



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

October 1986

MY DEAR JAY - Part I

Brink Family Correspondence, 1884-1904

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

Introduction

Charles Denison Brink was born in Upper Falls, Vermont on February 12, 1838. During the Civil War he enlisted in the Tenth Regiment of Vermont and took part in the Battle of Gettysburg. Many years later, one of the survivors of that battle wrote of the Confederate Army charge up Cemetery Ridge: "Color Sergeant Charles Brink while carrying his own flag in one hand, grasped a rebel flag with the other and demanded its release." Other troops beat back the charge and the flag captured that day is now displayed in the State Capitol in Augusta, Maine. Mr. Brink was discharged with the rank of Captain on August 8, 1867.

On February 8, 1865, he had married Mary Eleen Henry in Charlestown, New Hampshire, where the couple made their home. A son Charles, 4, and a daughter Alice, 6, died of scarlet fever within four days of each other in April of 1871. Mrs. Brink died when another son, Jay Henry, was born on June 18, 1881. After the loss of his wife and two children, Mr. Brink apparently felt the need to start a new life. In 1884, leaving his small son with his parents and a relative, Miss Harriet Parks¹, he came to Nebraska where he bought a farm near Miller. He seems to have lived in Kearney most of the time.

Letters preserved by the Brink family show the changing relationships between a father and a son whom he knew only through rare visits.

Kearney, Nebr. Dec. 28, 1884

My dear boy,

How is my little Jay this cold morning? Papa would be very glad to see you and see what a little man you have come to be. I suppose you help Auntie and Grandpa and Grandma ever so much, help Auntie bring in the wood and keep just as still, and

mind all Auntie tells you. Did you know that all good little boys do just as they are told? . . . I think you will for when papa comes home he wants to ask Auntie all about it and you would not like it to have her say you had not been good—

Did Santa Claus come and see my little boy? He was here and he said he was going way in to New England just as soon as he could give all the little boys and girls something to make them happy. I see a nice picture book marked for you, and lots

of presents . . . loaded into his sleigh and oh he had such a pretty team four little reindeer, and oh they had bells all over them when they went off . . . there was such a jingling.



Charles D. Brink

1. Referred to as "Auntie" in the letters.

(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 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 \$ 7.50
- Institutional Membership \$10.00
- Supporting Membership \$25.00

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

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Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director.

Phone 234-3041

WITH THE SOCIETY

October 26, 2:00 p.m. Mark your calendar and attend a meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society at Ravenna. The program will focus on Ravenna's 100-year history. The city has just celebrated its centennial year. If anyone needs a ride, call Margaret Hohnholt, program chairman, (237-7327), or the Museum office (234-3041).

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A SPECIAL THANK YOU: to Lawrence Curd for his work in restoring the recently acquired railroad cart.

And to Dale Sickler for the donation of bound copies of the *Kearney Daily Hub* and other local newspapers covering the period from 1892 to 1952.

And to Jeff Jorgensen, former member of our Board of Directors, now living in Gering, NE, for his extensive postcard collection and for a copy of John E. Carter's recent book, *Solomon D. Butcher, Photographing the American Dream*.

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A full busload of members and friends participated in the BCHS-sponsored tour on Sunday, October 12. Visits were made to Platte River State Park near Louisville, and Fort Atkinson State Historical Park near Fort Calhoun.

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A Message from President Chandler Lynch:

With the proposed changes in the tax laws, now is the time to make that gift to the Buffalo County Historical Society. Our Society, like many small non-profit organizations, has felt the pinch of the present economy, and needs the financial support of members and friends. Last month I outlined a fund-raising method through life insurance which would ensure future benefits to the Society. Please give this your consideration.

Remember the Buffalo County Historical Society in your 1986 gift plans. The Trails and Rails Museum is off to a good start. Your gifts will guarantee continued growth and service to the community.

NEW MEMBERS

- Phil and Ellene Euler Kearney
- Burton Mougey Kearney
- Lori Jameson McCool Junction

Now papa want to tell you about the little birds that live about the farmyard. When we feed our cattle we have a large box . . . to put the meal for the cattle, and there is large flocks of little birds about the size of the bird that used to look into the window at Aunties. Well they come and pick up the meal and they fly so many together and so fast that they strike the boxes and get a wing broken or hurt someway. We have picked up several and carried them into the house and they seem to be quite glad to get in out of the cold and will hop around the room and pick away at any crumb they can find. After they stay awhile we let them out, and they go off happy seeming to say thank you . . .

