



Buffalo Tales



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ANNEVAR — RAVENNA'S PARTY FOR CENTRAL NEBRASKA PART II

by Valerie Vierk

With Europe at war and America nervously trying to stay out, Annevar #19 (1941) went ahead.

Top billing was Captain Jimmie Jamison, champion high fire diver who somersaulted and then dove from a 110 foot tower into a six foot tank of water surrounded by blazing gasoline. Virginia (Pesek) Nolda, fifteen at the time, remembers the incredible excitement surrounding this act. Even by today's standards, it required extreme courage and skill.

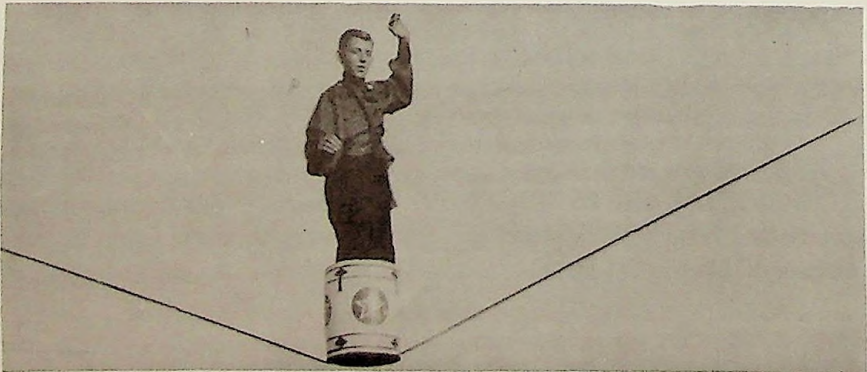
The Boy and Girl Scout concession stand cleared \$100. One hundred eighty-three pounds of hamburger were used and someone calculated that the buns used, if placed in one stack, would rise 732 feet in the air. There were twelve other concession stands.

George Yanda, a local farmer, displayed a 2,600 pound horse in a private booth.

The Ravenna Band, under the direction of Laddie Lysinger, played all three days. The Dick Wickman orchestra also played.

But not everyone was at Annevar. "Miscreants took advantage of the celebration to visit and loot a farm home." They took bedding, kitchen utensils and even gas for their car.

December 7, 1941 shattered the nation's hopes of staying out of the war, but Annevar '42 wasn't immediately abandoned. In May 1942, however, the Ravenna News announced that most of the carnivals and traveling troupes had announced they were not leaving winter quarters due to lack of manpower, lack of transportation due to gas and tire rationing, and lack of repairs. Many other celebrations in the area were canceled, as well as many of the county fairs. In July, it was announced that Annevar



Morrie Burbank
Annevar #23 (1949)
(Photo courtesy of Herb Nolda)

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Volunteering!! What is it? Definition: "To give or offer to give on one's own initiative." It is something that our Museum could not function without. Our members and friends are great volunteers!

The Christmas Tree Walk, Wagons West, Archives, Museum Clean Up Day, plus many other jobs require a lot of volunteers and our Society appreciates all of you.

At our last board meeting we talked about keeping records of our volunteer hours. I know some people do record their time, however, what we want to do is have a volunteer record sheet at the depot for everyone who puts in volunteer hours to record their time and the date. This will provide us with a record we can use to reply to inquiries about our use of volunteers. In the very near future we will be applying for grants from foundations, corporations and businesses and the question of the use of volunteers is usually a part of such applications.

Again, I thank you for all the time you give to the Buffalo County Historical Society and Trails and Rails Museum.

Larry Nansel, President

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Copier Donated to Archives

A Xerox copier has been donated to the Archives section of the Buffalo County Historical Society by Marian Dettman Johnson. This gift was given in honor of Alice Shaneyfelt Howell for her scholarship and excellence in research to gather information, writing, and publishing Buffalo County history. A copier has been desperately needed in the Archives. In the past it has been necessary to take a document from the premises to make copies. Not only has this been an inconvenience to the person waiting for the copy, but there is also the danger of a document being accidentally damaged or lost in this excess handling.

The Society is very grateful to Marian for recognizing this need and then taking action. We also join her in applauding the work that Alice has been doing over the past 25 years.

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MEMORIAL GIFTS RECEIVED in memory of Chandler Lynch, include Dewayne and Beverly Wolf, Darrel and Jean Manning, Dick and Eileen Mercer and Lawrence and Eva Rice.

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NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Baldwin, Kearney
Ward Urbom, Arapahoe

was "canceled maybe for the duration" (of the war).

While Ravenna threw itself into the war effort, Annevar was not held in 43, 44, or 45. This must have been a great disappointment to the children of the community who looked forward to the celebration all year.

Then in 1946, when most of the soldier boys came back, Annevar came back too. But twelve young soldiers from the area would never attend another Annevar. This was the 20th Annevar, and was called "Annie, Goddess of Gaity."

