



Buffalo Tales



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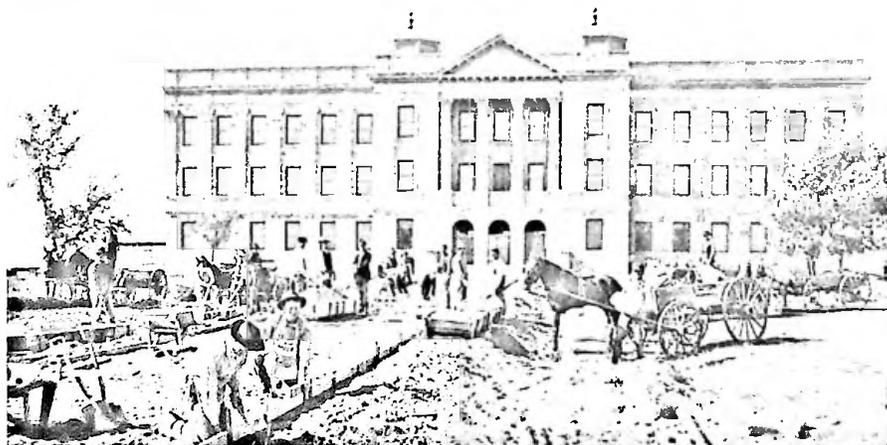
KUDOS AND SOUR GRAPES:

Reactions To Locating The Normal School At Kearney.

by Philip S. Holmgren

The Nebraska State Normal School at Kearney held its first class on June 19, 1905. The legislation providing for the normal school to serve western Nebraska was enacted at the end of March 1903. It provided that any community west of a line five miles east of the 98th meridian, interested in having the school located in their midst, was to submit a bid consisting of at least twenty acres and such other buildings or money as they felt would improve their chances of selection by the State Board of Education as the site for the new school. Fifteen communities submitted bids and on September 1, 1903 the board selected Kearney. The following quotations indicates some of the reactions to that selection.

The **Kearney Democrat** gave Kearney's reaction in this fashion: "The whistles blew, the cannon roared, the people yelled, the Eagle soared: Crocker, Gregg and Thomas, Brown, can have the Best in this Man's town." Crocker, Gregg, Thomas and Brown were the committee members who had been responsible for planning and presenting to the State Board of Education the case for the Kearney location of the Normal school. The **Democrat** went on to explain that the Board selected Kearney on the 111th ballot as the logical site for the new school. "Kearney sends its gladsome greetings to Col. Thomas J. Majors, Mr. Towney, State Treasurer Mortensen, State Superintendent Fowler, Prof. Delzell, Mr. Rogers and Rev. Ludden, comprising the



The Normal School building constructed in 1905. E. R. Edwards & son, C. E. Edwards, cement contractors.

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.

Annual dues, payable January 1:

- Family membership.....\$ 5.00
- Individual membership... 3.00
- Institutional membership. 5.00
- Sustaining membership... 25.00 +
- Life membership..... 100.00

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WITH THE SOCIETY

Report on the Annual Meeting

New officers elected at the annual meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society held at the Nebraskan on April 20 are Alice Howell of Kearney, president; Maxine Schroeder of Shelton, vice-president; and Edna Luce of Kearney, secretary. Directors elected to serve 3-year terms are Leonard Silver and Maynard Envick of Kearney and Glenn Stover of Poole. The term of office of newly elected officers and directors will start on June 1.

At the business meeting following a luncheon attended by 88 members, certificates of appreciation were awarded to outgoing officers and directors, as well as to the editor of **Buffalo Tales**, Gene Hamaker, and members who have contributed articles during the year. Also recognized were individuals who have performed special services to our Society during the year, or made outstanding contributions of artifacts or archives.

Dr. Richard Ikenberry, Biology Professor at Kearney State College, gave a slide presentation on the Oregon Trail and the Pony Express, tracing the routes of each from their starting points on the Missouri River to the point where the routes join, and westward through Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming and into Idaho, which is as far as he has traced the routes. This fine program by Dr. Ikenberry is deeply appreciated by the Society.

Mrs. Howell announced the plans for the May meeting at the museum on the 25th, at 2:00 p.m., with a program on schools and education in Buffalo County.

Philip Holmgren III has been employed by the Society to direct the activities at the museum during the summer, from its opening on May 31 until closing on September 1.

Committee (Board of Education). Upon the successful ballot all votes were not cast for Kearney, but the entire board is now unanimous and harmonious, and Kearney, in its enthusiasm, has not forgotten to give three cheers for every member of the board. Now let Kearney put its strong shoulder to the wheel and keep the wagon going. Stand up! up!! up!!! for Kearney."

