



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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PLEASANTON

by June I. Hand

Pleasanton is a small town in the northern part of Buffalo County, situated on the South Loup River, with a population of 350. It was the last town on the end of a spur line of the Union Pacific and lies in the center of a rich farming community. A factor contributing to the success of this community is the fact that some of its people have lived in the locality continuously for one hundred years or more: Arp, Bauer, Bell, Croston, Dehm, Dixon, Downey, Duncan, Eckhout, Edson, English, Geisler, Hand, Holthusen, Hunter, Janitscheck, Jones, Kirschner, Klein, Kreitzer, Lindner, Luce, Mauler, Nickman, Pfeiffer, Phillips, Pritchard, Reese, Riessland, Ritter, Rohrich, Royle, Schwab, Shafto, Stover, Tillson, Unick, Vest, Zimmer, Zwiener, and others, no doubt. Early Pleasanton area settlers were primarily from lower Austria and of English-Welsh descent. Many of the Austrian families settled in Butler County, Nebraska, before coming to the area west of Pleasanton.

One of the earliest settlements in the vicinity was made on the farm of Henry Peters in Section 2, Rusco Township. This land was pre-empted by Albert M. Morse in 1874 and was the site of the first post office, known as South Loup. Two years later this same land was homesteaded by Henry Peters. The name of Peters gained more than local fame because of a bridge across the South Loup bearing his name. The ironic part of the situation is that the county built the bridge with the help of A.M. Morse. In 1874 Charles B. Oakley, Louis Colburn and H. H. Clark located in Pleasant Valley, northwest of Pleasanton.

One interesting bit of history concerning our town had to do with the choice of town site. Everyone knows that the river bottom is hardly the place to plat a town. But in the 1880's, the Omaha Republican Valley railroad officials, who chose the site, had too many troubles of their own to worry about the probable consequences to us.

When they arrived in our vicinity, they discovered that the only logical place for the town would be where there was a settlement, a river crossing used by the stage line, the survey of Section 35 of Loup Township for a railroad section, and most important, a post office. The post office was situated on the north side of the river and was known as Riverview, established in August 1883.

There was much speculation as to why the name Pleasanton was given our village. Mr. Hays is said to have named the town and the post office. Since he had previously operated a store some two miles northwest of Pleasanton in Pleasant Valley, it is the assumption of this writer that the name originated from that.

On June 23, 1890 while the young town was in its infancy, a cyclone came along and blew away the tents, and made kindling wood of the little shanties. When the storm had passed, it was found that the depot had slightly changed its location, landed on a canvas drug store and had parted with a portion of the roof. Two box cars lay on

WAGONS WEST — JUNE 2

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WITH THE SOCIETY

WAGONS WEST CELEBRATION! Saturday, June 2, 1:00 p.m. to sundown at the Trails & Rails Museum. There will be buggy rides, square dancers, a black powder group in action, living history demonstrations, old-time games for children and adults, and various activities on the grounds at all times.

Entertainment under the tent: Blue grass music by Rough Around the Edges, Excerpts from Amherst's musical show, *Annie Get Your Gun*, Buck Newberry will speak about the Plains Indians, and music by Jim Cudaback.

Pie, coffee, soft drinks, popcorn available throughout the afternoon.

5:00 p.m. Buffalo Stew Supper

7:00 p.m. Historical play, *Wood River Center*. An authentic portrayal of early local history through drama, story-telling and music, by the Historical Society and Kearney Community Theatre.

Bring your own lawn chairs.

The annual meeting and dinner of the Buffalo County Historical Society was held on April 22 at the Ramada Inn. Preceding the dinner Dr. Joseph Porter of the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha gave a program: *Three Star General George Crook, Hero or Scoundrel*. The program was funded by the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities.

A buffet dinner followed with Jim Cudaback providing organ music. Colleen Parker and Catharine Bahnsen played and sang three early musical selections dedicated to Kearney and Nebraska, written and published locally.

The annual business meeting was called to order by president Margaret Hohnholt. New directors elected for three-year terms are Elmer Holzrichter, Alice Howell and Susan McFerrin, all of Kearney. Viola Livingston of Gibbon was reelected to the board.

