



Buffalo Tales



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THE KEARNEY AND GOTHENBURG BOOM PERIODS

by Kieth Buss

In the last part of the Nineteenth Century both Kearney and Gothenburg experienced a boom period during which both towns had dreams of becoming industrial giants. These two towns had many similarities and differences during this boom time.

The most important and basic similarity the two towns shared was that they both had the same type of geographical location. At both Kearney and Gothenburg, the hills bordering the Platte Valley came down close to the Platte River. This made it economically feasible to build a canal from the Platte River into these hills, dam a ravine to form a reservoir and so use the stored water to generate electricity. Without this essential geographical location it is doubtful Kearney or Gothenburg could have had the boom period they did have. To further illustrate this, Ogallala could be brought into the picture. It too had the same type of geographical location and also built a canal and reservoir between the years 1889 and 1892. Unlike Kearney and Gothenburg, however, a boom failed to materialize. One reason had to do with geography again. Ogallala was located on the South Platte River which could not supply enough water to the Ogallala canal, while Gothenburg and Kearney were on the Platte River with its more abundant water supply. There were also other reasons for the failure of the Ogallala canal such as local opposition and a lack of money.

Kearney was the first to take advantage of its favorable location. In 1882, a local canal company was organized and construction started. The work was almost completed when that company ran out of money. George W. Frank was induced to take over the canal work in 1885, and he carried it to a successful conclusion in 1886. The Kearney boom was on.

In 1888, Olof Bergstrom, the founder of Gothenburg, saw what was happening in Kearney and believed the same thing was possible for Gothenburg. In the spring of



Houston Hotel, 1014 Lake Avenue, Gothenburg.

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As some of you may be aware of by now, the Board of Directors voted by a large majority to accept the Boyd Ranche house and to move the structure onto the museum grounds. Since the prospect of obtaining the house was so sudden, it has required a series of emergency meetings by the Board. We feel that our decision to save the frame home, steeped in rich, historical significance to Buffalo County, could not be ignored. The project is going to be costly so we will be doing fund raising in order to finance the move, restoration and upkeep of the house. We will be calling on some of you for your assistance in one form or another.

It is exciting to be a part of such a progressive Society — moving forward to preserve the past. Sad to say, we are finding ourselves in the position of hiring more and more in order to preserve and maintain the grounds, staffing, and regular or special projects rather than utilizing volunteers. The activities of the Historical Society and the museum require a great deal of effort. Perhaps many of you don't feel a part of the Buffalo County Historical Society, but the fact that you are reading this certainly would indicate your interest. Please call and become an active part of a Society on the grow. My number is 234-6319.

One last note. On Sunday, August 8, the 1860 log cabin was dedicated. Mrs. Mary Snow, the lady who donated the cabin to the Buffalo County Historical Society, returned to Nebraska from her current home in California to cut the ribbon and officially open the cabin to the public. The ceremony was well attended. Come by and see the latest building on the Trails & Rails Museum grounds.

Susan C. Lynch, President

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Dr. Robert Manley, well-known Nebraska historian, has agreed to come to Kearney and portray James Boyd in a program sponsored by the Buffalo County Historical Society. This will be a benefit for the Boyd Ranche House Fund. Watch the papers for date and place.

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A total of \$1,030.00 has been received in pledges and gifts to be used for moving the Boyd Ranche House. You can also be a part of preserving this important Buffalo County historic landmark. (See inside page)

A Memorial Gift has been received for the Boyd Ranche House Fund from Elaine Behrendt in memory of Ellen Myers.

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On September 26 your historical society will have a float in the UNK Band Day Parade in Kearney. Featured will be the newly acquired Mormon handcart and some pioneer travelers.

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Please advise us of changes of address. Otherwise, we have to pay for the address correction from the post office, and your *Buffalo Tales* is returned to us.

