

# Buffalo Tales



Volume 8, No. 8

Buffalo County Historical Society

September 1985

## THE ARTS IN EARLY KEARNEY

### Part I

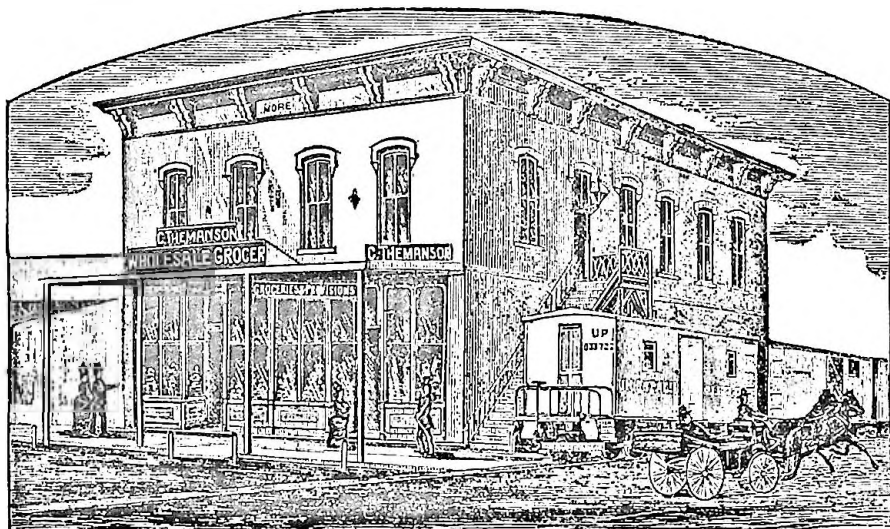
by Margaret Stines Nielsen

(Note: Much of the information on music was taken from "A Musical Life of Kearney—1871-1939" by Lucy Hull, a piano teacher at Kearney State Teacher's College. It was a program given for Fort Kearney Chapter, D.A.R. in 1938.)

Music was a part of Kearney life from its beginnings. On November 1, 1871, George and James Smith, brothers of town site agent, D. N. Smith, paid for pre-emption claims for property which would soon become part of Kearney Junction. F. G. Keens wrote Mrs. Hull that James Smith, a violinist, was "our first fine musician and was a lovable character." Mrs. George Smith owned the first piano. Her husband played the guitar "very well", and with James they "formed a fine trio".

The first record of a musical event is the "Oratorio of Queen Esther". Mrs. A. H. Conner, wife of Judge Conner, was the Queen and Mr. Keens was King Ahasuerus. Mrs. Jennie Grant was organist. It ran two nights to a crowded house in 1874.

The first band was organized in 1875 with William Brumbaugh as director. The first piano teacher was Mrs. Charlotte Barnes who had been an assistant with William Mason in New York City. Another teacher, Professor Disraeli came a year or two



More Hall  
First Opera House.  
(Continued on Page 3)

**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 68847. 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:

Family Membership . . . . .	\$ 7.50	Institutional Membership . . . . .	\$10.00
Individual Membership . . . . .	\$ 5.00	Supporting Membership . . . . .	\$25.00

Life memberships are \$100.00 for an individual; \$150.00 for husband and wife, jointly. Contact Alice Howell, Publications Chairman, 237-7858.

Officers and Directors: President, Chandler Lynch III; Vice-President, Barb Avery; Secretary, Margaret Hohnholt; Treasurer, Leo Henricksen; Directors: Glen E. Wisch, Frances Link, Merlin Berglund, Leonard Silver, Philip S. Holmgren, Minnet Steinbrink, Henrietta Rhamy, Edna Hehner, Pat Waddington, Marlan Johnson.

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Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director.

Phone 234-3041

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### WITH THE SOCIETY

**September 29, 2:00 p.m.** Buffalo County Historical Society meeting at Elm Creek Community Hall. Dr. Joe Jeffrey will give the program on "Fence Posts."

