



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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Gilbert C. Fosdick II, Stagecoach Driver

by Mardi Anderson

Occasionally a request for information leads us to a story about a person who spent some time in Buffalo County and which sheds some light on the character of others who lived here. A request for information about Gilbert Fosdick II has done just that. Not only did we discover what happened to this young man but we also learned more about David Anderson who was the sheriff of Buffalo County at that time.

The letters included in this story have been transcribed here as they were written, without changing spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Apparently Fosdick did not capitalize the word "I" or use punctuation to end his sentences. For clarification extra spacing is used at the end of sentences in his letter.

Our thanks to Cathy Ward of Parkersburg, Pennsylvania for providing the information about Gilbert Fosdick and his family and for donating copies of the letters and newspaper items used in this story. The copies are now on file in the Buffalo County Historical Society's Archives.

When Gilbert C. Fosdick II arrived in Kearney in February 1877, he found gold fever and Kearney businessmen laying plans to supply the prospectors. Gold had been discovered in the Black Hills but that was Indian territory. A treaty had been signed with the Sioux Indians so the gold seekers could now enter the Hills legally. They were waiting for spring and the snow to melt.

Gilbert and his sister, Mary, four years his senior, were the children of Sgl. Gilbert C. Fosdick, a Civil War veteran. The senior Fosdick had enlisted in the New York Infantry but now in the 1870's he lived in New Jersey. Mary married Charles Helms, also a Civil War veteran, and they were living with their four children in Paterson, New Jersey. Gilbert had not married and, apparently looking for adventure, had gone west. Now, after a visit with his sister, he had returned to the west to search for gold.

It was logical that Fosdick would come to Kearney. Local businessmen and newspapers were promoting Kearney as the place to which prospectors could travel by train and then disembark to buy their mining supplies. From Kearney they could proceed on up the Kearney and Black Hills Route to Deadwood, Dakota Territory.

C.W. Dake, president of a bank in Kearney, formed the Kearney and Black Hills stage line in late winter and early spring of 1877. He was joined in this venture by R.S. Downing, who had moved to Kearney from Lowell in Kearney County. They applied for and were granted the contract to carry mail from Kearney to Deadwood. The route had been laid out the previous summer and



Gilbert C. Fosdick, II

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WITH THE SOCIETY

A Note from the President:

This being my final President's Message, I want to list the one thing that makes me the most excited. That is being able to hire Brad Driml to head up the fund raising for our new building and we have hired Miller & Associates for our architectural firm. We will be working with Reed Miller and Dick Stacy. I feel we have gotten ourselves off the ground and are making much progress.

I have had several people tell me how much they enjoyed the story about Carl Spelts in the last Buffalo Tales. More stories like this about people in our area would be great. If you feel you would like to submit an article about yourself or a family member that would be of interest, please contact Roger Davis the Editor of the Buffalo Tales or the Society Director Sherrie Dux-Ideus.

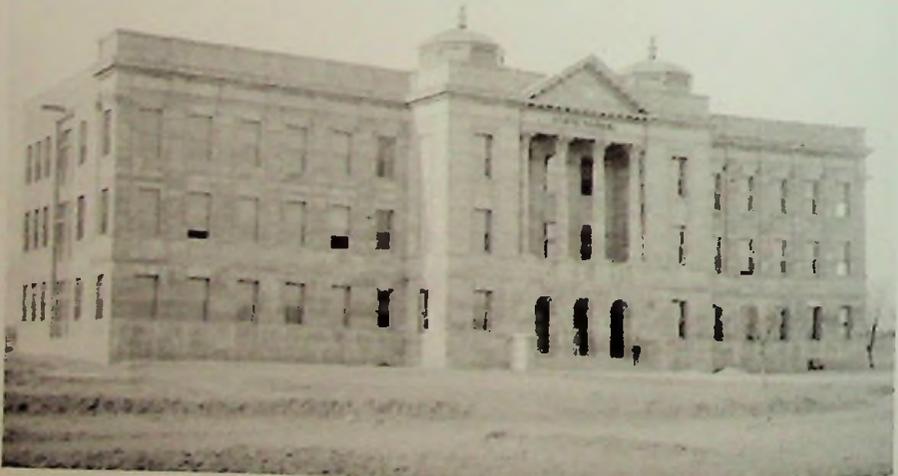
I want to thank the members of the Buffalo County Historical Society for the support you have given me while I have been your President and I hope you will give the same support to Dora Day our new President.

Thank you,

-Larry Nansel, President

A Note from the Editor:

As many of you may know, the University of Nebraska at Kearney will be celebrating its centennial anniversary this coming year. The institution was chartered in 1903 as the Nebraska State Normal School at Kearney. It opened its doors in September, 1905. Over this summer a number of historical vignettes will be prepared to celebrate the centennial in the coming year. As many of the readers of the Buffalo Tales are alumni and/or relatives of alumni, I would appreciate any stories, photos, memories, tales...tall or otherwise...that you could send along to me. They will be forwarded to those preparing for the centennial, and will also make for some interesting local history for our future editions. Just send what you have to: Roger Davis, Dept. of History, UNK, Copeland Hall, Kearney, NE 68849. Thanks, and have a good summer.



