



Buffalo Tales



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e-mail: bchs@kearney.net website: bchs.kearney.net

HISTORIC HOMES OF RAVENNA—THE POLENZ HOUSE Part III

by Valerie Vierk

Today the porch on the east, the main entrance, survives. On the 4th of July last year two American flags flew from this porch, adding an even more traditional effect. Colorful pansies were planted on each side of the sidewalk leading to the porch.

The south porch serves as the main entrance for guests to check in and out. It is very sunny as it is mostly windows. The wallpaper boasts ivy plants with a white background. A white wicker desk holds the guest book and brochures. In the southeast corner a white wicker love seat sits. And even in a historical home, a computer is needed, which sits on a huge old oak table.

Outside, southwest of the house lies a fenced garden area. This is a very peaceful and charming area. Entrance is gained through a decorative metal gate on the east that Betty recently painted a periwinkle shade. Old red bricks have been put down to form circular walkways and to give a historical effect. A natural wood picket fence forms the east and north boundaries while a high natural wood privacy fence forms the west boundary. The carriage house forms the south boundary. This area is shaded by a large linden tree. A chiminea, a type of outdoor fireplace, sits here and one of the large stone bird baths that originally set in the south yard. A somewhat circular pond that is heated in winter and attracts many birds and small animals lies on the east. This is the original pond that was discovered after the Shraders bought the place. The pond had been totally covered up and a dog run made in this area. When the overflow pipes were discovered the Shraders started digging and found the pond. It has two small inlets that are believed to be for plants that love water. Goldfish inhabit the pond and several frogs formerly did until the resident cat caught them all and presented them to her owners. A periwinkle blue swing hangs on the south and several lawn chairs and a table invite loungers to read a book or just rest and enjoy the area. A new edition is a gazing ball. These were used by the Victorian ladies who did not find it convenient to stroll in gardens with their long dresses. They could merely look into the ball and see the entire area! These have recently become back in vogue.

A larger linden from the early days grows a few feet to the east, across the driveway, and shades another patio area. Another linden grows south of this. One of the stone bird baths still sits on the south lawn. A short distance south, next to the curb, grows a large silver maple tree. Although maples are fast growing, the size of this suggests the tree is approximately seventy years old. It grows close to the footbridge that spans Piedmont or "Canal" Street as it has always been called by local residents. This bridge originally built in 1910, is a novelty in itself. It spans what was originally a creek bed. During heavy rains (before the recent dam north of town) Canal Street would run curb-full and children would gleefully float their little boats down the "river" for five blocks until it drained into a storm sewer at the east edge of town.

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WITH THE SOCIETY

A Note from the President:

As I am preparing this message things are buzzing at the Trails and Rails Museum. Every organization has volunteers there decorating the trees for the annual Christmas Tree Walk. This is the one event that many people look forward to each year to really get them in the holiday spirit.

We have just received a great addition to our museum with the donation of a pump organ from Jackie Rosenlof and her family. We have placed the organ in the church and we do thank the Rosenlof family for this gift.

I hope everyone has been able to see the windmill that has been placed on the museum grounds near the Boyd house. We want to thank the families of Glen Wisch and Merwyn Henderson for using their memorial money to have the windmill, pump and tank installed. The windmill will actually pump water by recycling through the tank. This is a great addition to our museum.

I am pleased to announce that we have hired Sherrie Dux-Ideus as the Director for our Historical Society. Sherrie is from Amherst and is presently working at the Hastings Book Store in Kearney. She will begin working the 1st of January, 2001. We are looking forward to having her help us coordinate the activities at the Trails and Rails Museum and the Farm Site. We hope you will stop in and get acquainted with her.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we want to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Prosperous and Happy New Year.

—Larry Nansel, President

A Note from the Editor:

Aneeta Brown, of Washington, Missouri, recently sent me a copy of *Kiwanis Footprints*, a history of the Kiwanis clubs of Kearney from 1920 to the present. I will be featuring some episodes of this publication in future *Buffalo Tales*. If your group or organization has some history that should be shared with our readers, I would be interested in looking at what you have. Maybe you already have a publication, or, maybe this is the time to have someone write up that organization history you have been meaning to get to. I look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, may the best of the holiday season be yours.

Historical Vignettes

A vignette is a short scene or incident. Historical vignettes are like short poems that may seem incomplete but suggest an internal story and stand alone as a curiosity piece or micro-history that can be appreciated for what it is while it may also inspire consideration of larger themes.

This semester Carol Lomicky, Associate Professor of Journalism in the UNK Communications Department, gave the students in her Interpretive Reporting class an assignment to write an historical article based upon a name randomly selected from the Kearney Cemetery. Mardi Anderson assisted the class with tips on geneology and documentation and the class produced some interesting historical vignettes. The following is a product of the class. More of these interesting vignettes will be featured in upcoming editions of the *Buffalo Tales*.

