



Buffalo Tales



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MORE ON BRICKYARDS

by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

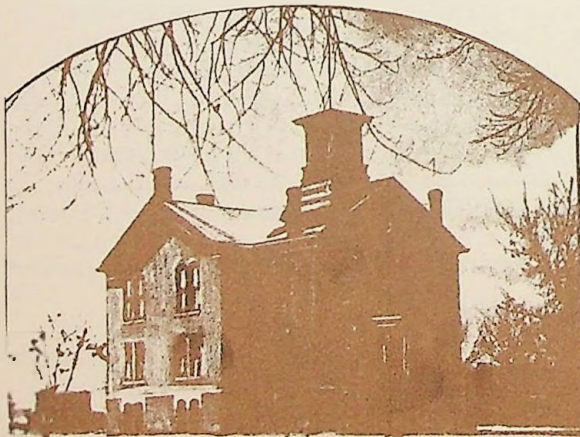
The first brickyard in Buffalo County was located near Gibbon, according to Leroy A. Walker, director of the Gibbon Heritage Center. In 1872 an election was held in the county to vote on the issuance of bonds for a new county courthouse in Gibbon, at that time the county seat. It passed in favor of the bonds and the county commissioners proceeded to plan the building and advertise for bids. H. B. Dexter of Omaha was awarded the contract to construct the three-story building for \$16,925.00. Stone for the foundation and lumber were shipped from Omaha. The brick would be manufactured at Gibbon by the contractor. The brick kiln was located about a quarter of a mile west of Gibbon on the north bank of the Wood River. The brick was made from clay and sand found in the immediate vicinity, and it was planned to burn the brick with wood from the Loup River, a twenty-five mile trip from Gibbon.

Hauling the wood from the Loup to Gibbon was quite a project in itself. With three yoke of oxen, two cords could be hauled in one load. The drive included about twenty miles without water, making it necessary to drive in the night as the oxen could not stand it without water in the heat of the day. One trip required three days with good luck, but usually took longer because of breakdowns or loose wheels. The wood hauled was both cottonwood and oak, cut on an island in the bend of the river which had been protected from prairie fires so prevalent in this area.

The courthouse was built in 190 days, 90 of those days in the dead of winter. Final settlement with Mr. Dexter, the contractor, was made on April 1, 1873. However, the first meeting open to the public to view the new building was on Washington's birthday, February 22, 1873, and the first term of district court was called on March 3, 1873.

H. B. Dexter's brickyard operated only during the construction period of the

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County Courthouse in Gibbon, 1873-74. From 1875 to 1908 the building was used by the Gibbon Public Schools, two church colleges and various commercial colleges.

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Well, I have good news and I have bad news. The good news is that we will be continuing our general meetings and programs very soon. We are aware that they have been missed, so to rectify this situation our Vice-President, Larry Nansel, is currently working on this.

Now the bad news: A desire for a continuation of tours has been voiced many times. Unfortunately, the efforts of your Board to find someone to put together even an afternoon excursion tour have been unsuccessful. Should any of you be interested in assuming responsibility for even one short tour, please contact me at 234-2491 or 236-6391. Don't be hesitant. We would all like to see the tours resumed.

Our annual Christmas Tree Walk is just around the corner and the train will be alive with all its bright lights for the Holiday Season. Be sure to drive by the Trails and Rails Museum when you are out looking at the Christmas lights.

We will again be hosting a luncheon for County Board and City Council members on December 3rd from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. If you would like to help with this affair, please call Margaret Hohnholt or myself. This luncheon helps our governing officials become acquainted with the Historical Society and our museum. It is also a way of thanking them for their past and future support.

In closing I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you a safe and happy Thanksgiving Holiday.

—Susan C. Lynch, President

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To update our mailing list for *Buffalo Tales*, we request each annual member to send us your 9-digit zip code when you send in your 1994 dues, which are payable on January 1. See new dues schedule on page 6.

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SHOP FOR CHRISTMAS AT THE MUSEUM GIFT SHOP

Books

- Tales of Buffalo County*, Vol. IV, 1990. \$8.95
 - Tales of Buffalo County*, Vol. III, 1987. \$7.50
 - Tales of Buffalo County*, Vol. II, 1984. \$6.50
- plus \$1.00 postage if mailed.

The above books are available at ABC Drug in downtown Kearney Centre, or call 237-7858 or 234-2491.

Miscellaneous Gift Items

Books, Maps, Cookbooks, T-shirts, Sweatshirts, Belt Buckles, Train Whistles, Longfellow High School commemorative plate, and much more.

A gift membership in the Buffalo County Historical Society is an ideal gift.

courthouse. The broken, twisted, cracked, over-fired and under-fired bricks not used in the courthouse were bought by the Gibbon Presbyterian congregation for their new brick church completed in March of 1873. It was the first church building in Nebraska west of Grand Island. Some of the bricks from the kiln are on display at the Gibbon Heritage Center.

