



Buffalo Tales



Volume 7, No. 1

Buffalo County Historical Society

January 1984

ROOTS OF BUFFALO COUNTY — THE SCANDINAVIANS

Part I

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

Although most Scandinavians coming into this area settled in Phelps or Kearney Counties, there were a number of Swedish people in Buffalo County by the mid-1870's. The **Kearney Daily Press**, on January 11, 1877 announced the first issue of a Swedish language newspaper, **Vart Nya Hem**, "a paper of general intelligence printed in the **Press** office" Subscriptions were \$2.00 a year. On May 9, 1877 the **Press** printed the following:

I have this day assumed ownership of **Vart Nya Hem**, the Swedish weekly—all bills due after this date for advertisement or subscription are payable to me.

Magnus Elmblad

Among the churches listed in Kearney at that time were the Swedish Lutheran and the Swedish Methodist.

One of the earliest of the Swedes on record was John Swenson, who came to Buffalo County in 1874. He homesteaded twelve miles north of Kearney, but later moved to a location on the South Loup where he established the early settlement of Sartoria and became its first postmaster. (**Buffalo Tales**, June 1981).

August Anderson moved from Phelps County to Kearney in 1875 and established a wagon and carriage manufacturing company at 16th Street and Avenue B in south Kearney. Travelers bound for the Black Hills often changed wagons at the Anderson home. When Anderson's son, Alfred T., returned from a short-lived apprenticeship as a painter in Omaha, his father announced that he would start work



Early Church Fathers

August 14, 1884

Top row: M. P. Rose, C. J. Strand,
A. A. Gustafson.

Bottom row: Rev. P. M. Sannquist,
Akey Themanson, C. J. Burke.

(Continued on Page 3)

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.

Gene E. Hamaker Editor
Alice Howell Circulation
Telephone 237-7858

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\$ 7.50
Individual membership ... 5.00
Institutional membership . 10.00
Sustaining membership ... 25.00 +
Life membership 100.00

Address:

Box 523, Kearney, Nebraska 68847

Officers

President Marian Johnson
Vice-President Henrietta Rhamy
Secretary Alice Howell
Treasurer Viola Mueller
Past President Maxine Schroeder

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 1984
Opal Reese, Pleasanton
Philip S. Holmgren, Kearney
Barbara Saum, Elm Creek

Term expiring June 1, 1985
Pauline Nichols, Gibbon
Glen E. Wisch, Kearney
Carl Oran, Kearney

Term expiring June 1, 1986
Leonard S. Silver, Kearney
Minnett Steinbrink, Kearney
Chandler Lynch III, Kearney

Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director. Phone 234-3041

WITH THE SOCIETY

Mark your calendars for upcoming meetings of the Buffalo County Historical Society:

- January 29 Gibbon Senior Center, 2:00 p.m.
Program by Leroy Walker on "Rocks."
- February 26 Pleasanton Fire Hall, 2:00 p.m.
Program: "History—How Do You Preserve It?"
- March 25 Elm Creek, place to be announced, 2:00 p.m.
- April 29 Annual Meeting, time and place to be announced,

The Trails and Rails Museum is open every Monday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Members of the Fort Kearney Genealogical Club are still at work on Monday afternoons organizing and indexing the Historical Society's archival material.

Museum Director Mardi Anderson would like Historical Society volunteers to help index photos, assist in filing, typing, etc. Also, the original teacher's desk from School District No. 1 is in need of stripping, refinishing, and being reglued in some places. We would like to have this ready for the summer season. Telephone or come to the museum on Mondays if you have any time for this volunteer work.

The temporary display from now until summer opening is made up of selected donations to the museum in 1983.



Have you sent in your membership dues? These were payable on January 1. Delinquent members will not receive **Buffalo Tales** after this issue.

with J. A. Stridborg, a photographer, on September 1, 1881. (**Buffalo Tales**, October 1982). Mr. Stridborg, "a fine Christian gentleman who had learned the trade in Stockholm, Sweden," had a studio on South Central Avenue, where teacher and pupil both lived until Stridborg was married in 1882 to Amanda Nordstrom. The next year the Stridborgs decided to try their hand at sheep-raising and moved to a farm in the hills south of town. A. T. Anderson continued work in the studio and in time, with the help of his father, was able to buy the business from Stridborg.

