



Buffalo Tales



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Buda: The oldest "Town" in Buffalo County

by Mardi Anderson

Buda is the oldest "town" in Buffalo County. It is located 2.5 miles east of Kearney, just east of the airport road, along Highway 30, on the south side of the highway and south of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Originally Buda was known as Kearney Station, but the name was changed to Shelby in 1872 because of confusion caused by the new town of Kearney Junction. This new name was soon confused with Shelton, another newly founded town in Buffalo County. Thus, on October 23, 1878 the name was changed to Buda. According to Fitzpatrick's *Nebraska Place-Names*, "it was called Buda after an old religious center." Other sources claim that it was named after Buda, Illinois or more than likely after Budapest, Hungary. Elton Perkey provides still another possibility. As a town closely connected to the railroad, Perkey suggests, that the name might have come from boxes or equipment labeled "Buda Foundry and Manufacturing Company."



The old Buda School (1910)

WITH THE SOCIETY

A Note from the Society:

As we ring in a new year we also begin the membership renewal and new membership process. Current members should have received membership statements in the mail. If you are a member we encourage you to continue your support of the Buffalo County Historical Society. We also encourage you to bring a friend into the society. We are exploring many new programs and events to make our society more accessible and informative. If you have any suggestions on how to better serve our membership please contact the Society/Trails and Rails Museum office at (308) 234-3041 11:00 to 4:00 Monday through Friday. Or you can E-mail us, bchs@kearney.net.

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The Union Pacific Railroad founded Buda in the summer of 1866 as work crews laid track through the Platte Valley. Buda was the ideal location for a town because it was directly across the Platte River from Fort Kearny. This was the nearest location to the fort where passengers and supplies could disembark. According to Andreas' *History of Nebraska*, "When the town was first laid out considerable effort was made to build up a town of importance. It is said that the town had at one time a population of nearly 600. This population, however, was of a temporary character, if, indeed, there ever were so many residents." In the very earliest days of the county, which was organized in 1870, some of the county's business was conducted in Kearney Station (Buda) before Gibbon and later Kearney served as county seats.

Kearney Station's fate was doomed when it was discovered that the town was actually located on the Fort Kearny Military Reservation. A small corner of that 10-mile square tract of land extended into Buffalo County at this point. Because this was federal property the U.S. government could have forced any residents to vacate the land. With no clear title to the land and fearing that they may lose their property, the early residents began moving out and the town was almost completely abandoned. The few buildings that had been built were moved away and by the end of 1866 only the station and a section house remained. Later, in 1877 after Fort Kearny closed, the land was opened to settlement and people returned. But it was too late for a sizable town to develop at this location because five miles to the west the new community of Kearney Junction was flourishing while Gibbon had been founded and was flourishing seven miles to the east.

Like so many other towns in Buffalo County, Buda owes its existence to the railroad. Soon after completion of the railroad, the Union Pacific was awarded a mail contract and post offices were set up along the rail route. The first post office was at Kearney Station, which was established on December 3, 1868. Unfortunately, without a thriving community to support the post office it was closed on March 17, 1869. However, it seems that mail trains continued to drop off and pick up mail

there because later references are made to local residents getting their mail at Buda. From about 1871 to 1876 John Reddy worked for the Union Pacific at Kearney Station. His territory extended from Gibbon to Kearney Station (Buda). When the weather was bad he would walk the whole 9-mile section between Gibbon and Buda checking for loose track and washouts.

In the early 1870's the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad was built across southeast Nebraska and into the Buffalo County region to form a junction with the Union Pacific. Because the Union Pacific did not own land at the junction it had no depot and would not stop its trains there. Instead, trains stopped at Kearney Station on the east or at Stevenson's Siding on the west. Finally, an agreement was reached in which some land was transferred back to the Union Pacific, allowing the company to stop their trains at Kearney Junction, thereby further diminishing the importance of Buda as a railroad stop. The Buda agent at that time was J.N. Keller. He was sent to Kearney as the Union Pacific agent and worked in the north half of the Burlington depot while Ralph Grimes served as the Burlington agent in the south half of the building.