We have got 2 little pigs oh just the prettiest little things you ever see for a pig. They go grunting around, sometimes they will curl down with a calf . . . and all go to sleep together . . . Perhaps Santa will bring you a pig or bird next Christmas . . .

Feb. 14, 1885

Miss H. M. Parks,

Dear friend and friend of my boy,

I am in receipt of your letter of the 3rd and am very grateful that all are in good health . . . We have been passing through another cold spell and are not quite out of it yet. It seems impossible to get warm enough to send the mercury above zero.

I am afraid that the weather is keeping it so cold that we will not get our cattle in condition to market before the 1st of March, that being the case you will not see the tramp before the first of April.

A **tramp**—now that's not so bad after all. At first thought . . . one can't help to associate the word **tramp**—mendicant dirt—and a host of other unpleasant thoughts—it is not at all necessary because one is a tramp that he should be dirty, ragged, or a beggar. I never knew a begging tramp who took the trouble to break ice for a bath, did you? . . . I like the name—certainly we must all get thro some way, tramp along, or be carried. For myself, I **prefer** the former. The more we tramp amongst our fellow men, the broader views we get of this life . . . I would rather be the tramp that I am than to sit down and let the weeds grow up so high that the sun could not shine onto me. This tramp life will not let the mold gather on us or get rusty . . . With lots of kisses for papas boy, and best wishes for you all I will sign myself your friend—

The tramp



First farmstead of C. D. Brink near Miller.

The next letter, dated June 27, 1893, carries the heading "C. D. Brink, Real Estate, 2100 Central Ave." It was likely written after Jay had visited Kearney.

Dear Jay,

. . . I received your letter yesterday was glad that you arrived home without accident, and in good health . . . You did not say that you had received the shoulder braces . . . If the braces have arrived don't neglect to put them on, **and wear them**. I remember you were to learn fast, and straighten up, and I then to buy you a wheel.

The letter you sent was very nice and I want you to write often and you must be careful and spell the words correctly . . . With kind regards to Auntie Parks, I will say goodbye.

Yours, Pa

Letters for the next three years are dated from Miller. The depression and drought had apparently ended the real estate business.

Miller, Nebr. Sept. 9/96

My dear Jay,

. . . We are finishing the haying this week and next to do is to sow the fall wheat, and husking the corn. We have already begun husking for the pigs, about 20 bus. they take each day, and soon will have to increase the amount. I do not think the corn on the home place will make more than 20 bus. per acre, and it may not that. My pigs are doing nicely. I think I have never had a better lot. I don't let anyone feed them unless I am absent . . .

In your letter you write that they all want McKinley for President there. It is not so here. Bryan will get the most votes in Nebraska, I believe. The West want more money to do business with and the New England states want protection. It looks to us out here in the west as though Bryan would be the next one to occupy the White House. **I hope he will**—but whichever one wins, I think I can live if the rest of the people can . . .

Since I wrote the first part of this letter . . . your letter came so I thought I would add a little to it. We have game here such as prairie chickens, quail, rabbit and in the spring wild geese. I am no hunter—have not shot a gun but once since I came to Nebraska, then I shot a dog but did not (hit) him. I like fishing but this is not much of a fish country, not nearly so good as where you are. I think it all right that you attend dancing school only don't let it take your mind off your studies . . .

Miller, Nebr. Dec. 29/96

My dear Jay,

I wish you a Happy New Year, and trust it will be of benefit to you. I have your letter of the 16th and will answer some of the questions propounded . . . On the farms where more or less land is under cultivation we have to fence to protect our crops. Some land in the western part of the state is occupied in common and herders are employed . . . Yes I have seen prairie fires but not many of later years as so much of the ground has been plowed that the fire can't make much headway—I have sold the greater part of my hogs. I lost from cholera 40 pigs and 15 to 20 hogs . . . I do not keep any sheep nearly all the sheep that are fattened in Nebr. are raised in states further west. There are not nearly so many ponies kept here as were when I first came to Nebr. The wheel has taken their place. I have none. I keep a buggy horse,