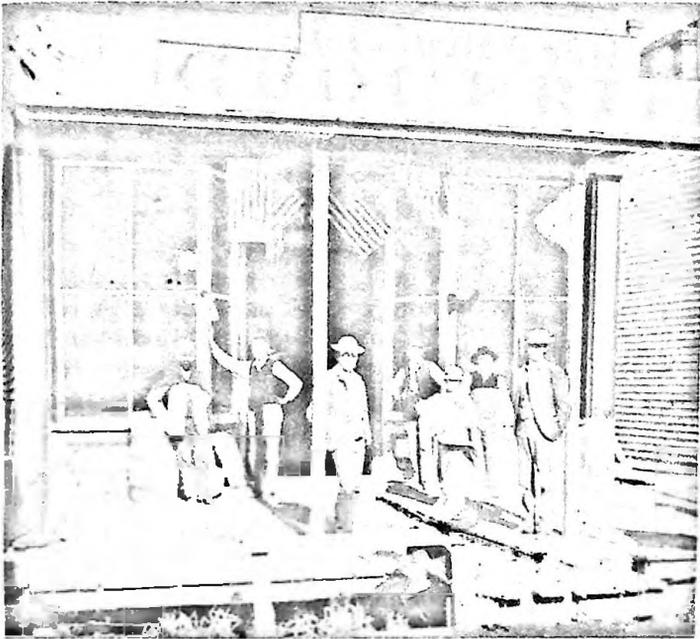
In 1876 the C. A. Ericksons came to Kearney from Peoria, Illinois. Mr. Erickson bought eighty acres near Riverdale from the railroad. They lived in a sod house until they were able to build a frame home, which still stands. Mr. Erickson farmed many acres near his home, using six and eight team horses. During the dry years he supplemented his income by working for the railroad and at milling and carpentry. When School District 77 was organized in the 1880's, Mr. Erickson, along with Christian Jacobson, William Knox and Adam Williams, built a schoolhouse in about eighteen days. The Ericksons had twelve children; many of their descendants still live in the area.

A number of Swedish families settled about ten years later between Riverdale and Kearney in the Greenhill area. Among them were the Sven Petersons, A. A. Andersons, Albert Olsons, Lars Melines, Johan Rydlunds, Emil Johnson and "Postage Stamp" Carlson, who tried to use a cancelled stamp on a letter and served time for it.

Johanna Swenson, born at Pearstarp, Sweden in 1844, came to America with neighbors in 1867. After living with two families in Iowa, she went to Omaha, then to Evanston, Wyoming, and to Sidney, Nebraska where she met Gustav F. Prascher who was serving in the army at Fort Sidney. The Praschers were married in 1874 in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and spent their honeymoon on a wagon train to Fort Laramie, then started for the Spotted Tail Agency, but hostile Indians caused them to turn back. On their way back to Fort Laramie a storm halted them, their food supply was soon exhausted and the men went on to the fort for supplies. While they were gone a wind of tornado proportions ripped the tent to shreds; Mrs. Prascher wrapped herself in buffalo robes, and with her husband's pistol for protection, hid in the sagebrush until the men returned. Later proceeding to the Spotted Tail Agency, they went on to the Red Cloud Agency where they lived through another Indian uprising.

In 1877 the Praschers purchased a relinquishment near Riverdale where they lived until Mr. Prascher died in 1904. Mrs. Prascher then moved to Riverdale where she died in 1930. In addition to their family of seven children, the Praschers took into their home a foster son, Sanfred Jensen Prascher, an orphan who was brought to America from Denmark at the age of a year and a half.

