



# Buffalo Tales



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## Winded: Kearney's Cyclone of 1908 By Heather Stauffer

Down Newark way the storm cloud made a plaything of a new four thousand dollar farm residence being erected by W. H. Householder and almost completed. Information is that it was completely wrecked.

--Kearney Hub, June 6, 1908

In 1908, nearly 22,000 people lived in Buffalo County, and since Kearney's population numbered around 6,000, the county was heavily rural. This dispersal of population probably accounted for the limited amount of damage caused by the town of Kearney's first, and only, tornado that struck the southern side of town on the evening of Thursday, June 4, 1908. The storm sent rain and hail falling all across the county starting late in the afternoon. Between four and six p.m., funnel clouds began forming. One eye witness, Conductor Belnap of the Kearney & Aurora passenger train, sighted at least six "twisters in the air" around Kearney. Though only one funnel touched down and wisped through part of town, the damage it caused was impressive.

Residents of Kearney read about the excitement of the night before on the second page of Friday's Kearney Daily Hub, starting with how the tornado's crossing of the Platte River caused "water [to be] drawn into the air to a great height" before heading northwest and pummeling into Elwood Jenkins home on the south side of town. Mr. Jenkins was in town, but his wife, two year old son, and baby were at the house. Mrs. Jenkins saw the funnel approaching, and only had time to grab the children and sit in a rocking chair before the cyclone picked up the entire house (Mrs. Jenkins still clutching the children inside) and turned it into a pile of debris well away from the foundation. She crawled out of the remains of the residence carrying her injured offspring, and headed for town. Mr. Jenkins and his father, J.H. Jenkins of the first ward, met up with them en route. They were taken to Drs. Mills right away (Eliza B. Mills and G.M. Mills were listed in the directory around that time). Mrs. Jenkins suffered from "severe injuries about the hips," her son a concussion, and the baby severe bruising. The Jenkins lost their house, barn, coup, buggy, most of the chickens, as well as \$32 stored in the house, none of which was insured.

(continued on Page 2)

### Director's Report

My, my, winter is definitely upon us! It is so gorgeous out here at the Trails & Rails Museum. Today we have the big, fluffy white snowflakes drifting down. It really gets you in the Holiday Spirit!

Speaking of, the 20th Annual Christmas Tree Walk is in full swing. There are 31 participants this year with several challenges out over the Penny Wars. Rumor has it; it will come down to the last hour of the ten-day event to see who the winner will be. I have organizations that have saved up pennies all year-round for this event.

Other recent good news includes a very generous grant. We happily accepted a \$1750 grant through the Kearney Area Community Foundation for acid-free tissue paper and archival boxes in numerous sizes. It is our responsibility to preserve the artifacts and archives that we house at the museum. The community grants and sponsorships help us to reach this goal.

Hope you each spend quality time with friends and family over the holiday season and we look forward to working with you in the near future!

Sincerely, Jennifer  
Executive Director

(continued from Page 1)



*Remains of Elwood Jenkins' place, June 5, 1908.*

When George Niles saw the cyclone approaching, he and his family took cover in a hole by their well. Their house was lifted up and placed southeast of the foundation by about one hundred feet (pictured below).



The storm also wreaked havoc on the G.S. Frank home south of town on "the former Schramm celery farm." Half of the house was destroyed, while other walls remained intact. Damages, partially covered by insurance, were estimated at \$2,500.

Meanwhile, the tornado smashed through the W.H. Cash home, where Mrs. Cash, their two daughters, grandson, and small dog sought shelter in a well hole. They survived in the hole, which was about three feet across, but all of their buildings and animals (except for the dog with them) suffered from the malice of the cyclone. Damages were estimated at four to five thousand dollars.

As the cyclone continued to the northeast, Barney Overheiser and J.H. Nichols lost their barns and suffered damages to the houses. Mr. Overheiser reported damages at \$250.

Mrs. John Wagner was home when the tornado picked up their house and deposited it west of the foundation. She was able to crawl out of the debris before the storm again picked up the house, "leaving the place where the building first struck as clean as though there had been no storm." Mrs. Wagner was left partially paralyzed, and the couple lost everything on their property.

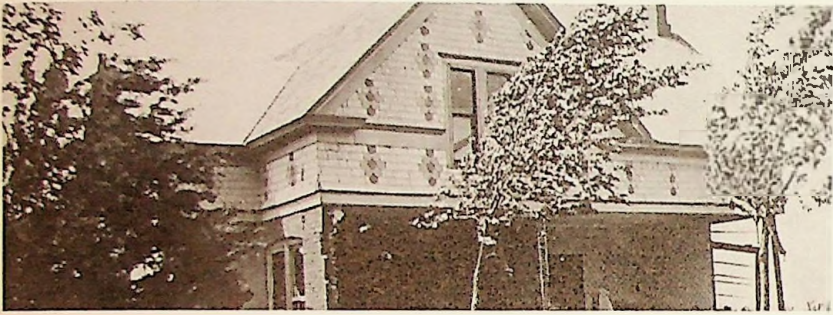
When the twister intersected Central Avenue south of the court house, it knocked down many small barns, blew out windows, removed chimneys, then skipped over some houses on Thirteenth Street and Second Avenue before picking up Mr. Parr's house and, amazingly, doing little damage as it set it down four feet north of the foundation.



