



Buffalo Tales



Volume 11, No. 1

Buffalo County Historical Society

January, 1988

Notice to Members of Buffalo County Historical Society Special Meeting of the Board of Directors of BUFFALO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Topic: Funding of the Museum

Place: Midtown Business Center
2022 Avenue A, Kearney

Date: Saturday, January 30, 1988,
10:00 a.m.

The problem is urgent. Members of the Society are specially invited to participate in this special board meeting. Please attend.

THE ICE INDUSTRY

by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

The power from the Kearney Canal, completed July 4, 1886, set in motion the plans for Kearney to become the Minneapolis of the West (*Buffalo Tales*, September 1978). Lake View (Kearney Lake) was filled, the first power was generated, and the spectacular growth of population and industry known as the "boom period" was well on its way.

At the beginning of 1887 there were less than a dozen permanent brick buildings on main street, then known as Wyoming Avenue, between present 18th Street to the south, and 24th Street to the north. Neither the impressive city hall with its clock tower nor the Buffalo County Court House had been built. There were three brick churches, Presbyterian at 23rd and 1st Avenue, Catholic between 5th and 6th Avenues on West 26th Street, and the original part of the church between 25th and 26th Streets on Avenue A, now the Kearney Community Theatre. There were three brick schools — Whittier, Emerson and Bryant.

Downtown building construction completed in 1887 included the first Midway Hotel, the Hamer Building, present Ayers Clothing, at 22nd Street and Central Avenue; the St. John & Barnd Bldg., now Hellman's Fashions at 2210 Central Avenue; the Hecht Building, now Claussen's Shoes at 2214 Central Avenue, and the Masonic Temple at 2224 Central Avenue. A news item in the *Kearney New Era* of August 20, 1887 states that "fully 100 new houses have been erected since May 1,

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. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the history of Buffalo County and its people. Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

- Basic Membership \$10.00
- Institutional Membership \$15.00
- Supporting Membership \$25.00

Life memberships are \$100.00 for an individual; \$150.00 for husband and wife, jointly.

Officers and Directors: President, Margaret Hohnholt; Vice-President, Alice Howell; Secretary, Colleen Parker; Treasurer, Philip S. Holmgren. Directors: Glen E. Wisch, Frances Link, Barb Avery, Merlin Burgland, Minnette Steinbrink, Edna Hehner, Robert Stubblefield, Viola Livingston and Chandler Lynch III. Publications Chairman: Alice Howell

WITH THE SOCIETY

Sunday, January 31, 2:00 p.m., General meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society, at the Woman's Club Home, 723 West 22nd Street, in Kearney.
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1988 Wagons West: Have you heard about our 1988 Wagons West celebration? It has grown into a city-wide event this year. We are sponsoring, with the Chamber of Commerce, the Kearney Army Air Base Reunion. It will be held June 3, 4 and 5. We hope to have a parade, big band dance, fly-over of military planes, static display of airplanes with, hopefully, a B-17 bomber included.

We need people who have an interest in that time period, and especially those who were associated with the Air Base in any capacity. Chan Lynch is chairman of the committee. Call him at 234-2491 with questions, information, or offers of help.

There will be a "briefing" at the Holiday Inn on Sunday, February 21, from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. to which you are all welcome to attend. We need help in identifying and contacting people who will want to come back to Kearney for the reunion.

A calendar with pictures of the Kearney Air Base will be available in February.
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Memberships continue to come in. Dues are delinquent on January 31. Response to our appeal for Supporting Memberships has been gratifying, and it is very much appreciated in our efforts to preserve the heritage of Buffalo County.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

John H. & Barbara Bancroft . . . Kearney Philip Holmgren III Kearney

NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Gary Hohnholt Grand Island	Verle Dority Shelton
Fred Barth Kearney	Mrs. Dean Brown Reston, VA
Clifford Fox Kearney	Daryl D. Dennis Conrad, IA
Lanny & Cheryl Gerdes Kearney	Yvonne Juhl St. Louis, MO
Esther Juhl Kearney	Gale McSwain Galax, VA
Louis & Bethine Ninegar Kearney	Richard Thornton . . . Santa Barbara, CA
Virg & Jan Salestrom Kearney	

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and they are mostly occupied by eastern people who have made Kearney their home." There is no listing of houses but research has revealed that the spacious home of J. D. Hawthorne at 2120 4th Avenue was completed in 1887, also the homes of F. G. Hamer, 321 West 27th Street; Warren Pratt, 809 West 22nd Street; and George Downing at 2112 3rd Avenue.