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NEW ANNUAL MEMBERS

- James BamfordKearney
- Sid HellmanKearney
- Roger RitterCharlottesville, VA

1888 Gothenburg precinct voted \$5000 in bonds to construct a canal, and the Gothenburg Canal Company, a local company, was organized. After this initial activity, however, not much more was done. It was not until 1889 when the people of Gothenburg subscribed nearly \$10,000 as a bonus for construction of a canal that serious activity began. That same year the Gothenburg Land and Improvement Company was organized in Kearney by Kearney people. President of the Company was O.S. Marden, who was manager of the Midway Hotel, secretary was C.H. Elmendorf, a son-in-law of George W. Frank, and treasurer was Robert J. Beattie. At one time Gothenburg had streets named after most of these men. This Company accepted the Gothenburg bond and bonus money and agreed to construct the Gothenburg canal. W.H. Elliott of the Kearney firm of Cox and Elliott was selected to superintend the construction of the canal. At first the Company had its office at 2119 Central Avenue, Kearney, but when construction started the office was moved to Gothenburg. In 1890, the canal was completed. The Gothenburg boom was on.

There was during this time a great deal of contact between the two towns. The Gothenburg Land and Improvement Company donated \$3,000.00 to the Kearney Cotton Mill subsidy. In 1889, John F. Jackson, who conducted a general store in Kearney, platted the Valley View Addition to Gothenburg. In 1892, W.T. Scott of Kearney secured the contract to erect the \$14,500 Gothenburg school house. At least on one occasion the manager of the Gothenburg overall factory came to Kearney to hire girls to operate the sewing machines. The All Souls Episcopal Church of Gothenburg was organized with the help of Bishop A.R. Graves from Kearney. Harry Small, who came from Iowa to Gothenburg to work in his brother-in-law's drug store, after a few months moved to Kearney, where he would have his own drug store.

Then there were the contrasts between the booms of the two towns. In 1890, the Gothenburg boom started to take a different direction from Kearney's. In that year all the real estate companies in Gothenburg, including the Gothenburg Land and Improvement Company, were absorbed into one big company, the Gothenburg Water Power and Investment Company. There were a few Kearney men in this company, but most of the shareholders were from Milwaukee. Individuals from Milwaukee had been increasingly interested in the Gothenburg boom, and it was not long before they dominated this new company. In fact, the Gothenburg Water Power and Investment Company was starting to dominate the town of Gothenburg itself; and, if the Panic of 1893 had not put an end to the boom, Gothenburg was probably destined to have become a company town. Kearney did not develop in this direction. No one company or organization really dominated its scene.



First Midway Hotel, Kearney



Columbian School, Gothenburg. Note Drill Team of Gothenburg Fire Department with axes on shoulders.

Another contrast between the two towns was the amount of local involvement in the boom periods. Kearney had the likes of George W. Frank and H.D. Watson and a legion of others. Such was not the case in Gothenburg. There was some local involvement, such as the three story brick Houston Hotel, which was built by Gothenburg investors; however, not nearly as much as Kearney. Of course, Kearney was a larger and older town. Probably the nearest Gothenburg came to producing something on the level of a George W. Frank or H.D. Watson would have been the brothers James and George Hiles. George Hiles had a large horse ranch south of Gothenburg, which James managed for him. James Hiles, with F.A. Reynolds, platted Hiles and Reynolds Addition to Gothenburg. George Hiles was a big promoter of the development of Gothenburg. In 1890, along with A.T. Gamble, Ross Gamble and H.D. Watson, he organized the Midland Loan and Improvement Company in Gothenburg. A.T. Gamble and Ross Gamble had the Buffalo County National Bank in Kearney. George Hiles lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was deeply involved in the lumber business there. He was probably responsible, in some part, for Milwaukee investors being so involved in the Gothenburg boom. Present day Hiles Canyon south of Gothenburg is named after this family.

To contrast even more the Gothenburg and Kearney booms, the residential sections of the two towns would only have to be compared. The residential sections of Kearney are full of fine Victorian houses that were put up during the boom period. Such is not the case in Gothenburg. Only a hand full of really nice houses were put



Longfellow High School, Kearney. 1890



Gothenburg Opera House, 925 Lake Avenue, Gothenburg.

up in Gothenburg during the boom period and these do not compare too well with those of Kearney. There was a lot of house construction in Gothenburg during its boom period, but most were what could be termed cottages that were put up for the many expected factory workers. Most were put up by the Gothenburg Water Power and Investment Company.

The most important similarity, therefore, between Kearney and Gothenburg was their geography and that they both took advantage of it to produce their boom periods. Once that was done differences did develop. The main contrast between the Kearney and Gothenburg booms was the amount of local involvement. Kearney had much more local support, while much of Gothenburg's support came from outside the area, first from Kearney, then from Milwaukee.

