avenue, shooting as they went. The sheriff (a Mr. Anderson), who had homesteaded where the now nationally known Watson ranch is located, was called. He stationed a number of men with guns at the railroad crossing on Central Avenue, while he went to meet the cowboys as they came back down the street. They paid no attention to Sheriff Anderson and the officers were compelled to kill the leader. The remaining cowboys rode out of town leaving their dead leader. They added to their number and went to Lowell that evening and proceeded to shoot up that town, killing two of the citizens and almost wrecking the entire town.

They threatened to return to Kearney and 'sack the town,' but a vigilance committee, composed of western men who knew how to use their firearms, was organized and this committee sent word to the cowboys that every man in Kearney had a rifle and was ready to shoot it out with them. The cowboys failed to return and that was the last trouble (trouble?-ed.) the citizens of Kearney had with them.

Mr. Grimes was one of the men to propose the building of the canal west of Kearney for irrigation and power purposes, and this work was carried to a conclusion soon thereafter.

Mr. Grimes was in Kearney when the tracks for the street railway were laid, the first motive power being furnished by mules. Later electric cars were installed, but the project was never a paying one.

In those days Kearney boasted of a cotton mill, a woolen mill, a cracker factory, a paper mill, an oatmeal mill, and a plow factory. While Mr. Grimes lived in Kearney, it grew from a village of 250 inhabitants to a city of 12,000 people.

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.

1994 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:
Basic Membership\$15.00
Institutional Membership\$20.00
Supporting Membership\$30.00 +
Life memberships are \$150.00 for an individual;
\$200.00 husband and wife.

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 1995: Glen Wisch, Philip Holmgren, Larry Nansel, Floretta Sullwold.
Term expiring June 1, 1996: Susan C. Lynch, Margaret Hohnholt, Wilma Harder, Helen Kinnaman.
Term expiring June 1, 1997: Mardi Anderson, Janet Eickmeier, Dan Speirs, Susan Underhill.

Officers (1 year term)

PresidentLarry Nansel
Vice-PresidentPhilip Holmgren
SecretaryMargaret Hohnholt
TreasurerMardi Anderson

TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

We have had a very busy spring. We have had several tour groups and many schools. We have been busy putting up some new displays and getting cleaned up. We did not have too many for clean-up day but the trees were trimmed, flower beds cleaned, hotel cleaned, ground around the Boyd House made ready to plant and planting done. The Boyd House and the hotel have been painted. Most of the flower beds are planted.

Collections day this year will be July 16. Many expressed the desire last year to participate that year if we continued so be sure to contact the Museum if you have collections to share. We would also like to add to our show any memorabilia from businesses, past and present — pens, pencils, calendars, spoons, key rings, thermometers — in other words, give away advertising. We will carefully mark and return it to you.

The school children will be meeting on Tuesday mornings with a gardening lesson each day plus working in the gardens. The garden behind the cabin has been planted.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

Trails & Rails Museum 706 West 11th Street (308) 234-3041

Buffalo County Historical Society

Box 523

Kearney, NE 68848-0523

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