



Buffalo Tales



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THE KOREAN CONNECTION

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

Author's Note

In August of 1994 Alice Howell and I met at the Kearney Library with Henry Ahn of Brea, California who was seeking information about a group of Korean boys brought to Kearney to further their education and to receive military training, as explained in this article.

In the early 1900's, following the Russo-Japanese War, Korea lost many of its "best and brightest" when it became evident that Japan would take over the country. Young Man Park² was one of the young men who saw no future in their country and immigrated to the United States.

Traveling with his uncle and a group of teenagers he went to Denver. As they understood that a knowledge of English was a priority, the boys enrolled in the fifth grade of the public schools where they progressed rapidly. Because Young Man Park was twenty-eight and the maximum age for enrollment was eighteen, the Superintendent allowed him to enroll declaring himself to be eighteen. When his uncle, Pak hui-byan was appointed supervisor of the students in several states he helped Young Man place five of his charges in Kearney homes through local churches in 1906. They probably came here because of the Kearney Military Academy and a Cadet Company at the High School. They worked as house boys in return for their room and board while they attended school.

In the next few years other Korean families and single men came to Kearney, where they enrolled their children in the Kearney schools. Their goal was to get all the military training they could so that they would be prepared to fight for the freedom of Korea in the future. Many of them had gone to Christian schools and were committed to democracy.

Henry Chung seems to have been the leader of the boys. Born in Soon Chun to a wealthy family he had been reared in luxury. He and his brother had a private tutor; they were required to study seven days a week, twelve months of the year. At the age of fourteen Henry went to college where he met a number of Americans. When he learned



Kearney High School Cadet Company 1906 or '07
Longfellow High School on right, original Whittier High School, left.
Nebraska State Historical Society Photo

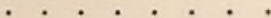
WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Our Annual Meeting in April was well attended. We elected 5 people to our Board of Directors. The two new members are Pauline Wells of Kearney and Dale Wright of Elm Creek. Each elected to a 3-year term. Susan Underhill of Riverdale and Minnette Steinbrink of Kearney were re-elected for a second 3-year term. During the last year a board member resigned, and Jerry Idt of Kearney was elected to fill the 1-year remaining on that term.

At the May Board meeting I was re-elected to serve another year as your President. This newsletter gives me an opportunity to express my appreciation to all of the Board Members, all of the Historical Society Members and the Museum Director, who have volunteered many, many hours working at the Museum this past year. Volunteers are the lifeline of the Society and keep our museum open and in operation. You need to give yourselves a pat on the back for all the things you have done. Thank you.

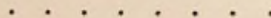
Larry Nansel, President



MEMORIAL GIFTS RECEIVED in memory of Stephanie Green, from Ed and Mardi Anderson, Nellie Donaly, Lois Eickloff, Vernelle Fuss, Wilbur Fuss, Tom and Debra Pratt, Jr., Phyllis Roberts and Margaret Tunks.

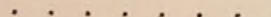
In memory of Bonnie Claybaugh, from Esther Zimmerman.

In memory of Ernest Ludwig, from Mrs. Charles Adelung, Dianna Fife, Alice Howell, Margaret Peterson and Marjorie Pflaum.



THANK YOU to the families of deceased members for designating Buffalo County Historical Society as suggested memorials. Memorial gifts are used for special projects: presently, the restoration of the James E. Boyd home on our grounds to the 1860's period.

The Board of Directors will work with Wendell Franz, a consultant on restoration of historical buildings. Mr. Franz at one time was the Director of the State Historical Museum in Lincoln, and later was curator of the George W. Norris House in McCook. We are fortunate to obtain his expertise to accurately restore this historic building on our museum grounds.



ARCHIVES: Volunteers are at work each Monday afternoon from 1:00 to 4:00, and welcome visitors who have inquiries or need assistance on Buffalo County family and/or local history. Appointments can be made on any day the museum is open (except Sundays) by calling Thelma Lyons at (308) 237-5744.



NEW BASIC MEMBER

Mary Lee Pesek, Omaha

of the many opportunities and the freedom in the United States he resolved to further his schooling there. To persuade his parents that he should go at such an early age, he convinced them that it was for his own welfare and future benefit. If Japan took over Korea no one would be allowed to go abroad to study. After they gave their consent he was on the boat within twenty-four hours. In Kearney he earned his keep at the F.F. Roby home³ although he had never done manual labor before. He graduated from Kearney High with valedictory honors in three years.⁴

In 1908 Young Man Park enrolled in the University of Nebraska. A large number of Koreans came to Lincoln the next year. A dormitory was set up at 1721 P St. where Park was superintendent and counselor of the students.

