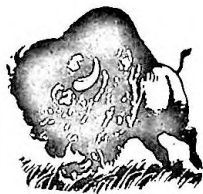




Buffalo Tales



Volume 3, No. 7

Buffalo County Historical Society

July-August 1980

THEY LOVED A PARADE Part II

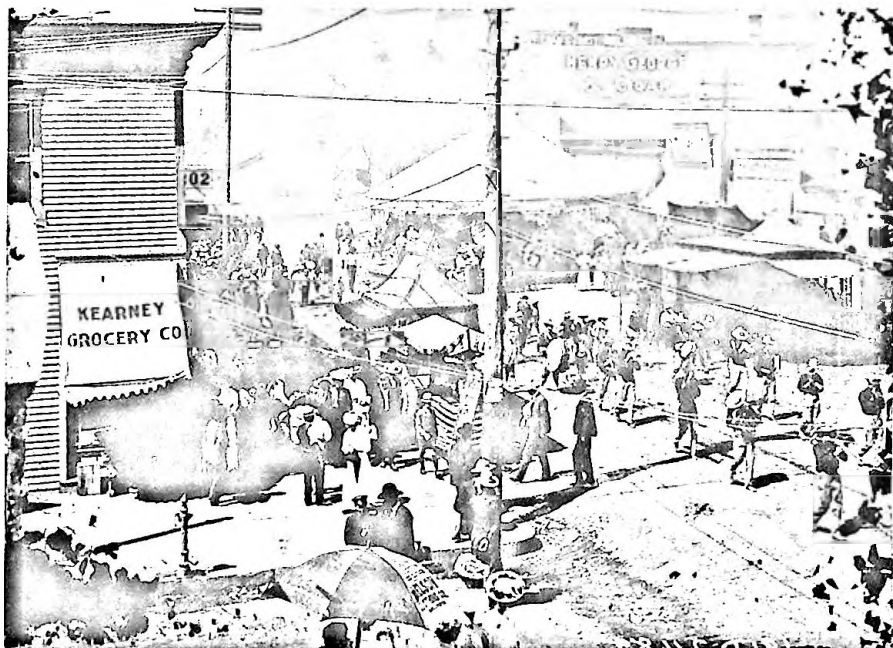
Margaret Ellen Nielsen

Kearney was twenty-five years old in 1898, but its citizens had little reason to celebrate. The town was still feeling the effects of the triple disasters of the early nineties: collapse of the Kearney boom, severe drouth, and the Panic of 1893.

The Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha was considered a state-wide undertaking. However, when it was proposed that the exposition be continued for another year, Kearneyites expressed their opposition to "the continual circus parade." The City Council went on record as against its continuance, adding, "We have proven our loyalty...notwithstanding it has been a considerable detriment to our business...and home interests and we have done our part in making it a success."

The Fourth of July

Townspople were forced to go elsewhere to celebrate the Fourth of July that year. In Pleasanton, "The Honorable W. L. Greene spread the eagle in his own peculiar style, jumped on the Spanish, and howled for the flag until he was hoarse."



Carnival at Kearney, 1907

(Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)

Buffalo Tales is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Editor..... Gene E. Hamaker

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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WITH THE SOCIETY

The Pioneers and Early Settlers are now featured in the exhibit room of the Trails & Rails Museum. A military escort wagon of the trails era has been loaned to us by the Fort Kearny Historical Park for the special exhibit. Many items used by the pioneers are on display for the remainder of the summer.

The flagpole has been raised on the museum grounds. Its dedication in memory of former officer and board member, the late Will C. Mueller, will be held on Tuesday evening, August 5 at 7:30 p.m. at the museum. Members and friends are invited to this event.

The June tour to Catherland in Red Cloud was cancelled. It will be rescheduled for a Sunday in September.

Parades are a part of the story in this issue of Buffalo Tales. We find that our file of photographs on this subject is quite scanty, considering the number of parades held over the years. We especially would like a picture of the 1922 Goat Parade, one of the largest, we are told, in Kearney's history.

The **Kearney Hub** noted, "People did more celebrating than for a long time."

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Kearney citizens had regained much of their optimism. This was rewarded in 1903 when the town was selected as the site for a new normal school. The laying of the cornerstone for the first new building was conducted by the Grand Lodge of the A.F. & A.M. The crowd was large in spite of a severe rainstorm. "Neither the roll of thunder nor the tattoo of falling hail could dampen the enthusiasm of this gathering," according to the **Kearney Hub**.