SOURCES

"Buffalo Tales" September 1986, January 1987, January 1989, January 1990, January 1991. *Kearney Directory for 1889, 1891 and 1892. One Hundred Views of Kearney, Nebraska. 1892. Newspapers—Kearney Daily Hub, Gothenburg Independent and Keith County News, Ogallala. Records in Register of Deeds, Courthouse, Dawson County and Buffalo County, Nebraska. Gothenburg photos, Dawson County Historical Society and Gothenburg Public Library collections; Kearney photos from Anderson Collection, Buffalo County Historical Society Archives.*



Kearney Opera House

TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

This has been a very successful year at Trails & Rails Museum. We have had a group of excellent tour guides who have done many things to support the museum and have worked hard.

The painting of the locomotive has been completed. Work is coming along fine on the log cabin. The grounds have been pretty with all the colorful flowers. The Boshardt girls won several ribbons with their Heritage garden.

During May, June, July and August, we averaged over 25 guests per day.

We received from Sid Murrish a new typewriter and a small file. We have been promised a flag which will be coming soon. A big THANKS to these donors.

Plans are being made for the Christmas Tree Walk December 5-13. If you know of anyone who would like to put up a tree, have them call me at 237-7327. We will also need donations of food for the bake sale, and volunteer help in all the buildings. If you can help in one or more ways, please let me know. It would save the committee some calling.

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Museum Director

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, 1993: Alice Howell, Elmer Holzrichter, Susan C. Lynch, all of Kearney; Viola Livingston of Gibbon.
- Term expiring June 1, 1994: Howard Kolbo, Mardi Anderson, Lois Rahmann, all of Kearney; Jim Cudback of Riverdale.
- Term expiring June 1, 1995: Glen Wisch, Philip Holmgren, Larry Nansel, all of Kearney; Floreta Sullwold of Elm Creek.

Officers (1 year term)

- President Susan C. Lynch
- Vice-President Howard Kolbo
- Secretary Alice Howell
- Treasurer Mardi Anderson

Trails & Rails Museum 706 West 11th Street (308) 234-3041

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BUFFALO COUNTY'S HISTORIC BOYD RANCHE HOUSE



The historic Boyd Rancho House, the first frame house in Buffalo County, has been donated to the Buffalo County Historical Society for removal to their Trails & Rails Museum. The house was built for his family in 1864 by James E. Boyd. It will be restored to its original period and made ready for museum visitors.

The Trails & Rails Museum is a proper place for this home. There it will take its place as one of the most treasured buildings in our Museum Complex.

WE NEED YOU TO MAKE THESE PLANS A REALITY.

Please help preserve this important Buffalo County landmark by completing and mailing the form below:

Clip and Mail

Boyd Rancho House Fund
Buffalo County Historical Society
PO BOX 523
KEARNEY NE 68848

Name _____

Address _____

Donation: \$25; \$50; \$100; Other \$ _____



Not only is the house a historic place, but James E. Boyd is a historic figure in local and state history. As early as 1857 Joseph and James E. Boyd operated a road ranche on the banks of the Wood River in Buffalo County along the California and Mormon Trails.

By 1858 James Boyd was manager of the ranche, raising corn for trail travelers, barley for a small brewery, and an ice house to provide ice. He also had cattle. The ranche was the location of the Nebraska Centre post office and Anan Henry, father-in-law of James Boyd, was the first postmaster appointed on July 29, 1859. He was replaced by Boyd on September 15, 1860. The ranche was a stop on the Western Stage Lines, and was mentioned in many diaries as a landmark on the trails north of the Platte.

In 1864 Mr. Boyd purchased 24 mule teams in order to engage in the freighting business. The first freight brought out included lumber for a new frame house. When the Union Pacific was built across Nebraska in 1866, he secured a contract for grading on the railroad. He was active in politics, was elected a justice of the peace in November, 1860, and a representative to the Territorial Legislature in 1866.

In February of 1868, James E. and Ann Boyd and their three children left Buffalo County and moved to Omaha. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1871 and 1875, served on the Omaha City Council in 1880, and became Mayor in 1881. In 1891 he was elected the seventh Governor of the State of Nebraska.