Carl F. Bodinson, born in Soderhamm, Sweden in 1846, came to America when he was nineteen. At Galva, Illinois he worked in a general store for a few years, eventually saving enough money to buy the store. In 1878 he came to Kearney where he operated a grocery store for eleven years, then bought the Harrington Hardware Store. In those early years business was often conducted by bartering of various items. Cedar posts were one medium of exchange; Carl saved the posts, knowing that when the prairie was fenced, they would increase in value, as they did. The Bodinsons had three sons, Fred P., Frank A. and Roy. The boys made extra money by gathering the many buffalo bones which dotted the prairie. In-Kearney they were manufactured into fertilizer and shipped to all parts of the country.



C. F. Bodinson Grocery Store, 1878.

Mr. Bodinson installed the first "telephone line" in town. Using two by fours for poles, he stretched a copper line from the store on Central Avenue to his home near 24th and Avenue A. Both ends of this line were fitted with tin cans which served as both transmitters and receivers. "It worked and that is all that was asked," according to a Hub article.

In 1899 he was elected County Treasurer, serving for two terms. He was later elected to the State Legislature for two terms, from 1908 to 1912. After Carl's death in 1913, his son Roy took over the store. When Roy died in 1926 he was succeeded by Frank. Roy is survived by two daughters, Anna Louise Tilton and Frances Voight, both of Sarasota, Florida.

Waldo Bodinson, born in Sweden in 1898, lost his mother at an early age. He lived with a minister's family until his uncle, Carl Bodinson, sent for him. He learned English and penmanship at the training school at Kearney State College and worked in the store. In 1945 he purchased the store; when it was sold in 1964, the Bodinson family had operated continuously in Kearney for 86 years. Waldo married Mary Sorensen and they had one daughter, Virginia McKinney, of Kearney.

Charles J. Burke, a native of Sweden, also operated a hardware store in Kearney, "The Pioneer". Coming to America in 1856, he went first to Galesburg, Illinois, later clerking in a hardware store in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, before coming to Kearney with his bride in 1878. Mr. and Mrs. Burke first lived in what was later known as the Adair house at 27th and 1st Avenue. It consisted of only four rooms at that time and rent was \$30 a month. Mrs. Burke recalled that there were no streets, and paths meandered in all directions. One trail led so close to their house that the wagons gradually tore off the siding on one corner of their house. Mr. Burke later went into the pump and windmill business, assisted by his son Milton. Maybelle Burke, Milton's

widow, served many years as city clerk.

Frank and Leander Hallgren, land agents for the Union Pacific were responsible for persuading many Swedes in and around Galesburg, Illinois to come by immigrant train to Phelps and Kearney Counties. Leander Hallgren and Victor Rylander built an emigrant house in the center of Phelps County. The town which grew around the house was Phelps Center, and it was the county seat for a brief period. However, when the B & M Railroad built west through Phelps County, George Holdredge, construction superintendent, located the line southeast of Phelps Center, and the new town of Holdrege was chosen the county seat at a bitterly contested meeting in 1883. Even before this some of the Phelps Center businessmen had moved on to Kearney, by then a prosperous, bustling town. N. H. Johnson, who came in 1879, was a grocer. C. E. Hansen, postmaster in Phelps Center, who married Ida Hallgren, moved to Kearney in 1881 and had a real estate business in the Midway Hotel during the boom period.

Andrew Swenson came from his native Sweden to Batavia, Illinois in 1870. He started in the clothing business, and later went into pharmacy, working in Chicago, Moline and Cambridge, Illinois. In 1880 he came to Kearney where he operated the Swenson Brothers Drug Store. On September 18, 1880, he married Amanda Carlson, daughter of Anders Carlson and Margretta Larson Carlson. Amanda was a graduate of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Stockholm, Sweden and a member of the "famous Swedish Quartette".