Historical Vignette: Bert Wood

by Tara Heil

UNK Senior - Ulysses, Kansas

On Thursday, September 16, 1886, an earthquake rattled dishes and shook beds in Charleston, S.C. The *New York Times* relates that on that day, the U.S. Army was moving 460 Indian "savages" by coach from their reservation in Arizona to the swamps of Florida, and Europe was being ravaged by cholera outbreaks. According to the September 18, 1886, *New Era* newspaper, the Kearney City Council was voting on the payment of a \$1.60 bill to the hardware store. Illustrated, 250-page "Marriage Guides" were available through the mail for 25 cents. White beans cost \$1.50 per bushel at the mercantile, while a pound of butter was 12.5 cents. And, though the newspapers carried no record of the event, Kearneyites Orson W. and Jennie (Maffet) Wood became the parents of a son, Bert.

Bert Wood was unique in that he was one of the few men from the Kearney area to not only enter the armed forces and complete training, but to also actually see service overseas during World War I. Though his obituary from the March 26, 1956, *Kearney Hub* says that he was "reared in Kearney," details about his youth are scarce. Given the wording of the obituary article, it is logical to speculate that Bert probably attended school either in or near Kearney. However, his name does not appear in the school district census records. He had at least one sibling, a brother named Orson W.

In 1908, when Bert was 22, his father died of blood poisoning. After the death of Bert's father, the Wood family again disappears from local recorded history for a span of about 10 years.

However, while the Woods were living in quiet anonymity in or near Kearney, World War I was making news around the globe. St. Quentin, a small French town on the war's Western Front, was the site of one of the fiercest German offensives of the war. In a drive toward Paris on March 21, 1918, German forces attacked the British troops stationed at St. Quentin. The beginning of the battle was a five-hour artillery bombardment that utilized more than 6,000 German heavy guns. The strength of the two-week assault was a turning point in the war. On April 2, President Woodrow Wilson agreed to send U.S. troops already stationed in Europe into battle to aid the British and French forces. Three days later the Germans called off their push toward Paris.

On June 24, 1918, less than two months after Wilson's decision, Bert joined the U.S. Army. According to the biographical book *World War I*, the 32-year-old trained for active duty at Camp Funston with Co. C, 105th Field Signal, 30th Div., and was sent to France, serving in the Buzancy, Vaux Andigny, Escaufort, and Ribeaucourt offensives. He also was active at St. Quentin, the site of the earlier two-week-long German attack. He is pictured in the book, a narrow-faced, clean shaven young man in full military dress.

After the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918, Bert remained in Europe as a member of the Occupation army. Bert was one of 4,355,000 U.S. troops mobilized during World War I. He returned home alive—unlike 126,000 other American servicemen.

Bert was discharged from Camp Dodge, Iowa, on June 24, 1919. Just five months after returning to Kearney, he applied for and received a marriage license from Buffalo County Judge J.M. Easterling. Bert and Kearney native Arlita (or Arletta) Pearl Turner, the daughter of Will and Sarah (Fox) Turner, were married on November 5, 1919, at the Methodist Church in Kearney. The officiating pastor was Oliver M. Keve, and the witnesses were John Turner and Nellie McInroy. Bert was 33; his bride was 28.

The newlyweds disappeared from local recorded history for about five years after their wedding. The 1926-1927 Kearney City Directory describes Bert as a "laborer," and lists their residence as 1416 Ave. A (about a block south and a block east of the present-day Buffalo County Courthouse).

The Woods again disappear from local recorded history after 1927. They are not listed in the Kearney City directories between 1928 and 1936. Cemetery records show that Bert's brother Orson died in 1928, and the cause of his death is listed as "senility." Also during this time period, Bert and Pearl had a daughter, Darlene. She was their only child, and she was never listed in any city directories.

The Woods later moved from their Avenue A home to 1506 5th Ave. (near present-day Kenwood Elementary School), according to the 1937-1938 Kearney City Directory. At that time, Bert was working in a 15-year stint as an engineer at the Kearney water pumping station.

Tragedy struck the family on March 12, 1939, when Pearl died at age 48 after a four-year bout with cancer of the uterus. An article on the front page of the March 13, 1939, *Kearney Hub* said she had been confined to bed and had been a patient at the hospital since December 1938. She was survived by her husband and daughter, who were still living in their 5th Avenue home. She also was survived by her mother, three sisters and two brothers. Pearl was buried in the East Field of the Kearney City Cemetery, and her simple gray gravestone says she died on March 14, 1939 (which differs from her actual date of death by two days). Lot 1412, in which she was interred, is owned by F.A. Wood. Edith F. Wood, who died September 12, 1899, is also buried there. However, the identities of F.A. and Edith Wood are mysteries, as no further information regarding them could be found.