**Fort Robinson Tour, June, 1986.** Interest in the proposed tour to Fort Robinson (see p. 2, July-August, 1985 **BUFFALO TALES**) has been good so we will go ahead with the planning of this tour. Dates will be June 17-20, 1986. Cost per person will be \$80.00. This includes bus fare to and from Crawford, bus fare to points of interest in the area, and three nights lodging at Fort Robinson. Meals and admissions are not included in the \$80.00 cost. We will need 40 people for this tour. In order to secure lodging at the Fort, a \$12.00 non-refundable deposit for lodging must be made by November 30, 1985. Although non-refundable, this deposit can be transferred to another individual.

Please send reservation and check for \$12.00 to Buffalo County Historical Society, Box 523, Kearney, Nebraska 68847, before November 30.

**October 15, 7:00 p.m.** "Samantha Comes to Town: An Evening with Jane Curry" will be the program for the October meeting at the Kearney City Library meeting room, 21st and 1st Ave. Jane Curry will present a program in which she portrays Samantha Allen, a character from the writings of Marietta Holley. Holley was a contemporary of Mark Twain and wrote many books of humorous commentary on politics and family life. The suffrage movement, money, politics and marriage are among the topics Samantha discusses.

This program will be presented at five sites in Nebraska through a Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women project funded by the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities. The BCHS is sponsoring the Kearney presentation.

**Museum.** Trails and Rails is closed for the season. It will be open by appointment by calling 234-3041 or 237-7339. A special Christmas display is being planned.

### NEW MEMBERS

Bonnie D. Nabower . . . . .	Kearney	Glenn L. Lavery . . . . .	Kearney
Dorothy Carmann . . . . .	Riverdale	Larry & Roberta Nansel . . . . .	Kearney

later. "He was an eccentric German ...who carried a green umbrella both winter and summer."

Mrs. Amanda (Andrew) Swenson, a graduate of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Copenhagen,<sup>1</sup> was the first vocal instructor. On January 6th and 7th, 1885 she directed "H.M.S. Pinafore" at the Model Opera House (also a skating rink, on Avenue B). In 1887 the operetta was again presented at Kearney Lake on a large boat which had been brought in for use at the pleasure resort on the lake. May Morgan, who played Josephine, soon joined the Andrews Opera Company which appeared in Kearney in 1889. Although she achieved some success she returned to Kearney "where she was for many years connected with the post office."

The Kearney Musical Society, organized by Mrs. Swenson, was taken over by Charles Dean. Under his direction the cantata "Don Munio" was presented.

An "Obituary of the Kearney Musical Society" appeared in the Hub on November 29, 1894. It stated that society members were at first its exclusive members. At the meetings a regular program was held followed by a dance. The membership was later opened up and "more pretentious work essayed". But the Society died of "neglect."

Music was introduced into the schools in 1888 with H. M. Draper as supervisor. In 1890, he gave a test to twelve boys who wanted to start a band — nine passed. The others qualified later and the band soon increased to sixty members. A girl's band, almost as large was conducted by Mrs. Draper. The students received points for progress and attendance. When they acquired a certain number of points they could turn them in for money — furnished by Draper.

He was soon infected by the delusions of grandeur common during the Kearney boom. He announced plans to make Kearney the "musical center of the West." Mr. Draper drew up plans for a conservatory "after the Mooresque style with an amphitheater seating 1,000 and stage large enough to hold 400 children, plus a number of large classrooms". The building of the Opera House in 1891 settled the fate of the conservatory.

During the social whirl of the Kearney boom, musicales were often a form of entertainment. Tower Hill (former Country Club), home of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Z. Tillson, was the site of many of these events. In 1879, on their way to their homestead in Schneider township, the Tillsons spent the night in the Commercial Hotel in Kearney. It was shortly after the Mitchell-Ketchum murders, and one of the Olives was spending the night in the hotel. The guests were too uneasy to sleep; when they learned that Mrs. Tillson was a pianist, they prevailed on her to play for them on the old piano in the parlor. The only piece of sheet music was "Silvery Waves". They insisted she play far into the night — she would never forget "Silvery Waves." After the Tillsons moved to a sod house near Poole, Mrs. Tillson's uncle sent her a very fine grand piano made by Ernest Rosencrans, for whom the uncle worked. Besides the Tillsons, the Judge A. H. Connor home at 505 West 27th, was the setting for concerts by their daughter Sarah who had returned to Kearney after several years of study with Ernest Liebling of Chicago. The KEARNEY ENTERPRISE noted that she was the most skilled pianist in town. Maud Marston Burrows described a musicale at the R. L. Downing home and "the remarkable performance of a difficult Potpourri from standard operas by little Nellie Downing" (Gibbons).