Certificates of appreciation were presented to Edna Hehner and Colleen Parker, retiring board members. Special recognition and gift of a stained glass picture of the Freighters Hotel were given to Hal and Marian Johnson, who are moving from Kearney. Both Hal and Marian served on the board, Marian was a past president and Hal a past treasurer. Two Dwarf Alberta Spruce trees have been planted in front of the hotel in honor of the Johnsons.

Memorial Day, May 28, will be the opening of Trails & Rails Museum for the summer. Hours will be 10:00-12:00 noon, 1:00-5:00 weekdays; 1:00-5:00 Sundays. Margaret Hohnholt will direct the museum operation with the help of guides and volunteers. Members will be contacted for volunteer service.

Display your quilts during July and August at the museum—old quilts with their histories, and new ones. Also sample blocks of different quilt patterns for display in the showcases. Bring to museum by July 1. Call Barb Avery or Margaret Hohnholt if you have questions.

The tour of Turn-of-the-Century Homes on May 13 was a successful affair with over 350 persons participating. Thanks to Nancy Barney and Margaret McClure and their committees who planned and carried out this special event.

their sides in the ditch. The hotel had moved about a rod and twisted around until it bumped against the round house. About half of the livery stable was missing, and the roof had gone off with the storm. Taken from *The Ravenna News* August 7, 1890, "But little is being done at Pleasanton, further than putting the finishing touches upon a couple of store buildings, and Leachs' large grain elevator."

The work of digging a canal, because of the continual flooding, and changing the course of the South Loup near Pleasanton was to commence in the spring of 1893. J. C. Pike was awarded the contract.

In January 1894, a fire broke out and burned down Hay's store, which was then located where Arp Hardware is now (1990), Hlava's Hardware, Kirschner's Meat Market and the barber shop. Hlavas, Kirschners and Hays rebuilt the same year. Mr. Hays moved his location from the middle of the block down to the corner and built a fine two-story building with a hall and offices on the second story. Dr. Penn moved his practice into one of these offices as soon as the building was readied.

The Ravenna News, March 23, 1894, "F. G. Hays building is up and nearly enclosed. Pleasanton will soon have a two-story building and hall. The latter is something we need much in this place."

The Ravenna News, April 13, 1894, "Pleasanton is enjoying quite a building boom. With the Hays building nearing completion, Robert Kirschner is building a new meat market and dwelling 24 x 40 feet in size. Pleasanton has a barber. His family moved into Mr. Baily's house today. Mrs. Baily runs the drug store. Pleasanton has two billiard halls, strong talk of saloon but no church."

Pleasanton became incorporated January 12, 1894, and the following Board of Trustees were elected: E. C. Moffitt, E. W. Noyes, A. V. Hlava, D. Wort, and S. E. Smith. In the very beginning of its history the town was stripped of all trees. They were cut down and sold by the early settlers for fuel, as well as for a way of survival by hauling and selling them in Kearney, which at this time was already treeless. Those settlers arriving in the 80's were quoted, "The land was a sea of grass to the river's edge." In the Village Board minutes, May 6, 1895, "A bill for \$3.00 was allowed Karl Kirschner against the village for 200 forest trees." These are the trees seen in the early pictures of Pleasanton. Jim Ball had stated that as a young lad he helped plant them. A great number of them were destroyed in the tornado of 1959.



North Side of Elm Street, looking west. ca 1917

In 1901 the village had a flood. On March 13, 1903 we had another flood. An ice gorge this time took the bridge out. *The Ravenna News*, March 13, 1903:

"The streets of the town were flooded deep enough to swim a horse and a part of the U.P. tracks were taken out. A big ice gorge formed above the town raising the water and inundating all the lowlands upstream. The two bridges were quickly destroyed despite the efforts of gangs of men who with pikes and prod poles strove to steer the ice away from the piling. The old bridge was swept away entirely and only two spans left of the new bridge.

Old timers say that twenty-two years ago, in the spring of 1881, about the same experience was had. Of course in that day there were no bridges to interrupt the free passage of ice, but there were plenty of gorges just the same and the South Loup valley was overflowed as much, if not more, than this year."

