



Buffalo Tales



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THE PIONEER NEIGHBORHOOD

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

The Pioneer Neighborhood represents the second phase of Kearney's development, when main street businesses moved north on what was then Wyoming Avenue. By 1885 business was booming and many elaborate homes were built west of Central Avenue. They reflected the architecture of the time with spreading porches, towers and balconies, all decorated with gingerbread. Many of these homes remain today, but a number have been converted to apartments. Those who take pride in their homes have been concerned with the upkeep of rental properties.

When the RAFT program put an option on the "old St. John house" they applied for rezoning the property in order to remodel the house into units for the temporarily homeless. A group of eleven neighbors met to consider their options. Out of this meeting grew the Pioneer Neighborhood Association, named for a park in the area. The group succeeded in stopping the rezoning and has continued to work with the city in improving the neighborhood.¹

The "old St. John house" was originally built by Dr. Frank Packard who came to Kearney in 1886.² He apparently had his medical office in the house, where he practiced almost until the time of his death in 1918.

Dr. R.L. Hart of Amherst bought the house in 1919. After extensive remodeling



The Dr. R.L. Hart home as it was in the twenties.
(American Home picture)

CHRISTMAS TREE WALK, December 4 to 12 - 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Theme is *The Magic of Christmas*. Also Bake Sale in Depot.

WITH THE SOCIETY

A Message from the President:

As I write this message we are still experiencing Fall, Indian Summer, weather and how thankful we are for that, because the painting of the locomotive and tender has been a long drawn-out process. The Heartland Soda and Sandblasting Co. has finished their work. It looks very nice and we thank them for doing this for us. In the Spring we will place new decals, cab windows and sideboards on the tender to finish the project.

Your President was invited to the National Association of Retired Federal Employees November meeting to present a program on the History of the Trails and Rails Museum. I was pleased to hear that they were going to designate the Trails and Rails Museum as the recipient of their Christmas donation, in honor of Henry and Margaret Hohnholt. My thanks goes out to them for this gift and also for inviting me.

I was invited to attend a meeting this week with the Spillway Park Museum Committee to share ideas on how our Trails and Rails Museum operates in relation to what they want to do with the Spillway Park.

On behalf of the Society Board of Directors and myself, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Blessed and Prosperous New Millennium.

—Larry Nansel, President

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NEW TREES:

Marian Johnson has purchased three new trees and had them planted on the Museum grounds. In a few years these trees will make for some very nice shade at the Museum. We all thank you, Marian, for your generosity.

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NEW LIFE MEMBER

Gary Straatmann, Kearney

NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Valerie Vierk, Ravenna

Mrs. Kenneth Wiederspan, Hastings

“HAPPY HOLIDAYS”

What could you give for Christmas

- That would be educational?
- Lasts one entire year?
- Does not break or become out-dated?
- Helps to preserve Buffalo County's history?

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he moved his family in 1921. There were only four houses on the block at that time and the house was encircled by a driveway, with a barn located on the southeast corner of the lot. Dr. Hart moved the barn to a farm near Amherst and built an attached garage on the south. After Mrs. Hart died in 1948 the doctor gave the house to Helen Hart St. John. Ida and Harold Fales lived there for a time until the St. Johns were ready for another remodeling project.³ Family furniture and contents salvaged from attics, etc., added many imaginative touches. Sam St. John died in 1964. After Helen married Howard Kennedy in 1968 she sold the house to Wayne Olson who lived there for 20 years. The house had deteriorated badly. One attempt at reconstruction failed for lack of money. The house was sold to Rita and Jim Weber who are working to restore the house to its past charm.

Although none of the old houses are owned by the original builders some of them have had as few as two owners. J.D. Hawthorne who founded a jewelry store in 1878 built a home at 2120 4th Avenue where he lived for many years. After his death it was rented for a number of years until Dave and Tancie Martin bought it in 1939. Dave owned the Martin Lumber Company. He served as a U.S. Congressman from 1961 to 1975. His widow, Tancie, still lives in the house.

S.M. Nevius, a pioneer attorney, built the house at 422 West 22nd in 1884. His daughter Frances was the first school teacher in Kearney in 1872. There was another owner before John G. Lowe bought the house in 1913. He had come to Kearney at the age of fifteen from Liverpool, England in 1885. He stayed with Henry Gibbons, station agent, who gave him a job. The Lowe family has been associated with the real estate and loan business for many years. Tim Lowe is the fourth generation of the family to live in the house.

A.J. Gallentine, a "financier and horseman", came to Kearney in 1881. He chose to build his house away from the heart of the city at 705 West 22nd, which was then a cornfield. Around 1900 he wanted to enlarge the house and convinced a reluctant contractor to raise the roof on stilts and build a second story. A feature was a billiard room in the basement where both men and women played. Evah Gallentine, who married Mark Atchison, continued to live in the house until she sold it to Eva and Myron Osterberg.

The house at 704 West 22nd was built in 1900 by Walter W. Barney whose father, Calvin had come to Kearney in 1880. Walter was in the abstract and real estate business. He and his wife, Anna, lived in two other homes after that. Their grandson Warren and Eleanor Barney bought the house back in 1953, and completely remodeled it. After



**The George W. Sherwood home:
divided and moved two directions.
(A.T. Anderson Photo)**

Eleanor's death Warren married Nancy Randall Ingram who redecorated the house as it was in 1900, adding many Randall antiques to those of the Barney family. After Warren's death she sold the house in 1996 to Brent and Theresa Yaw.

A distinctive home in the neighborhood is the residence at 810 West 22nd Street, built in 1911. Located on a spacious lot it is built in the craftsman style with influences of Frank Lloyd Wright's prairie style. It features a semi-circular drive in front with a *porte cochere* leading to what was once a carriage house. A horse pen was located in the back. Among those who have lived in the home are the families of Dr. C.B. Edwards, Otis Melton (former mayor), Dick Sehnert, Leroy Corrigan, Jim Gallagher and Dr. Clint Jones, the present owner.

