



Buffalo Tales



Volume 11, No. 10 Buffalo County Historical Society November-December, 1988

50 YEARS OF KVFD EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE

by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

Emergency medical services provided by the Kearney Volunteer Fire Department to thousands of area citizens ended on August 1, 1988. It was a 50-year record of volunteer community service at its finest.

Although 1938 is the year the Kearney volunteer firemen officially started emergency medical services, there seems to have been some activity in rescue services a few years earlier. On May 4, 1933 a recommendation was made by then Fire Chief August Fredericks to the city council that an inhalator be purchased for the use of the fire department. The inhalator was received in July and immediately put into use, at first only in Kearney, but within a few years it was taken to other towns in the area. Claude "Buck" Courtier, now 86 years of age, remembers taking an inhalator on many calls in the 30's. The Good Samaritan Hospital did not at that time have this breathing-aid device so the doctors borrowed from the fire department. Besides the hospitals, it was used in the home or wherever needed for victims of drowning, suicide attempts, broken necks, whooping cough and newborns having breathing difficulties. Reports on the use

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Red Cross first aid class of December 1935 trained by Dr. W. E. Rose and Mrs. Geo. Dunn of the American Red Cross included eight firemen. Left to right: (standing) J. S. Elliott, Wm. N. "Babe" Peterson, Geo. Beaver, Mrs. Dunn, Marvin Stovall, Frank Geiselman, Chas. Stovall, Dr. Rose, Dude Veal; (front row) Larry Johnson, Swede Mattson and Clarence Alcorn attending "Victim" Roe Gordon.

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. 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 \$10.00
- Institutional Membership \$15.00
- Supporting Membership \$25.00

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

Officers and Directors: President, Margaret Hohnholt; Vice-President, Merlin Berglund, Secretary, Colleen Parker; Treasurer, Philip S. Holmgren. Directors: Frances Link, Barb Avery, Minnette Steinbrink, Edna Hehner, Alice Howell, Robert Stubblefield, Viola Livingston, Chandler Lynch III, and Jim Cudeback. Publications Chairman: Alice Howell.

Trails & Rails Museum 706 West 11th Street (308) 894-8041

WITH THE SOCIETY

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT Margaret Hohnholt—

Wayne E. Reynolds of rural Kearney, who died November 8, was a past member of the Board of Directors of the Society. He was a longtime supporter of our work. We extend sympathy to his wife Ettamabel and his family and thank them for suggesting the Buffalo County Historical Society for memorials.

Several activities are coming up for the Society. Don't forget the **BIG BAND DANCE** on November 19th at the Armory. It's a return of the same orchestra, Harvey Larsen, which was here for the Air Base Reunion. Cost—\$3.50 per person.

Christmas Sights, Sounds and Smells will be featured at the Trails & Rails Museum from December 3rd through December 11th from 1-5 p.m. each day. Enjoy the Christmas trees featured by 15 organizations from Kearney, Elm Creek and Arnhemst. Christmas cookies and candy will be on sale at this time. If you can volunteer to be a hostess and/or furnish cookies please call Margaret Hohnholt, 237-7327 or Lois Tollefsen, 237-2800. Admission \$1.50 per person. (Children under 12 free if accompanied by a parent.)

Plans for the Bus Trip to Fort Robinson, June 21-23, 1989, are being completed. We will leave Kearney on June 21, visit Valentine and the Bowring Ranch on the first day. We will spend 3 nights at the Fort. We will tour into South Dakota on one day and do some touring around Crawford the other day. (Different than the last trip). On the return trip on Friday, we will stop at Gordon and also tour the Sandoz area. Cost—\$95.00 per person. This will include transportation and room in the lodge. In order to make reservations, we must have a \$50.00 per person deposit by December 20th. If you find, after making a reservation, that you can not go, you must find some one to take your place as we have to pay the Lodge at Fort Robinson in advance. The balance of \$45.00 per person will be due at a later date. Mail reservations and checks to Buffalo County Historical Society, Box 523, Kearney, Nebraska 68848.

FROM MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN Mitzi Steinbrink—

1989 membership dues are payable in January. Your memberships make possible the collection and preservation of Buffalo County history. You are a vital part of our work. As you consider membership renewal, remember that a Supporting Membership enables us to do more. We need your support!

NEW MEMBERS

- Dorothy Bond Kearney Kristi Salestrom Kearney
- Jack Dobberstein Kearney Paul Tockey Ravenna



Walter Fowler, KVFD member for 35 years, spearheaded early EMS training.

of the first and succeeding inhalators were made annually from 1933 through 1944.

