



Buffalo Tales



Volume 21, No. 5 Buffalo County Historical Society September-October, 1998

KEARNEY 100 YEARS AGO PART I

by Mardi Anderson

1898

McKinley was president. War loomed on the horizon. Gold in Alaska beckoned. Judge Bill Greene of Kearney was our Representative in Congress. Mayor Hulbert would soon be replaced by B. O. Hostetler and S. B. Funk was replacing D Wort as sheriff. The city council faced the issue of sidewalks. Laborers on the celery farms were unhappy. And whose bones were buried under the floor of a Kearney saloon?

D Wort, outgoing county sheriff, left to his successor an "infernal machine," a box which had been rigged up to explode when it was opened. It had been evidence in an attempted murder case some 8-9 years earlier and had been handed down from one sheriff to the next since then. (But it has apparently been lost somewhere in the last century. Frank Dineen says he did not receive it when he took office.) Mr. Wort moved his family into Kearney, sold his business interests in the northern part of the county,



Dr. Maurice A. Hoover, Brigade Surgeon Second Nebraska Volunteer Regiment, commander of 1st Division, 3rd Corps hospital at Chicamauga.

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

I want to thank all the volunteers for their time that they have given to the Buffalo County Historical Society and the Trails and Rails Museum. The Society and Museum could not function without your assistance.

Some of the members of the New Building Committee are meeting again with Mrs. Margery Lauer, Executive Director of the Kearney Area Community Foundation. The Shared Staff Program is to be used for our fund drive for the new building.

Wilma Harder, President

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

The Meeting and Tours Committee has planned the programs and events during the 1998-1999 year. If any member requires a ride, please call the committee chairman, Ed Anderson, at 237-7339.

Sunday, November 1: "From Mammoth Hunters to Horseback Warriors," by Les and Jan Hosick. 2:00 p.m. at Trails & Rails Museum. This program is funded by the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities.

Sunday, November 22: "Santa Claus and Christmas Trees," by Fred Luebke. 2:00 p.m. at Trails & Rails Museum. This program is partially funded by the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities.

Sunday, January 17, 1999: A visit to the Wood River Museum at Shelton.

Sunday, February 28, 1999: History Day—Middle school and high school students display and demonstrate their contest projects.

Sunday, March 28: A visit to the Ravenna Museum at Ravenna.

Sunday, April 18: Annual Meeting. (Details later)

Saturday, May 1: A Bus Tour of historical points of interest in the North Platte area. (Details later)

Saturday, June 5: Wagons West

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MEMORIAL GIFTS received from Earl and Gerry Godfrey and John and Sydney Kruse in memory of Charles Oldfather, and from Jean Turner in memory of Bob Lawhead.

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1999 NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Sidney Kruse, Walthill, NE
Gladys Styles Johnston, Kearney

and with the purchase of the elevator at Buda, operated a grain business.

Ice skating on Kearney Lake was a favorite pastime. In January two boys fell through the ice and almost drown. The ice was also a basis for a portion of the economy of Kearney. The Kearney Ice Company, owned by Smith and Jakeway, harvested ice off Kearney Lake. In one day as many as 35 cars of ice were shipped out of Kearney on the Union Pacific. During January they shipped out 400-500 carloads.

Dr. Beckett and his brother-in-law, Edward Keene, of Kearney had gone to Alaska to look for gold. Dr. Beckett's letter, written in late November, came from Five Finger Rapids. By November ice had prevented them from going further so they had stopped and constructed a hut — half log, half dugout. The temperature was about 60 degrees below 0.

By February plans were underway to send several men from Kearney to the Klondike. "Never before has the mining craze taken such hold of people of Kearney, and today there are a great (many) prospective millionaires who will dig a fortune from the mountains of gold in the Klondike country." Twenty local business men had formed The Kearney Klondike Company and contracted with Emil Soderquist to go to the Klondike. "Visions of gold continually float before the eyes of the members of the company."

But fate had other plans in store for Mr. Soderquist. He had just been elected captain of Company A. He told them he would not be here long but they wanted him to be their captain anyway.

The Spanish-American War

The Nebraska National Guard Unit in Kearney was Company A. Early in the year their main activities appeared to be social. Following a masked military ball in January and a dance at the armory on Valentines Day, plans were being made for a drama later in February to raise funds for uniforms to wear at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition scheduled to open the first of June in Omaha.

Then on the night of February 15 the Battleship Maine was blown up in Havana Harbor. War was declared on April 21. "Kearney celebrated the coming of war with Spain Thursday evening and the boom of cannon and the thunder of musketry could be heard all over the city. The raising of the national colors occurred during the afternoon when the Hub bulletin board announced the declaration of war, made by Spain, in forcibly severing diplomatic relations. It didn't take long to get out the colors, and while the stars and stripes floated over all business houses, while the subject of war was being considered from every standpoint on the street, Company A only required a very few hours to recruit its strength to the maximum (65 men), and announce that its ranks were full."

On the morning of Wednesday, April 27, Company A left Kearney by Burlington Railroad for Lincoln. They were escorted to the train by Civil War veterans and the Midway band. "They marched from the armory north on Ave. B, west on 22 St. to Ave. A, north on Ave. A and west on 23rd to Central, then south to the depot. Near the depot the old veterans formed a double line and let the troops pass through. The crowd was so dense at the depot that it required a great effort for the boys to get on board the train."