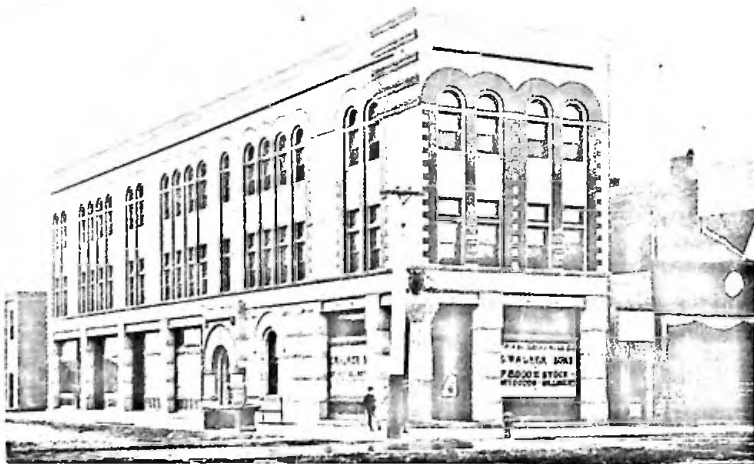
nearly all . . . drive a pair but one does pretty well for me. Ponies are not worth much now, \$5 to \$25 . . .

You are nice to so readily give up the idea of having a saddle. I hope it won't be long before we will get out of the money squeeze so that we can have things more to our liking. Yes—gold is found in many places in the Black Hills . . . No steam plows in Nebr. Learning to be an engineer and being one on the railway is quite two things . . . **Very few** men get engineers unless they work up from fireman . . . It want(s) a man of great nerve. I think you hardly fitted for such work . . .

The letters for the next three years deal chiefly with farming and weather. Prices in 1897 were: wheat 60¢, oats 10¢, corn 7½ to 10¢. Wheat went up to \$1.00 in 1898 then dropped to 60¢, corn 15¢, potatoes 40¢, butter 10¢, eggs 12¢.

April 17/98

. . . I have been away from Miller for a month to my farm in Elm Creek, doing some repairs on the buildings and seeding 80 acres of alfalfa, which is our best grass for feeding stock. It is much like clover but produces very much more as when it is two years old we can cut three crops each year and will do well for many years without reseeding. It is an expensive crop to get started . . . the seed cost \$3.25 per bus. and often we fail to get it to grow. It looks like war and before this reaches you we may be in it. I have been in one and will not try it again, but many of the young men here seem ready to go . . .



Real Estate Office of C. D. Brink was located in this building, 2100 Central Avenue.

May 30/98

. . . You ask what I think about the war. I think it may be necessary at times . . . but always to be deplored, for no matter what may be gained the loss of life and money must be great . . . You say you would like to go if you were old enough. I think you would change your mind were you to try it. I have been to war and got all I wanted. Soldiering in our country is bad but going into the Tropics is much worse. Never harbor the thought of being a soldier.

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. . . I want you to make great headway in your studies . . . for I want (you) out here with me . . . I need to have you out here to help me and I want you fitted to do so . . .

June 5/99

. . . In your last letter you wrote that you wished to come out here. Now I have written to your Uncle Charles Robinson, Rutland (Vermont) and he writes me there is a Commercial College in Rutland and I have concluded that the best thing for you is to take a course or two there.

Enclosed you will find Bk. Dft. for \$125—one hundred for "Uncle Henry" and \$25 for you to buy clothing . . .

Sept. 6/99

My dear Jay,

I was very glad to hear that you were at Rutland and ready for school. So far as clothing consult your Cousin Charles, he can tell better than I what you want . . .

You wanted to buy a camera, which I wouldn't advise you to do, as you will have no time to take pictures for you must remember you are now past play, and must fit yourself for caring for yourself.

I want you to take up penmanship and bookkeeping you don't want anything to do with telegraphy, there are hundreds for telegraphy that are out of work. What you want most to learn is to keep act. of books and write letters as well as Charles can . . . I want you here to help me but I want you equipped so you can be a help. I have paid out several thousands for you, which I was glad to do, and now all I ask is that you make me happy by fitting yourself to not only help me but be able to look after your own interests.

So soon as you will write a nice clear business letter in a pretty hand, I will buy you a first-class camera.

Now Jay do your very best to help yourself, and please me, and in time to come you will look back with pleasure that you made the effort . . .

With love,
 C. D. Brink

Part II will appear in the next issue.