



# Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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## The Origins of The Mother Hull Home 1889-1929

by Mrs. Ella Melton Peck

The Mother Hull Hospital was incorporated in April, 1889 with Mrs. Nancy Hull as president. The Board of Trustees included: Mrs. Mary C. Barnd, Mrs. Helen Dryden, Mrs. Nancy Hull and Mrs. L. M. Parish, secretary. The institution admitted any and all, with or without funds, each of whom were given every care possible. This was the first hospital in the city of Kearney and, in later years, was to become the Mother Hull Home. As Mrs. Hull's granddaughter, Mrs. Eleanor Munn, wrote in 1929, "the Mother Hull Home did not drop fully equipped from heaven as the goddess Minerva is said to have sprung from the head of Jupiter." Rather, she said, it had "an humble origin" and an interesting history. A part of that story will be told here.

There may have been earlier attempts at an organization, but, according to the original minute book, the Women's Christian Temperance Union came into being June 10th, 1880 at a meeting held in the home of Mrs. Louisa Collins, familiarly known as the "Mother of Kearney". The W.C.T.U. has been in continuous existence since that time and celebrates its 100th anniversary this June.

One woman who soon became a member of the W.C.T.U. was Mrs. Nancy Hull, wife of a Kearney physician. The minutes reveal that she became treasurer in 1882 and in 1886 was elected president. Mrs. Hull was soon recognized as the leading per-



2213 First Avenue

This building was the first courthouse in Kearney, relocated and bricked over. First row, from left: 1st, Edgar Hale; 5th, Mrs. Hull; 6th, Louisa Collins. Second row: 5th from left, Serena O'Brien.

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Editor..... Gene E. Hamaker

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.

Annual dues, payable January 1:

- Family membership.....\$ 5.00
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- Institutional membership. 5.00
- Sustaining membership... 25.00 +
- Life membership..... 100.00

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Trails & Rails Museum

Phone..... 234-3041

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*WITH THE SOCIETY*

A bus tour to Red Cloud to visit Willa Cather country and the Webster County Museum is scheduled for Sunday, June 29. Cost of the bus fare will be \$10.00; admissions, if any, are not included, but would not exceed \$2.00. Reservations must be made in advance, and a check for \$10.00 must accompany each reservation.

It is planned to have the bus leave our museum grounds by 10:00 a.m. Each participant is to bring a sack lunch for a noon picnic in Red Cloud. The tour should return to Kearney before 7:00 o'clock.

Please send reservations to the Buffalo County Historical Society, Box 523, Kearney, NE 68847.

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The Trails & Rails Museum is open every afternoon from 1:00 to 6:00. Exhibits during June focus on the Plains Indians, and there are many interesting new artifacts on loan for the present display. Pioneer life will be featured in July.

You will notice that a brick platform is now laid on the east side of the depot and between the depot and the train.

Many artifact and archival items have been received from the following donors: Hallie S. Dryden, Viola Mueller, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Kilpatrick, LaDonna Doughty and Jacqueline Strickland (daughters of Lloyd and Nina Frank), Ralph Lancaster, Ernest Ludwig, Louise Butler and Lucile Stefanski.

Summer personnel at the Museum include Philip Holmgren III, director; Bertha Wagner, NRTA/AARP Senior Community Service Employment Program; and Karen Rodehorst, CETA Youth Employment.

sonality and dominant spirit of the organization and continued to be until her death in 1911. Throughout this time she fought intemperance, which she believed brought the despoiling of childhood, degradation of womanhood, the ruin of manhood and much of the world's crime, destitution and misery.

The furtherance of temperance, as its name indicated, was the main goal of the W.C.T.U., but, from the beginning its concerns were much broader. This was soon manifest in the activities of the group in Kearney. The members began aiding the needy in their second year of organization and were the leaders in relief efforts during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Through the efforts of Mrs. Hull and her loyal helpers, the first library of the city was begun. A few books were secured and a very modest reading room was opened on Central Avenue. This was where they carried on much of their work in caring for the needy, and it was also their regular meeting place. Meetings were held weekly in those days.

Fund raising projects were endless. References are made in the minutes to a wide variety of fund raising projects such as ice cream socials, Golden Rod festivals, oyster suppers, musical entertainments, benefit plays, tournaments, chicken pie dinners, and so on. As the W.C.T.U. assumed more responsibilities, the need for additional funds increased.

A few incidents recorded in the minutes suggest the range of interests of the ladies of the W.C.T.U. There was a "Mrs. James, whose husband had left her and who wanted a home for her baby, but did not wish to give the baby away and was willing to work and pay for the baby's board." On another occasion they responded to "a girl laying very sick at the home of Ellen Haight, who was not able to take proper care of her." Mrs. Hull and Mrs. Weddin were delegated to "go right over after the meeting." A third request involved "three women from the Cotton Mill asking for clothing."

