



# Buffalo Tales



Volume 17, No. 2

Buffalo County Historical Society

March-April, 1994

## THE MANY ADVOCATIONS OF CLARENCE A. MURCH

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

Clarence A. Murch was a lifelong educator but his expansive nature stretched to include a long list of accomplishments. He was hunter, fisherman, writer, poet, editor, an avid booster of Kearney, church worker and scholar.

Born on the banks of the Fox River near Appleton, Wisconsin, he took to field and stream at an early age. While taking the classical course at Lawrence University in Appleton he also taught two terms of country school. In his autobiography he was "determined to choose anything but school teaching . . . yet I drifted into it and am at it yet."<sup>1</sup>

In April, 1877 he married a schoolmate, Marcia J. Southmayd. After two years of farming he taught and was a part owner of business colleges in Green Bay, Wisconsin and Dixon, Illinois.

In Illinois the Murches found the Rock River ideal for fishing in his made-to-order cruising canoe. Mrs. Murch sometimes accompanied him. "She was never afraid to bait her own hook or to remove the fish when brought to the net."

In 1889 they moved with their daughter Ruth to Kearney, "attracted by

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The Murches in front of Ivy Lodge.

Notice of Annual Meeting — Page 2

WITH THE SOCIETY

Notice to Members of Buffalo County Historical Society

ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, April 17, 1994, 4:00 p.m.

at Apple Annie's

1010 Third Avenue  
Kearney, Nebraska

The annual meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society will be held in the meeting room of Apple Annie's, 1010 Third Avenue, in Kearney, Nebraska, on Sunday, April 17, 1994.

The business meeting will start at 4:00 o'clock. On the agenda for the business meeting is the election of four directors. A report of the year's work will be given, acknowledgments and recognitions made.

At 6:00 o'clock, a dinner will be served and a program will follow. Cost of the dinner is \$10.00. Reservations must be made by April 10 and paid for in advance.

Send check to cover the dinner cost to Buffalo County Historical Society, Box 523, Kearney, Nebraska 68848. Checks should be made payable to the Buffalo County Historical Society.

MEMORIALS RECEIVED:

From Leola M. Schruers, in memory of Frances Link.

From Paul and Minnette Steinbrink, in memory of Charlie Richardson, James Isaac, Eugene Walters and Beuford Wells.

1994 NEW BASIC MEMBERS

Chuck and Kristi Salestrom . . . . .Kearney    Rick and Laura Kozen . . . . .Shelton  
Sandra Spence . . . . .Kearney    Glen and Susan Underhill . . . . .Riverdale

1994 SUPPORTING MEMBERS

Everett and Mable Harvey . . . . .Gibbon    Rodney Pierce . . . . .Kearney  
Harold K. Nutter . . . . .Gibbon    Dan and Julie Speirs . . . . .Kearney  
Kieth Buss . . . . .Gothenburg    Mr. and Mrs. Paul Steinbrink . . . . .Kearney  
Dr. and Mrs. Joel Johnson . . . . .Kearney    Sid Hellman . . . . .Kearney  
Ward Minor . . . . .Kearney    Mr. and Mrs. Martin Maul . . . . .Riverdale  
Mr. and Mrs. Ron Norman . . . . .Kearney    Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Hayman . . . . .Shelton

DATES TO REMEMBER:

April 17    Annual Meeting  
May 28    Trails & Rails Summer Opening  
June 4    Wagons West

the chance for improved fortunes." They brought the canoe along but found it not suited for Nebraska waters.

After a few weeks at the Midway Hotel they moved to the second floor of the Holmes Book store<sup>2</sup> in March of 1890, just before the Midway burned to the ground.<sup>3</sup> They established the "Up To Date Business School" in the front four rooms of their new quarters and lived in the two rooms at the back.

