



Buffalo Tales



Volume 19, No. 5 Buffalo County Historical Society September-October, 1996

GEORGE ZEBEDEE RICHARDS

"A Pioneer on the Move"

by Philip S. Holmgren

Many of the pioneers who came into an area that was in its early stages of development stayed for only a short time. If fortune didn't smile on them they moved on to another area that gave promise of improved fortune-making.

George Zebedee Richards was an experienced pioneer before he came to Kearney Junction in 1872. Born at High Ham, Somersetshire, England on June 27, 1834, he came to America in 1849. He was a surveyor by trade and did much surveying for the railroad, counties and cities. By 1856 he is in Sauk City, Wisconsin, where on June 8th he is married to Caroline Snyder. Birth and death records trace the move from Wisconsin to Benton, Missouri to Story County, Iowa and on to Waverly, Nebraska by 1862.

The ten-year stay in Lancaster County was during a period which saw the region go from a territory to a state and the capital moved from Omaha to nearby Lincoln. George Richards and his father-in-law, Simon P. Snyder, were involved in the surveying

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George Zebedee Richards
June 27, 1834 — July 1, 1901

"NEW"

TALES OF BUFFALO COUNTY, Volume V
1996 ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TREE WALK

(See Page 2)

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

The Buffalo County Historical Society Board of Directors and Committee are still very busy trying to get a new building on our museum grounds. We are nearly all amateurs when it comes to drawing plans and setting up fund raisers.

Last month we had Mr. John Boomer, who most of you knew when he worked for the Good Samaritan Foundation, come and speak to our building committee. Mr. Boomer is an outstanding fund raiser and he shared some of his ideas and gave us some direction. Our thanks to him for coming to Kearney, at his own expense, to help us in this way.

For you folks who are looking for a Christmas present for your friends or relatives, you might think of getting them a copy of Volume V of *Tales of Buffalo County*. They are at the printers and will be done for Christmas.

Larry Nansel, President

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★ ★ ★ **CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS** ★ ★ ★

Books

"NEW"

Just Published — TALES OF BUFFALO COUNTY, Volume V, 152 pages, with photos and index, includes articles of Buffalo County history originally published in **Buffalo Tales**, 1990-1993. Subjects include the ghost towns of Armada and Nantasket, Post South Loup Fork, Pleasanton School District No. 105, Gibbon's D.P. Ashburn, Buffalo County's Flour Mills, Brick Works, REA, and Kearney's Military Academy, Public Library, and Kearney & Black Hills Railroad.

Also on hand are Volumes I, II, III, and IV. Cost of each, \$10.00 per copy, plus \$1.50 if mailed, and 60¢ sales tax to Nebraskans. Special price for all five volumes, \$45.00 per set.

These books are available at the Trails & Rails Museum, ABC Drug, **hastings books**, **read all about it**, and MONA in Kearney, or can be ordered from the Buffalo County Historical Society, P. O. Box 523, Kearney, Nebraska 68848-0523.

1997 Memberships

Basic (Family) Membership	annual dues	\$ 15.00
Institutional/Business Membership	annual dues	\$ 20.00
Supporting Membership	annual dues	\$ 30.00 +
Life Membership, individual		\$150.00
Life Membership, husband and wife		\$200.00

Life memberships are one-time payments and are placed in an investment account with only interest used.

All memberships entitle a member to a subscription to **Buffalo Tales**, participation in meetings, tours and other events, plus voting rights at the annual meeting of the Society.

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Attend the Christmas Tree Walk at Trails & Rails Museum, December 7th through the 15th, from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. each day. **The Night Before Christmas** is the theme of the 1996 traditional Christmas Tree Walk.

of the new capital city. Documents indicate that the surveying was done in the "most careful manner, and with utmost patience." They express the belief that the lines were so well established that "future litigation about lapping of lots will be practically



Kearney 1876

**Richards Livery Stable — Corner of Dakota and Grand Avenues
Now Northeast corner of the intersection of 2nd Avenue and 25th Street.**

impossible." Construction of the new state buildings in Lincoln was deserving of no such complimentary evaluation.

Not long after their arrival in Waverly a prairie fire destroyed their home. The response to this disaster was to dig the replacement into the ground and build a roof of sod. George and Caroline entertained both houses of the first Nebraska legislature in their dugout home. Caroline helped make the first United States flag to be flown in Lincoln. It was used during the celebration of the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad. In addition to celebrations their lives were also touched by grief and loss. A two-month old son had died during their stay in Missouri, and while they lived in Lancaster County, Nebraska, their oldest daughter and an eight-month old son died.

In 1872 with the building of the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad to join the Union Pacific Railroad at the new settlement of Kearney Junction, there was an opportunity for George to use his surveying skills in the location of the railroad and the establishment of the new community. In addition to his work as a surveyor Mr. Richards went into the livery stable business with a man by the name of Stafford. An advertisement in the *Central Nebraska Press* of April 24, 1873 indicates they had stock for sale and "Horses, Buggies, etc. to hire by the hour or day." In the *Kearney Times* of November 30, the Livery, Feed and Sale Stable is now under the sole proprietorship of G.Z. Richards. The stable is located at the corner of Grand and Dakota Avenues in Kearney Junction, Nebraska, and has the "Best Accommodations in the city for Boarding and Horses." On a map of Kearney dated 1876 a large barn is located at the address given—now the northeast corner of the intersection of Second Avenue and 25th Street.