That there was no hospital in Kearney in the late 1880's as the population surged and the boom got underway was to be deplored. It is said that Mrs. Hull had long been in the habit of caring for people in her own home, providing for lonely girls coming here in the boom days, but an ordinary house was inadequate for all the various activities in which Mrs. Hull and her co-workers were engaged. Mrs. Hull covered the city and outlying districts, ministering to those in need as she drove her white horse here and there, often accompanied by one of her lieutenants. The need for a hospital was imperative, especially to one of Mrs. Hull's humanitarian impulses. Thus it was that the W.C.T.U. took the initiative in April of 1889.

Incorporation does not seem to have brought a hospital into being. There is no listing for a hospital in the city directories of 1889 through 1892. The library and meeting room of the W.C.T.U. changes twice during this period as they continue their other work. Meals and lodging are found for strangers and for girls looking for work. The W.C.T.U. became sort of a clearing house for those needing work and those desiring workers. One of Mrs. Hull's principles was that no one should be turned away and all must be cared for, regardless of worthiness or poverty.

Another move was made in the fall of 1893. The Clifton house at 1809 Central Avenue was rented. The W.C.T.U. was to use the lower part and the upper part became their hospital. James O'Kane and his wife moved in, he acting as the superintendent. O'Kane promptly sought donations of bedding, linen and cotton and advertised for nurses to work twelve hour shifts, night or day. "None but good and

experienced nurses need apply," he said. In December, 1893 the minutes show that three ministers, the Reverends Black, Barnes and Hoffman, visited the hospital, wanting "to know all about it, who was running it and sifted things pretty thoroughly." What conclusion they reached is not recorded.

The staff of the hospital varied over the years. A superintendent, manager or matron oversaw the whole, with a cook, nurses and volunteers assisting. The W.C.T.U. in November of 1893 voted to pay the nurses four dollars a week if there were more than five patients at the hospital, and three and a half dollars if fewer than five. Later, in 1912 and 1913 the cost per patient per week was placed at five dollars. Doctors, of course, were on call or visited to care for their patients.

A chance to move into better accommodations appeared to develop in February of 1894, when Mr. George W. Frank, Sr. visited a meeting of the W.C.T.U. He offered them two lots on Capitol Hill at 39th and Second Avenue and said he and his wife would donate \$1,000 anytime they built a hospital on the site. No further mention is made of the offer.

An article in the **Kearney Daily Hub** of February 13th, 1896 reviewed the operation of the hospital, still located in the Clifton house, but since October, 1895 under the management of Mr. and Mrs. J. Sleeper. There were six patients in the hospital at this time, at least two of whom were county charges. The county paid the expenses of the latter and were also paying the salary of the nurse and probably the rent for the building. The W.C.T.U. ladies met the other costs, including that of patients unable to pay for their treatment. One such patient, a lady aged 87, had been there for a long time, "and while she was not ailing with any sickness, she has no one to depend upon for a living." The **Hub** sums up its account with these words: "all persons who happen to meet with an accident of any kind are taken there for treatment and proper physicians are summoned, and persons who meet with such accidents are kept there until they are perfectly able to continue on towards their destination."

Later in 1896 the group did move the hospital to the Scott hotel building. This must have been at 2213 First Avenue where the next surviving city directory shows them in 1904. From the secretary's account, it would seem that the City was paying the monthly rent of ten dollars. However, private donations and such amounts as patients were able to pay were the only source of income for the hospital. No matter how hard pressed they were for funds, Mrs. Hull was always confident that some way, some how, means would be provided. A close associate recalled being greatly perplexed as bills were coming in and there were no funds on hand. Mrs. Hull stilled her fears and, on returning from dinner, to her amazement the sum of fifty dollars had come in from an unexpected source. In her sweet, motherly way, S. C. Bassett wrote, Mrs. Hull would present an appeal so pathetic that no one thought of refusing.

The minutes of the W.C.T.U. between 1898 and 1905 are missing, but, in 1905, they record a contribution of \$888.95 by the volunteer firemen. This apparently was a part of their annual benevolence. For several years, the minutes list a nice sum contributed by the firemen. There was a need for such amounts. The W.C.T.U. paper for Nebraska, the **Union Worker** of February, 1905 reports that ninety-one patients were cared for at the hospital in 1904.