Late in 1935 eight KVFD members were among those who took a 5-week training course in first aid offered by the American Red Cross, and soon after the completion of the course the Red Cross located a mobile unit in the fire station manned by the firemen. Late in 1938 fourteen more firemen took the training and by the end of the year two new first aid stations manned by Red Cross trained workers opened, one at City Hall and one at Elliott's Motor Lodge on Highway 30 near the west edge of the city. A squad of four would be on hand at all hours at the Motor Lodge and a "rescue" squad of ten at City Hall, according to the *Kearney Daily Hub* of December 31, 1938. These were the third and fourth such stations to be opened in Nebraska, and the seventh and eighth in the nation.

The late Walter Fowler, who joined the volunteer firemen in 1918 and was a member for 35 years, was the driving force behind the effort to have firemen trained in Red Cross first aid and was one of the early instructors of the course. He was also one who promoted other equipment and as a result Kearney Volunteer Fire Department's emergency service was often one of the first in the state to try new equipment or take more training. The Kearney firefighters who worked with it say that their emergency medical service was progressive from the beginning, and became more sophisticated each of the 50 years it existed.

In 1938 a request was made of the city council, and approved, for the purchase of a diving suit and helmet for use of the firemen in rescue operations. Early 1939 brought another major project into the emergency medical service plans when the firemen, the civic clubs and interested citizens of Kearney started a drive for an iron lung, a pressurized chamber to help patients breathe. Because Omaha at that time had the only two iron lungs in the state, the firemen pointed out that "one should be available in this section of Nebraska." The fund drive was completed and the iron lung arrived at the fire station in October of 1940.

After the fund drive was kicked off, the firemen, always looking ahead, decided that a vehicle would be needed for the iron lung. They planned and built a trailer to carry not only the iron lung, but first aid equipment, a portable light unit and a boat. The trailer was used for a short time but was found to be inadequate, so they decided to buy a new "disaster" truck with the money left over in the iron lung fund. In August, 1941, Kearney's first emergency unit was put into service. It was the second of its kind in the state; Omaha had the first. It served the citizens of Kearney and the surrounding area for ten years, transporting to the hospital automobile accident victims, persons who became ill or injured in the home or elsewhere, and taking polio patients to Omaha or Lincoln.

Early in 1951 a drive for a new emergency unit was launched. \$5,000 was needed, and most was collected in a one-day drive on February 17. The new unit would be the "best in the Midwest," and would carry at least six persons. When this unit was ready for service, it was dubbed "Big Red" because of its bright red paint. Although upgraded from the first unit of 1941, it was described by today's firemen as "a boxy and cumbersome" vehicle. However, it served the citizens of the Kearney area for eighteen years.

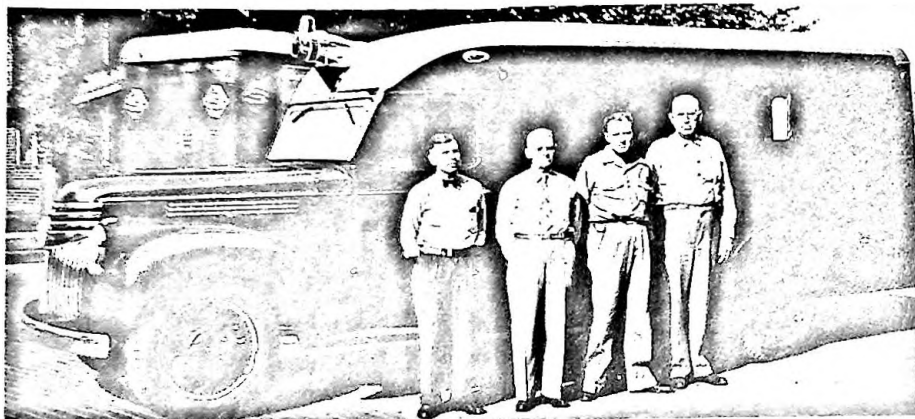
Through the '50's and '60's the emergency medical services in Kearney consisted mostly of basic Red Cross first aid. Firemen were not required to take the training, but most of them did. And to get a little more first-hand experience, they would find an old junked car and use it for practice in getting "would be" accident victims out of wrecked automobiles. A scuba diving team was added in the '50's. In 1969 a new unit was purchased, this one designed and built strictly for emergency use in contrast to the two former units which had been converted to medical service use. The "Jaws of Life" equipment was added in the '70's.

A new era of Kearney's volunteer emergency service was initiated in 1972 when Dr. Kenneth F. Kimball and Dr. Joel Johnson started a pilot program with the Kearney firemen for training to become registered Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's). Dr. Kimball had been involved on the national level with this program and the first classes in Kearney were taught even before the textbooks were printed. The training included 81 hours of class time and ten hours in the emergency room of Good Samaritan Hospital. The first EMT's to complete the class in Kearney and pass the required tests were among the first in the nation to be on the National Registry of EMT's. In the late '70's the State of Nebraska took over the certification of emergency medical technicians, with new guidelines for training and certification. However, Drs. Kimball and Johnson have always been available locally for questions or advice.