Another brickyard in Gibbon is mentioned in the *Gibbon Beacon* of June 1, 1889:

Robert Wallace, an old time Gibbon citizen, is getting the yard in shape preparatory to burning 300,000 brick at this place. The new Baptist church will use 100,000 in their new building. A gentleman in the village has contracted for another 100,000 and without a doubt Mr. Wallace can easily dispose of all the brick he can burn here this summer . . .

This Baptist Church is now the home of the Gibbon Heritage Center.

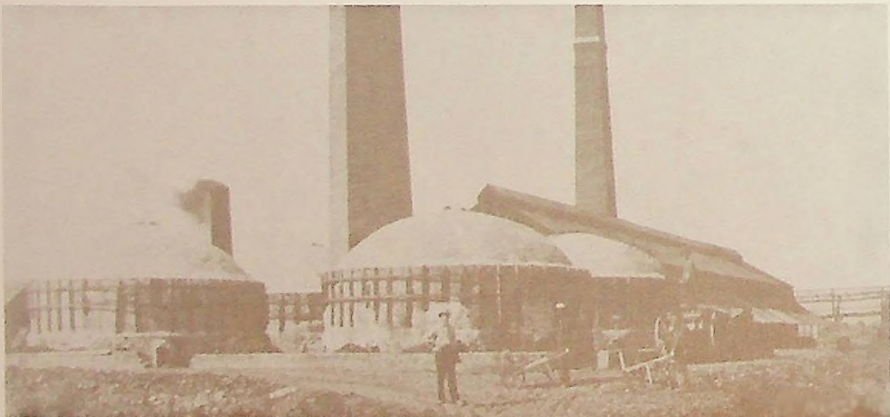
William F. Rapp in his compilation of *Brickmaking in Nebraska*, (1993), lists also J. D. Gilbert having brick works in Shelton in 1886-87 and in Gibbon in 1888-89, and also lists Simon Mosser in Shelton in 1888-89. No further information has been found on these brickmaking operations.

According to Lois Johnsten and Edith Abraham, historians in the Ravenna area, a brickyard in Ravenna was opened in 1886 by King, Kerr & Co. on the banks of Beaver Creek in the southwest part of the village. It proved to be an undesirable location and was moved to land on the clay hill north of town which was a part of Echo Farm. This clay hill is still called "Brickyard Hill" by the local people. The exact year of the move is unknown. Bob Mutton was manager in 1888, from 1891 to 1898, and again in 1906. King, Kerr & Co., Henry Schiek and his brother, J. C. Brukner & Stuber, Fred Sears, Quinn & Pete Moritz and L. P. Southworth make up the list of owners.

J. C. Brukner owned the brickyard in 1902 when a new steam plant was installed, and in 1904 when new sheds and a new kiln were built. In September of 1905 business was halted because an old horsehoe got into the "bowels of the pug mill," but repairs were quickly made and brickmaking started again the next day.

In 1888 a kiln of 140,000 bricks was fired. By 1898 production of 2,000 bricks an hour was reported, with bricks selling at \$10.00 per thousand. This was the year brick sidewalks started to appear around Ravenna. Many are still there. In 1890, 200,000 bricks went to build the Sugar Beet Factory in Grand Island. 1907 saw three-quarters of a million brick made that summer.

L. P. Southworth was the last owner. When he closed down for the season in 1909



Kilns of Hibberd Brick Co.

he wanted to sell and quit business, but could not find a buyer. The Sanborn Fire insurance maps show the Ravenna Brickyard operating until 1913 with Mr. Southworth the owner, so the yard was apparently abandoned at the end of the 1913 season. The *Ravenna News* of June 25, 1915, carried an article about extensive damage being done by high winds at the abandoned brickyard, and recommended that something be done as the site is "in a tumble-down condition and probably not safe for children and others who might trespass upon the premises."

Another brickyard in the county was located at the abandoned town of Watertown in the northwest corner of the county. In the 1880's Henry Zarrs built a brick house one mile southeast of Watertown. He made the bricks on the site. In 1889 he and Alva Fitch established a brickyard on the southwest corner of the village along the railroad and west of the Wood River. It was in operation for ten years. Bricks stamped with a "W" have since been found in the Watertown and Miller vicinity.

In Kearney the only brick firm to survive the depression of the mid-1890's was the Hibberd Brick Company. George W. Frank, in July of 1889, became the owner of all the brick companies in Kearney, including Richard Hibberd's yard. The companies apparently continued to manage and operate the yards under Mr. Frank's ownership. On January 30, 1893, George W. Frank deeded the yard back to Richard Hibberd. Records in the office of the Register of Deeds verify these land transfers, as does an item in the *Kearney New Era* newspaper.

The depression which began in 1893 caused the demise of the Hurley, Midway and Kearney Brick Companies and caused hardship for Mr. Hibberd. The *Kearney Daily Hub* of February 7, 1894 states that Mr. Hibberd's brick plant had closed in 1893 because he had no market for the brick he made. For a few years there was little construction in and around Kearney and there is no doubt that Mr. Hibberd and his employers suffered along with other Kearney citizens in those depression years. No city directories were printed until 1904, and information in the newspapers dealt largely with the need to provide food, clothing and fuel to the destitute. Early in 1894 the city council considered a proposal to pave the street and put in storm sewers on Central Avenue, but opponents to the plan stated that "for eleven months of the year Central Avenue was as good as it could be, and better than if paved with brick." It would be twenty-one years before Central Avenue was paved.