Sandwiched between Kearney and Gibbon meant that Buda would remain a small Buffalo County community. In 1890 Buda had a population of only twenty-five and it reached its peak of forty-five people in 1910. Its inhabitants in 1890 included an agricultural implement dealer, a justice of the peace, a blacksmith, and the station agent who also served as the postmaster. D. Wort operated a grain elevator in Buda. He opened his business after losing the election for a second term as county sheriff in 1899. He already owned a grain business in Pleasanton and after leaving the sheriff's office he expanded to several towns in the county, including Buda. By 1900 Buda had a grocery, church, Wort's grain elevator, and a school. The agricultural implement dealer, justice of the peace, blacksmith, and the station agent named ten years earlier were apparently gone. A Presbyterian Church was established about 1907-1909 in Buda. It was located next to the general store. Perhaps this was the formal organization of the church that was meeting there in 1900. Later, after the church closed, their building was moved to southeast Kearney.

Buda School, District 11 was organized in 1871. The school was actually located a mile east of Buda on the north side of the highway but it was near enough to take the name. Bonds with a total value of \$1700 were issued in June 1873 for building and furnishing a school. Funds for repayment were raised through taxes in the district. One would guess that a sod structure, like in so many other pioneer communities, was used for the first school sessions until the wooden structure was erected. A picture in the *Hub* newspaper shows this building to be the typical rectangular structure with three windows on a side and the entry door on the end.

At some time before the turn of the century a new larger school was built. We might guess that it was in the summer of 1894 because in

September a ceremony was held for the raising of a 40-flag pole from which a "spick and span new flag flung to the breeze." There was a program and speeches by Senator Norris Brown and W.L. Hand. The *Hub* proclaimed this a great day and "at the close 'Old Glory' will float over one more school house as an inspiration to the rising generation."

As was true of schools in so many parts of Buffalo County, the Buda School was a community center. Community meetings, literary societies, and dances were usually held at local schools. At the Buda School the first 4-H horse and colt club in the nation was organized in about 1915. In 1918 or 1919 the schoolhouse was destroyed by fire and classes were held in a barn while the new building was built. The new building had the same shape, perhaps the same foundation, but it did not have the bell tower. The entrance was placed in the center front instead of under the bell tower at the corner and a second story was added. The basement of the school had two restrooms, lunchroom, and a shop for the boys. On the first floor there was one large classroom with a divider that could be lowered. The high school classes (9-11) were taught on the second floor. The last high school classes were taught 1941-2. Then Buda was an eight-grade school until it merged with Center School District #28 at the end of the school year in 1959. This building is still standing today (December 2003).

The building had various uses after the school closed. It served as a family home and as a place to raise dogs before it was renovated into apartments in 1995. Presently the building has five apartments. In the basement there are two one-bedroom apartments while a pair of two-bedroom apartments are on the main floor and an efficiency apartment sits on the second floor.

Buda today is much like it was a century ago. It is a quiet little community with a mix of residences and businesses, mainly agriculturally oriented. The Wort elevator was removed about 1980 and was probably last used during the late 1970's when this author rented it to warehouse newspaper collected by the Kearney Recycling Center before it was shipped off to be made into cellulose insulation. The Solomon Dehydrating Company silos are currently being used by Platte Valley Feeders, a feed yard about three miles north, to store corn. At the east end of Buda, next to Imperial Road, stand two blue warehouses. The smaller one is used by FedEx. There are two businesses in the larger one. Northwest Electric repairs electric motors and Select Sprayers sells herbicide sprayers. Big Flag Farm Supply Fertilizer Plant is the largest business in Buda. It occupies the space between Solomon and a row of residences. A large metal building along the railroad tracks, with "Buda Corn and Storage" painted on its side, is used by Heartland Soda and Sandblasting. Unseen from Highway 30, screened by large trees, warehouses, and storage tanks are ten residences, nine of them currently occupied. Two of these homes are on the south side of 39th Road, which runs the length of Buda from east to west. The other eight are on the north side. Born in 1866 when the railroad pushed through

Buffalo County. Buda holds the distinction of being the oldest "town" in the county.



Present day Buda as seen looking northwest. The Solomon silos are on the far left. Big Flag fertilizer equipment is lined up in front of a coal train stopped on the Union Pacific track. Some residences can be seen on the right.

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