1. Tales of Buffalo County, Vol. II.

In August of 1889 when the G.A.R. Veterans had their encampment in Kearney the enlistment of one of the Army's finest band directors expired. Joseph Benisch came from Germany to New York for a series of concerts. He soon learned that in signing a contract, he had joined the army. "The army had a ....hard time in those days securing band directors."

Professor Benisch stayed in Kearney after the encampment; he was director of both the Midway Band and Orchestra. The band owned one of only five copies of "Custer's Massacre". Professor Benisch provided some of the sound effects by shooting a pistol loaded with blank cartridges. One night, as he was about to shoot he saw some children romping in the grass in front of him.

"Mein Gott, kids, get out of the way!"

"The shooting was rhythmic...but the band members layed down their instruments and laughed. The drums were...all that was audible." Among the artists who appeared on the stage of the More Opera House (present location of Chicago Lumber) or the "new Opera House" were:

1898: Stuart, the Male Patti, in the Opera "1492". After repeated encores "he showed the range of his voice from coloratura soprano to deep bass".

1892: Edward Remenyi, Hungarian violinist, he also toured Europe as accompanist for Brahms.

1898: Madame Sophia Scalchi, "the greatest contralto of all time".

1901: Sousa and his band

Neally Stevens — pianist, and pupil of Liszt.

1924: Rosa Poselle

In 1905, when Kearney Normal opened its doors, there was no music department. George N. Porter, English and Forensics teacher, directed the orchestra; but practice for the Christmas concert couldn't begin until after Thanksgiving because Mr. Porter was also the football coach. He organized the first band in 1908, played clarinet in both groups, and was baritone soloist for the chorus. Professor Benjamin H. Patterson became director of orchestra and band in 1910.

Mrs. Grace Steadman, who organized the music department, presented "The Messiah" in 1911, with the St. Paul (Minn.) Symphony Orchestra accompanying.

During the twenties, Mrs. Steadman organized a women's quartet which sang "all over" — including early-day radio. Members of the quartet were Hester Mallory (Smithey), Hallie Smith (Dryden), Margaret Smith (Howard) and Ruth Walker (Toole). Catharine Boyle (Bahnsen) was one of their accompanists.

Hobart M. Swan was the first composer to have his music published. Professor Patterson composed orchestral numbers, the song "Kearney, the City Beautiful", and "Our Nebraska" with words by Hugh McClure. "The Man of Galilee" with words by Reverend Oliver Keve and music by Horace Smithey, has been sung many times in the East. C. A. Murch, former teacher at the Military Academy and head of the commercial department at the college, wrote "The Blue and the Gold". William G. Haxby wrote "I've Always Wanted to Call You Sweetheart".

#### *Two Kearney Artists*

The oil portrait, "An English Girl" which hangs in the Kearney Public Library and Information Center, was the gift of Lawton Parker, an internationally known artist.

Born in Michigan, he came with his parents Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Parker in 1873 to



Marion Smith



Lawton S. Parker

a farm on the former Fort Kearney Reservation. (The Arvon Marlatt farm). He attended the Kearney Schools. When he was fifteen he saw a copy of the magazine "Interior" in which the editor Dr. W. S. Gray offered a prize to "an artist with no instruction". Lawton submitted an entry. One of the judges of the contest wrote that he would give him free instruction if Lawton would come to Chicago.

Parker was soon awarded a scholarship to the Chicago Art Institute where he graduated with highest honors in 1888. As he was still very young, he went west where he painted portraits for \$5.00 each.