In 1892 Anson Graves, Bishop of the Western Diocese of the Episcopal Church, established a coeducational preparatory school in Kearney. Murch wrote "For three years my wife and I were respectively principal and matron of the Platte Collegiate Institute . . . three years of hard work and poor pay but boundless experience."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after their arrival in Kearney Murch became President of the Christian Endeavor, a Congregational youth group . . . "under his guidance it became a power in the Christian work in the state".

From the first Professor Murch was an enthusiastic booster of Kearney. *The Kearney Gait*, established for the sole purpose of promoting the town, carried in its first issue of March 15, 1891 a poem by Murch titled "The Kearney Gait". The only other surviving issue lists C.A. Murch as editor.

In the Institute's catalog of 1893-94 he describes "Kearney the gem of the Prairies."

Built largely by New Englanders, it has attracted an unusual proportion of educated . . . men and women who, delighted with its moral, social and intellectual atmosphere, and invigorating climate, have made their homes here.

It is beautiful for location also with the magnificent Platte River on the south and the rolling hills of the watershed on the north, the artificial lakes and canals of the water power and in every direction thrifty farms and fine drives.



**Business school classroom in Opera House.**



Professor Murch first met Claude Kind, editor of *Sports Afield*, in his own office. The editor encouraged him to submit articles to the magazine. His published articles and poems combined the keen eye and humor of the sportsman with an appreciation of the beauty of nature. In "Homily and Hunting"<sup>5</sup> he described a quail hunt.

Lunch baskets under the seats, guns on knees, dogs up behind the back seat and two lively and fleet ponies in front . . . quails in prospect . . . the rustling corn fields brown beneath the autumn sun; the gently declivity of the ravine at our left with its close-cropped mat of wild grass and brown fringe of stalks . . .

A good day of "flushing the birds from their coverts" or "in some brush-tangled tree claim" . . .

the spin homeward . . . winding around the hillsides and up through the shady draws between the little glassy lakes lying still and cool under the slant rays of the westering sun.

The economy of Kearney and the nation hit rock bottom during the nineties, but Murch had faith in the town's future. In his autobiography he wrote . . . it would be difficult to lure us away from our Nebraska home . . .

We love the bright climate, the invigorating air and the general sense of wide openness . . . the sweeping plains afford . . . we like the warm-hearted, generous and whole-souled people . . . found here.

In 1898 he established the Kearney Normal and Business College on the fourth floor of the Opera House. Tuition rates listed in the catalog were: Business course \$60.00, Shorthand and typing \$50.00, Telegraphy \$40.00. The above included books, "good to finish". English branches were \$13.00 per term of thirteen weeks.

The Murches moved to a house at 2112 Second Avenue which they called Ivy Lodge. His mother, Sarah Boynton Murch bought the house in 1898 and lived with them until her death in 1900.<sup>6</sup>

The Murches published a book, *Ivy Lodge*, with photographs of each room of their house by A. T. Anderson, on the opposite side of the page were poems by Clarence pertaining to the room, pen drawings were by Marcia Murch. A number of the oil paintings on the walls, or on easels, were done by Marcia, "an artist of some note".<sup>7</sup>

The business school was closed in 1904, in 1905, when Kearney Normal opened its doors, C. A. Murch was named Principal of the Department of Commerce. As might be expected, he also wrote the "Color Song".<sup>8</sup> He was described as "one of the most popular of the original faculty (with) a genuine interest in young people.

In 1908 the Murches published another booklet, *When Me and Gus Goes Fishin' and Other Verses*, to be given as Christmas gifts to friends. The title referred to publisher Gus Webbert, other hunting friends were Henry Lambert, Norris Brown and Charles Gregg. The verses were in the style of James Whitcomb Riley.

