



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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SACRAMENTO TO KEARNEY BY CAR, 1917

by Weslie Wort Wilder

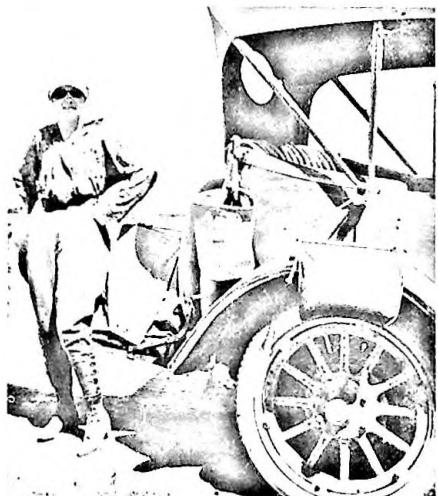
It was in the spring of 1917 that the long discussed project of driving from Sacramento, California to Kearney, Nebraska began to take shape. Since Dad (D. Wort) was at that time selling Overland "Sixes" in Kearney, we inveigled him into letting us buy one in Sacramento to drive back to Kearney for him to sell. It was duly arranged by the company and we picked up the car in June, right after the school where I was teaching closed.

Meanwhile, many other arrangements had been accomplished, among them, for my friends who went along, "learning to drive". Myrtle Willward, a Santa Ana, California girl, never could function as a mechanic, but Rachel King, of Portland, Oregon, would tackle anything. However, Myrtle didn't trust Rachel and refused to go if she drove. So, I was commandeered to do all the driving. It was pretty exhausting work and by the end of the trip I was about done in. For money we carried travelers checks.

Good friends, who knew more of the road than we did (especially Ferd Basler), suggested we carry a spade, rope, axe and saw. There was also a rack for the running board to hold sundry articles (pots, pans, and picnic kit). The baggage was strapped to the rack at the back of the car. A canvas pail and a water container hung outside, toward the rear. The bedding roll was in the rear seat, also a box of matches in a tin can, with room left for a passenger. We also carried a fire extinguisher. Much later we



Weslie Wort and Rachel King In traveling togs.



Rachel King and the car ready for travel.

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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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Trails and Rails Museum Phone . 234-3041 If no answer, call 236-5566 or 237-7858.

WITH THE SOCIETY

The Trails and Rails Museum is now closed after a most successful summer season due to a well-functioning Museum Board, a summer director, and many volunteers. Our thanks and appreciation are extended to all who helped as museum aides, as well as those who worked on the schoolhouse and the engine.

* * * * *

September 26. "Radio History" in Buffalo County will be the subject for the regular monthly meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society on Sunday, September 26, at 2:00 p.m. in the community room of The Ravenna Bank at Ravenna.

Homer McConnell and Paul Wice of Kearney and Lyman Cass of Ravenna will be the featured speakers. Gary Straatmann will mount a display of radio memorabilia.

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October 4. Reception at the Kearney Public Library hosted by the Buffalo County Historical Society and Friends of the Library at 7:30 p.m. on October 4. This event will open the exhibit of the A. T. Anderson Photo Collection, and also mark the tenth year of the reactivation of the Buffalo County Historical Society. The exhibit will be on display through October 16.

A. T. Anderson started his photographic career in Kearney in 1881 and opened his own studio here in 1887. The collection of early photos has been copied from his book entitled, *Kearney, Nebraska, as Seen Through the Camera*. The project was made possible by a grant from the Myron Scott Trust, and with the permission of daughters Ruth M. Anderson of New York City, Miriam Worlock of Kearney, and Elizabeth Uldall of Edinburgh, Scotland.

needed this item when the hot sun ignited the can of matches and the roll of bedding caught fire. Rach was the heroine. She quickly broke out the extinguisher and saved the day.

Clothes were important. Rach and I wore peg-top khaki pants, high-top, laced hiking boots; but Myrt refused to wear anything so unladylike. Her outfit was an ankle length khaki divided skirt. Our caps and hats were the same material. Only a picture could describe how we looked.

