



Buffalo Tales



Volume 8, No. 10 Buffalo County Historical Society November-December 1985

LETTERS TO NELLIE - Part I

Introduction

Nellie was the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wm. R. Adair. Her real name was Helen, but she was known to family and friends as Nellie.

The Adairs were a prominent family in Kearney from 1890 to 1915. Wm. R. Adair and his brother, James S. Adair, moved to Kearney with their families about 1890 and became affiliated with the City National Bank. This was at the height of Kearney's "boom" period (See Buffalo Tales, September 1979). In the financial depression which followed in the mid-90s only two of Kearney's seven banks survived, the City National and the Farmers Bank.

Helen graduated from Kearney High School in 1898, and that fall enrolled in Western College at Oxford, Ohio. The letters to Nellie were written by her mother during her first year of college. Excerpts of the letters which follow include many familiar names and places in Kearney's early history and give a clear picture of the times after the collapse of the "boom" period.

The entire collection of Mrs. Adair's letters is in the archives of the Buffalo County Historical Society.

THE LETTERS

My dear Nellie,

September 18, 1898

It is after eight o'clock but is so dark I can scarcely see to write. Papa has gone to the bank and of course I am alone. I have not gotten used to your being away and have indeed been lonesome. Went to see Aunt Jennie¹ yesterday. They are busy cleaning house. Found Mrs. McKean there and we came home together. You never saw muddier streets than we found when we came home, and now we are going to have another downpour.

I'm so anxious to know how you got along in Chicago.... You must tell me everything. You know I am interested in every little thing you may write. I can't bear to go in your room, it makes me cry.... Last night at prayer meeting everyone asked for you....

I am baking today and must polish the communion set. Saw Miss Stewart² yesterday. She was very sorry she did not see you before you left and would have done so but for the rain.

My dear Nellie,

September 21, 1898

Must hurry off a letter to you this morning. Yesterday morning Papa and I started off for a twenty-mile drive and *such a drive!* We went northwest, lost our way and drove up a canyon, found no roads and Papa said he would drive up another, so off we started and drove and drove but no trace anywhere. Away off in the distance over the bluff I spied a team and buggy, as I supposed, going along at a rapid rate. Papa drove along at a rapid rate, too, but soon we lost sight of him, the bluffs were so high and steep. Then Papa said, "I will drive right up here," so steep the horses could barely make it but finally we reached the top and how glad I was to see the man right in front of us, and he proved to be the man's son whom we were going to see and directed us, the place being only half a mile away but quite hidden by the hills, and I

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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 68847. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the history of Buffalo County and its people.

Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

- Basic Membership \$ 7.50
- Institutional Membership \$10.00
- Supporting Membership \$25.00

Life memberships are \$100.00 for an individual; \$150.00 for husband and wife, jointly.

Officers and Directors: President, Chandler Lynch III; Vice-President, Barb Avery; Secretary, Margaret Hohnholt; Treasurer, Leo Henriksen; Directors: Glen E. Wisch, Frances Link, Merlin Berglund, Leonard Silver, Philip S. Holmgren, Minnett Steinbrink, Henrietta Rhamy, Edna Hehner, Pat Waddington, Marian Johnson.

Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director.

Phone 234-3041

WITH THE SOCIETY

1986 Major Project. The completion of the Loup River Freighters' Hotel will be the major project of the Buffalo County Historical Society for 1986. This was the decision of the Board of Directors at its meeting on November 2. Marian Johnson will be director of the project.

Although the exterior restoration is finished, the interior work remains to be done. This involves woodwork and floors, papering and painting of all rooms and hallways. Funds will be needed for labor and material.

Our Historical Society must have continuing community support in order to complete and maintain our ongoing programs. Members and friends are urged to remember us through donations, memorials, estate planning and income tax write-offs. Ours is a non-profit organization and all contributions are tax deductible.

Christmas Open House. "REMEMBER WHEN...?" is the title of this year's Christmas display at Trails and Rails Museum December 7-15. The museum will be open from 1-5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, December 7-8 and 14-15, and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the week of December 9-13.

Exhibits will include hand-made quilts from the Country Crossroads Quilters Club of Kearney and from the museum's collection. There will also be a display of miniature and model tractors collected and owned by Glen Lavery of Kearney. This collection includes models of tractors from a 1912 Titan to present day Whites and John Deeres.

Nebraska History Network elected Mardi Anderson as its president at its annual meeting in Omaha on November 2. Congratulations, Mardi!

Dates to Remember:

- Nov. 17: Society meeting at the Community Hall in Elm Creek, 2:00 p.m.
Dr. Joe Jeffrey will give the program.
- Nov. 30: Deadline for \$12.00 deposit for Fort Robinson Tour,
June 17-20, 1986.
- Dec. 7-15: Christmas Open House at the Museum.
- Jan. 1: Membership dues are payable. Upgrade if you can.
- Jan. 11: Board of Directors meeting at the Museum, 10:00 a.m.