Later he went to Paris where he enrolled in the Julien Art School; and *L'ecole de Beaux Arts*. He was a friend and pupil of James M. Whistler. Next he accepted a professorship at the Arts League in St. Louis where his paintings attracted much attention at the World's Fair. As a pupil of John LeFarge in New York he took a first prize and was awarded the Chandler Paris scholarship for five years training. In 1913 his "La Paresse" won the first medal of the *Societe des Artistes Francais*—the first time this honor was bestowed on anyone other than a Frenchman. It was "the highest academic decoration that any painter can attain."

In 1921, Maud Marston Burrows approached Mrs. Adah Seaman Basten of the library board with the suggestion that the library buy one of Parker's paintings. With the support of the board, Maud wrote the artist about the matter. Later he offered "An English Girl" as a gift to the library "in memory of my father and mother who loved the Home Town and all associated with its early history from the time they settled on the farm...to the time they came to Paris with me."

"An English Girl" received a Gold Medal at the International Exposition at Munich in 1905, and medals at The Carnegie Institute in Pittsburg and the Art Institute in Chicago. It was one of the three canvasses exhibited at the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco where it received a Gold Medal. The painting was unveiled at the library on January 1, 1924 with John G. Lowe president of the library board making the opening address and Mrs. Basten giving some personal reminiscences of the artist.

Mr. Parker died September 25, 1954 in Pasadena, California. Surviving him were his wife Beatrice Snow Parker and a son Larry.

In 1967 a showing called "Impressionists-Post Impressionists-Twentieth Century" was held at a gallery in Los Angeles. Most of the main gallery was given over to the paintings of Lawton Parker a "recently rediscovered American Impressionist."

**Buffalo County Historical Society**  
**Box 523**  
**Kearney, NE 68847**

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Marion C. Smith, first art instructor at Kearney Normal was born near Lincoln on August 31, 1873. Her mother died when she was a child and her relationship with her father was most unhappy. After her graduation from Lincoln High School she went to live with her uncle, James H. Canfield,<sup>2</sup> who was later Chancellor of the University of Nebraska. While she attended Nebraska she was an assistant in the art department. She taught in Lincoln High for several years, then went to Santiago, Chile in 1901 where she taught in the University for about two years.

In 1905 she joined the faculty at Kearney Normal where she remained until her retirement. She continued her studies at the Chicago Art Institute, the New York Art League Landscape School, the Philadelphia Art School, as well as taking classes under a number of well known artists.

Miriam Anderson Worlock described her as "tall, erect, handsome, and unusually charming." She helped many needy students, and "was partial to the boys in her classes."<sup>3</sup>

With two other unmarried faculty members, Alma Hosis and Gertrude Gardiner, she built a house at 714 West 23rd St.<sup>4</sup> which they named Hope Lodge for obvious reasons. Miss Smith was engaged at one time but her fiancée died.

Her well-known compassion extended to the American Indians. She spent some time on the Rosebud Indian Reservation where she did a number of water colors. They included "Woman In Mourning" (her husband was to be sent to the state Penitentiary), Mrs. Spotted Tail" (wife of the Brule Sioux Indian Chief), "Squaw With Papoose", and "Indian Warrior" (one of the participants in the Custer Massacre). She gave six of her Indian pictures to the college in 1961.

Marion was the art department for so many years that she was reluctant to leave. After her forced retirement in 1943 her room was not used for several years in deference to her.

In her last years she withdrew into her small home on West 26th Street with a "houseful of absolutely uninhibited cats and dogs."

She died in 1971. In addition to instilling a love of art in her students her influence is evident in many ways. She was responsible for bringing many exhibitions and artists to the college, and was a member of the committee which chose art for the college collection under a Carnegie Grant in 1940.

Sources will appear at the end of Part II.

2. The father of writer Dorothy Canfield Fisher.

3. Quote from "Who's Who in Chapter AS P.E.O." Marion was a charter member.

4. The Jack Campbell home.