



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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THE NEWSPAPERS OF KEARNEY

Part II

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

No account of Kearney newspapers is complete without mention of Moses H. Sydenham who began publishing the *Kearney Herald* at Ft. Kearney in 1862. After moving to Dobytown (Centora) he began publishing the *Central Nebraska Star* in about 1870, and later at intervals in Kearney. When the fort was closed he advocated the removal of the national capitol to the military reservation. Failing this, he then proposed that 39th Street and 2nd Avenue (Capitol Hill) in Kearney be the site.¹

The proliferation of Kearney newspapers matched the boom of other businesses beginning in 1888. The 1891 City Directory lists two dailies and five weeklies, some destined to be as short-lived as the sixty-three incorporated companies listed in the same directory.

The *Central Nebraska Press* was discontinued about 1887; in 1888 editor William C. Holden established the *Liberty Bell*, continuing the "personal journalism" for which he was notorious. By 1890 J. M. Easterling² "and associates" had assumed the plant and changed its name to the *Nebraska Standard*, which was soon consolidated with the *People's Sentinel*. James A. Edgerton, editor, (known as the "toiler's poet") advocated the principles of the people's independent party.

Holden took over the *Courier*, established in 1888 by Ferdinand McConnel. It was absorbed by the *Sentinel* and the combined *Nebraska Standard* and *People's Sentinel* was consolidated with the *New Era* in 1895.

J. M. Easterling in an article written for the fiftieth anniversary of the *Hub*, states

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Kearney Daily Hub, 23 West 22nd Street, until 1910

BUFFALO TALETS 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.

Officers and Directors: President, Margaret Hohnholt; Vice-President, Merlin Berglund; Secretary, Colleen Parker; Treasurer, Philip S. Holmgren. Directors: Frances Link, Barb Avery, Minnette Steinbrink, Edna Hehner, Alice Howell, Robert Stubblefield, Viola Livingston, Chandler Lynch III, and Jim Cudaback. Publications Chairman: Alice Howell.

Trails & Rails Museum

706 West 11th Street

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WITH THE SOCIETY

Cur Fall Fun(d) Day was a hot windy day but the horseshoes clanged anyway, and many people enjoyed the Museum and many children enjoyed the buggy rides. We really thank all who gave of their time and talents to make this day a success. Things like this cannot happen without the cooperation of many members. Thank You.

.....

The Fall Tour to Nebraska City was enjoyed by 40 members and guests. It was a lovely fall day and we were treated royally by the guides. The committee is to be congratulated.

.....

The next activity will be the Big Band Dance which will be held on November 19th at the Armory from 8:00 to 12 o'clock. Harvey Larsen's Band, (which was enjoyed so much at the Air Base Reunion) will be featured. Admission is \$3.50 per person. Members of the Society will have tickets to sell, or they may be picked up at Midtown Business Center. Let's all join together to make this a big success.

.....

During December, the Museum will be open December 3 through the 11th. We will be featuring Christmas Trees decorated by various groups in the County. They will be depicting the interests of these groups. The sounds, sights and smells of Christmas will put us in the mood for Christmas. For more information, call Margaret Hohnholt—237-7327 or Lois Tollefsen—237-2800. Volunteers will be needed, so let us hear from you.

.....

A trip to Crawford is planned for next spring. The date will probably be the middle of June. Some new areas will be visited on the way up and back. As of now, a four-day trip is planned. Be thinking about this as we must have reservations before January 1. More details later.

NEW MEMBERS

Sid and Bernice Murrish Kearney Kay Vetter Central City

In 1891 Kearney was the home of organized labor, and the printers went on strike. So, as they had no war chest, they started the *Daily Review* . . . It was a "throw away" paper and covered the city . . . In those days weekly pay day came on Monday to save us from the effects of the night before. The treasurer of the "venture" (a tramp printer) had collected for the week's advertising and on Saturday . . . had tarried too long at the bowl and the gaming table, and hit the road . . . The strike came to an end, and the *Review* quit the game.

Will Maupin, who had come to Kearney to work for the *Enterprise*, was editor and wrote "sunshine poetry" for its "readable columns". Later, writing the "Kearney Come Back Club", he stated he "borrowed \$2 from Frank and Roy Rhone to avoid the necessity of walking across country . . . after the explosion early in the summer of 1890".³

The *Buffalo County Sun*, established by George J. Shephard in 1894, lasted until February 8, 1900 when it was absorbed by the *Hub*.

The *Kearney Gait*, a monthly, appeared on March 15, 1891 with H. H. Martin as editor. Its sole purpose appeared to be the promotion of the Kearney boom. A poem, titled "The Kearney Gait", by C. A. Murch, appeared on the front page of the first issue. The term, descriptive of Kearney's progress during the boom, had appeared as early as 1889. The only other issue of the paper located was for June, 1891.