Captain George Webb was the major attraction this year. He claimed to have been born in a Bamum and Bailey tent, and also claimed that his grandfather was the first man to swim the English Channel in 1883. He was "from a family of death defiers" and made his debut at age six. He dove from ninety-seven feet into a tank with four and a half foot of water! Herb Nolda remembers Webb balancing backwards on the tiny platform, "Sighting through his legs" as he claimed he did before the thrilling dives. He also dove into a net that he claimed was the smallest net that anyone had ever dove into. He held the record for shallow water diving.

The Henrys was a dog act combined with juggling and clever clowning. Mr. Henry also dove into a small box lined with swords. This was billed as the most difficult act on stage at the time.

The VFW Post sold 3,000 raffle tickets for a new Chevy. It was won by a farmer who showed up the next morning to claim his new car, driving an "old" '31.

The Kiddie parade wasn't up to par, with only 100 kiddies. The reason given was shortage of materials to make costumes.

A flaming Model A provided a little unplanned excitement, but the fire was quickly doused by the local firemen. Another car was stolen and found "unhurt" up by Loup City, but the baseball bat was missing.

Marshall Lee Marrs had eight special police on hand, but "they didn't get a customer." No arrests at Annevar was a record.

Annevar #23 (1949) featured the King Brothers, a two man hand balancing act, and Tom and Jerry, a roller skating act. Morrie Burbank also performed on the slack wire with his wife, Josephine. The wire was 20 feet in the air and Morrie executed the original barrel slide. They also juggled objects on the wire and performed double somersaults as they exited the wire.

At the large horse show, Audrey Labert's trick horse, Lady Rascal performed.

Annevar #25 (1951) had weather that "Annie got her skirts a little damp the 1st night when a little shower came up."

The Olympians, a trampoline act, performed. This was the first time such an act had ever performed at Annevar.

And once again, an event not on the billing caused a little excitement. A crowd was at the baseball field for one of the games when a plane buzzed the field and then dropped his map case with a note saying he was out of fuel and needed to land. The pilot in distress had been attracted by the lights of Ravenna, especially the ball field. Upon reading the note, seven or eight cars sped to the air strip, and with help from their headlights, the pilot was able to land successfully. He stated he was an Army Air Force private from Billings, Montana, but he wouldn't give his name.

Annevar #41 (1967) was one of the outstanding years as it celebrated Nebraska's 100th anniversary of statehood. Early in the year Centennial neckties went on sale, with the proceeds to be used to build a permanent Centennial Ravenna float to travel to other celebrations that year to promote Annevar. The businessmen were to wear their ties on Tuesday and Saturday, and the ladies their Centennial dresses on the same days. A contest was later held for best Centennial dress.

"Brothers of the Brush" was formed, and by May 1 weekly whisker judging

contests were held, judged by three local barbers. To most of the young folks of the town, this was the first time they'd ever seen a man sporting a beard. Badges for the Whiskers Club and Shaving Permits were also issued.

One day the employees of The Ravenna Bank looked up to see several masked and armed men entering the lobby. When one of them handed a teller a note that said, "Money," their worst fears were confirmed. As the robbers were leaving the bank, the president got off a few shots, but the villains thundered away on horseback. Later the Brown Gang was tried by the Court of Annevar, with John Sanborn Mingus, "the hanging judge" handing down the sentences. Evidence also showed that the president had been in with the robbers.

In the float parade, local farmer, Paul Tockey's large Conestoga wagon, sponsored by the Ravenna News, won 1st place in the business division. Second place went to Henningson Foods. Their name was spelled out in eggs on one side and on the other side 1967 was spelled in colored eggs.

In the mid-60's the Ravenna Youth Council became very active and started booking teen dances at the City Auditorium. These dances became well known throughout Central Nebraska and usually drew large crowds. But the youth dance on Tuesday night was a disappointment as the "Shangri Las," a big name band, didn't show. The next day Youth Council members learned that one of the group had been hospitalized in Sargeant. However, the band did play the second night, and paid for advertising on the radio to try to make up for the embarrassment to the Youth Council.

Bob Pesek's "Playmates" and the Mel Pop Orchestra engaged in a battle of the bands on the first night.

For the wrestling fans, three matches were held at the ball field, with hometown athlete, Jack Pesek, wrestling Dale Lewis.

Two parachute jumps were held. Two men jumped from 3,000 feet and one executed a free fall from 10,000 feet.

A tractor pull was also held, a youth rodeo, and the annual flower show.

The Lions Club concession club served 200 pies, 330 lbs. of hamburger in the famed "Lion Burgers," 288 packs of buns, with 2,712 bottles of pop to wash it down and 1,000 lbs. of ice to cool the beverages.

