



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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ROOTS OF BUFFALO COUNTY—THE SCANDINAVIANS Part II

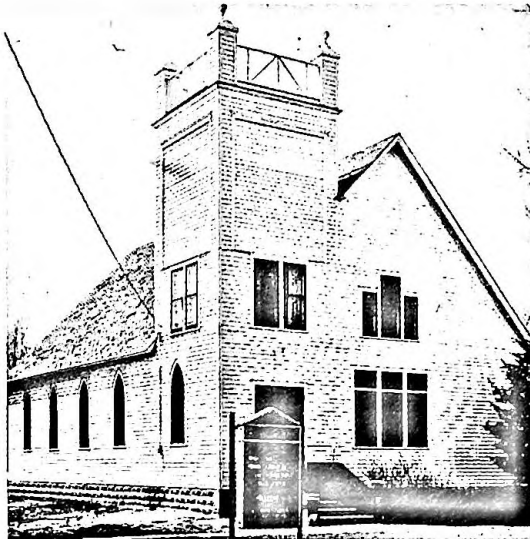
by Margaret Stines Nielsen

The Swedish Mission Church in Kearney began about 1888 with a group of Swedes meeting in homes, and later in the Anderson Studio. Mrs. A. T. Anderson wrote of the:

prayer meetings and gospel meetings, with simple traveling brethren as speakers, and Alfred playing the old Swedish hymns that still touch the depths of my heart. He had made backless benches that were stacked outside...and often when brought in...were wet and snowy, but no one found fault with this, and the testimonies, songs and prayers that ascended from this simple room have been a comfort and strength...through all my life.

In ¹⁸⁹⁰ a small church was built on 25th and Avenue C. The Reverend H. G. Swedell was first pastor of the permanent Mission Church in Kearney, Nebraska, organized in 1899 with A. T. Anderson as chairman and Otto Carlson, secretary.

Financial problems and disputes over doctrine marked the early years of the church, and it was closed at various times. In 1928 revival meetings were held in a tent



Evangelical Free Church
25th Street and Avenue C, 1910-1966.

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Membership in the Buffalo County Historical Society is open to anyone who has an interest in Buffalo County and its people, or in the history of the area.

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Family membership\$ 7.50
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Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director. Phone 234-3041

WITH THE SOCIETY

The regular meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society will be held at the Pleasanton Fire Hall on Sunday, February 26, at 2:00 p.m. Members of the Pleasanton area will give a program on "History, How Do You Preserve It?" A large collection of photos will be on display.

In March the meeting will be held at the Elm Creek Community Building at two o'clock on the 25th. Clyde Wallace will speak on the Plum Creek Massacre and, weather permitting, will lead a tour to the site.

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Three legislative matters require the attention of all of us interested in historic preservation and the interpretation of history.

LB 891, if passed as introduced by the Revenue Committee, will affect the tax exempt status of local and state historical societies. The bill needs an amendment to the definition of educational organizations which will exempt historical groups.

LB 885 before the Appropriations Committee, if passed, would bulldoze a historic neighborhood in Omaha, including the Storz mansion, for a UNO parking lot.

Governor Kerry's budget recommendation includes a provision that the State Historical Society raise \$140,000 of its budget by charging an admission fee to its facilities, which includes the new State Museum of History, State Archives, Research Library and museums throughout the state. Such a fee could eliminate visits by thousands of school children to our State museums, and would place a hardship on genealogists and historians who depend on the state facilities for research and reading. Write members of the Appropriations Committee on this matter.

As Marvin F. Kivett, Director of the State Historical Society says: "History always needs help."

south of the church. Seven faithful women were largely responsible for the continuance of the church. They were Tilda Rundquist, Mrs. Gust Bloomquist, Anna Bloomquist, Mrs. Ed Hagg, Anna Hultman, Mrs. Amanda Erickson and a Mrs. Lundberg. With the appointment of Arley Bragg as pastor in 1929 the English language was allowed for the first time at services on the first and third Sundays of each month. In 1932 members accepted the title of Evangelical Free Church of Kearney.