NEW MEMBERS

Mr. & Mrs. Chas. Pflaum . . . Elm Creek Mr. & Mrs. Garnsey Weed . . . Kearney

do not think we ever could have found it. We came home a better way and arrived just as the lights were being lighted. My, but I was hungry!

We are having lovely weather. I am thinking about you all the time and wondering how you are getting along taking care of yourself *all by yourself*.

Your letters thus far are quite satisfactory and I hope you are going to have a happy, lovely time. We want you to get what you wish for your room. Are the walls frescoed, papered or kalsomined? How about your clothes, is there anything else you need? I wonder how you spent last Sabbath. After church the Wilsons, McKears, Pearl and just everybody flocked around me to know if we had heard from Nellie.... It seems like six months since you went away.

My dear Nellie,

September 21, 1898

We were glad to get your Sabbath letter this A.M..... Have not seen much of the Niblocks.³ She told me coming home from prayer meeting she did not get to say half she wanted to to you - said she just could not. While she wanted you to go and thought you were going to have such a nice time, she just felt as if she could not do without you....

I have been taking it quite easy. Can get lovely bread from Mr. Rose, our old German friend. They supply the Midway, Mrs. Dildine and ever so many others.... Mrs. Clark sends her love to you. She is going in to the Frank Improvement building - takes the rear room, the one intended for the bank president; says it is an elegant room and likes it because she will be on the first floor....

Did your hat carry through all right? How are your things anyway - are they anywhere near satisfactory?



City National Bank 1890.

My dear Nellie,

October 12, 1898

Just finished reading your letter received this morning. Went to the bank on my way home from Uncle Jim's and was delighted to find it. Papa went to Omaha on the early train Tuesday morning. There was to be a big time, McKinley there, etc. Aunt Jennie came for me in the afternoon and we took a nice long drive, then I went home with her and staid all night. Daisy⁴ is coming to stay tonight....

As to a hat I suppose you will not often need a dress hat but must have one of some kind. Pearl Cummings has one of those little red turbans. Irene (McKean) has trimmed up her blue sailor with her old birds, and Aunt Jennie trimmed up Daisy's blue sailor with some old stuff and does not look too badly.... Finches are going to get me a jacket, will have it soon and will cost me \$16. Mrs. Webb has one just like it. Mrs. Dildine likes it better than the one she got. Mrs. Webb is making her a nice new winter dress. (She) will finish your dress first of the week and think you will have it by last of next week....

My dear Nellie,

Thursday morning (October 20)

This must do for your Saturday letter. I hope your boxes go through all right and that you enjoy the contents. Daisy made the chocolates and Aunt Jennie came yesterday and helped me make the cookies. Mr. and Mrs. Niblock were over last evening. Mrs. N. said she wished we would put her in the box, she would so much like to see you....

P.S. John Cummings sent the pears. They will be good in a short time. And we put in two or three of your favorite apples - all we could get in.

My dear Nellie,

November 8, 1898

Surely I would have taken a good cry if Papa had not brought a letter from you today.... Was so glad to know you have a coat and hat, that you will be comfortable and not be obliged to *borrow*.

Papa has gone to the Midway to get election news. It is thought J. E. Miller of Majors is elected Senator. Won't he be delighted! Papa thinks the state election has gone Republican, but Norris Brown did not get it and Green will go back to Washington.

Have you learned to play golf, tennis, basketball or any such thing? And how about your music? ... I am hungry to hear the piano! No one has played for us since you went away. ... Did I tell you Boyles are in the Moore house. Miss Stewart boards with them....

Did Papa tell you he has about bought the Jones place? He thinks he can make quite a nice home by building an addition like Moores did. I think he gets it for \$975 - what do you think?....

My dear Nellie,

November 17

Am quite alone again this afternoon. William⁵ started back to Omaha this morning. It was good to have him home if only for a short time....

Surely you have had a good deal of experience in the two months you have been away. The reception must have been very nice. Did you feel comfortable in your silk? I hope so for I thought it would be very pretty. I wonder what Marjory wore and said and did to captivate the young professor....

The noted evangelist J. C. Hammond is here, holding meetings at the Presbyterian Church this afternoon. Will be here two days longer. Papa and I are going to hear him tonight. Last of next week the great temperance man, John G. Wooley, is to be here. Tickets are selling at 50¢ a piece. The sessions will all be held in the Opera House. There will be no service the Sabbath he is here—only in the Opera House. I am very anxious to hear him.

The flight of time is so swift, can scarcely realize next week will bring Thanksgiving and your 19th birthday....

Papa, Willie and I were at McKean's Monday night, and at Niblocks last night. Monday afternoon Willie and I called at Uncle Jim's. Daisy is making over her old black gown.