Annevar #43, (1969), stands out in this author's mind as that was the year of the



**Herb Nolda representing Ravenna Railroad Association
on model steam engine he built. Annevar #65 (1991)**

(Photo courtesy of Virginia Nolda)

huge "Smoke Ring" dance in the city auditorium. I'd just graduated from high school, the Vietnam War was at it's height, emotions were running high. It was an exciting time to be alive. I remember standing on a chair during the dance, looking out over that sea of gyrating bodies, nearly 1,000 strong, hardly believing this was really happening in little Ravenna! The auditorium was beastly hot, but no self-respecting teenager would dream of missing this happening.

That year also featured Shetland pony pulling, a junior rodeo and two raffles for cars. A local man and a young man from Kearney, just out of the service, won the cars. Five thousand tickets had been sold (\$1.00 each) with 100 sold by mail. Ticketholders were from coast to coast.

Annevar #50 (1976) was also a big year as this was our country's Bicentennial.

The float parade was huge and colorful, and just beat the big rain shower. The theme was "200 Years in Song."

Other events were a tractor pull, afghan drawing, Bicentennial pageant, flea market, Annevar queen contest and dairy princess contest. For the first time ever, turtle races were held, with 25 entries including a category for "Best Dressed."

Annevar #54 (1980) will be remembered as the year the ferris wheel broke while fully loaded. Two pins broke, which allowed two braces to come loose. The operator climbed the ride to console three young girls who were stranded one seat from the top. It was an hour and a half before all the people were safely back on the ground. The only injury was to a Ravenna woman who was cut by one of the fluorescent lights that broke.

At the Annevar Queen pageant, seven former queens were honored.

Annevar #60 (1986) celebrated Ravenna's 100th anniversary. The Centennial store was the center of activity throughout the year as many historic displays were housed there. At Annevar, 1,232 people signed the guest book. They represented 31 states, D.C. and 77 Nebraska towns. During the year a Centennial book was published, with contributions written by many people. A Ravenna mug, plate and t-shirts were also for sale.

At the Annevar celebration, a Centennial 30-30 caliber Winchester rifle with gold plating was auctioned for \$1,575. Congresswoman Virginia Smith presented the town with an American flag that had flown over the Nation's capitol. A huge alumni reunion was held at the high school. Six hundred tickets were sold, with other alumni showing up to visit with classmates. A quilt show, band concert and flea market were also held.

Now in 1997, the spirit of Annevar is still alive and well, as new generations have come of age to carry the torch. In this summer's parade, a team of black Percherons appeared, pulling a Northrup King Seed wagon, their harnesses trimmed in bright pink, as were the shirts of the four outwalkers. As I hadn't known of this entry, I was thrilled when I suddenly saw them prancing majestically down the street. Even as an adult, Annevar still holds surprises and thrills. She has changed with the times, but she is still with us, weaving a magic spell on those summer nights when the colorful lights of the carnival light up the sky.

SOURCES

The Ravenna News, Herb, Virginia and Steve Nolda, Mary Mora and Edward Vierk.

Author's Note

Upon beginning this project, I quickly became aware that it would be difficult to compress seven decades of Annevars into two brief articles. Therefore, I could only make random comments. I regret that I couldn't mention all the names of those who have worked so hard to make Annevar what she is. I have always lived in or very near Ravenna, and have never missed an Annevar.

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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, 1998: Merlin Burgland, Larry Nansel, Janeen Vokoun, Jerry Idt.

Term expiring June 1, 1999: Wilma Harder, Helen Kinnaman, Margaret Hohnholt, Mark Hadenfeldt.

Term expiring June 1, 2000: Minnette Steinbrink, Susan Underhill, Pauline Wells, Dale Wright.

Officers (1 year term)

- President Larry Nansel
- Vice-President Mark Hadenfeldt
- Secretary Janeen Vokoun
- Treasurer (to be appointed)

TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

Even though we are officially closed for the season, many things are happening at the Museum. The Nansels, (Larry and Roberta) spent one Saturday cleaning trees out of the evergreens and sealing the wood on the Merry-go-round and the new ramp on the depot. Women from the Kearney Womens Club are updating the pictures of the schools in the School House, the archivists are working each Monday and the Christmas Tree Committee is getting ready for a Christmas Tree Extravaganza to celebrate our tenth walk. If some organization is interested in putting up a tree, let me know. We have room for a few more.

Volunteers are always needed. If you have some time and would like to spend some time, just call me. Of course we will need many of you for the tree walk on December 6-14. We also need help in putting up the lights on the train and the outside decorations.

We need food for the bake sale held during the Christmas Tree Walk. Donations are welcomed any day during the walk. Food goes out nearly as fast as it comes in.

We hope to see you all during the walk. The trees sound fabulous this year. Our theme is the TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS. See you then.

— Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

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