Items of interest concerning the hospital in the first decade of the twentieth century include the following. At a meeting of April 5th, 1907 it was reported that the

operating room had been newly fitted up and was ready for use. On the 11th of May 1907, a memorial service was held at the Christian Science Church in memory of Mrs. J. Sleeper, former superintendent of the hospital, a Mrs. Snider, Moses Sydenham who was "a brother and helper" to the W.C.T.U., and Dr. Hull, Nancy Hull's husband. In November of 1909 it was noted that the hospital had been opened sixteen years earlier. This would suggest that the hospital was not formally recognized as such until they occupied the Clifton House at 1809 Central Avenue in November of 1893. It was further reported that eighteen hundred patients had been cared for in those sixteen years.

Mrs. Nancy Hull, first president of the hospital, and president of the W.C.T.U. much of the time from 1886 until now, died in March, 1911. The **Kearney Daily Hub** captioned the news in this fashion: "Mrs. Hull, was founder of the W.C.T.U. Hospital, Mother of the Sick and the Poor and the Homeless and one of the Best Loved and Most Widely Known Women of Buffalo County. She was associated with every movement for the betterment of civic and social conditions." Mrs. Peter (Serena Sylvia) O'Brien was then elected president and served for about eight years in that capacity.

Following World War I, the W.C.T.U. was again discussing a new location for the hospital. As there are no minutes for several months, it has to be assumed that it was in this period of time their quarters at 2213 First Avenue (where the V.F.W. building now stands) were relinquished and the hospital was moved to a two-story frame house at 1513 Central Avenue across from the Courthouse. This building, then owned by Mrs. Anna Gard, is today in the area of the Roller Ranch. Mrs. Ollie Holt became president of the W.C.T.U. at this time.

It was in 1922 that the hospital became a home. As stated in the official souvenir booklet of Kearney's centennial of 1973 a Hospital Benefit Association had incorporated in 1902 and started the Kearney Hospital. Financial difficulties led to its closing in 1910. The Episcopal Dioceses re-opened it on the 9th of March, 1912 as St.



1890 D. B. Clark Home, 23rd Street and Avenue B  
Purchased 1923 from Dora and Daniel Herbert. Torn down 1976.

<p>Non-Profit Organization Bulk Rate</p> <hr/> <p>U.S. Postage PAID</p> <p>Postal Permit No. 7 Kearney, Nebraska</p>
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Lukes Hospital and it served the community until the Kearney General and Good Samaritan Hospitals were built in 1922 and 1924 respectively. The building of these hospitals no doubt made it seem wise for the Mother Hull hospital to be incorporated as a care home, a function, as we have seen, they served from the first years.

For some time the W.C.T.U. had been looking forward to a building of their own. A letter of April 1st, 1920 was sent to all the Unions of Nebraska asking for substantial pledges and funds to build a new hospital. The local group had set aside savings for such a purpose and had recently received a legacy of \$1,950 from Mr. Jonathan Drake of Amherst. Now that they were a care home, rather than a hospital, the plans for acquiring a building of their own were pressed.

Few building programs ever come easy and without differences of opinion. The venture of the W.C.T.U. was no exception. After almost twelve months of investigation, litigation, concern and, finally, intervention and help from officers of the state W.C.T.U., the twenty-two room house on the corner of 23rd St. and Avenue B was purchased on November 8th, 1923 from Daniel and Dora Herbert for \$10,000 in cash, leaving an unpaid balance of \$4,000. The house was occupied in December of 1923. The house had been built in the 1890's by D. B. Clark, first a painter, then real estate dealer in Kearney.

Now the Mother Hull Home had its own building. It was paid for by the end of 1928 and in January, 1929 another frame house was purchased immediately south of the first residence to meet the demand for additional rooms. The second house was named the "Frances Willard House" initially, but later was called "Men's House No. 1." The large, stately main house served from 1923 to 1975, when it was demolished. Its demise was not easy to take by those who had either lived in it or found their way to it for untold numbers of meetings in the course of its fifty-two years as Mother Hull Home.

Mrs. Hull's granddaughter concluded her 1929 address with these words: "Banks have gone one by one, corporations have crashed, and business failures have been in our community, but Mother Hull Home stands as a monument to the faith, hope and love supplemented by the sound business judgment of the noble band of the W.C.T.U. who are still carrying on with unabated zeal and indomitable courage."

#### Bibliography

Record books, Secretary and Treasurer, W.C.T.U., 1880-1929; a biography of Mrs. Nancy Hull written by her granddaughter, Mrs. Nelly Munn, and read at a Mother's Day meeting of the W.C.T.U. May 10th, 1929, a handwritten manuscript; Minutes, Board of Trustees, the Mother Hull Home; S. C. Bassett, *History of Buffalo County*, v. 1; Kearney Business and Professional Women's Club, comp., *Where the Buffalo Roamed*, 1967; *The Kearney Centennial Book*, 1973; the *Kearney Daily Hub*, various years; Kearney City Directories, 1888-1928; and, an interview with Mrs. Nellie Milldyke, secretary of the W.C.T.U., 1922-1923.