



# Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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## THE LEBANESE IN KEARNEY - Part II

by Minnette Yanney Steinbrink  
Yanney - Abraham

Nicola E. Yanney was born in Fih, Lebanon on February 5, 1873. He was married to Martha George AlByke of Al Haat, Lebanon on November 8, 1892. They emigrated to Nebraska that same year, settling in Omaha. There, on October 29, 1893, their first son Elias Khourv, was born. Two years later, on July 4, a sister Anna joined the family.

Nicola then located on a farm north of Gibbon, in Buckeye Valley, where the family lived in a two-room soddie. A son John was born on May 22, 1897, and a son Mose on July 19, 1899. Those were happy, prosperous years until Nicola lost his wife Martha on February 11, 1902, and his infant daughter nine days later. He found it difficult to adjust to his loss and it was at this point that Nicola changed the direction of his life. A group of Orthodox Christians in Kearney were seeking a leader and a priest. Knowing that Mr. Yanney was well educated, the group asked him if he would attend seminary in Brooklyn, New York, and become an ordained priest for the St. George



Wedding of E. K. Yanney and Mary Abraham, 1916.

Bishop Raphael at right; the Rev. Nicola E. Yanney, left. Stole worn by the Rev. Yanney was a gift from the Czar of Russia.

(Continued on Page 3)

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 . . . . . \$ 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 Henricksen; Directors: Glen E. Wisch, Frances Link, Merlin Berglund, Leonard Silver, Philip S. Holmgren, Minnette Steinbrink, Henrietta Rhamy, Edna Hehner, Robert Stubblefield and Marian Johnson; Publications Chairman, Alice Howell.

Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director.

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### WITH THE SOCIETY

The annual meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society on April 20 was attended by 82 people. Directors re-elected for 3 year terms were Minnette Steinbrink and Chandler Lynch III, both of Kearney. Robert Stubblefield of Shelton and Alice Howell of Kearney were elected, also for 3-year terms. Leonard Silver, who is retiring from the Board of Directors was applauded for his many years of service as an officer and a director.

At the first meeting of the new Board on May 6, officers were elected as follows: Chandler Lynch, president, Margaret Hohnholt, vice-president and Alice Howell, secretary. Leo Henricksen will continue as treasurer.

**CELEBRATE WAGONS WEST!** Saturday, May 31 - Noon to sundown at the Trails and Rails Museum. The festivities will start at 12:30 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open the Freighters Hotel. From 1:00 to 5:00 there will be musical entertainment, living history demonstrations, tours of the hotel, Sandy Creek Muzzle Loaders in action; pioneer photos in pioneer costume; pie, hot dogs, coffee and soft drinks. A barbecue from 5:00 to 6:30, and other entertainment, raffle drawing and music from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. **FUN FOR EVERYONE! BE THERE!**

Members of the Historical Society who live in the City of Kearney should make yourselves aware of current proposals affecting Harmon Park. There will be a meeting at City Hall on Tuesday, May 20, at 7:30 p.m. at which more information will be given to Kearney citizens.

The historical significance and the environmental impact of Harmon Park on the city should not be overlooked. Although the expanded area and the Harmon Park name date from a later time, the original Third Ward Park is as old as the city itself.

### NEW MEMBERS

- Everett & Ardys Pitcher . . . . . Kearney
- George & Paula Kotsiopolos . . . . . Kearney
- Mr. & Mrs. Perry Kenney . . . . . Amherst
- Peter & Jane Kotsiopolos . . . . . Kearney
- Paul & Helen Casper . . . . . Elm Creek

### LIFE MEMBERS

- David & Linda George . . . . . Kearney

Parish. He accepted, and on March 4, 1904, he was consecrated by Bishop Raphael, the first Syrian Orthodox Bishop in the United States. The Reverend Yanney served St. George's until his death from Spanish influenza on October 28, 1918. He was 44 years of age.

The children of Nicola and Martha attended public school, first in Buckeye Valley and then in Kearney. The eldest son Elias Khourv, known as E. K., attended the Nebraska State Normal School in Kearney where he received a business degree in 1913. He studied at Boyle Business College in Omaha and the University of Omaha for a year, specializing in advanced accounting. In 1915 he became manager/partner of the Yanney Grocery Store with his uncle, George Yanney. In 1916 E. K. was married to Mary Abraham in Ironwood, Michigan. She was born in Fih on January 19, 1900, and emigrated to the United States in 1907 with her parents, Habeeb and Minnie Abraham. They had not planned to bring Mary with them but she could read and write both English and Arabic and the parents needed her as an interpreter. Mary had chickenpox when she arrived at Ellis Island and was held a week before she could enter the United States. The family settled in Ironwood where a brother of Habeeb lived.