A flourishing and longtime business growing out of the three lakes which were a part of the Kearney canal and reservoir was the ice industry. For many years Kearney furnished most of the natural ice for central Nebraska, before the advent of artificial ice plants and electric refrigerators. The ice from the lakes in the late eighties and early nineties was just about the finest to be had. Kearney Lake at that time was 40 feet deep in the center, and the water was unusually clear.

The first year, according to the *Kearney New Era* of January 8, 1887, "the Nebraska Ice Company gave employment to 45 men at the reservoir this past week, cutting and putting up ice, besides about as many more hauling it to the cars. They have loaded and shipped 15 cars to Holdrege, and have contracts for 30 more, making a total of 900 tons for that place. The company also expects to ship 400 tons to Minden as soon as they can obtain the cars. The temperature Friday morning was 22 below zero."

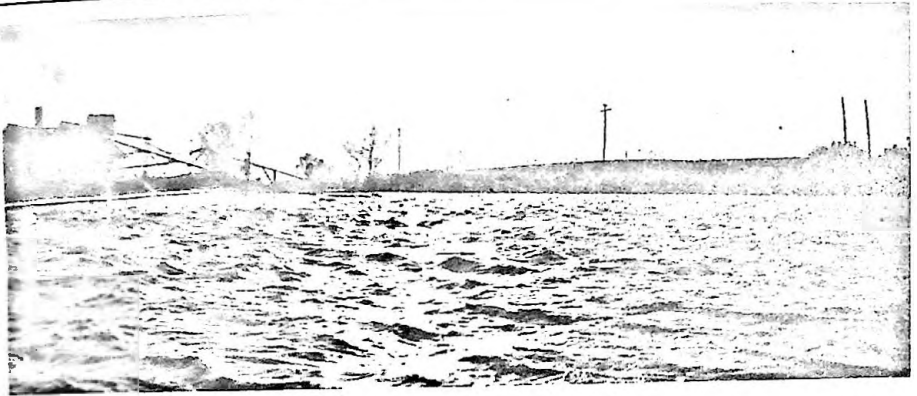
Juan Boyle was the lessee of all of the Kearney Lake privileges, and he, along with the Nebraska Ice Company of Omaha, built an ice house in the early part of the winter. It was located just east of the power house on the south bank of the lake. It was a massive frame structure described as follows:

The building has two gables running south and the room inside is separated by 8-inch wall. The building is double walled, there being a dead air space of two feet between the walls. This is filled with sawdust. The partition wall is also filled with sawdust. Ten carloads of sawdust were required. The building is 104x84 feet with 24-foot posts, making each room 100x80 feet on the inside. Each partition will hold about 25,000 tons of ice.

The Union Pacific at that time was the largest patron of the company. They used not hundreds but several thousands of cars of ice, which were shipped to Grand Island



Skaters on the Lake Kearney.



Sunset on Kearney Lake. Note icehouse at left.

and North Platte. At the latter city they were used for icing Pacific Fruit Express refrigerator cars. So great was the demand for the Kearney natural ice that the Union Pacific had a side track which ran along the east bank of the canal tail race. This helped in the shipping, as ice was shipped winter and summer to many cities and towns in the state. On September 10, 1887, a carload of ice from the ice houses at Kearney was shipped to the Nebraska State Fair.

In its first few months of operation, labor problems were encountered. The *New Era* of January 22, 1887, carried headlines: *THE ICE MEN STRIKE*. The story follows:

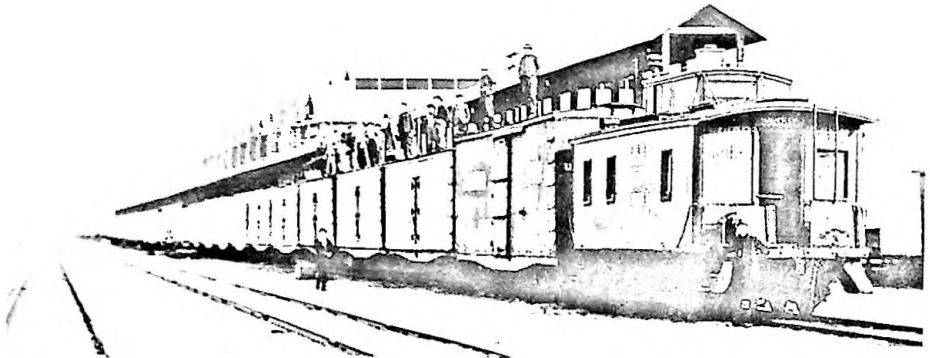
An overbearing foreman caused the ice cutters and loaders to strike; the foreman would deduct a full hour's pay if they lost fifteen minutes in time, whether the loss was the fault of the company or not. The men were getting only 15¢ an hour, and during the short days \$1.20 per day was about the most they could earn. The strike was for 20¢ per hour. The matter was settled by compromise, \$1.50 for nine hours work (about 16½¢ per hour).

