

# Upcoming Events

## Wagons West Celebration

Make sure you come out to the Trails & Rails Museum Saturday, June 29 from 10-2 pm for the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Wagons West Celebration! See black smith demonstrations, children's games, vintage tractor show, quilting, and more!

## Flea Market

In conjunction with our Wagons West Celebration, we will be having a Flea Market on our West property! Come check out all of the vendors 9am-5pm on Saturday, June 9th. Contact Gary Straatmann for details..

## 7th Annual Trivia Contest

Get a team together of 8 of your smartest friends on Tuesday, August 27th from 6-9:30pm for the 7th Annual Trivia Contest & Dinner! Eat good food, answer questions, win prizes, and have a GREAT time! Cost is \$10/person. Location to be determined.



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 68848-0523.

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Katherine Wielechowski, Editor

2013 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Individual.....	\$35.00
Family.....	\$40.00
Institutional Membership.....	\$50.00
Supporting Membership.....	\$75.00
Silver Engineer.....	\$125.00
Gold Engineer.....	\$250.00

\*\*We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.\*\*

### Directors

Term expiring June 1, 2013: Vicki Bissell, Chad Henning, Lynn Rauner, Lance Hehner

Term expiring June 1, 2014: Mary Beth Lowe, Sharon Martin, Duane Muhlbach, Mike Peak

Term expiring June 1, 2015: Corene Philips, Dan Speirs, Gary Straatmann, Bernie Hascall

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# Buffalo Tales

May/June 2013

## **Memories from the Saunders**

### **Family**

#### **Kearney Residents from the Late 1800s**

**By Jane Ball Niswonger**

*This article is based on a number of sources including, family pictures, family letters, stories told in the family down through the decades and some research done in Sweden by friends of the family. I need to provide a caveat that there could be errors at the detail level, but in the larger view, the story of our family in Kearney, NE is accurate and fondly told.*

After the Civil War, towns were sprouting up in the mid-west area of vast ranches and small farms worked by the offspring of pioneers. One of these towns was Kearney. Kearney in the 1880's was experiencing the advent of the railroads, and the growth of small towns with their libraries, churches, schoolhouses and, yes, saloons, built by people looking for a fresh start in life. Kearney grew from the influx of immigrants as did many other small towns. Kearney in particular and Nebraska as a whole, seemed to gather folks with a particular moral fiber and point of view. They were practical people with a sense of community. The libraries, the schools, the barn raisings and the churches were nurtured by the community, and the small merchant traded and supported his fellow townspeople, all with a view to establishing a community.

In 1867, a 12-year-old named John Dallas Saunders, left his family in a southern state and arrived in Kearney to meet with relatives already living there. As time passed, he was fortunate enough to be able to land a job with room and board in the Carriage House of the Frank family at the Frank House. Mr. Frank was an entrepreneur and one of the developers of Kearney.

Mr. Frank built a hydro electric plant that provided the energy needed by Kearney to move into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and bring all the benefits of America's developing technical advances. J.D. was able to work for Mr. Frank and develop his knowledge and skills

in engineering to the level where he was one of the people recognized for this achievement.

This was proved by the fact that he received an invitation to visit the White House. One of the favorite family stories about that trip, is that J.D. requested to see the kitchens in order to see the state of the art appliances at the White House.

Not too long after the turn of the century, J.D. had become a small businessman who owned and ran a grocery store and multi use establishment that today we might call a shopping mall or department store in a residential neighborhood.



J.D. Saunder's store at the right.  
(Date unknown)

The neighborhood also had a Normal School, AKA Teachers College, which was a large brick edifice housing administration, classes, lodging and the dining room for the school. The college has evolved into University of Nebraska, Kearney.

Across the street from the college was the block that held the 3-peaked roof building, housing a busy set of shops that were run by J.D. and his wife, Tilly.

With two stories, three wings, a basement labyrinth, and a loading dock, all sorts of enterprises hummed away. The soda fountain would have been the most popular with young people from the college, and the bookstore offered an intellectual hub. There was

also a cafeteria, a butcher shop, a beauty parlor and even a sundries department. The establishment was nicknamed the "Button Club". Of course there was no limit to membership, but we still get the idea of a community center for news and intellectual stimulation for the citizens of Kearney and a way for a new comer to make himself or herself known in the community.