Mary's marriage to E. K. was the result of traditional Arabic matchmaking by their families. It was not the wish of Mary but she was not allowed to object. The Orthodox ceremony was solemnized by E. K.'s father on November 6, 1916. Returning to Kearney, Mary found herself at age 16 cooking and keeping house not only for her husband, but for his father and two brothers also. E. K. left the grocery store and went to work for the Union Pacific for a while, then became deputy county treasurer of Buffalo County in 1921-22. On May 2, 1922, he was sworn in as a deputy revenue collector, and five years later became a Collector of Internal Revenue of Nebraska, a position he held until his retirement in 1944. His offices were in the southwest corner of the second floor of the just vacated Post Office building. E. K. passed away on December 23, 1945, at age 51.



Yanney children with friends. Left to right: Michael, Vernon, Minnette, Eugene, Kenneth Abodeeley, and Harvey.

Mary developed into a strong, intelligent business woman and homemaker. Her husband's work required lots of time out of town, which left her to handle their nine children and the family chores. Truck gardening was a family tradition. The family had always raised its own food supply and in addition produced and marketed fruits and vegetables from the family home at 801 West 13th Street, selling also at local stores and door to door. The nine children were kept busy, raising goats for meat and milk, feeding the kids by the bottle, gathering eggs, feeding pigs and chasing the ducks and geese out of the garden. As a reward, each week a family picnic was held in the haymow of the family barn.

Mrs. Yanney died on December 11, 1970. Today a daughter, Minnette (Steinbrink), and her husband Paul reside in the family home and continue the 52-year old family business, selling fresh fruit and vegetables from a self-serve open air market in their backyard. Six of the children of E. K. and Mary are living: Minnette and Margaret (Shada) of Kearney; Mildred (Shada) of Omaha, Eugene of Lodgepole, Vernon of North Platte, and Michael of Omaha.

John K. Yanney, second son of Nicola and Martha moved to Youngstown, Ohio in 1928. Anna, their only daughter, died at age 12. Mose, the youngest, graduated from Kearney High School and attended Kearney State College two years, working also in the Boston Store. He married Wadia Nemer, an immigrant from Lebanon whom he met in O'Neill, Nebraska. This, too, was a family-arranged marriage. They left Kearney soon after their marriage and went into the cafe business, first in Lexington, then in Tecumseh and Lincoln. The couple had seven children.

George and Simon Yanney, were brothers of Nicola who followed him to Buffalo County from Fih. George arrived in 1900. At first he farmed near Riverdale, then operated the Yanney Grocery Store at 2414 Central Avenue until 1930. He married Rebecca Shada in Kearney and they had eight children, seven of whom are living: Nicholas, Abraham, Mary (Gossan), Anna (Warnke), Nora, Elias, Doris (Clark), and Irene (Bloomquist). Little is known of the emigrant Simon Yanney.

A nephew of Nicola, Michael M. Yanney, emigrated to Kearney from Fih in 1904 with his wife Selma (Gager). He worked first for the Union Pacific, then operated a small grocery store at 2023 Central Avenue. After the death of his Uncle Nicola, Michael went into the priesthood to replace his uncle at St. George. He served the parish for seven years (1923-1930), and was instrumental during that time in the construction of the present St. George Church. Father Yanney and his family moved to Sioux City, Iowa in 1930 where he became pastor of St. Thomas's Parish until his retirement. To this marriage were eight children: Emily (Alberts), Rose, Richard, Murrish, George, Mose, Marie and Josephine (Samore). The Very Rev. M. M. Yanney died July 3, 1959.

#### *Abood*

Kamil (Camel) Abood emigrated from Diermirmas, Lebanon in 1903 at the age of eighteen. He and two young cousins joined his brother, Abood Abood, in Kearney. They could not speak, read or write English and made their living peddling. To better understand the difficult times these early immigrants experienced because of the language problem, a tragic ending came to a dinner party to which Camel and his friends and relatives were invited. Helen Abood was hostess in her home, and had prepared a popular Lebanese meatloaf called "kibbee", and she had accidentally used a powdered poison which she thought was a seasoning. All became violently ill.



Camel & Rose Abood, with son Roy. 1914

Helen, her son and two of the guests died, the others were very sick, but survived.