The writer was unable to find additional information about Andrew. An A. Swenson was a charter member of the Episcopal Church in Kearney, established in 1883. The Swenson Brothers Drug Store continued operation in 1884. In 1888, Amanda was listed in the city directory as "the widow of Andrew Swenson" and as a vocal music teacher. In 1887 she was director of "H. M. S. Pinafore" which was staged on "a huge boat" imported by an enterprising business man for use at the resort at Kearney Lake. She also organized the Kearney Musical Society which presented a concert of local talent, the proceeds going to the purchase of the first street lamps in town. Mrs. Swenson was frequently mentioned in Maude Marston Burrows' column during the boom years in connection with social and musical events. When the Musical Society presented the cantata "Don Munio", Mrs. Burrows wrote:

The duet by Mrs. Swenson and Mr. Beattie, "Once More My Royal Master's Call," called forth a storm of applause which did not abate until they stepped forward....Mrs. Swenson's voice has lost none of its sweetness, and the fact that it had not been heard for a long time in public made it all the more delightful to her listeners. The duet was beautiful.

In February of 1890 when the young women of Kearney, at the instigation of Maude Marston Burrows, organized to solicit money to procure a hospital for Kearney, Mrs. Swenson promised to give a concert for the benefit of the hospital drive. She left Kearney sometime after 1893.

The Swedish Lutheran Church listed in 1877 was in all likelihood an informal group of people meeting in homes for religious services. They often met with the Akey Themansons; Mr. Themanson was a lumber dealer in Kearney. An ardent Republican, he swore he would never live under a Democratic President. He died the day Grover Cleveland was inaugurated. One Themanson daughter, Bertha, worked in the studio of her cousin, A. T. Anderson. Another daughter, Rosalyn, married Tor-

Buffalo County Historical Society
Box 523
Kearney, NE 68847

Non-Profit Organization
Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Postal Permit No. 7
Kearney, Nebraska

Mrs. Weslie Wilder
Emma Jane Wilder
P.O. Box 34
Kearney, NE 68847

val Andrew Holmes. Their son Kenneth would return to Kearney to practice dentistry.

In 1883 a group of Swedes and Norwegians met at the home of C. J. Burke for the purpose of forming a church. However, the Swedes withdrew, and a year later, on June 11, 1884, again in the Burke home, the Swedish Lutheran Church was organized under the direction of the Rev. P. M. Sannquist. During the summer a church was built at 19th Street and Avenue C south of the railroad. The Rev. J. Torell became the first resident pastor in September 1884. Other early "church fathers" in addition to Themanson and Burke were August Rose and A. A. Gustafson, carpenters, S. M. Wetterburg, a painter, and C. J. Strand, a clerk.

All services were in Swedish, and in 1914 the Rev. Kenneth Bescher tried to introduce the use of English into the service "but with very little success." A resolution was adopted in 1923 to move the church "to a better part of the city" in order "to come in touch with other people besides those of Swedish extraction." The cornerstone of the church at 25th and Avenue B was laid in 1924. That year the decision was made that all services would be conducted in English.

First Lutheran Church in Kearney will observe its 100th anniversary this year.

Resources will appear at the end of Part II.

Author's Note: Anyone having additional information about Andrew Swenson or August Swenson are urged to contact Margaret Nielsen at 234-3526, or Alice Howell at 237-7858.

NEW MEMBERS

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Mr. and Mrs. Gary Hughes | Gibbon | Stan Martin | Lincoln |
| Eva Livingston | Gibbon | Donna Martin Bonness | Lincoln |
| Lewis D. Patton | Kearney | Winona R. Snell | Berryville, AR |
| Lane Pitcher | Kearney | John R. Hay | Mesa, AZ |
| Roger L. Wisch | Kearney | Mrs. Harold Hay | Tucson, AZ |
| Mr. and Mrs. Albert Dellert | Shelton | Clark M. Hay | Ridgecrest, CA |
| Mr. and Mrs. Don Oliver | Shelton | Stanley L. Hay | Spring Valley, CA |
| Pat Waddington | Shelton | Glenn W. Hay | Loveland, CO |

LIFE MEMBERS

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Emma Jane Wilder | Kearney | Mr. and Mrs. Fred Schroeder | Shelton |
| Myrna Axmann | Riverdale | Barbara Saum | Elm Creek |