

# Buffalo Tales

SEPT/OCT 2009

## KEARNEY ARMY AIR BASE: A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNAL



Main Gate of Kearney Army Air Field  
May 3, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So



Kearney Army Air Base patrol jeep (right)  
September 13, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So



Military Police (left)  
September 13, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So

By Katherine Wielechowski

In 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor was still a fresh and painful memory for Americans. The attack launched a new era in the history of the United States and started the mobilization of the American economy and workforce for war. Men enlisted or were drafted into the Armed Forces, women stepped into the vacated places in the workforce, and the government scrambled to prepare all that was needed to fight a two-front war. One thing that was necessary was air bases for planes that would eventually help turn the tides of the war. August, 1942 brought the Army's attention to the brand new Keens Municipal Airport outside of Kearney, NE and with September came the beginning construction on the Kearney Army Air Base.

While the Kearney Army Air Base was a training and processing base for the Army Air groups, the major-

ity of the army personal arrived in Kearney by rail. The Union Pacific "troop trains" carried soldiers across the country, taking them to bases where they would train for war and ships that would carry them to the action. Large capacity air planes were still a few years away so, while pilots fought from the air, they still had to use land and sea transportation to get to the battlefield.

During World War II, the military was still racially segregated. There were separate barracks on base and living quarters in Kearney itself for African-American personal and their families. There were even separate recreation facilities for the African-American soldiers and their families to relax and socialize.

While the majority of planes that passed through the KAAB were B-17 Flying Fortresses (pictured below) or B-29 Super Fortresses, this Northrop P-61 Black Widow (above) spent



Troops arriving in Kearney NE  
October 25, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So



Troops arriving in Kearney, NE  
October 25, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So



SQDN C Orderly Room Staff  
July 2, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So



Northrop P-61 Black Widow  
May 10, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress  
(date unknown)  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Crowd amassed to see the Boeing  
"5-Grand" during its stay at KAAB  
July, 1944  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.

some time at the base for processing. With its black paint job and its state-of-the-art radar, the Black Widow was the first plane made specifically for night fighting.

Another special plane that was processed at the Kearney Army Air Base was the Boeing "5-Grand" (also pictured below). The "5-Grand" was the 5000th B-17 to be manufactured at Boeing's Seattle Plant since Pearl Harbor and was processed at the KAAB in July of 1944. The "5-Grand" was covered with the thousands of names of the Boeing employees who worked on it.

Daily life on at the KAAB was not all work. There was also time and places to play. The base supported a bowling alley and a NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) Club. Both were where military personal and their families could go to have some fun and socialize. The base also supplied a library for the residents to use for research material or pleasure reading.

While the rest of the country was shopping in grocery stores and department stores, the families who lived on the KAAB had to do their shopping at the Post Exchange (PX). It did not carry everything but it had the basic amenities that

the residents could not live without. For all of the "extras" that the families needed, they had to travel into Kearney to buy them.

The KAAB even had photography operations, complete with offices, a studio, and a lab. Photography had become a popular and relatively inexpensive medium to capture daily life shortly before World War II and was used readily to document life during the war, both by the people in the action and behind the front lines. All of the photos compiled in this photo journal came from an album that was donated to the Buffalo County Historical Society. We do not know who donated it or who took the time to put it together but without it, this special glimpse into an important part of Kearney's history would have been lost.

World War II ended in Europe on May 8, 1945 with the surrender of Nazi Germany to the Allies and the signing of the acts of surrender May 7th and 8th in France. The war in the Pacific theater officially ended WWII on September 2, 1945 when Japan signed the formal surrender aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, Japan.

The surrender of Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan closed an



Base Headquarters  
July 20, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Chow Line Mess Hall #3  
July 2, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Non-Commissioned Officer's Club (NCO) Bar  
September 5, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.





NCO's Club  
September 5, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Base Bowling Alley  
May 28, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Kearney Army Air Base Library  
May 15, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.

important era in American history. The war showed how a country's entire economy and the purpose of civilian life could be focused toward the war effort and toward supporting the troops overseas. American civilians had put in millions of hours and dollars building everything that the troops would need, from cloth for uniforms, to battleships, to airfields.

When the war ended, many of the things that the country had produced became superfluous and mostly unnecessary. The government gradually began closing or re-outfitting factories that had produced war supplies. Military bases were some of the last remnants of the war to close. Personal was reassigned to other bases or discharged from the military all together and the planes and other large equipment was redistributed to bases that were chosen to stay open.

The unofficial end of the Kearney Army Air Base came in January of 1948 when it was re-designated the Kearney Air Force Base. It would eventually take too much money to bring the base back up to standards so operations officially ceased on March 15, 1949. It was listed as an inactive base until 1951, which was the last year it was on the Air Force's list of bases.

Now the Kearney Army Air Base is simply a memory in the minds of the citizens of Kearney and the members of the Army Air Corps who were stationed there.

*If you are interested in learning more about the Kearney Army Air Base, more information can be found in Buffalo Tales Volume 11, No. 4, "The Kearney Air Base: The Military" and Vol. 11, No. 5, "The Kearney Air Base: The Civilians," by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell, published in April, 1988.*

#### Sources:

Buffalo Tales V. 11 No. 4 "The Kearney Air Base: The Military," by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

*Images of America: Kearney* by Mark R. Ellis and Heather E. Stauffer

KAAB Photo album donated to the Buffalo County Historical Society

Skylighters.org

Wikipedia.com



PX (Post Exchange)  
May 28, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Shelves of supplies  
(date unknown)  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Cpt. Dovie Roberson  
April 30, 1945  
Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Unidentified man working in the photo lab at KAAB (date unknown) Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Unidentified people working in the photography department at the KAAB (date unknown) Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Inside Kearney Army Air Base Library May 15, 1945 Property of Buffalo County Historical So.

**DID YOU KNOW...?**

... that the Freighters Hotel was built in 1884 by Jerome Lalone, a house painter and wallpaper hanger from Kearney. It was moved to the museum in January 1983.

See your words in print! What is you favorite memory of... harvesting? Corn, milo, wheat, or soy beans, did something extraordinary happen or only the ordinary?

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

## GHOST HUNTING

The Central Community College in Grand Island will be renting the Trails & Rails museum to host a ghost hunting class, October 13, 2009. Bill Sinnard and Jacob Sikes, the founding members of the Midwest Paranormal Investigators, will lead the investigation.



Parade at the KAAB (date unknown) Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



Parade at the KAAB (date unknown) Property of Buffalo County Historical So.



V-E Day Parade May 10, 1945 Property of Buffalo County Historical So.

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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](mailto: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

-Our 2009 cumulative total number of guests as of Sept. 7 is 5770. This time last year, we were at 3316. Last year we had 780 people in from Labor Day through the end of the year, with the majority coming during the Christmas Tree Walk.

### Attendance #s:

2004:	1811
2005:	3356
2006:	5321 (150th Anniversary of Mormon Trek during Wagons West)
2007:	4440
2008:	4463

-11 students were assigned to BCHS from the Service Learning program at UNK. Lyn is working with these students to help with afterschool programs, make displays to tie in upcoming adult programming to Buffalo County history, and to help with day-to-day operations.

-A thank you letter was sent to Senator Nelson for voting against S Amdt. 2372 and H.R. 3288, which would have prohibited Transportation Enhancement funds to be allocated to museums. The depot was upgraded just a few years ago partially funded by a Transportation Enhancement program. The American Association of Museums had sent out an e-mail with these facts and requested museums to send thank you letters to the senators that supported museums.



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

Visit us at  
[www.bchs.us](http://www.bchs.us)

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