As far as the trip itself was concerned, friends all gasped at our unwise courage in tackling mountains with ungraded and unpaved roads, hot deserts with boiling engines, and unknown dangers. The Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church was so concerned he joined forces with one of the vestrymen to find a pistol and teach us to shoot. Unbrave Myrtle, after coaching, snapped the holster about her waist to frighten any Bug-a-Boos that might attack us. She was more afraid of the gun than any dire thing that might appear, and we were afraid of Myrtle having it in her possession. So, we were ready to start out.

Our first objective was Lake Tahoe, but before we reached Folsom something went wrong with a thing called a "magneto". A passer-by in a truck offered to pull us into the next little town. This delay took so much time we had to stop at a little, very rustic hotel in Placerville for dinner and the night. Then, the next morning we were up bright and early to enjoy the ride through the mountains with time out for a picnic lunch near a waterfall. Now we were beginning to experience one-way dirt roads and steep grades with warning signs—"Beware of Falling Rocks". As we reached the south end of Lake Tahoe, after passing the steep "Strawberry Grade" safely, we could see we would be on the outside of the road when we met other cars. When we met one chauffeur-driven car we hugged the inside of the road and forced them to the outside. The stately couple in the back seat were much chagrined. This was the scariest part of the trip from the driver's point of view. At one narrow elevation we looked down on Echo Lake to left and Tahoe on the right. By dinner time we had reached Tahoe Inn, exhausted but grateful to be alive. It was beautiful and we would have liked to stay, but there were miles to go.

With regret we left Tahoe and were on the down hill side of the mountains toward Reno. The Riverside Hotel looked very inviting, but it was too early to stop and we pushed on through uninteresting country to Lovelock, Nevada. The hotel there was over a saloon and we were entertained the night through with reveling below us. Leaving Lovelock, we decided to make our breakfast on the way. Our fuel for a fire turned out to be sagebrush cut with our trusty axe. Coffee was put on over a makeshift grate we had purchased; and bacon and eggs were fried. The clean-up was disagreeable as there was no available water. We didn't try that again.

On we went, around hills and through sagebrush as far as Winnemucca for another overnight on a street of saloons. A little restaurant gave us some good home food. It was a short trip from there to Battle Mountain with its nearby Indian reservation. We were as much a curiosity to the Indians lounging around the village as they were to us. On again with altitude rising until we reached a railroad stop in Carlin, where we paid 50¢ a gallon for gas. It all had to be imported by truck, they told us. Elko was our lunch stop. A nice little town where we found our **first pavement**, about a mile down main street. It had a very nice hotel too. Later in the afternoon we swung north and drove and drove through sagebrush until we wound up at a tumble-down

ranch house where some cattle were wandering about. This certainly didn't look right so we turned around and drove and drove, finally reaching the road east which we had missed. We rounded a mountain, crossed the railroad track, jiggely-jog, and into Wells. The hotel there was more like a remodeled two story house at the end of a street of saloons. There, of all things, we had a piano in our large second floor room.

The next morning we started early, hoping to reach Ogden, Utah but only reached Montello (over impossible one-way desert roads). We came to a railroad crossing on a high embankment about one-half mile outside the town, then drove down the main street to a few one-story buildings and pulled into a filling station for gas. What a relief to get out of the car for a few minutes. As we walked around the car, lo and behold! We found the rope dragging that had held our luggage on the rack. A great wail broke out—to have to go back over that despicable road?? There was no traffic so we didn't doubt it lay where it fell. However, among our sympathetic onlookers there was one chap who offered to go back and look for the luggage while we had lunch. As it turned out, we had barely filled the tank when he returned. The baggage had fallen off at the railroad crossing. Once again we started out.

Why we decided to go around the north end of the Great Salt Lake, I'll never know, but it was an easy ride and we saw some nice Utah countryside without much habitation. We finally pulled into Promontory Point where the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads had joined. Here a schoolhouse looked like the only possible spot for a camp-out in a desert landscape. Fortunately we met up with a couple who were really equipped for camping. By pooling our supplies we managed a very good supper. They had a tent, but we did not. So, we made our bed on the car seats and blankets to sleep the best we could under the stars. The next morning, after a pooled breakfast, they left for the west and we went east and south, skirting Ogden and enjoying some delightful green fields and trees on the way to Salt Lake City.