The 1941-1942 Kearney City Directory shows that Bert moved to 2009 5th Ave. following the death of his wife. The directory does not list an occupation for him. That directory listing is the last written record of Bert residing in Kearney.

The March 26, 1956, *Kearney Hub* carried the news of a huge blizzard in the Northeast that dumped over 12 inches of snow on New York City, closed La Guardia Airport, and killed 110 people. On that day, President Dwight D. Eisenhower requested \$4 billion from Congress for military aid. Nebraska Republicans had just voted to endorse Richard Nixon in the upcoming presidential election. A one-pound can of coffee cost 69 cents, and an 18-ounce jar of peanut butter cost 39 cents. A small article at the bottom of the front page is headlined "Bert Wood, 70, Dies in Montana."

According to the obituary, Bert was hired by the Burlington Northern Railroad after Pearl's death. He lived in Billings, Montana, and died March 25, 1956, in a veterans' hospital in Miles City, Montana, of bronchial pneumonia. Bert was buried in the Kearney Cemetery on March 29 next to his wife. He was survived by his daughter, Mrs. Harold Schulhof of Glenco, Illinois.

SOURCES

In the writing of this piece, I used historical information from *The First World War: A Complete History* by Martin Gilbert (Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1994). I also used information from the Encyclopedia of the First World War on the Spartacus Internet Encyclopedia website (www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk).

(Continued from Page 1)

In May of 1993 the Shraders hosted an open house for Aunt Betty's Bed and Breakfast. Approximately five hundred guests signed the guest book. Residents of Ravenna were delighted to see that the house was furnished with the decor of its early years and was being preserved. Harold Polenz helped host the event and patiently answered questions about the house's early days. He loaned a unique pillow sham with the image of the house (from an actual photo) etched upon it. This had been made shortly after the house was built as was evident by no trees in the yard. (In March 2000 Harold donated this family heirloom to the bed and breakfast.)

Aunt Betty's Bed and Breakfast has hosted guests from numerous states and several foreign countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, Japan, Nigeria and others. The couple from Denmark flew into Minneapolis and spent their first night in America at Aunt Betty's.

The author was delighted to visit the house in December 1999 when the house was decked out for Christmas. A photo shoot had been scheduled with one who knew the house well. The stairway was draped with garland, the dining room table held presents wrapped and soon-to-be, a huge tree stood in the "parlor" and underneath it were toys from an earlier time. One was a wooden rocking horse, another was a little rocking chair that belonged to the little boy who peeked at the bride and groom 82 years before. And best of all, Harold was there in person to pose with his little chair! He often visits his friends, Betty and Harvey, enjoys delicious meals, and tells more about the house. Ravenna is fortunate to have him, a living link to the grand past of this historic home.



Harold Polenz and his childhood rocking chair at the Polenz house - December 1999.

Photo by Valerie Vierk

Ravenna is fortunate too, to have the big house, not only for the historic benefits but a practical benefit: lodging. Ravenna people love their classes reunions, many of which are scheduled during the annual summer celebration, "Annevar". The bed and breakfast helps with the overflow from local homes. History repeats itself: "Aunt Betty" hosts receptions and parties, meetings for churches, and takes in "boarders". Mrs. Polenz, no doubt, smiles.



Aunt Betty's Bed and Breakfast decked out for Christmas 1999.

Photo by Valerie Vierk

SOURCES

"The Ravenna News". Special thanks to the following people who provided information: Grandsons of Bertha, Harold and Albert Polenz, Betty and Harvey Shrader, Herbert and Virginia Nolda. This article is dedicated to Harold Polenz, who died on June 26, 2000 at age 90.

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Dr. Roger P. Davis, Editor

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TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

By the time you get this the 13th Annual Christmas Tree Walk will be over. This year we have the most trees ever and they are beautiful. They are prettier than ever if that is possible. We know much thought and planning has gone into this project and the committee who have worked on this for a year and all those who contributed trees are to be congratulated.

We have just received a pump organ which was taken out of the chapel at Good Samaritan Hospital when it was remodeled several years ago. The organ was donated by Mrs. Jackie Rosenlof and will be used during this season. It will be formally dedicated later.

All of us at Trails & Rails wish you a Joyous Christmas Season.

—Margaret Hohmolt, Volunteer Director

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

Buffalo County Historical Society

Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848-0523

Address Correction Requested

L
MRS MARIAN JOHNSON
4616 PONY EXPRESS RD
KEARNEY NE 68847