A typical Fourth of July celebration in Kearney during the early years of the twentieth century included a parade, oratory and band concerts on the high school lawn. A "train carnival" might pull into town and set up rides and other attractions on Central Avenue. At times the observation car of the train was opened up and folded back to make room for a screen on which such movies as "The Great Train Robbery" were shown.

Dr. Frank O. Raasch tells of the year that a Baptist minister appeared at a city council meeting to protest the "girlie show" at the carnival.

"Why, you can even see part of their bosoms," he said.

"Why, that's terrible," the mayor exclaimed. "I move we adjourn and investigate this ourselves.!"

Part of the Fourth of July observance might be held on the banks of Kearney Lake. The feature of the show, a high diving act, would be postponed until 11:00 p.m. or later to hold the crowd on the grounds as long as possible.

Halloween

Halloween had always brought out

"ghoulies and ghosties and long leggety beasties

And things that go bump in the night."

Herbert K. Greenman wrote at the time of Kearney's Fiftieth Anniversary, "How many remember the big Halloween Celebration of '88 when Central Avenue looked like a wreck, with a threshing machine blocking both the doors to both Greer's and Robert's stores, and a top buggy astride the roof of Judge Whittier's office building?"

The Kearney Retailers, in 1922, tried to corral wayward spirits by holding a day-long Halloween celebration. The crowd, lured to town by parades, free attractions and bargains in all the stores, was estimated at 12,000 at the morning parade and 15,000 at night.

The morning feature was a goat parade, "there participated 147 goats, each in costume, and each accompanied by his or her retinue of herders...and their costumes were even more ludicrous than the goats."

The Halloween lighting scheme of the night parade gave a "weird and most appropriate touch of color". The floats and "scores of masked revelers moved up and down the parade area for over an hour. Then the street was turned over to those in costume who made merry in Halloween fashion. That show, once under way, nothing could check it until the orchestras at the various dances struck up 'Home Sweet Home'."

Eleanor Nelson Horner of College Station, Texas, writes of her chief impression of the Goat Parade, "Dr. (L.T.) Sidwell, Superintendent of the T.B. Hospital, who was about as wide as he was tall, wore a harem dancing girl's costume, full baggy pants, bra top, and the veil covering nose and mouth and hanging to his shoulders. He danced a sort of seductive dance, gliding up to some man on the sidewalk and

either tried to kiss him or give him a bump. People laughed until they cried he was so funny."

Armistice, 1918

One of the largest—and loudest—of the impromptu celebrations occurred on November 7, 1918 when word came through at 2:00 p.m. that the guns had stopped firing on the Western front. Pandemonium broke out on Central Avenue. Schools and businesses were closed as the populace took to the streets in a driving rain.

The **Hub** described "a burlesque band composed of employees of a local department store, horns sounding, tin pans tintinnabulating, and iron hammer striking on stove poker." Add to that blowing whistles, heavy and continuous bombardment by every gun owner in Kearney, tin horn kazoos, tambourines, sleigh bells, hand bells—anything audible..."Dressed in his faded blue uniform of the sixties, with the same knapsack and saber hanging at his belt, John Lawler, Civil War veteran, paraded the street surrounded by an admiring throng of small boys who trotted along at a half canter to keep up with his double-quick military gait. At intervals this doughty old soldier stopped to fire off his ancient muzzle-loading blunderbuss..."

Across the street another group of children followed a "jocular and sportive character...A very portly gentleman, he was ludicrously camouflaged by a blue calico wrapper and slick yellow auto cap...he daintily held up petticoats, revealing sizable legs clad in blue overalls...and still the whistles blew...A hearse bore, so the sign proclaimed, 'The Kaiser'...Small boys, faces polka-dotted with mud rode the front, the rear, and straddled the hood."

The celebration continued into the night with "bonfire variations...the cold, gray dawn of the morning after, with its rumors that news of the signing was false, could not dispel the general joy."

The celebration of November 11 was somewhat of an anticlimax. Whistles were blown when a flash came over the **Hub** wires that the Armistice had been signed. Then everyone went back to bed until "the fire whistle began its unearthly screeching at 5:00 a.m. and huge motor trucks went zipping around the streets, their occupants firing guns and yelling 'Get up, Get up' in historic Paul Revere fashion, the people of Kearney realized that this Armistice wasn't so phony after all." School was again dismissed, reason enough for the joy of the youngsters and the celebration continued "from before dawn until after dark"...The parade was organized this time, many flags were displayed, quantities of popcorn, and other refreshments were consumed.

The **Hub** reported, "There never was such a glorious day as the day the armistice went into effect."