In 1909 Park established a summer military training school on a farm a mile west of the Buffalo County Court House which was rented by Chin-chan Joh. Henry Chung applied to the city for an informal permit, agreeing not to use real firearms. Park received a similar permit from the state.

The Kearney Daily Hub of August 30, 1909 reported on the first summer session:

But few people in Kearney are aware that a Korean military school has been in session . . . thirteen students, five of them from Lincoln, received training in various branches. The school opens at nine o'clock and closes at half past six. At half past seven the study hour begins and at nine school is over for the day. The military work consists of command in drill, gymnastics . . . infantry strategy, duties in corps, salutation. . . . studies taught are Korean mother tongue, Korean history and geography, algebra, arithmetic English grammar and reading and other sciences. The boys also have an opportunity to learn agricultural affairs.

In March 1910 Hastings College offered the use of Ringland Hall for the summer, and the chance to rent twenty acres of the college farm "where they will conduct a market garden." One of the two professional gardeners accompanying the group was William Kim who had worked at the Industrial School in Kearney. Twenty-six students arrived on campus in June, five stayed over for the academic year. A three year course was offered by the Military School, where the usual college courses were taught, along with three nights of military tactics, compulsory Bible classes and sports from seven to eight. Some of the boys were already Presbyterians, others joined the local church.

"Diligent and amiable, the young Koreans earned the respect of college officials and community."⁵

Young Man Park had been a friend of Syngman Rhee for many years. With his uncle he had been fighting for political reform in Korea. In 1895 he was thrown in prison where he met Rhee and they became "sworn brothers". In 1910 Park was asked to become editor of a Korean newspaper in San Francisco. He invited Rhee, who had received his Masters degree from Harvard, to take over the school, sending him round trip expenses.



The Young Military School Officers; Hastings College 1911

... as soon as he arrived. Rhee started criticizing the military academy ... (it was) nothing more than a fantasy to even think of militarily opposing such a power as Japan. Rhee devoted one full week to half insane dancing, holding prayer and hymn-singing sessions four or five times a day, on the order of a Christian revival. He then packed up and left for the East.

Rhee repeatedly borrowed money from all his friends with no intention of paying it back. His treatment of Park went against the code of sworn brothers.

... never fight with brothers but join hands in preventing scorn from outside ... do not owe others but rather have them owe you ... In the face of ... Rhee's malicious acts of humiliation insult and subterfuge (Park) never lifted a finger, something that ... shows what a great man he was.

Henry Cu Kim, who wrote the above criticism of Rhee, had taken fifty Korean students from Lincoln to Hastings that year. The school continued for several years. Most of the students left Kearney for Hastings or other schools.

The caliber of these students is indicated by the success they had in their later lives. Henry Chung after attending Kearney Normal graduated from the University of Nebraska, majoring in political science. He received his Masters from Northwestern and his Ph.D. from American University. With Synghman Rhee he was designated as a delegate to the Versailles Peace Conference but Korea was not recognized as an independent nation and they could not get a visa.

After 1919 Chung traveled in the United States and Hawaii on behalf of the independence movement, and taught in colleges. He wrote essays on "The United States Policy Toward the Far East" and "Korea's Treaties".

After Synghman Rhee was elected first President of the Republic of Korea he was the nation's Ambassador to Japan.

He remained in touch with the Roby family. Edna Basten Donald recalled that "when Mrs. Roby went out to her ranch in Colorado during her last days I was told that Henry went and attended, and saw that she had proper care because her husband and ... son had died and she was quite alone".⁶

Il Han Lu New, a close friend of Chung, who had stayed with Mrs. E. B. Tufts and family, transferred to Hastings High School, attended the University of Nebraska for three years and graduated from the Ypsilanti, Michigan School of Law. At the University of Michigan, where he received a degree in Business Administration, he met Wally Smith. After graduation Smith decided to offer fresh bean sprouts at his grocery store. With Il Han New he started growing them in a bath tub. Next they canned them in glass jars, which led, in 1922 to the formation of the La Choy corporation. New later sold his share of the corporation, and returned to Korea when his country was liberated. He eventually established a pharmaceutical company named the Yu-Han Corporation.

Churhoo Park attended Kearney Normal, then graduated cum laude from the University of Nebraska. He was President of the Korean Students Association before



◀ Henry Chung: from a luxurious childhood to houseboy in Kearney to Korean Ambassador to Japan.



▶ Churhoo Park: returned to Korea to teach in Chosen Christian College.

returning to Korea where he taught in Chosen Christian College.