State Normal School building after completion, Kearney, Nebraska

(continued from Page 1)

road ranches had been established along the way to provide supplies to the travelers.

The Kearney and Black Hills Route went northwest out of Kearney. Tracks made by wagons on this trail can still be seen in a pasture north of the Buffalo Hills subdivision on Cottonmill Road. Once the route reached the Wood River it followed the river to Armada, a mile north of present-day Miller. From Armada the route went into Custer County, continuing in a northwesterly direction to the Middle Loup River. At this junction a road ranch had been established called Dakesberg. The Kearney and Black Hills Route followed the Middle Loup River almost to its source in the sandhills, then turned in a more north, northwest direction toward the Black Hills and Deadwood. The advantages of the Kearney to Deadwood route were loudly proclaimed in local newspapers. According to the Central Nebraska Press.

The route was used by gold prospectors and freight wagon drivers as well as

"The route from this city to Custer City and Deadwood, is with little exception over a...fertile and gently rooling (sic) country, well watered with numerous streams, most of which are skirted with an abundance of growing timber. Grasses abound in the greatest profusion and luxuriance..."

"...Good ranches have been established outside the limits of permanent settlements where the traveler can find excellent accommodations both for himself and beast and at prices that do not imply robbery. To all persons contemplating a trip to the Hills, either by stage or with freight, we unhesitatingly say by all means take the Kearney route."

the stages carrying passengers and mail. It was probably only used during the summer of 1877 because Sidney, Nebraska soon became the accepted jumping off place to leave the railroad and head for the Black Hills.

Although Gilbert Fosdick had come west to seek gold, he had no funds when he arrived in Kearney in mid-February. David Anderson was the county sheriff. Fosdick appealed to him for help and apparently made a good impression on the sheriff. Mr. Anderson took Fosdick into his home and helped him find a job driving stage for the newly formed Kearney and Black Hills stage line. The first stage left Kearney on April 30, 1877 with John Campbell driving.

Fosdick was assigned to a section of the route which started at Swan Lake in what is now Cherry County and went about 20 miles northwest to the Snake River. He lived in a tent at Swan Lake. In May he wrote to his sister and brother-in-law.

sWan Lake May 18, 1877

Dear sister And Brother it is With pleasure I Wright these few lines too you hoping it Will find you And your family enJoying Good health As it Leaves Me At present i Am Now Driving stage on the Kearney And Black hills stage line the reason i Did Not (right [inserted]) No Weather i Would stop hear or Not (i Did Not [inserted]) for it is A New route And i Did Not No What Wages they Would pay i Am Now stationed At swan Lake the lake takes its Name from the Number of Wild swans that frequents hear i Am All A lone in My tent righting this letter With A Cracker Box for My table And A sack of Corn for My Chair My Nearest Neighbor is twenty Miles on eather side of Me My Drive is twenty Miles from snake river too this Lake And Back i had some slap jacks for Breckfast And some Coffee And Backer [tobacco?] for Desert i Am expecting the stage in [?]earery mirute And then i Will have to go on too snake river i Was out this Morning And gatherd some Wild flowers And put them up in My tent i hope you Will excuse this short letter And paper for it is All i have Got And i Am too hundred Miles from the Nearest town in your Next Letter please too Let Me No how Gertrude Brown is Getting Along Also her folks tell Gertrude Brown that Gill often thinks of her When hee is Alone in this God for sachen Country Dear sister And Brother Not having Mutch to right At

present i remain your loving Brother G. C. Fosdick Direct too Mee G. C Fosdick
 Cair. C.W. Dake Kearney Nebraska

Station .No. 8

Descendants in the Fosdick family have no idea who Gertrude Brown was. A month after Gilbert Fosdick wrote this letter to his sister and brother-in-law he was dead, killed by Indians. He was 27 years old.

On June 22, 1877 this article appeared in the Paterson, New Jersey newspaper:

HAD HE A SISTER HERE?

The following explains itself, and will read with interest by those of our citizens who may have knowledge of the unfortunate young man's antecedents:

Kearney, Neb., June 22, 1877

To the Editor of the Press:

Dear Sir. - A young man by the name of G. C. Fordic, or L. C. Fordic, was murdered by the Indians between this place and the Black Hills, on the 18th. Day of this month while employed as mail carrier on a station on the mail route running from Kearney Junction, Neb., to Deadwood D. T. The above named was a young man, about twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, five feet nine inches high, light hair and beard. There was nothing found on his person by which we could ascertain the whereabouts of any of his friends, but if my memory serves me I think he told me he had a sister living in Paterson, N. J., and I think her name began with an "H". He also told me he had been on a visit to Paterson a year or so ago, and was returning west to seek his fortune in the gold fields of this Territory. Any friend or relative of the above named can get further information by addressing the undersigned.