In 1910 Camel returned to Lebanon and married Rose Khourney at the St. Michael Orthodox Church in Diermirmas. When Camel returned to America with his bride in 1913, they located in Gothenburg, then in Iliff, Colorado, and in 1920 moved to Kearney and farmed on "the Island" by the Platte River southeast of town. In 1925 they moved a house from the 1733 Ranch area to 1721 Avenue K and made it their home, raising produce to sell. In later years Camel also raised gladiolas and sold them to Kearney Floral.

Camel and Rose had eleven children, eight of whom are now living: Roy of Kearney; Jeannette of Amherst; Philip of Marshalltown, Iowa; Emma (Kalush) of Okemos, Michigan; George of Lorena, Texas; Lula (Fortino) of Big Rapids, Michigan; Nick of Culver City, California and Dorothy (Holle) of LaPalma, California. All of the children attended Alcott School in southeast Kearney except Jeannette, who attended Bryant School. They all attended Kearney High School. Roy, George and Philip served in the armed forces in World War II.

Amen Abood and his wife Anna (Joseph) were born in Damascus, Syria. Leaving his wife behind, Amen came to America in 1890. He settled first in Michigan, then came to Kearney in 1900 and operated a general store. He returned to Syria to bring his wife and daughter to Kearney, then farmed near Lexington for a short time before returning to Kearney in 1918 where they farmed and peddled merchandise. Six of their seven children are living: Sadie (Toomey), Simon, Johnny and Anthony of Kearney, Charles and Neff of Lexington. Simon owns the Abood Repair Shop in Kearney located at 1115 Central Avenue started by the Abood brothers in the 1940's.

#### *Deeb*

Kalil Dib (Carl Deeb) was born September 9, 1894, in Diermirmas, Syria. He emigrated to this country, arriving on the S. S. Madonna on September 21, 1911, following his brothers David and Abe who had arrived in 1906. In 1921 he was married to Norma Shada in Kearney. The Deebes were farmers and truck gardeners at the southeast edge of Kearney.

In 1937 Carl and Norma took over Abe Joseph's open air fruit and vegetable market at 11 East 21st Street, behind the bank building at 21st Street and Central

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Avenue. There the Deebes' Market operated a retail and wholesale produce business for many years, moving to 2106 Avenue A in the late 1940's.

They had three sons. Victor was killed during combat in World War II. Anthony lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Woodrow in Anamosa, Iowa. Carl died on July 17, 1958, and Norma on June 27, 1984.

#### *Sadd*

Moses Sadd, born in 1863, lived in Damascus, Syria. His wife was Helen George, a sister to Simon, Charlie and Sam George, early immigrants to Kearney. Upon arrival in the United States they lived in Kearney a short while and then moved to Lexington to farm. In 1930 they returned to farm in the Black Woods area just west of Kearney, later moving to Shelton. There were four sons and four daughters. Albert lives in Glenvil, Farris in Hastings, Selma in Fremont and Elwood in Kearney. The other children are deceased. Mose died in January 1957 at age 93 and Helen in 1961.

#### *Jacobs*

Mike Jacobs came to the United States about 1900 and located in Gothenburg where he joined his brothers in farming, with peddling as a sideline. Later he farmed for himself. He liked his new land and immediately applied for citizenship so that his wife, left in Syria, would automatically become a citizen and would not have to stay at Ellis Island. Becoming a citizen took nearly five years, so that when he sent for his wife Helen and their first child Mary, she was five years old before her father saw her. They moved to Buffalo County, farming near Odessa and Kearney. Mike and Helen had eight children. A son Jake resides in Wood River.

There were other Syrian and Lebanese emigrants to Buffalo County on which there is little information. Some of the family names are Bolus, Nessar, Nama, Simon, Malouf, Elias, Coury, Gibreal, Haddad, Saba, Hydar, Korrey, Davis, Abe Williams and Abe Joseph.

Today the joy of having come to America continues. St. George Orthodox Church remains the center of cultural and social life for many of these families. Matched marriages are fewer in number, but the Arabic language is often sung or spoken.

#### SOURCES

Murrish Yanney, *Yanney Family Heritage*; Rev. Nicola's Arabic Bible translated by Father John Essa; Interviews with Nick Yanney, Norma Jean Deeb, Mildred Shada, Jake Jacob, Simon, Rose and Roy Abood, Jeannette Bergt and Elwood Sadd; *Kearney Daily Hub*, *Kearney City Directories*; Cemetery Records and Buffalo County Naturalization Index.