The communities who were unsuccessful in their bid for the Normal were less than enthusiastic about the selection of Kearney. One of the strongest negative statements was found in the **Aurora Sun**.

"From a moral standpoint the board have selected the worst in the entire list of fifteen towns. A place that is noted the state over for its dominating saloon element and grafters in behalf of houses of prostitution. It certainly seems that it was not to be the town that offered the best inducements and clean surroundings, morally, that should be entitled to this school, but the town that could show the least cash, the greater number of saloons, greater number of houses of prostitution and ungodly surroundings, should win this state prize, an institution that you desire to have your boys and girls attend to procure an education...all things considered morally and otherwise the board selected practically the worst as far as present and future educational needs are concerned."

The **Aurora Sun** went on to imply wrong doing on the part of Kearney and the Board.

"There seems to have been a thorough deal, and of the rottenest kind, such as is common among propositions of this kind when placed in the hands of a few. It would be mean for us to intimate that there was a corruption band brought into play in the location of this institution. It is also horrible to think that this intelligent (?) board would deliberately set aside all laws of decency, and injustice and locate this state educational institution within surroundings such as furnished by a town like Kearney."

The **Aurora Republican** was more restrained:

"the suspense is all over. The darkness of doubts has been dispelled by the daylight of certainty. The agony is finished. The persimmon has been knocked...What we are trying to say is that Kearney landed the western normal. We lost - so did thirteen (14) other towns - Kearney won. Hurrah for Kearney! Hurrah for the Western Normal! Hurrah for the state board! Hurrah for hurrah and a tiger!"

Although disappointed in the selection of Kearney, other communities made a lesser attack on Kearney. From the **Atkinson Graphic**: "There is no use denying that the northwestern part of the state does not feel a bit good over the location of new state normal at Kearney...to two-thirds of the state Kearney is just as inaccessible as Peru." From the **Rushville Recorder** came this comment. "Kearney is an eastern central city...the location of the state normal there is no concession to the western half of the state...so far as the northwest is concerned it is no provision at all as the teachers around Kearney could make the trip to Peru a great deal easier than the teachers here could get to Kearney." From the **Ainsworth Star-Journal** came the bitter comment: "North Nebraska gets what it usually does get - get left...the location of the school at Kearney suggests that something else than the greatest needs were being considered. Something else entered into the decision than the will of the majority..." Later came this comment: "the location of the normal school at Kearney was a mistake. Northwest

Nebraska will not be satisfied until it gets a Normal School." The left out feeling also came from the **Alliance Times**: "It only exemplifies what has often been said, that when the state has anything to give, western Nebraska is not considered worthy of notice."

The **Central City Non Partiel** concluded that the Board has acted upon the theory that "to them that hath shall be given," while the **Central City Democrat** said: "Kearney is a pretty little city and Central City wishes her well, and hopes that she will secure all, and more than all of the expected advantages from having the school located in her midst." The **St. Paul Republican** said: "aside from tendering cordial congratulations to the victorious town, little comment is necessary. Some of us honestly believe that St. Paul offered superior advantages, but we are not 'sore'." The **Holdrege Progress** was short and to the point: "this settled it...the people of Holdrege feel considerably disappointed but not disheartened." The **St. Paul Phonograph** felt that since Kearney had the Boy's Industrial School they should not have tried for the Normal and said "the State Board of Education may think they did the right thing by locating the new Normal School at Kearney, but the people of fourteen different towns think different."

The **Ord Quiz** speaking for the hometown of board member Mortensen, who had continued to vote for his hometown to the end, came this serious accusation:

"The farce entitled 'The location of the new normal school', in which the normal school board were the chief comedians, has at least ended, at least as far as their acting is concerned. The closing act of the comedy was the location of the Normal at Kearney and the funny part of the play was the fact that the four men who placed it there knew from the start that it would go to Kearney after all the junketing trips had been had and the banquets offered had been sampled. When Kearney's bid was first received it became apparent that Kearney had a plan in view that the public was not supposed to get onto...While each of the ambitious towns seeking the school felt pretty sure that it would be the lucky one, Kearney of all of them was more than sure, they knew they would get it...Knowing that Kearney was to be selected the action of the board in going about to all the fifteen towns and looking with apparent interest at all the sites offered was only a farce, though hardly a laughable one. It has cost the state heavily and the interested towns much more...The long time spent at voting was simply to



Green Terrace, 1903: Included in Kearney's bid for the New Normal School.

make the public think that there was no pre-arranged plan to select Kearney anyway.....”