*The Bond's house*

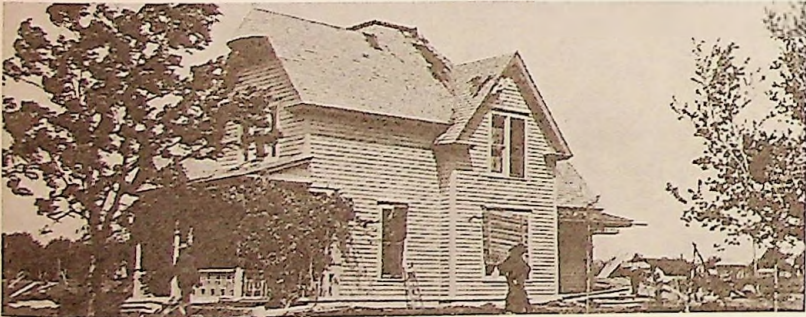
Across the street, D.C. Bond and his wife ran out of their cottage and held on to trees as the storm wrecked their house and barn, then threw the roof five hundred feet, where it landed by Kenwood school (ruins pictured above).

Down the block, Mr. A.P. Salgren and his family had just reached their next-door-neighbor's home, that of A.T. Anderson, before the tornado knocked out part of the Salgren's two-story home.



*Salgren home*

Though entire sections were missing, some pictures on the walls were left alone as an eerie reminder of the "normalcy" enjoyed earlier that day. Both families' barns were demolished, as well as that of their neighbor, E.J. Woolworth (whose house is pictured below). Woolworth's house was also lifted off the foundation, and after the brick foundation fell into the cellar, was dropped back down, intact minus the chimney and windows. Woolworth's losses totaled about \$800.



The cyclone's final victims were at Seventeenth Street and Eighth Avenue. There, it removed shingles from Mrs. William Hecht's home, and blew out windows and part of the roof of Senator Norris Brown's residence.

Despite such extensive damages and close-calls, no human fatalities were reported. In the days following the storm, many oddities of the cyclone were reported, including the discovery by A.H. Cash of a pocket watch belonging to his family, which he found one mile north of his home.

Multiple funnel clouds were spotted across the county, and though Kearney's cyclone did the most damage, reports of excessive rain and hail were also reported. A funnel cloud touched down just east of the State Industrial School and traveled northeast to the Glenwood area before abating. Though damages were less expensive around the county, the storm did take its toll. Wheat fields near Center were damaged by hail; the South Loup River near Pleasanton flooded after twelve hours of heavy rain; barns in the north-eastern part of the county were damaged and destroyed; the railroad line to Pleasanton near Boolus was washed out; trees along the Wood River near Glenwood were pulled up

by the roots, stripped of bark, and broken to pieces; hail stones near the Wood River that pummeled the ground contained mud in the middle, several of which were about eight inches in circumference, and the largest (fifteen inches around) weighed two pounds.

Almost immediately after the storm's damages were apparent, the local Relief Committee began investigating losses and "The Cyclone Fund" was organized as a call for monetary donations to help the victims around town, most of whom were uninsured. The second meeting for the group was held on the evening of Saturday, June 6th at city hall. Monetary losses for each residence and farm were recorded, and affirmations made that everyone who suffered damages would get some money from the fund based on the proportion of the total. By the second meeting, the committee had raised about \$1,100, and Chairman Jas. Boyd reported that every person they asked had given something. The town seemed to empathize with the sufferers, a feeling the Hub highlighted--especially after the editors of Kearney's newspapers were appointed to the soliciting committee for gathering money--by stating, "It is considered a privilege to be allowed to donate to the relief fund. Many of the sufferers are Buffalo county pioneers whose heads have become whitened by the snows of Nebraska winters. Many saw everything that they had accumulated in a lifetime of hard work vanish in the whirl winds. The spirit in which those who suffered from the storm bear their losses should be commended. They are not prejudiced and they do not complain. It means only more work, with work of youth after the shoulders are rounded by age." The meeting was adjourned and another scheduled for June 20 when the total of the collection would be calculated and dispersed.



*Photo of wreckage taken the morning of June 5, 1908.*

Another fund was started after the Thursday storm produced the funnel in Glenwood Park, north of Kearney, which demolished the property of George W. Poole. In describing this fund, not only did the Hub list each donor, but also how much they gave. Almost seventy contributors gave a total of \$250.65. Regarding the Kearney Cyclone Fund, however, after the June 6 meeting, nothing more was mentioned.

Kearney residents showed their best efforts in aiding those who had suffered from the town's only tornado, and cleaning up began almost immediately. Senator Norris Brown's house had been damaged that Thursday night, and by the time he and his family returned from Washington four days later, on Monday, June 8, "he found that friends had looked after repairs on his house...and it was ready for the family to 'move right in,' but he was manifestly disappointed that the twister which ripped up the roof did not also 'raise the mortgage.'"

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Dr. Mark R. Ellis, Editor

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Family .....	\$40.00
Institutional Membership .....	\$50.00
Supporting Membership .....	\$75.00
Life-Individual .....	\$275.00
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\*\*We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.\*\*

*Directors*

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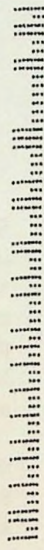
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Sources were found in several articles of The Kearney Hub from June 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1908. Population numbers were estimated from U.S. Census reports of 1910. Photographs taken by H. Swan, courtesy Buffalo County Historical Society.



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