



Buffalo Tales



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EPISODES IN THE LIVES OF EARLY BUFFALO COUNTY WOMEN

Compiled by Emma Jane Wilder

Those early years in Nebraska from the late 1890's into the 1940's were spartan and uncertain. Hardships were just a part of everyday life. This paper has been organized to reveal the uniqueness of those times by the known human interest stories of some of our early women residents. Unfortunately, as always, many stories have perished along with their story teller. But, the few we are able to tell remind us of the varied obstacles the women had to overcome, and their courageous contributions.

Hadassah Grant Seaman (1841-1911)

Hadassah managed the Odessa Post Office after she and her husband arrived in Buffalo County in 1873, and long before the expansion of population and good roads. It has been a family story that Odessa was named for Hadassah. This is indeed credible since it has been found that the town, Peake, was named for its first postmistress, Jeannie Peake, in 1884.

Hadassah's daughter Adah Seaman taught school in Dobytown at the age of 15. "After arriving at the school by stagecoach, she would be greeted by the rattle of a snake under the doorstep".

From *Ten Generations of Grants* compiled by Myron Scott.

Submitted by Ardella Webb

Anna Sabrina Mellinger Toole (1861-1941)

Mary Jane Boyle Kirkpatrick (1867-1936)

Anna Toole was a practical nurse who gained her knowledge from books and practical experience with Drs. D. D. and J. J. Cameron and Dr. Basten. She accompanied the doctors when they delivered babies in the home and frequently stayed a few days afterward to see that all went well. She was active from about 1900 to the mid-1920's. It was she who brought Aunt Jen Kirkpatrick into the same line of work about 1915.

But Aunt Jen went a little further. She had a home with two extra bedrooms. So she turned her home into a confinement hospital where the women could come, deliver their babies and stay a few days as need warranted. The doctors, needless to say, were delighted with her arrangement. She continued the confinement hospital from about 1918 until 1925.

Submitted by Catharine Bahnsen

Emma Jane Chesbrough Wort (1865-1958)

Emma C. Wort was a college graduate and teacher, and, like many other women of her day, totally supported education. But, these were the days before the F.D.I.C. and banks had a tendency to fail.

She had experienced the depressions of '98 and the '30's, as well as the failure of many banks during the '30's. In addition she had learned in her own family how an Illinois banker had cheated her aunt of some of the income from her inherited estate. All this knowledge deepened her distrust of banks.

So, she began to hide cash. Her monthly household allowance, given her by her

WITH THE SOCIETY

From the President:

The year has once again begun at a terrific pace. Election time is fast approaching, Wagons West Celebration is just around the corner, the Annual Meeting is very close by and the Christmas lights on the train are finally down. Work has begun on the log cabin and soon the *Kearney Hub* will be running a campaign to raise money to "Raise the Roof" for the cabin. Watch your papers and feel free to participate in the drive.

In other activities, preparations are under way to move the archival material to its new home in the church building (a temporary location until a permanent base can be constructed in the future). If you have the time or desire to help with this project, please contact Alice Howell or Mardi Anderson. There is much to be done before March 30th, the date set for the open house and the official unveiling.

Let us know if you would like to be an **active** member. Help is needed in many areas of the Historical Society and your help would be welcomed.

—Susan C. Lynch, President

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Starting in 1992, *Buffalo Tales* will be published bi-monthly. Due to increased mailing costs, it was decided to cut 1991 publications from ten to eight, and to publish six issues per year thereafter. Along with this members will periodically receive a newsletter regarding plans and dates for special events throughout the year, such as the Annual Meeting, Wagons West, Trails & Rails Museum summer activities, etc.

A Publications Committee will be responsible for the publishing and mailing of *Buffalo Tales*. Members of the committee are Philip S. Holmgren, Chairman; Margaret Nielsen, Alice Howell and Merlin Burgland.

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Mark your calendar for these upcoming meetings:

February 23, 2:00 p.m., at First State Bank of Shelton.

March 29, 2:00 p.m. Opening of Archives Center in church building at Trails & Rails Museum

April, Annual Meeting. Date, time and place to be announced.

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Memorial Gifts have been received:

In memory of Mabel Vohland from Alice Howell.