George continued to work in his profession as a surveyor and was involved in surveying the route from Kearney to the Black Hills shortly after gold was discovered in that area. An article in the *Kearney Times* dated April 19, 1877, describes in detail the route from Kearney to the Black Hills. "Wood, water and an abundance of grass along the entire line" and "The United States mails to be carried over this route on and after May 1, 1877" are two sub-headings of the writeup. The three reasons given for encouraging people to take this route are: "First—That it is a good, if not the best, route leading to Custer City and Deadwood. Second—It is the established government mail route and will be thoroughly protected. Third—Because in point of economy it is the cheapest route on account of the level character of the country through which it passes." Only two negative comments appear about the route. One refers to the most uneven portion of the entire route as the first ten miles between Kearney and Armada. The other deals with a five-mile stretch of sand between the Snake and the Niobrara Rivers. They are quick to add that it is no worse than the sand people encounter south of Kearney on their way to the Republican River valley.

Apparently Mr. Richards persuaded himself that the route was so good and the opportunities so great in the Black Hills that he sold his business and traded some of his livestock for oxen that would be more practical for moving his family and their belongings to the "Hills." Economic conditions in Kearney had not been good. The national depressions that started in 1873 along with draught, the Easter blizzard of 1873 and the grasshopper scourges of 1875 and 1876 resulted in a depressed economy. In 1938 Eldora Richards Mathews writes a letter to the editor of the *Queen City Mail* in Spearfish, South Dakota. The first sentence reads, "In the spring

of 1877 after all crops had been eaten by grasshoppers at Kearney, Nebraska, my father George Z. Richards and family decided to go to the Black Hills." This is what a girl, who was fifteen years old at the time of the move, recalls as the reason for the move over fifty years earlier.

This was an experienced pioneer family that left Kearney on May 15, 1877 and would reach Rapid City by June 20th. They left Kearney with three heavily loaded wagons, two pulled by two yoke of oxen and one pulled by two yoke of oxen and one yoke of cows. The mother, Caroline, drove a driving team and spring wagon with her four sons, ages four through ten, and her 15-year old daughter. The family was assisted in this move by two hired men and a boy.

Eldora's letter to the editor describes experiences on the trail: "My mother made enough clothing to do the family all summer and purchased enough food for a year. She also made about sixty yards of rag carpet, knowing these things would be hard to get in a new country. ...We cooked over a campfire in a Dutch oven, iron kettles, frying pans and had a small tent for the family to sleep in; killed enough game after the first hundred miles so that we had fresh meat most of the time. ...We had to stop about once a week to let the stock rest—then mother would do the washing and bake light bread...

"We crossed the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The first morning we were on it we met the mail carrier going back on the trail, and we heard the next day that he was killed before noon by Indians. We were fortunate enough to cross the Reservation and never see any Indians, except a Frenchman's wife—a squaw man they called him."

On arriving in the Black Hills they built a large house on Centennial Prairie about five miles from Deadwood. The Richards family operated a freight stop between 1877 and 1880 where freighters camped to lighten their loads before going over the mountains into Deadwood.

A major reverse occurs late in the summer of 1878 when George sends the man, who had run his freight outfit, to the railroad with ten yoke of oxen and four wagons, and with money to buy supplies. This man wrote a letter saying that he was starting back, but instead he headed in another direction and the Richards never heard from him again.

In the fall of 1880, George moved his family to a ranch on Hay Creek near Belle Fourche. When Butte County was organized George was appointed the first Treasurer. Later he was elected County Treasurer, and for many years was County Surveyor. Much of the original land surveying in the western part of Butte County was done by George Richards. The accuracy and thoroughness of his recorded surveys was appreciated by those who came after him.

Although George Z. Richards spent more of his adult life in western South Dakota than any other place, he made a contribution to the life and development of no less than five other communities, including Kearney and Buffalo County, Nebraska.

SOURCES

Most of the information used in this article comes from material provided by Lawrence L. Stitt, a great, great grandson of George and Caroline Richards. It consisted of photographs, biography, news articles, obituaries, family records and a letter.

I appreciate very much having this opportunity to look at the life of George Z. Richards and his family, who gave five years of their lives to the early development of Kearney and Buffalo County, Nebraska.
P.S.H.

BUFFALO TALES is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization, whose address is P. O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848-0523.

1996 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:
 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, 1997: Mardi Anderson, Janet Eickmeier, Minnette Steinbrink, Susan Underhill.

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Officers (1 year term)

President Larry Nansel
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TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

The week of October 7 - 11, we participated in the "Operation Lifesaver". Over 350 took part in the train ride, the handouts and presentations. Many visited the Museum for the first time.

Thanks to volunteers Myron and Iola Fougerson, Dora Day, Marian Wisch, Marge Newlon, Edith Johnson, Gladys and Merwyn Henderson, Lois Wilken and Henry Hohnholt, all buildings were staffed each day. Operation Lifesaver provided all of the other help. This was another valuable community wide service provided by Trails & Rails.

Don't forget the Christmas Tree Walk coming up on December 7 - 15. Our theme: "The Night Before Christmas" offers many opportunities for exciting trees. We again need many volunteers to bring food for the Bake Sale and volunteers to be hosts in the buildings. If you can help, call Wilma Larsen - 237-2697 or Margaret Hohnholt - 237-7327.

Many new gifts will also be available at the Gift Shop.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

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

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