Professor Murch died on January 16, 1910 at the age of fifty-four after an illness of about a year. On January eighteenth, funeral services were held in Ivy Lodge with the Reverend J. J. Parker of the Congregational Church officiating. The following Friday a Memorial Service was held in the college chapel, where his chair was draped in black. Tributes were given by President A. O. Thomas, other faculty



Here we are— Me an' Sam Patch—  
Two of a kind an' a tolerable match.  
Sam understands me an' I seldom fail  
To catch the drift of his eloquent tail;

It's many a chat we have together  
By field and stream in summer weather.  
I tell Sam Patch my stock of lore  
Of birds and fields and fish galore.  
His honest eyes look into mine  
As I rattle on 'bout gun and line.  
And he cocks his head with a knowing leer  
If I strike a yarn that's a little-queer!  
An' he says as plain as A, B, C—  
"That's a fairy tale, but you can't fool me."

We love the fields and the sunny weather,  
And we roam the hills and dales together.

members, a student and a member of the Board of Education. A resolution signed by the Memorial Committee said in part,

... by his honest, manly bearing... his genial, helpful service [he has] won the esteem... of the students... and the love of the faculty. His great heart went out in the warm pressure of his hand, his genial smile, and his optimistic song.

Hub publisher Mentor Brown in a eulogy of Professor Murch also spoke of his love of young people, "His influence among them was great, his personality was magnetic, and his example was worthy and consistent."

Ruth Hazlett Jordan, had three children, Marcia (Oldfather), Gerry (Hardin), and Bob Hazlett. Surviving today are Charles, Dick and Alan Oldfather, their children and grandchildren. Alan's son, Bill, and grandson, Peter, are the sixth and seventh generations to live in Ivy Lodge.

#### NOTES

1. "A Popular Contributor", *Sports Afield*, July, 1897.
2. Now Shopping Tripps.
3. Family history states they moved the day of the fire. As it started at 7:30 A.M. it's likely that the move was made before then.
4. In 1898 the Institute was renamed the Kearney Military Academy. *Buffalo Tales*, January-February, 1993.
5. *Sports Afield*, December, 1893.
6. Sarah had been injured in a train accident. It is believed she bought the house with money she received from a settlement with the railroad.
7. From a program given by Marcia Oldfather for the Shakespeare Club. Mrs. Murch had attended the Art Institute in Appleton for a year. She taught art at the Institute and, after Clarence's death, she taught two terms at Central City College. She died in 1914.
8. Also known as "The Blue and the Gold" and "The Alma Mater".

#### SOURCES

My thanks to Alan and Charles Oldfather for loaning me the Murch papers and photographs. Other sources were *Where the Buffalo Roamed*; Holmgren, *Kearney State College 1905-1980*; two bound volumes of *Sports Afield*; *Buffalo Tales*, January-February, 1993; *Kearney Daily Hub*, 1-27-1910; letter from Diane Oldfather; telephone conversations with Charles Oldfather and Velma Hazlett; *Tales of Buffalo County*, Vol. 4.

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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, 1994: Howard Kolbo, Mardi Anderson, Lois Rahmann, Jim Cudaback.

Term expiring June 1, 1995: Glen Wisch, Philip Holmgren, Larry Nansel, Floretta Sullwold.

Term expiring June 1, 1996: Susan C. Lynch, Margaret Hohnholt, Wilma Harder, Helen Kinnaman.

**Officers (1 year term)**

President ..... Susan C. Lynch  
Vice-President ..... Larry Nansel  
Secretary ..... Margaret Hohnholt  
Treasurer ..... Mardi Anderson

**TRAILS & RAILS**

The sun has finally gotten rid of the snow which surrounded the Museum much of the winter. These nice spring days make us realize that Trails & Rails will soon be hosting the area schools who visit us annually. We have received the first request from a school plus a request from a tour group of 44 persons. New displays are being created. We will soon be calling volunteers to help during this summer.

Wagons West will be June 4th. Make your plans now to attend.

School children will again be doing the flower garden and the 4-H vegetable garden.

Sally, Don and Dorte will be back to help this summer.

—Margaret Hohnholt,  
Volunteer Director

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

Buffalo County Historical Society

Box 523

Kearney, NE 68848-0523

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