In memory of Ron Cope from Frances Link, Dr. and Mrs. R. L. Link and Alice Howell

In memory of Bernice Urwiller from Wayne Urwiller

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NEW LIFE MEMBERS

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|--|---------|----------------------------|---------|
| Dora Day | Kearney | Jan R. Eickmeier | Kearney |
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NEW ANNUAL MEMBERS

Supporting

James W. & Y'londa AndersonKearney

Basic

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|---------------------------|---------|------------------------------|---------|
| Teresa Kreutzer | Kearney | Jeanette H. Nickel | Kearney |
| Dorothy Golay | Kearney | Judy Johnson | Overton |
| Myrna Fish | Kearney | Don Rosenthal | Gibbon |

husband, was "banked" in her closet. Neither her husband nor her daughter approved of this practice. (Until her death, I never believed it held much money.)

Nonetheless, the hoard grew. It was Grandmother's Closet Bank. Upon her death in 1958, her daughter, Weslie, and granddaughter, Emma Jane, spent a full evening cleaning out the closet of the remainder of this hoard. She had hidden her money (in \$10 and \$20 bills) in shoe boxes, in all the drawers in her chiffonnier, under the dresser scarf, in her jewel box, behind pictures, on the shelves, and anywhere she could find space for a bill. When we were through the total cash removed from her closet amounted to \$7,000.00.

Submitted by Emma Jane Wilder

Mrs. Irma (Mrs. Joe) Wolford (1878-1969)

Irma Wolford was another who firmly supported education, insisting that her grandson knew his multiplication tables and spelling. But, it was she who was responsible for paying off the mortgage on their Buffalo County farm during the depression days of the '30's.

In 1910 the Joe Wolford family purchased a farm in Buffalo County for \$75.00 per acre. Getting ahead, in those days, meant expansion to the farmers, and became a common practice among them. So it was that the Wolford family first bought land in western Nebraska, and when that didn't produce they sold it and bought land in Wyoming. But the Wyoming land did not produce either. Meanwhile the mortgage was coming due on the Buffalo County farm. So they decided to sell the Wyoming land for whatever they could get. Then Joe Wolford died in 1936. Unable to gain enough from the sale of the Wyoming land and with the bank starting to foreclose, Irma Wolford decided to borrow the money to pay off the mortgage.

It was at this time that her son told her to let the farm go. But Mrs. Wolford was determined to save it. She began to pay off the mortgage by using her chicken and egg money and whatever she made from the farm to do it, making her payments many times in nickels, dimes and small change. She eventually hired help, taking in a partner and managing the farm. By 1945 she had paid off the mortgage.

In addition to completing the mortgage payments, her days were full making her own soap, churning butter, taking care of a large garden and, during harvest, serving dinner for 12 men. She lived to the age of 91.

Submitted by Vincent Wolford

Sadie Shada (1886-1965)

Sadie Shada immigrated to the United States about the beginning of the century with her husband, Mose. They were Lebanese and eventually selected Kearney as their home. Mose started a career in peddling, taking his supplies by horse and wagon to farm homes in Buffalo and Custer counties. This left Sadie to care for their garden space so she could sell her vegetables to Kearney residents. About 1910 they moved into a home with a larger garden space, which was to become their



Irma Wolford

main source of income.

Not long after that move, Mose got a job with the Union Pacific Railroad. Eventually, because of poor health, Mose was forced to retire from his job with the railroad, later dying in 1939.

This left Sadie totally responsible for her large family. She would load up her horse and wagon with vegetables, taking one or two of her boys along to help, and would make her way through Kearney each day, stopping at innumerable households to sell the fresh produce. This involved many miles of walking.

Sadie had little knowledge of the English language and did very little writing. Nonetheless she was able to communicate with her friends. She was proud, respectful, and did not ask any special favors. But because of her values, and hard work she raised a very fine family of ten children. Submitted by Mike Shada

Charlotte Robinson (1907-

When Charlotte Robinson was about three years old a band of gypsies came through their farm and tried to carry her off.

About 1910 gypsies were roaming the country intent on taking anything and everything they could lay their hands on. A good sized band of them arrived at her father's farm (Edward Shovlain's). They had apparently seen Charlotte with her intriguing red hair and wanted her. But her terrified mother (Elizabeth Jacobson Shovlain) had seen them and immediately went about locking the doors. This didn't deter the gypsies, latched door or no, they still tried to get in, intent on taking Charlotte with them. But Charlotte's father happened to be working close enough to the house so that he was able to chase them off. Happily, a childhood in a gypsy camp was not meant to be for Charlotte. Submitted by Charlotte Robinson

Esther Stock Kroeger

Esther Stock Kroeger was secretary of the Kearney Chamber of Commerce and later became a news reporter and Assistant Editor when her husband issued the newspaper the *Daily News*. She was the one who recognized the value of, and implemented an application for, a grant from the Harmon Foundation for the development of our Harmon Park.