Freeman

Swan N. Freeman, born in Goteborg, Sweden in 1846, came to Moline, Illinois where he worked for a lumber company. He married Charlotte Holberg, also a native of Sweden, and the couple bought a farm in Center township, where they moved in 1885. They had two daughters and one son. Mrs. Freeman died in 1891 and with the hard times of the nineties Swan ran into financial difficulties. His son, Bennett, who was farming in the area, sent his sister Rose to a school in Chicago. She later married Melvin Jones, founder of Lions International. Bennett's son, Verne of Kearney, was for many years Clerk of the District Court of Buffalo County.

Farris

Swan Farris accompanied a group of schoolmates from Sweden to Chicago in 1856. During the next few years he worked at a variety of jobs on the Mississippi: from raftsman to cabin waiter to building levees along the river. For a time he drove an express wagon in New Orleans, hauling slaves from Arcade Hall to the railroads and boat landings. He was opposed to slavery, however, and with the outbreak of the Civil War, went to Galesburg where he operated a restaurant and dealt in real estate.

He was living in Chicago when a doctor recommended that he seek a change of climate for his health. As he had accumulated land in Odessa township and in Phelps County, he moved to Kearney with his second wife, Cecilia Peterson Farris. They bought "a handsome residence at 1810 7th Avenue." Mr. Farris died in 1926 at the age of 90, a wealthy man. He had accumulated a collection of old coins, and of rare books, some dating to the 1400's. In a hand-written will with several codicils, he left the collections to Luther College in Wahoo, and bequests of \$1000 to \$5000 to other Scandinavian colleges, institutions and churches. One bequest went to "the Charitable Home for Needy, Epileptic and Feeble-minded Children of Axtell, on condition that the home is permanently established." Another went to the Children's Orphan Home at Phelps Center.

Swenson

Research by June Hand of Pleasanton has revealed that the family of John Swenson populated much of the area around Sartoria and Pleasant Valley.* Peter Swenson, a brother, settled east of the Pleasant Valley Cemetery in Sartoria Township. Anyone passing his house stopped to have "coffee and goodies" with Peter's wife, known to all as "Aunt Betty."

A sister, Gustava Svendsatter, married Gunne Nillson in Markaryd Kronsberg, Sweden. At least three of their children immigrated to Sartoria in the late 1880's. John

* Additional information requested in Part I about Andrew Swenson reveals that in his will he appointed "my brother John Swenson" as executor. (It appears that John was co-owner of the Swenson Bros. Drug Store in Kearney and of the building and lot at 2114 Central Avenue where Over the Rainbow store now stands.)

August Nillson came to his uncle's ranch at that time. He took the name of August Gunst, married Anna Kreutzer and they had four children. His sister Augusta Nillson married Anton Johnson. Another sister, Hilda, married Sven Jonasson in Geneva, Illinois. They changed their name to Jones. They also came to Sartoria and worked on John's ranch for a time. They had thirteen children. Other Swensons in the area appear to be related but time and space do not permit inclusion in this article.

Lindbeck

John Peter Lindbeck, born in Jon Koping in 1838, married Johanna Louisa Johnston in 1872 in Sweden. They came to America in 1888 with five of their six children. Upon arrival they were detained at Ellis Island because one son was ill. While waiting there they were robbed, but managed to get to Minnesota where a brother lived. Shortly thereafter they moved to Axtell where they had friends. By this time the Kearney boom was on and Peter, a skilled woodworker and wood carver, soon found work doing interior finish work in many of the mansions being built at that time.

When he was working on the Frank house their daughter Matilda Sophia, born in Sweden in 1872, met John Dallas Saunders who was a coachman for the Franks at the time. In 1892 J. D. and Matilda were married. The couple lived for a time in the Tillson house (the recent Country Club home), then Mr. Lindbeck built a house for them on the corner of 8th Avenue and 27th Street where they would be nearer to the schools. Mr. Saunders was a stationary engineer at the Kearney Power Plant. When his wife took on the responsibility of the dining room at the new Kearney Normal School, J. D. also assisted in the management. Of the nine Saunders children, two sons and four daughters survive. Eleanor Dale, one of the daughters, lives in a home next to the one built for her parents. Walter Lindbeck, the youngest of John Peter Lindbeck's children was a Lutheran missionary in China for thirty years until driven out by the Communists.