His brother, Ch'o-muk Park ran a restaurant in Detroit with Henry Cu Kim for ten months. He returned to Korea where he made his way into Manchuria. He was trying to smuggle firearms to rebels in Korea when one of his letters to Syngman Rhee was intercepted by Japanese police. Nothing more is known of him.

Kwan Soo Lee (stayed with Mrs. Lottie Norton) enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1916. During the summer of 1917 he was with an infantry company doing guard duty at the Union Pacific Bridge in North Platte when he accidentally drowned.

Arthur Y.S. Kim, who stayed with Archdeacon James Cope of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, later graduated from the Yale Medical School and practiced in California. During World War II he was Captain of the Tiger Battalion (made up of Koreans) in the California National Guard. Yong-dae Kim, also a doctor, practiced in Chicago.

David Paine who had attended Kearney Normal, learned photography under A.T. Anderson and opened a studio in Callaway. He sold it a short time later to another Korean and went to San Francisco. In 1916 he opened a gallery in Shanghai, China.

The "guiding spirit" of the Korean students in this country, Young Man Park believed that the Koreans should have a "shadow government" here based on the U. S. Constitution. He was instrumental in forming the Korean Residents Association Of Nebraska which expanded to all of North America. He continued to speak and write on the issue of independence for his country. He and his former "sworn brother" Syngman Rhee went their separate ways because of the difference in their philosophies. Park advocated all possible means of gaining freedom for Korea, including armed rebellion; Rhee thought it could be accomplished by negotiation. This seemed to mean playing both sides with an eye out for his own interests.

Park made one last attempt to negotiate with the Japanese, then went to Hawaii to visit old friends "in one final do or die try to realize his combined military and agricultural plans in the Far East, only to fail again. In October 1928 he was felled by a bullet from an ugly young hoodlum".⁷

After the liberation of Korea in 1945 Rhee returned to his homeland to a hero's welcome. He was elected the first President of the Republic of Korea in 1948 and at first instituted many reforms but lost his popularity because of police repression, corruption and his notion of his own infallibility, a trait well known by his former friends in America. During the 1960 election there were charges of election fraud, followed by a rebellion. Rhee resigned on April twenty-seventh. He died in Hawaii in 1965.

NOTES

1. Mr. Ahn, Coordinator of the UCLA Korean American Research Project, is writing a paper on **The Young Korean Military School (1909-1914: Its Role in Korean Diaspora.)**
2. Pak Yong-man, Koreans place their surname first. In this country they Americanized or simplified their names.
3. Owner of the Kearney Flour Mill.
4. Arthur Lerch, a high school friend of Chung's, put his knowledge of things Korean to good use. An army career man, he was Provost Marshall General when in 1945 he was appointed Military Governor of the American-occupied zone of Southern Korea.
5. P. L. Johnson, Hastings College treasurer.
6. Basten interview, 2-11-81.
7. Henry Cu Kim.

SOURCES

I am indebted to Thelma Lyons who took over the local research for Henry Ahn. She loaned me her notes which are on file in the archives of Trails and Rails museum. Other sources: Henry Ahn; Donald interview with Jim Smith and David Clark, 2-11-81; **The Writings of Henry Cu Kim**, translated by Dae sook Suh; Catherine Renschler, Executive Director, Adams Co. Historical Society; Collier's and America Encyclopedias.

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 68848-0523

- 1997 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:
- Basic Membership \$15.00
- Institutional Membership \$20.00
- Supporting Membership \$30.00 +
- Life memberships are \$150.00 for an individual; \$200.00 husband and wife.

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 1998: Merlin Burgland, Larry Nansel, Janeen Vokoun, Jerry Ilt.

Term expiring June 1, 1999: Wilma Harder, Helen Kinnaman, Margaret Hohnholt, Mark Hadenfeldt.

Term expiring June 1, 2000: Minnette Steinbrink, Susan Underhill, Pauline Wells, Dale Wright.

Officers (1 year term)

- President Larry Nansel
- Vice-President Mark Hadenfeldt
- Secretary Janeen Vokoun
- Treasurer (to be appointed)

TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

By the time you receive this, Wagons West will be over. I hope you were able to attend, if not, some of the displays featuring the Mormon Trail are still being displayed.

Our attendance so far has been very good. We have several tour groups scheduled for June and July. I have visited with the guides at rest stops and our brochures are at all I-80 rest stops. Many of the guides have visited our Museum.

The Garden Kids will be active as soon as school is out. Do stop at the Museum and see what is happening.

— Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

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