The grocery store was the heart of the matter since during all the economic ups and downs, it was a staple of life. The townsfolk developed relationships of trust with each other, and credit was extended to customers as well as delivery services. Jobs were the other great service provided. Many a student or young person looking for a start, was able to make that first step with a job in one of the stores, or even as a salesperson selling their goods at wholesale in order to make a living.

With all the desperate folk coming in and out of the stores, the availability of newspapers and magazines in the bookstore provided news of the day and was part of the draw. No doubt acquaintances passing in and out enjoyed a friendly chat.

John Douglas and Tilly ran the stores for many years and raised a family of 10 children. Theirs is one of a myriad of stories about the events and the people of this memorable small town in America.

#### About the Author

*Ms. Niswonger wrote the story using information provided by her father, so at her request, the biography of Doug Ball follows:*

"Bio" for John Douglas "Doug" Ball – Born Kearney, NE - 1918

Doug was born in Kearney and moved to Long Beach, CA with his family when he was about 12 years old. He returned to Kearney for a couple of summers and worked in his grandparent's store which is the main subject of this story. He mostly helped with stocking shelves and making deliveries in the old pick-up truck used for that purpose. He had many cousins with whom he kept in touch over the years (decades).

Doug met his wife Martha at Stanford University. WWII began shortly thereafter and they married. After the war ended, they lived and raised their family of 2 boys and 1 girl in Menlo Park, CA. Doug worked at AT&T his whole career and then he and Martha retired to Santa Cruz, CA. They live and enjoy retirement and continue to play bridge and enjoy grandchildren and great-grandchildren. All of the children and grandchildren have enjoyed hearing all the stories of his fond memories of Kearney and the Saunders family.

## 2013 Calendar of Events

**Sunday, June 9:** 6th Annual ½ Marathon/5K: Buffalo County Stampede—Reg. @ 6 am. Race @ 7

**Saturday, June 29 from 10-2 pm:** 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Wagons West Celebration

**Tuesday, August 27th from 6-9:30pm:** 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Trivia Contest & Dinner

**Saturday, Oct. 26 (time TBD):** 3rd Annual Old-fashioned Halloween Party

**All of November:** Christmas Decorating (during regular business hours)

**Saturday, November 30 from 12-1pm:** Members Only Preview of the 26th Annual Christmas Tree Walk

**First two weekends in Dec. (Nov. 30/Dec.1 and Dec. 7/8) from 1-5 pm:** Open to the public: 26th Annual Christmas Tree Walk

### Education notes:

**Ghost Hunting classes** with the Midwest Paranormal Investigators

**Fabulous Fridays** will continue to be held on the 2nd Friday of each month.

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

PO Box 523, 710 W. 11th St., Kearney, NE 68848  
(308) 234-3041 www.bchs.us bchs.us@hotmail.com

We hope you enjoy these stories about Buffalo County and we would love to hear yours! Please submit your memories and stories to us by e-mailing them to bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com or sending them to the post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848.

**We appreciate your support!**

### Director's Report

-The 2013 Preservationist of the Year Award has been awarded to Corliss Dixon and the Pleasanton FBLA for preserving the Pleasanton depot which is an important piece of Pleasanton's history.

-The first ever Volunteer of the Year award was given to Todd Pickering for his continued support and help at the Trails & Rails Museum and organizing the 1/2 Marathon three years in a row.

-The 'Kearney Cultural Partners' met with Roger Jasnoch Tuesday, May 14 and we met again on Tuesday, May 21 to start working on a grant for the KVB to help with promoting us.

-a grant for \$1.1 million has been submitted to the Peter Kiewit Foundation. We should know around the end of June or beginning of July .

**Be sure to join the Buffalo County Historical Society group or the Buffalo County Historical Society/Trails & Rails Museum fan page on Facebook!**

**Trails & Rails Museum**

**Buffalo County Historical Society**

**710 West 11th St. P.O. Box 523**

**Kearney, NE 68848-0523**



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