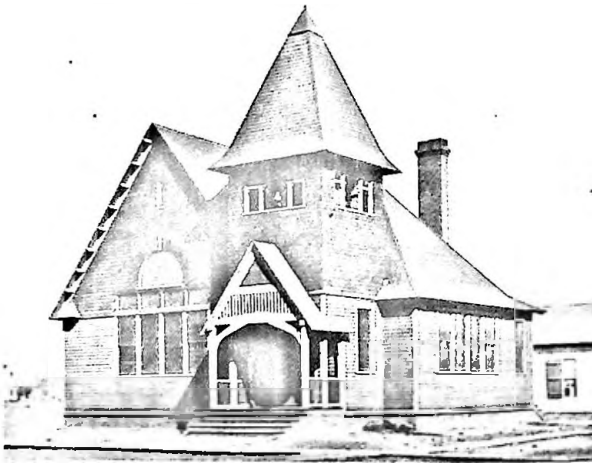
My dear Nellie,

November 24, 1898

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. Papa and I expect to dine at home and alone. We neither gave nor received invitations, nor have I heard of any who are going to entertain.... I am quite well satisfied to stay home. Papa and I will go to church at 10:30. Rev. Forsythe preaches the sermon in the Presbyterian Church. Then we will come home and eat our dinner: prairie chicken, mashed potatoes, turnips, good bread and butter, picallily, squash pie, coffee, cake and strawberries. Don't you think that will be good enough dinner for us? After the things are all cleared away, will go down to Uncle Jim's....

You asked about the Jones place. Well, it is at a standstill. Papa is now thinking some about R. A. Moore's place. How does that strike you? It will be sold soon and Papa thinks could get it for about \$1,800. Would you like that better than the Jones place?

As to your bringing your trunk, I hardly know what is best. I took Mrs. Niblock's telescope when I went home. It's quite a nuisance to carry a telescope. If you could get one of those basket affairs—I don't know what they are called—but would be light and easy to carry. Be sure and wear your outing flannel underskirt.



United Presbyterian Church, northwest corner of the intersection of First Avenue and 24th Street.

My dear Nellie,

November 29, 1898

Your letter came yesterday. I think you had a nice time at Thanksgiving and a very nice dinner, for all of which I am glad. Think I wrote you we would be at home. After dinner we went to see Uncle Jim. He is better now and out yesterday.

Mr. Wooley has come and gone. What a grand man he is! Held three services in the Opera House on Sabbath, splendid audiences greeted him each time. Last night Papa and I called at Mr. Boyles'. Miss Stewart was there, pleasant as always. I went all over the house. You need not be surprised if Papa writes you he has bought the Moore property, will know tonight. Well, I guess we could live there, could we not? The price will be eighteen hundred dollars. After coming home we heard someone at the door and who should it be but Miss (Maud) Marston and her brother Weir. Weir goes back to his regiment soon, is stationed near Detroit.

Did I tell you Papa invited Mr. and Mrs. Niblock for Thanksgiving evening. We had Oyster Stew and fun. Used the little table in the front parlor. Papa bought me four

Buffalo County Historical Society

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lovely roses and they graced the table. As the Niblocks had not been invited "out", think they quite enjoyed it.

My dear Nellie,

December 9, 1898

It is so cold tonight - I decided to stay home from prayer meeting. Just a calm, piercing cold, no blizzard. It has been cold since Monday night. Papa and I ate supper last evening at City Hall. The Presbyterian Ladies had their art sale and supper. I failed to discover the "art" when I went down in the afternoon. They had a very poor display. We went down at six and I enjoyed the supper but Papa thought it very poor. Tomorrow night we expect to go to the Opera House to hear Maximillian Dick, America's greatest violinist, a good soprano and pianist accompany him. Dr. Chittenden⁶ has assumed a great responsibility in bringing him here.

Now as to your questions. As to moving at Christmas, would not think of it even if we could. Mr. (Juan) Boyle had rented the house from the Moores until the first of May so moving time will not come before that. Papa and I went over one evening. Mrs. Boyle showed me most of the house, was not in Miss Moore's room so know nothing of it, but Miss Stewart said it was a lovely room for a young lady, has a hardwood floor and rugs. The dining room has hardwood floor and is quite good size. Rooms in new part are not so large as I thought. We will have a storeroom and plenty of large drawers for dresses and bed clothing. When you come we will go over and see all we can of it.... Good night, with much love.

My dear Nellie,

December 15, 1898

Here goes the last letter I suppose will write before you come. Think you can have a fine trip as far as Chicago. Anyway, four girls should have a very nice time. Now as to your waist - a dark navy blue would be very pretty for you, but of course, you will know what you want. If you see anything in silk you like, better bring or have samples sent.

...The fountain pen will be all right for Papa, I think, if can get a good one. I have sent for *Peloubits Notes* for him. Of course, "just like you," I don't want anything....

Quite a scare at Peru, smallpox bad in Nebraska City and some cases I believe in Peru. I do not want you quarantined anywhere....

Uncle Jim and Aunt Jennie are both well again....

1. Jane Adair, wife of James S. Adair.
2. Miss M. I. Stewart, high school principal.
3. The Rev. and Mrs. J. H. Niblock, pastor of United Presbyterian Church. The Adairs were active members of the United Presbyterian Church, which in 1898 was a separate denomination from the Presbyterian Church of Kearney, also mentioned.
4. Daisy Adair, daughter of James and Jane Adair.
5. William Adair, brother of Helen.
6. Dr. E. P. Chittenden, first headmaster of Kearney Military Academy.