Richard Hibberd and his brickyard survived. Along with brick-making and his



Hibberd Brick Co. and Keller Concrete Machinery Co. at work on the gymnasium at Kearney State Normal School, 1916. Richard Hibberd is the man with the beard in the back row in the center of the photo.

construction business, he turned to sales work. An undated promotional letter sent to area brickyards by Mr. Hibberd described the "Klose Patent Brick Kiln" worthy of consideration, a kiln that "does not have the balky way of so many other kilns, . . . is easy to construct . . . minimum amount of fuel, . . . comparatively no waste . . . being able to give employees more wages . . . bettering their condition, educating their children, making their homes happy and preventing that annoyance to manufacturers—*STRIKES!*" His letter was sprinkled with humor and suggestions for the good life of a brickmaker if you buy a Klose Kiln.

The brick company gradually found its way back to a flourishing industry. An article in the *Hub* of June 14, 1900 describes the brickyard since "the revival of good times." The newspaper reporter found about forty men at work, some digging clay, some mixing it, some shoveling it, some tending a new brick machine, and some carrying the freshly moulded brick and storing it in the drying sheds. The new machinery was turning out brick at the rate of 38,000 per ten hours, but had a capacity of 70,000 per day. The drying sheds were being filled with unburned brick for a kiln of 650,000 brick, 450,000 of which were common building brick and 200,000 a superior paving and sidewalk brick. Another recent improvement was an addition of 25 feet to the height of the smokestack of the kilns. Power was furnished by a steam boiler and engine of 125 horsepower. The article concluded with the statement that "Mr. Hibberd has always stood up for Kearney. By the same sign it is a pleasure for the *Hub* to stand up for Hibberd. Use Kearney brick!"

Another news story in the Industrial Section of the November 26, 1909 *Hub* noted that the Hibberd Brick Company "is looked up to by many of our leading businessmen as the institution that helps to make Kearney."

In 1912 Mr. Hibberd built a downtown business building on the southwest corner of the intersection of Central Avenue and 23rd Street. The second floor of the building was leased to the Masonic Temple Association and served the Masonic Lodge until their new Temple was built in 1927.

Richard and Emma Hibberd had a family of six children, John C., Charles F., Elma, Lucy, William E., and Adelbert L. A granddaughter, Mary Kottas of Lincoln, writes that "all of the boys of the family worked in the brickyard at one time or another. John and Charles as foreman, William (Mary's father) as manager and foreman. Delbert later became a doctor. Mrs. Kottas tells an interesting sidelight about her grandfather:

"When he established his business he was advised that his plant was outside the city limits and thereby free of city taxes, but he insisted on having his property annexed because he planned to use the city streets."

The brickyard was a victim of the depression of the early 1930's. Mr. Hibberd had hopes of reopening although he was in his 80's and almost blind. He died on June 7, 1932 at the age of 88. During his 50-plus years of business in Kearney, his firm supplied brick for practically all the larger buildings erected in Kearney, including structures at the State Industrial School (now Youth Development Center), Kearney State Normal School (now University of Nebraska at Kearney), and practically all of the churches and schools built in that era of Kearney's history. Richard Hibberd was a Townbuilder in every sense of the word.

SOURCES

Bassett, *History of Buffalo County*, 1916, Vol. 1, pp. 123-124; Rapp, *Brickmaking in Nebraska*, 1993; *Gibbon Beacon*, June 25, July 5, July 12, 1889; *Kearney Daily Hub*, June 14, 1900, November 26, 1909, June 8, 1932; *Where the Buffalo Roamed*, p. 246; Kearney City Council minutes, 1913-1915; Personal interviews with Leroy Walker, Lois Johnsten, Gladys Anderson, Thelma Lyons; Correspondence from Mary Hibberd Kottas, Rita Hibberd Butler, Paul E. Hibberd, Edith Abraham.

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\$150.00 husband and wife, until January 1, 1994.

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**CHRISTMAS TREE WALK
TRAILS AND RAILS MUSEUM**

What better way to get into the mood for Christmas than to visit the Trails & Rails museum and enjoy the Christmas Trees which are decorated by many clubs and groups in Buffalo County! This year's dates are December 4-12 from 1-5 every afternoon. The donation asked is a modest \$1.50 with children 12 and under admitted free when accompanied by a parent.

One of the special treats of the walk is the marvelous array of Christmas baked goods which are for sale. When you come to see the Trees, enjoy a free cup of hot cider while you select your particular favorites from the wide assortment available.

Volunteers are needed to bake the goodies and man the buildings at the time of the walk and to assist with tour groups at other times. Please call Wilma Larsen at 237-2697 or Margaret Hohnholt at 237-7327 to volunteer.

Margaret Hohnholt, Museum Director

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

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