A few days later a second strike was inaugurated by the teamsters who thought there was too much work for too little pay. An advance of 60 percent was sought, which the company promptly refused. The company's manager said he could get all the teams necessary at their present price and doesn't propose "to be bulldozed into paying more."

The putting up of ice was not without its dangers, and each winter there were many narrow escapes from drowning, not only by the workmen, but many times the skaters. Many a life was saved by the prompt use of long ice pike poles. The danger did not all lie in the work on the lake, but many workmen would get hurt in the ice-conveying machinery and cutters as the ice houses were being filled and the ice carried on an endless chain.

Kearney customers were delighted with the new supply of ice so close at hand. It was suggested that \$5 or \$10 ice tickets purchased at the office or from the driver would save annoyance and inconvenience. Heretofore all ice used in Kearney had been hauled from the Wood River and the demand each summer far exceeded the supply. A pleasant Sunday afternoon in winter found many sightseers at Kearney Lake, witnessing the cutting of 18-inch ice, the clearest and purest to be had.

Meanwhile, Mr. Boyle continued his efforts to make Lake View a great pleasure



Icing Union Pacific cars at North Platte.

—S. D. Butcher Photo

resort for winter, as well as summer activities. The ice company kept the lake free from snow in order to make the best ice, which was ideal for skaters who would throng the lake by the hundreds in the afternoons and evenings. The lake was lighted with arc lights for night-time skating. Late in 1887 a toboggan slide was constructed and one dozen toboggans were ordered for added fun and pleasure.

Other evidences of growth mentioned in issues of the *Kearney New Era* of 1887 read as follows:

Jan. 22: There were nearly 100 teams counted on Wyoming Avenue at one time Saturday afternoon between Greeley Avenue (27th St.) and the railroad track, besides half as many more hitched on the side streets and put up in stables.

Mar. 19: W. A. Downing sold 46 sets of double harness during the first ten days of March.

Apr. 30: There have been a great many trees set out this spring and if they all live it will only be a few years until the treeless appearance of Kearney will be a thing of the past.

Oct. 22: Public drinking fountains for man and beast have arrived and the locations selected.

And from the Court House items of January 22:

The Board of Supervisors were in session four days, from Tuesday to Friday, inclusive. The county paid nearly \$300.00 for their services. Did they earn their money? Did they do any more or better work than three men could have accomplished in the same length of time? These are nuts for the poor taxpayer to crack.

The business community of 1887 included eight druggists, thirteen physicians, five harness shops, 26 attorneys, three banks, four newspapers, four jewelers, six meat markets, and four saloons. License for each saloon cost \$1,000.00. School teachers' salaries were \$25.00 to \$40.00 a month. Corn sold for 20¢ a bushel, hogs at \$4.50, and a good cow \$25.00.

Such was the City of Kearney at the beginning of 1888.

SOURCES

Kearney New Era, 1887; *Platte Valley Tribune*, "More Than Forty Years Ago", August 6, 1937.

Buffalo County Historical Society
 Box 523
 Kearney, NE 68848

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1988 SUPPORTING MEMBERSHIPS

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Josephine Bissell Kearney	Doris E. Lundy Kearney
Mary Bessie Burcham . . . San Diego, CA	Chan Lynch Kearney
Paul & Helen Casper Elm Creek	Homer McConnell Kearney
David & Margaret Clark Kearney	Mr. & Mrs. Duncan McGregor . . Gibbon
Joe & Bea Elliott Kearney	Marj Newlon Kearney
Mary Elliott Kearney	Harold K. Nutter Gibbon
Jack & Joan Erickson Kearney	Mary Q. Nye Kearney
LaMoyne & Jan Fern Kearney	Jeanne L. Patterson Houston, TX
Robert D. & Norma Guge Kearney	Rodney Pierce Kearney
Fred E. Hammer APO New York	Mr. & Mrs. Wayne E. Reynolds . Kearney
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L. F. Haug Shelton	Merwyn & Beverly Schliefert . . . Kearney
Edna Hehner Pleasanton	Paul & Mitzi Steinbrink Kearney
Marlin & Cheryl Heiden Kearney	Bob & Lenore Stubblefield Shelton
Henry & Margaret Hohnholt . . . Kearney	Curtis & Barbara Thienel Shelton
Dale Link Ravenna	Leroy & Lucille Walker Gibbon