The same thing happened again in 1907, only this time a block of ice poked a hole in the schoolhouse and the children had a longer vacation. A schoolhouse on the hill and an iron bridge put an end to part of our troubles. But it didn't put an end to the floods. For several years a supply of dynamite was kept in the jail and used on the gorges. "An ice gorge several miles in length formed below the village and the water backed up into the streets, and for the first time in its history Pleasanton streets were navigable with row boats. Wooden sidewalks were floated away and the residents of the lower part of the town were obliged to leave their homes and take refuge with their neighbors across the tracks."

The flood on July 18, 1924, made all of the others seem as nothing in comparison. In fact, Pleasanton history since is all reckoned from the 1924 flood. Everything is dated either before or after that date. Practically every bridge on the river from Ravenna to the point where the stream unites with the Middle Loup was taken out. The Pleasanton bridge was left in place but suffered damage from the approaches being washed out.

At its height the flood waters on the sidewalk arose to the depth of over three feet. Everything in its path was carried downstream or partly wrecked. It carried away about eight hundred feet of the U.P. tracks and wrecked the Tollefsen-Elliott lumber and coal sheds and the Wort Elevator. At the Hays Store a hole nearly twelve feet deep was washed out by the surging current, but the building remained firmly unanchored on a



South Side of Elm Street, looking east.

part of the foundation. A fine two-hundred pound Chester White hog came floating down with the tide. The only dry spot in the village was the Pleasanton State Bank steps. The hog picked out his location and stuck it out. Villagers managed to get feed to him and he fared well.

In February 1924 the Central Power Company's transmission line was completed to Pleasanton, although the rural area of Pleasanton did not receive electricity until late 1949 and 1950.

The village of Pleasanton was greeted with another flood in June of 1935. The big steel bridge over the Loup River south of Pleasanton washed out. A small foot bridge was built to facilitate travel until a new steel structured bridge was built and dedicated September 23 of that year.

We were found digging out from yet another flood on Sunday, June 21, 1947. The bridge, although damaged, was not washed out, and traffic could cross the following Monday morning. Never before had the water risen so high in the business district. The previous high was in 1924.

The railroad track was washed out all along the line and there was a question as to when the Pleasanton-Poole branch could be put in use again. In April, 1948 it was announced by the Interstate Commerce Commission that the 22-mile branch of the U.P.R.R. between Boelus and Pleasanton would be abandoned. Thus ended our era as a railroad town.

Our community rejoiced in 1954 when Highway #10 was black-topped, followed in 1960 with straightening the road to by-pass our village and the addition of a new concrete bridge to span the South Loup River. This improvement shifted all the heavy main traffic around town.

Our last large fire was July 9, 1959 on the east side of Pleasanton's business district, destroying a feed storage building, a barbershop and a cafe, and gutting another cafe. The fire came just eleven days after a tornado and hail storm battered the town, destroying crops over an extensive area, and uprooting trees in town. Several buildings in town were damaged by the storm.

During the Depression people found many cheap ways to entertain themselves.



1924 flood, looking south to bridge. "Pop" Giles standing near cream station.

Buffalo County Historical Society
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Pleasanton offered baseball on Sunday afternoons, Hugo players in Ashers Hall, picnics in the park and on the river, and free movies sponsored by the merchants. These free shows were shown by Jim Phillips, outdoors on the corner lot east of the Methodist Church. They drew large crowds of customers to town on Wednesday nights.

The competition of other towns has taken its toll and some of the businesses through the years have closed. Despite this our population has grown through the past 20 years: 1960 population 199, 1970 population 261 and 1980 population 350. Many families living in Pleasanton commute to surrounding cities for employment, but we still maintain a growing well-kept village. Some recent improvements include the installation of a complete sewer system with lagoon in 1966, some street paving in 1971, a new tennis court in 1979, and a new rodeo arena in 1975.

It is befitting to end this history of our town with an excerpt from Francis M. Ball's, "The History of Pleasanton" from the school's *Bulldog*, dated February 4, 1932. "Pleasanton has encountered many hardships including cyclones, fires, and floods. But never-the-less it still stands today—a modern *village*! With a world-wide reputation, it boasts of being one of the most prosperous agriculture districts in the middle west. Hurrah! for our home town and this beautiful city of Pleasanton on the Loup."

NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Sally H. CampbellLincoln, NE Mary Ellen RobertsOmaha, NE

1990 SUPPORTING MEMBERS

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