It was in 1924 when William E. Harmon of New York City organized the Harmon Foundation for the purpose of lending financial assistance to communities wishing to open playgrounds. Esther heard of this, "and with the assistance of Chamber President Ray E. Turner, made application for a grant from the Harmon Foundation." Fifty communities of the nation would receive funds to secure fields for playgrounds. 784 towns applied, Kearney was one of the fifty lucky recipients.

from *Buffalo Tales*



Sadie Shada

Elise Tollefsen (1892-1975)

The Harry Tollefsen family bought the Kearney Ice House in 1929. When the elder Tollefsen was unable to manage the Ice House, his wife, Elise, took over and successfully managed it for many years, until it was sold in 1956.

Acquiring help was a problem for her, as it was seasonal work. There were many times when the boys would not show up and then it was up to Elise to handle the ice when a customer came to pick it up. She had learned how to manipulate the 300 lb. slabs of ice, how to chip it to reduce it to the size that a customer would want without destroying the entire block. (The ice was scored in 50 lb. segments and could be reduced according to the needs of the customer.) Because the ice house floor sloped toward the delivery door and had a metal surface, she was able to move it easily over the floor. Then, when no help was available, she would assist the customer in placing the block on the bumper of the car.

Business ability was only one of her talents. She had a beautiful soprano voice and sang in the Episcopal choir for many years. Submitted by Gaylord Tollefsen

Mabel Frame Rice (1896-1988)

When Mabel Rice's husband, Doc Rice, died in 1932, she was left with three boys and very little income. First, Mabel completed some commercial courses at Kearney State Teacher's College, and then was persuaded by a friend to run for County Register of Deeds.

"When she looked over the list of candidates running for all offices, she decided that she knew more Republicans than Democrats; and that people voting for them might vote for her too — if she were a Republican. So she became one. She also thought that she might know as many people in the county as anyone running against her.

"The job paid \$1,500 a year, and during the depression that was incentive enough to attract candidates. She worked hard, speaking to all groups and individuals that would listen, nailing posters on telephone poles and handing out cards. When the final votes for the primary election were counted, she had beaten Dewey Kring, a well known Kearneyite, by 14 votes.

"Subsequent elections were easier. Economic conditions improved and the job became less attractive. She served six 4-year terms and retired in 1958.

"One son is a retired mechanical engineer, another a retired soil conservationist, and her youngest son, a psychiatrist, passed away in 1983."

Submitted by Larry Rice



Mabel Frame Rice

Alice Hendrickson (1904-)

In those early years farm women wore many hats, qualified or not. Alice remembers that in the early 20's she delivered a baby, never having been trained as a mid-wife.

As Alice explains: "If the call to the family doctor for a delivery came in the middle of the night and you lived 12 to 15 miles from his office, there could be times when the new one was ready to arrive before the doctor. I was called at 12:00 a.m., saying I was needed. 'Come and bring any clothing you might have from your two children'. The couple was unprepared for an early birth date. Time lapsed and no doctor in sight, and the baby boy was ready to be born, so I assisted. I cleansed the mouth of fluid and moved the tiny body from the mother far enough to cover it with a clean blanket. 'All is fine', the doctor stated when he arrived and took over."

Submitted by Alice Hendrickson

With all our current home appliances and governmental safeguards, we sometimes forget what it was like to live 50 to 90 years ago. This paper has been prepared to give us a deeper appreciation of what women went through during those early years.

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.

Directors

- Term expiring June 1, 1992: Glen Wisch, Philip Holmgren, Mike Stauffer, all of Kearney; Chad Anderson of Amherst
- Term expiring June 1, 1993: Alice Howell, Elmer Holzrichter, Susan C. Lynch, all of Kearney; Viola Livingston of Gibbon.
- Term expiring June 1, 1994: Howard Kolbe, Marti Anderson, Lois Rahmann, all of Kearney; Jim Cudaback of Riverdale.

Officers (1 year term)

- President Susan C. Lynch
- Vice President Jim Cudaback
- Secretary Alice Howell
- Treasurer Marti Anderson

Trails & Rails Museum

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