College Hi-jinks

Another "unofficial" parade provided Kearney with "one of its first exhibitions of college hilarity" on July 24, 1923, when a "shirt-tail" parade of "almost every boy in attendance" celebrated the end of the summer term. The **Hub** wrote, "the feat was planned quietly and as a result both the college authorities and the citizens were taken by surprise. Some of the citizens admitted afterwards that when the first shouts of the boys were heard on Central Avenue, they did not know but what the town had been invaded by the ghosts of Indian warriors seeking their previous hunting grounds."

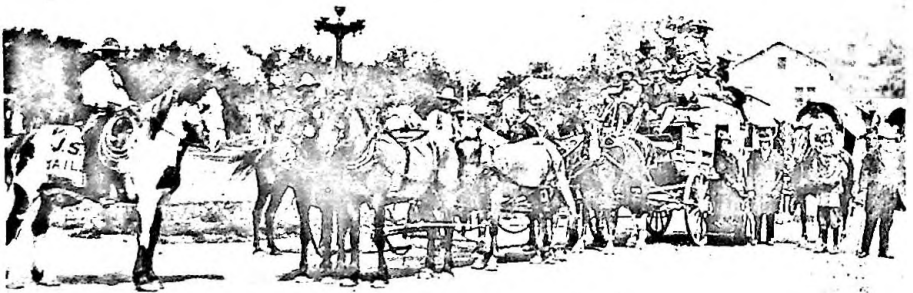
Gathering at Tent City, back of the college, the boys formed a line "and giving 'right undress' marched in route step down 25th Street. Beginning with the hotel at the north end of the business district and ending at the station at the south end, they

invaded every place of business that was open." They entered both theaters, "gave a few college yells and gave the patrons a show they had not paid for." After consuming free water at the Emporia candy kitchen, "they proceeded to stage a ghost dance at the...23rd Street intersection. Although the boys broke the quiet of the evening they broke nothing else, and the police commended them on being a considerate crowd...after the downtown demonstration the revelers proceeded to take vengeance on all male students who had failed to take part. All boys found were compelled to run a gauntlet while the palms of hundreds of hands were applied with telling effect to their persons."

Kearney's Golden Anniversary

The three-day Golden Anniversary celebration in 1923 brought an estimated crowd of 51,000 to Kearney. Several months before the scheduled event, the Chamber of Commerce had sent letters to former residents urging them to come back for the celebration or to write of their own memories of Kearney. A bound volume of "The Kearney-Come-Back Club Letters" is now the property of the Historical Society, and provides a wealth of material about early Kearney.

Between seven and eight thousand were served at the barbecue on the high school grounds on September 12. The Honorable Norris Brown of Omaha referred to the "Kearney gait" of the celebrants which was also manifested "when before the ashes of the ruins (of the Midway Hotel, 1891) were cold, plans had been drafted and efforts made to finance rebuilding."



Parade Kearney's 50th Anniversary 1923

A magic lantern show of "old timers and some not so old" was presented. "Old time pictures of present citizens, notably Dr. Basten, Jack Lowe, Dan Morris, M. A. Brown, were sufficient to produce a riot." "The campfire" was presided over to Will M. Maupin who arrived as job printer during the Kearney boom with 19¢ in his pocket, and "departed after the crash with \$2.00 borrowed from Frank Rhone."

The parade on Thursday was led by Colonel Curt Alexander of Hastings, who was reputed to look like Buffalo Bill, and by J. A. Boyd. It was a "review of historical comparisons and modern incongruities...Keenan's Float was by far the most popular...and the generous Big Chief threw out handfuls of his famous candy to them...There were expressions of amazement at the length of the line and the evident trouble to which every participant had gone."

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A "Fiftieth Anniversary Premier Circus" was held Thursday evening with "indescribable acts" presented by home talent, including "Rilonette, the human volcano" and "Lizzie, the Ford who can think."

Train service was provided to the fair grounds on Friday night for the grand climax, a \$15,000 firework demonstration. The Hub estimated there were eleven to thirteen thousand on the fair grounds and another four thousand at strategic points outside. "Never in all the history of the fair has a crowd of such proportions been assembled on the premises."

In years to come, celebrations would be more elaborate, and costly, but it is doubtful that any of them could match the enthusiasm and spontaneity displayed during Kearney's first half century.

SOURCES

Kearney Daily Hub; Come Back Letters, 1923; Raasch, an Interview, July 1979; Eleanor Nelson Horner, letter dated July 1, 1979.

They Loved a Parade, Part I, appeared in *Buffalo Tales*, January 1980.