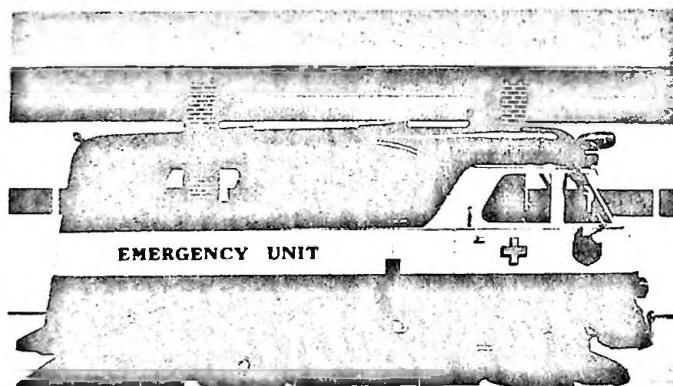
Until its termination on August 31 of this year (1988), Kearney and the surrounding area had the benefit of the best in emergency medical services by the Kearney Volunteer Fire Department. A second emergency unit a little larger than the 1969 unit was added, and the two units served the community until 1982 when a third unit was donated to the Fire Department by Mrs. Fern Baldwin. The number of unit calls rose steadily each year, from ten in 1941 to an all-time high of 834 in 1987. At the rate calls were received in 1988, the figure would undoubtedly have been over 900 if the service had operated the full year.

The crews of the emergency units have been dedicated and faithful, always operating at two speeds—fast and faster. Longtime member Gordon "Doc" Turner, when in the bakery business in downtown Kearney, was always one of the first to arrive in response to a unit or fire call. When the Volunteer Fire Department was located on the west side of City Hall, the back door of the Turner Bakery was directly across the street. In his bakery "whites" he was often taken, or mistaken, for a doctor. However, the nickname of "Doc" was pinned on him because in his volunteer career as a Kearney fireman he delivered a total of seven babies enroute to the hospital on emergency unit calls.

Although the KVFD emergency service has been replaced with a service operated by the Good Samaritan Hospital in Kearney, the Emergency Medical Technicians still have a place in the fire department, says Fire Chief Dick Rains. The firefighters respond to car accidents where someone is injured and continue to maintain a scuba diving rescue team.



KVFD First Emergency Unit, 1941. Left to right: Wm. N. "Babe" Peterson, Walter Fowler, J. W. Bowker, Mayor E. G. Tunke.



KVFD Emergency Unit, 1951 — "Big Red"



KVFD Emergency Unit, 1969

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The Kearney community paid tribute to the fifty years of emergency medical service at a "Hearts of Gold" banquet on October 7, 1988 honoring the firemen and their wives. A bronze sculpture titled "Somewhere Everyday," created by artist Gary Coulter was presented to the department and will be displayed in the fire hall. It was a recognition and an expression of thanks for an outstanding fifty years of service to the community by the Kearney Volunteer Fire Department. As expressed by Mayor Justus Dobesh, "You will not be forgotten."

SOURCES: *Kearney Daily Hub*, May 4, 1933; December 31, 1938; January 5, February 2, 1939; October 28, 1940; January 14, 1942; January 3, February 16, 1951; October 7, 8, 1988. Annual reports, minutes, and scrapbooks of Kearney Volunteer Fire Department; City Council minutes, May 1933. Personal interviews; Fire Chief Dick Rains, Gamsey Weed, Claude "Buck" Courtier, Milford Wiseman, Helen Fowler Munson, Gordon "Doc" Turner, John Maze.

PHOTOS: Helen Fowler Munson, KVFD scrapbooks.

DO YOUR CHRISTMAS SHOPPING AT TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

When you come to the Christmas Tree Walk, do some holiday shopping at the museum gift shop:

Books: Tales of Buffalo County, Vol. II	\$5.95
Tales of Buffalo County, Vol. III	\$7.50

The above books also available at *Gerbers Books & Gifts* in downtown Kearney Centre.

Steam Locomotives of Nebraska, (new)	\$3.50
Kearney Centennial Book, 1873-1973	\$2.50
Trail Dust to Star Dust, Gibbon centennial, 1871-1971	\$8.00
The Untold Story of Boot Hill, Lowell in 1870's	\$5.00
Kearney State College, 1905-1980	\$7.00
Notepaper: Sketches by Barb Avery and by Carol Kimball	\$4.00
Railroad Items: Union Pacific glassware; train whistles, bookends Kearney centennial medallions, prints, postcards.	

Gift Memberships for 1989: (see annual dues schedule above) or books may be ordered from Buffalo County Historical Society, Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848. Add 75¢ postage if book is to be mailed.