Harry Atwood, a corporal in Company A, had agreed to be a correspondent and wrote letters which were published periodically in the Hub. He wrote of their arrival

at Camp Alvin Saunders in Lincoln, "Arrived 1:30 Wednesday afternoon. By evening all companies had arrived and set up their tents. Along the way at every town there were people waving flags, bands playing and cannons fired. Their first meal that evening was fried bacon, boiled potatoes, bread and coffee. There was sugar for the coffee but because butter was not part of the rations they had to use bacon grease to "butter" their bread and potatoes. Reveille at 6:00 a.m., taps at 11:00; 4 hours of drill daily."

The Burlington organized a special excursion train to Lincoln for family and friends to visit the troops on Sunday a week and a half after leaving Kearney. About 200 from Kearney went along with an estimated 20,000 to 35,000 from around the state. The following week another train again took visitors to Lincoln but this time it was families going to say good-by to their loved one rather than pleasure-seekers going for a good time.

Kearney's was one of the last units to be mustered in, so they camped at Lincoln for almost three weeks. Ten of our men did not pass their physicals but replacements were immediately found and left for Lincoln on the noon freight.

Part of the Nebraska troops were placed in the First Regiment which was shipped out to the Philippines. They came through Kearney on the evening of May 16. The rest, including Company A, were placed in the Second Regiment which went to Chicamauga. The first battalion of the Second Regiment consisted of companies A of Kearney, G of Omaha, M of Grand Island, K of Schuyler, under command of Lieut. Col. Emil Olson of Kearney. In civilian life Col. Olson was the Kearney city sewer and building inspector. The City Council had to appoint someone else to take his position since his return was "problematical". The Regimental Surgeon was Dr. Maurice A. Hoover, a Kearney physician who held the rank of major. He was promoted to Brigade Surgeon with the rank of colonel soon after reaching Chicamauga. One of the three



A.T. Anderson took this picture of the troops and the Kearneyites who came to bid them farewell as they prepared to board the train for Lincoln on the morning of April 27, 1898.

regimental hospital stewards was Henry B. Storm, also from Kearney.

Allen Ellsworth, company musician, described the arrival of Company A at Chicamauga on May 23. "It is so hot here we cannot drill or do any thing else. When we arrived at the park yesterday we had to march five miles to our camp grounds. On the way many men dropped, fatigued, and could not stand more. The people around here say yesterday was a cold day, but it was too hot for us... The boys from New York seem to think we are cut-throats and demons. That is their idea of western people."

A Chattanooga paper had a different view. "The Second Nebraska presented a creditable appearance as it marched into camp yesterday afternoon. The members of this regiment bivouacked in their (train) cars Saturday night. The Second is one of the best equipped commands on the field and its men are the most decent, orderly and well-behaved that have come to Chattanooga. The people who came in contact with them while they remained in the city were impressed with the gentlemanly manner in which they conducted themselves."

In the meantime, a Boys' Brigade was organized in Kearney to replace the National Guard. This notice appeared in the paper. "Attention Boy's Brigade. Every member must report for drill this evening. Orders have been received to recruit up the brigade to one hundred members and to be ready to leave at a moment's notice. New recruits are wanted. All boys and young men between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, of good moral character, and of sound physical health, who will sign the pledge, are eligible for membership. In case the brigade is called out, the state will furnish guns and equipment." At least one of the meetings of the Boys' Brigade had to be postponed to a different night because it conflicted with a previously scheduled high school activity.

Buried among other articles about the war, items such as this one could be found in the newspaper: "The Cuban question and political issues sink into insignificance with the man who suffers from piles. What he most desires is relief. DeWitt's Witch Hazel Salve cures piles. Niels P. Hansen"

Troops, ammunition and equipment coming through the city on the Union Pacific soon became a common sight. W. E. Jakeway announced that the price of bunting, like wheat and other necessities had increased by 300%. The City Council planned to decorate for Flag Day despite the increased cost. Mayor Hostetler called on the citizens of Kearney to provide aid to families of the men who had gone with Co. A. A committee appointed - John Dryden, Homer Allen, Niels Hansen, S. A. Fees, and H. A. Julian - to work in conjunction with the ladies relief organization which had already organized several weeks earlier.

SOURCES

Sources for article: *Kearney Daily Hub*, 1898.

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 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, 1999: Wilma Harder, Helen Kinnaman, Margaret Hohnholt and Dick Ikenberry.

Term expiring June 1, 2000: Minnette Steinbrink, Susan Underhill, Pauline Wells, and Dora Day.

Term expiring June 1, 2001: Edward Anderson, Wilma Larsen, Janeen Vokoun, and a vacancy to be appointed by the Board.

Officers (1 year term)

President Wilma Harder
 Vice-President Susan Underhill
 Secretary Janeen Vokoun
 Treasurer Mardi Anderson

TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

It hardly seems possible that we have been closed for a little over a month. We have been open two Sundays and several times for special groups. In cooperation with the Q125 Commission we entertained the volunteers those who had participated in the celebrations during the year. Besides touring the facilities, guests were served ice cream and cookies. We had a nice attendance. The Garden Club which met during the summer ended their year with a meeting when they made stone soup and a meeting at which they made rolled ice cream. This is a fun group of youngsters who are guided by Carol Bosshardt and her daughters and friends. Thanks to all of them. They help us in many other ways too. The children who attend also receive a special coupon from Burger King each week they attend a meeting.

It won't be long before the Christmas Tree Walk. We have several new trees and room for one or two more if any one is interested. Wilma Larsen will soon be calling for volunteers to help each day. We can also use donations for the Bake Sale. Profits from these ventures go into the museum operational budget.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

Dates — December 4-13 for the Christmas Tree Walk.

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

Buffalo County Historical Society

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