The Utah Hotel was a blessed sight since, by this time, I was completely worn out.



Weslie Wort, Rachel King and Marion Hull changing a tire in Wyoming.



In Wyoming, showing car on railroad embankment where rails and ties had been removed. These embankments in places were 25 feet high.

There we were met by Marion Hull from Kearney who was to make the return trip with us. Rachel left us to visit relatives while she was in Salt Lake City, and I went to bed. My cousin, Dick Reimers, took the car to give it a careful lookover to see that all would be well when we started out again. After a couple days rest and sightseeing we were off again—straight through the Wasatch mountains. It was a twisty, turny road ascending all the way. We had not reached the summit when the engine began to heat, so we stopped to let it cool off in a nice, woodsy spot near some settler's cabin. When we decided to go on again, the engine refused to start. Today I think they would call it a "vapor lock", but at that time we had no idea what to do. We went over to the cabin to call Dick in Salt Lake and he told us to hold everything and he would be up as soon as his old and trusty Pierce Arrow could get him there.

While we waited we asked the cabin people if they could give us a bit of food. "Well, sandwiches, mebby." O. K. "Coming up." We were handed the craziest sandwiches since their invention. Hunks of bread, more hunks of roast beef and plenty of mustard. This plus water from a spring was our lunch, but the spot was ideal for a picnic. So, we filled up on scenery. Ere long Dick arrived, easily started our engine (of course) and away we went for a scenic afternoon drive through the mountains and valleys and down to the plains to Rock Springs, Wyoming.

We were glad to stop here as it had been a long day. Now we were in "cowboy" country. Roads became impossible as we were often on an abandoned railroad track with spaces where the ties had been removed. We traveled over the tops of embankments to spaces where there were no bridges. Hopefully we would descend on one side, prayerfully hoping the car could make it straight up on the other side. Certainly it was impossible to make "time". The next day, up and off to Rawlins with much of the same. Here Myrtle got a big laugh with her gun strapped to her side as she went through the lobby of the hotel. After that the gun was put away.

One day, when crossing the sagebrush desert of Wyoming, we could see against the rim of the mountains on the horizon a small cloud of dust. Being in the northeast, we were sure it couldn't be a storm brewing. As we went along at our regular fifty mile per hour speed we watched the spot get larger and larger. Could it be a whirlwind? No. In a short time we discovered it was people. At last, here came our Indians. Alas! it was only a poor little family journeying we knew not where. They were a family with one poor horse fitted with a travois, or a pole on each side connected at the back with a hammock to carry some luggage and one small child. That dragging equipage had created the dust cloud. To them we were a mere breeze passing by as far as any recognition went. We tried to speak to them, but to no avail. Our Indian encounter, instead of exciting, turned out to be a total loss.

We continued to have more bad roads. Finally, we had a lunch stop at Medicine Bow. The cafe was in a false front wooden building surrounded with the same type saloons and a general store. The food was very plain, but filling. It was served in true ranch style at long tables. On again, over hot dusty roads, hoping to reach Cheyenne before dark, but, we didn't quite make it and had to turn on our lights. With those little lights it made going down hill like dropping into an abyss. At long last we made Cheyenne and were joyful to find lights and some pavement and the best hotel since Salt Lake. We reveled in nice, warm baths and dinner, where we could wear dresses for a change. We felt we were really approaching Nebraska and home.

We didn't quite make it there the next day, we only made it to Paxton. There we

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went from the sublime in hotels in Cheyenne to the ridiculous in this small town. It was our most unhappy night. Sheets had not been changed since the last occupants. We brought up our own blankets and bedding and didn't even bother to use the bed. The next A.M. we grabbed a bite of breakfast at a nearby cafe and set forth for North Platte and the short trip from there to "home".

We almost fell into 22nd and B, we were so relieved to be there. It was the end of a fun journey. Having escaped unwild Indians in Wyoming, gas bandits in Carlin, Nevada, suffered minor mechanical difficulties and fatigue, we had arrived home safe and happy.

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