John Peter Lindbeck family.

Ek (Eck) - Hallen

Enoch Albin Ek (Eck) and Hedvig Sofia Maria Kallstrom, both from Smaland province, met and were married in Omaha on August 8, 1891. They came to Kearney the next year and Mr. Eck opened a paint store in a little building off Central Avenue on East 22nd Street. After he built the store on 2215 Central in 1916, his son Angur went into business with him.

A brother came to Kearney about the same time. Because of military conscription in Sweden and the similarity of Swedish surnames, the brother had been assigned the name of Hjalmer Hallen. Mr. Hallen farmed near Riverdale. Their father, Jonas Ek, a military man, also came to Kearney to live; he died in a fire in his house in 1899.

Enoch and his wife had five children. They built a home at 3rd Avenue and 18th Street. Angur's daughter Doris wrote:

Grandpa had great faith in Kearney's growth. When I was a victim of a bank closure in 1932 he repaid me what I had lost and told me to always trust the banks. He owned the lot on which the Masonic Temple sits and sold it to the Masons "on time" although he had a cash offer for it. He felt the Masons were a better community asset than a filling station.

Angur continued to operate the paint store until December 1964. He died in January, 1965. He is survived by his wife Helen and two daughters, Doris of Flagstaff, Arizona, and Marilyn Lindly of Laramie, Wyoming.



E. A. Eck Paint Store
East 22nd Street, 1892-1916

Mattson

Herman Gunnar Mattson came from Sweden to Nebraska in April, 1904 to visit his two brothers who were living in Shelton and Kenesaw, and to find work to support his growing family. After looking around the area he picked Kearney for his future home. In July, 1905 his wife, Ida Perrsson Mattson, left Goteborg, Sweden with their seven children. Herman G. Mattson described their departure in *The Mattson News* of July 29, 1959:

Buffalo County Historical Society
Box 523
Kearney, NE 68847

Non-Profit Organization
Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
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Kearney, Nebraska

Address Correction Requested.

We left from the home place...at Borngarter #21. A fine drosky (hack),...the driver wearing a high silk hat, pulled up in front of the gate....The boys were dressed in white blouses, black bow ties, black knickers, socks and shoes. The girls had white blouses with gray bow ties, gray skirts, and black shoes and stockings....That hack...was decked out with many bouquets of flowers from family and friends. Ivan helped to take charge of the troop as he was always the instigator of all that was good. Carl Gunnar, the smallest of the troop, was like a young calf on the loose, you had to ride herd on him at all times.

Henrietta Mattson Boyd recalled that the wood sidewalks and dirt roads were the first things to strike these city-bred children. When the children enrolled at Kenwood School, the language barrier was such a problem that they were all put in the first grade. This proved too much for the teacher because they were making fun of her "funny English". The school appealed to Blanche Eck who told them "to pay attention and listen". By the end of the year the Mattsons were advanced to their proper grades.

Mr. Mattson was a painting contractor, assisted at various times by his sons. They had thirteen children in all. Ivan was a photographer and served as Mayor of Kearney from 1939 to 1942. "Swede" was appointed postmaster in 1932. He served in the army during World War II, coming out with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He returned to his job as postmaster until his retirement in 1950. Of the thirteen Mattson children, six survive: Henrietta (Boyd), Carl Gunnar and Caroline (Robinson) of Kearney; Paul of Fullerton, California; Arne of Omaha; and Dr. Harold A., an orthopedic surgeon in Dallas, Texas.

Part III will conclude this series on the Scandinavians and will tell of the immigrants from Denmark and Norway.

NEW MEMBERS

- Mr. & Mrs. Jack EricksonKearney
- Mrs. Charles F. RandolphKearney
- Mrs. Wayne McKinneyKearney
- Mr. & Mrs. Maurice Smallcomb . .Gibbon