Speaking for another unsuccessful community, the **North Platte Tribune** conceded with this statement: “The new Normal School...will be located in Kearney...while North Platte is disappointed in not securing the school, it congratulates Kearney on its success, and hastens to assure that up-to-date and progressive town that outside of North Platte our people believed that Kearney is the best location for the school. The school is the biggest thing for the town that Kearney has ever captured” and this little dig: “it is worth twenty cotton mills.”

From the **Hastings Democrat** came a short statement, “...Hastings extends the warmest congratulations to her sister city on the west.” The **Hastings Tribune** let a little more feeling come through: “Kearney has secured the state normal. It matters not how it got it, she’s got it, and that puts an end to it so far as the speculation is concerned. The **Tribune** congratulates the wire-pulling politicians of Kearney who so skillfully and successfully manipulated the deal. From all indications Kearney was positive of the plum long ere her people started to raise a dollar for the site. Be this as it may, the race is run and Kearney has won. May her people realize as much benefit out of the state normal as they anticipate.”

The **Alliance Pioneer-Grip** addressed some pleasing words to Kearney and the board. “It was not the town that offered the most money that won, but the one that appeared to the board to be the best location, all things considered, for present and future needs of the educational interests of the state. Kearney is so situated that no one is disposed to utter a word of criticism against the choice of the board and especially the good people of this city. Alliance tried hard to get the school we will admit and made a fair offer, but as we have failed we are glad to see Kearney get the school. Kearney we congratulate you.”

The **Beatrice Sun’s** statements were positive: “Kearney is very favorably located upon two leading railroads of the state, and is well equipped to take care of the normal. It is a good clean town, a healthy place to live in, and one where the moral tone will be what is desired.” From another non-contending community, the **Fremont Tribune** had these observations: “Kearney is a good location for the school. It is situated in about the geographical center of the state. It is especially well situated for accommodation of the people who’s interests it is expected the institution will serve.” The **York Times** never let people forget their superior location even though not in the designated part of the state. “The **Times** congratulates Kearney on its good fortune and believes the location is as good as could have been selected after York was let out. The school will be accessible to all parts of the state and especially the western portion which the school is intended especially to accommodate. Kearney is a pleasant and well built city and is large enough to furnish suitable accommodations for a considerable body of students, success to the new normal. We hope it may become one of our leading state institutions and a power in the educational world.”

The **Hastings Republican** was convinced there had been some wrong doing in the selection process. “Evidence is accumulating every day bringing to light the rottenness on the part of the state normal school locating board. Enough evidence has come to surface to show that the location of the normal was definitely decided upon long before the board began to make the rounds of the competing towns.... The farce, deception and fraud back of this whole deed should be sifted to the very core.... In

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face of such facts every possible recourse should be taken to repudiate and invalidate the action of the board designating Kearney as the seat of the school." The **Omaha Bee** reported: "A movement has been started in the west end of the state to have the next legislature change the present normal school system so the normal schools of the state will be under the direction and control of the State University, and to repeal the law enacted by the state legislature for the erection of the new normal school at Kearney." It went on to say: "The first talk of dissatisfaction regarding the location of the school came from Hastings, but some time later it was attempted there to get the citizens to take the bonus they had offered for the normal and endow the Hastings College and allow the normal to go glimmering."

The **St. Paul Phonograph Press** passed on the news: "It was reported in Lincoln that an injunction would be asked for by one or more of the competing towns to prevent Kearney from getting the school without a fight through the courts. The request is to be based on the fact that Kearney offered twenty acres of land which is not in one tract, when the law requires that the land be one tract of not less than twenty acres; that Kearney was allowed to modify its bid after all were opened; and if these are not sufficient to get the injunction, then the constitutionality of the law giving the board the power to locate the school will be attacked." To the last proposition the **Grand Island Independent** replied: "It would appear that after the other cities had put in a bid for the location they cannot with very pretty grace maintain that the new law is unconstitutional - that they were after something, the acquiring of which would have been unlawful. It looks like a very good time on the part of the other cities to adopt the motto 'Don't get sore!' " From the **Lincoln Star** came the advice: "The state board of education having selected Kearney as the site for the new normal school, the thing for the other towns in the contest to do is to forget about it and try for some other kind of prize." It later quoted a citizen of Aurora as saying "In time the matter will be partially forgotten and all bitterness will be eliminated. Of course there was only one school to locate and fifteen applications for that school. There were bound to be fourteen disappointed towns."

On October 5, 1903 the **Kearney Daily Hub** reported: "Everything is at last settled. At a meeting of the state board of education in Lincoln on October 4, they accepted the deeds to the site, the building plus a bond from the city of Kearney agreeing to repair the building according to the wishes of the board. The Attorney General Mr. Prout gave the board the opinion all were valid and in order."

With this action the effective opposition to the selection of Kearney as the site for the new normal school came to an end.