David Anderson,
 Sheriff of Buffalo Co. Neb.

Charles Helms apparently recognized his brother-in-law from the description in this ad and contacted Sheriff Anderson. The sheriff then wrote to the Helms' to tell them personally about his acquaintance with Fosdick and the circumstances of his death.

July 5, 1877

Mr. C. W. Helms Esq
 354 Market St
 Paterson N. J.

Dear Sir. Your letter of June 28th came to hand a few days ago, and in reply would say in regard to G. C. Fosdick, that my first acquaintance with him was about the 15th of February last. he came to me for a place to stop over night as he was out of money - (we have agreed many of that kind to call on us in this county - and donot pretend to - or at least we cannot accommodate them all) - but I liked Dicks general appearance (we called him Dick) I took him in and kept him untill about the 25th of April when I got him a job that he wanted very much driving Stage from here to the Black Hills. he had nothing in the Shape of property that I know of and I cant say whether there is anything in the Shape of wages coming or not - you can find out by addressing C. W. Dake. Kearney Junction Neb. I was very Sorry when I learned of his death as I had taken an interest in the yong man. My wife and family thought a great deal of Dick. he was always So pleasant about the House, and always in a good humer, and I think after he had Swon his wild oats as every yong man has to, he would have Settled down and made one of our very best citizens -

The Particulars about the Killing as I learned it are as follows - On the morning of his death he was told there was indians on the line and that he had better not go with the mail, but - thinking it would look cowardly on his part he saddled a mule and Started, and when last Seen alive he was about Seven miles

from the mail Station - and Some distance from the road running from the Indians. The company looked for him for a week and found his body Striped and Scalped - his body was buried by Mr. Hardenburgh the agent of the road and another employee - the mule was Shot and male Sack has not been recovered. Dick was Shot through the head and Shot through the Body, his clothes and papers taken

Mr C. M. Dake is proprieter of the Stage line that imployed Dick. his address is given

Yours. David Anderson

Following the receipt of Sheriff Anderson's letter by Fosdick's family, the Paterson newspaper printed a notice of Gilbert Fosdick's death.

A Former Patersonian Killed by the Indians

A young man named Gilbert Vosdic, who has a sister living at Sandy Mill, went out West about a year or so ago, and got a position as mail carrier on a route leading to Deadwood, D. T. Word has been received of his death, he having been overtaken and killed by Indians while on his way over his lonely mail route. The only relative he has in this city is his sister, who is almost heart-broken over the circumstance. His father lives in Newark.. Vosdic was a young man of good qualities and those who knew him here will be shocked to hear of his violent end.

Ever think of this area as being a part of the frontier, or of Kearney being a frontier town? We were, once, about 125 years ago.

SOURCES

Buffalo Tales, Vol. 8, No. 2, Feb., 1985 "Freighting in Buffalo County" by Mardi Anderson; *Central Nebraska Press*, April 19, May 3, May 17, September 6, 1877; *History of Buffalo County, Vol I*, by Samuel Bassett, pp. 199 and 375-76; family information, letters and newspaper clippings from Cathy Ward, great grandniece of Gilbert Fosdick.

Hail! Hail! The Gang's All Here...on cleanup duty!

Much like a good part of Kearney, the Trails and Rails Museum and the Farmstead properties sustained damages during the June 12th hail storm in Kearney. I was greeted early Thursday morning by broken windows in the Depot, the Freighters Hotel, the School and the Church. Many of these buildings also sustained siding and roof damage. Several of the Farmstead outbuildings also suffered from the hail.

Many thanks to Duane and Dora Day and Larry Nansel for coming down to Trails and Rails early in the morning to sweep broken glass and board up the broken windows. They didn't even complain when I called them at 6:30 a.m. with the damage report!!!!!! Fortunately, no artifacts were damaged in any building during the storm and we will continue to be open throughout the tourist season.

Sherrie Dux-Ideus
Director

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Dr. Roger P. Davis, Editor

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Vice-PresidentLarry Nansel
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TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

On Saturday, June 8th, we held our annual Wagons West celebration and presented the new gazebo donated by the late Merna A-mann and her daughter, Wanda Haber. It seems like it is always cold and rainy on that day or one year it was the hottest day of the year. This year was hot and very windy. But I think everyone had a good time. The Maverick band was super and we made good use of the gazebo. We are now observing our regular summer hours and are open every day.

Our next special day will be Collections Day, July 13th. We have just received a fabulous collection of toy farm tractors which will be featured. Several other collections have been promised. Do you have one you would like to share with us? Please contact us at the museum. These definitely tell the history of our area.

Living History Day will be August 17th. Be sure to mark both days on your calendar.

If you have any ideas for either of the days be sure to share them with us. These are always fun days.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director
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