Three homes in the neighborhood are on the National Register of Historic Places. The oldest is the home at 723 West 22nd. An example of American decorated cottage, it was the first of several houses of similar design built by Charles Hanson in 1885. Wallace A. Downing, owner of a leather goods and saddle store had come to Kearney in the seventies. He bought the house in 1886 and the family lived there for many years. In 1930 his daughter, Maren Morrison, presented the home to the Kearney Woman's Club. Many distinctive features, inside and out, remain today. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981.

The Southern Colonial house at 2222 9th Avenue was built by Dr. A.O. Thomas, first President of State Normal School at Kearney. He lived there from 1907 to 1913. It underwent many changes through the years. In 1979 the Kearney State Alumni Association bought the house from the family of Harold and Lillian Swan. Today the house is again used for college affairs as it was in the Thomas era. The home was placed on the National Register in 1983.

The "storybook" house at 2215 9th Avenue would seem more at home in a French village. With its high gables and rounded doorway, it is in the Tudor Revival style popular in the twenties and thirties. Walter Klehm, who taught Architecture and Construction at Kearney State College, built the house which was completed in 1931. Chris and Mildred Hansen owned it for twenty years, selling it to E.A. Jorgensen in 1963. When their "dream house" came up for sale in 1996 Pam and Stan Kaye bought it and started a major rehabilitation project. Because it is unique in this area it was placed on the National Register this year. Stan accepted a position at the University of Florida and sold the house to Troy Harris.

Both churches in the neighborhood are on the National Register. First Baptist was



**Comnock-Keenan house:
moved from West Kearney.
(A.T. Anderson Photo)**

built in 1890. President Truman worshipped there on his whistle-stop tour of 1948. After the congregation moved to a new church several denominations occupied the building. Leroy Martin, the present owner, is thoroughly renovating it for his personal home. St. Luke's Episcopal, built in 1908, is the only active downtown church.

The Keenan home was moved from West Kearney, a posh boom era development. Walter Comnock, one of the brothers who owned the Cotton Mill, was the original owner. E.R. Porterfield bought the house in 1900. To move it, the house was perched on large wood rollers and pulled by a team of horses. Gladys Smith told Phebe Keenan that her father took her to where a crowd had gathered, expecting that the contrivance would fall through the tail race bridge. The house is now at 2220 6th Avenue. The Killion family bought it in 1913, Mr. Killion was the owner of a men's store. They lost the house during the depression and it was used as a dormitory for W.P.A. workers. Harold and Phebe Keenan bought the house in 1939. Mike Keenan purchased it from his mother in 1994 and added many new features.

In 1885 George W. Sherwood, a lumber dealer, bought a half block from the South Platte Land Co. and built a house at 2310 4th Avenue. In February, 1889 H.D. Watson bought it for \$20,000. Typically, he sold it to George W. Frank a month later, who sold it to another buyer in October. By January, 1890 Sherwood bought it back for \$13,000. The days of the big deal were over, the Sherwoods, who were living in Chicago, finally sold it to George P. Rowell in 1908. The house would know several other owners and often stood vacant. Dr. and Mrs. C.B. Edwards lived there with their sons for a few years.

After World War II the Greater Kearney Corporation was organized to encourage the building of houses to relieve a severe shortage. The Corporation bought the house from Charles P. Lucas in 1946. The southern wing was split off and carted to 2003 6th Avenue. The main section went around the corner to 419 West 24th Street. It is an apartment house today.

Builder Frank Vandewerker bought the property in 1949, and divided it into three lots. He built the house on 411 West 23rd Street for Harold and Ida Fales, and my husband Vance and I have the home at 405 West 23rd Street. "Sugar and Spice Child Care Center" occupies the north half at 2310 4th Avenue.

This is only a sampling of the many fine homes in the Pioneer Neighborhood. For many years smaller was better but with the trend toward large homes, those in the neighborhood have regained their value.

NOTES

1. Boundaries of the Pioneer Neighborhood are from 2nd Avenue on the east to 17th Avenue on the west; from 25th Street on the north to Railroad Street on the south. Original officers: Mike Keenan, President; Bobbie McKenzie, Vice-President; Janet Fox, Secretary; Treasurer, Cindy Foote.
2. "Tales of Buffalo County", Vol. I, Page 144.
3. "The American Home" Article by Helen St. John (Kennedy) August 1960, Page 34.

OTHER SOURCES

Phebe Keenan reminiscences, letter from Helen St. John Kennedy, Kearney Daily Hub, May 11, 1999; telephone interviews with Tancie Martin, Phebe Keenan, Jack (Shot) Lowe, Janet Fox and Jim Rundstrom.

AUTHORS NOTE

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TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

Christmas is upon us. The Christmas Tree Walk is exciting—we are getting the material for the booklet which we make for the walk and there are many unusual trees being prepared. We are using this nice weather to get some of the decorations outside. We will be ready for all of you December 4 to 12, from 1-5 each day. Don't forget the bake sale which takes place during the walk. We appreciate donations of food and you can bring it as you come if you care to participate. We have the bake sale every day.

Browse in the Museum Gift Shop for Christmas giving. *Tales of Buffalo County*, Vol. I-V, other books on local history, train souvenirs, and much, much more.

A new bench has been placed in the yard by the Lions Club in memory of Delbert Kahle.

We are making good use of our time in getting ready for the Walk and the school program, which will be here before we know it. It's exciting to see so many things happening and so many volunteers offering to help. We need you all. If you wish to volunteer at any time, please let me know.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

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

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