L. B. Cunningham changed the *Journal-Enterprise* to the *Weekly Journal* early in the nineties. These were hard times for all businesses but the *Journal* kept going until 1906, when Cunningham sold the paper to T. B. Garrison publisher of the *Kearney Morning Times*.⁴

The *New Era-Standard* consolidated with the *Kearney Weekly Times* in 1909, and the weekly became the *Kearney Morning Times* in 1913 with F. W. Brown, editor. This paper was absorbed by the *Hub* in 1917.

The *Kearney Daily News* first appeared on August 28, 1893, with Forrest L. Whedon as editor and Charles and Jerry Scott, publishers. The name was changed to



Kearney Daily Hub, 13 East 22nd Street, 1911-present

the *Kearney Democrat* in 1894. The office was originally in a frame building at 21st and 1st Avenue, now the location of Sears store, and later moved to 22nd and Central.

Whedon's motto was "a newspaper without a muzzle". In 1896 he wrote, "Bryan feels just as proud that he was defeated by Hanna's money as McKinley dares feel because he was elected by it." Whedon's outspoken column, "Thoughtful Thinks", was a topic of conversation about town each time the paper appeared. The last of his columns was found in his typewriter after his unexpected death. Mrs. Whedon operated the paper for a time with the help of her son-in-law, Arthur W. Stevens, and later with Roy Barnard as editor. C. N. Harris bought the paper in 1926 and in an editorial on June 5, 1926, titled "*Democrat Retires—Kearney Tribune is born*", he wrote, "It is not our intent to fight the battles of any political faction." W. D. Edson became editor in 1930.

In an editorial on July 14, 1932 titled "We Relinquish the Wheel" he announced the sale of the paper to Vance R. Beghtol. Mr. Beghtol, of Hastings, had previously been with a paper in New York City and also served two years in an editorial capacity in Paris.

In his first editorial on July 21st, he wrote:

To the best of our ability we shall steer the craft in the straightforward course set by our predecessors . . . Our attitude politically will be, as nearly as possible, independent, which may be difficult for one reared in the traditions of republicanism. . . . These are the days of our nation's second Reconstruction . . . We must retrench, get back to earth, rebuild our lost prosperity.

The paper felt the pinch of the depression very soon. On September 29th Beghtol wrote, "Realizing that money is tightening, this newspaper is reducing its rates to \$1.65 a year, 85¢ for six months, 45¢ for three."

On July 28, 1932 he had written, "Mr. Hoover has done his best . . . He may have done better than any other man could have done . . . yet there has been a shade of dissatisfaction.

By September 29th he was writing, "We trust you are voting for Roosevelt. We used to be a Republican, too, sort of, but we have seen the light. Do you want your daughter to drink home brew? Then vote for Hoover."

After Beghtol's death his wife, Marjorie, continued the paper as the *Platte Valley Tribune* until some time in 1938, then operated the publishing company as a separate business.

By April 4, 1939, Henry C. Kroger and Esther Stock Kroger⁵ were operating the *Kearney, Nebraska, Daily News*, a morning paper, successor to the *Platte Valley Tribune*, at 2302 Central Avenue (Gerber's Store). On December 27, 1941, Mrs. Kroger announced she had sold the *News* to the *Kearney Daily Hub*:

Since "Heinie's passing, I feel I cannot "carry on" without him . . . I wish to thank all of our loyal friends and employees who helped make the paper the success it was. "Heinie" and I were happy with our work and I shall ever treasure many beautiful memories.

In the silver anniversary edition of the *Kearney Daily Hub* Mentor A. Brown wrote,

The *Hub* was founded upon the rather shaky foundations of the old

Central Nebraska Press . . . In the fall of 1888 the present editor and manager of the *Hub* came to Kearney upon the solicitation of a Kearney citizen . . . then visiting in Beatrice. The writer had a few months before disposed of the *Beatrice Express* . . . he visited Kearney, was pleased with what he saw . . . Rice Eaton and J. P. Johnson owned the plant of the *Central Nebraska Press*, which they had just revived. The writer bought the Johnson interest, retained Mr. Eaton, and organized the *Hub Publishing Company*.

The name of the paper was changed to the *Semi-Weekly Kearney Hub and Central Nebraska Press*; by 1891 it was the *Daily Hub* for about a year. "Then trouble began" the *Hub* struggled through the "boomerang years" of the national panic, barely able to make the payroll. Frank S. Williams, managing editor of the *Lincoln Journal* at the time the *Hub* celebrated its golden anniversary, wrote of his experience with the paper as editor. Shortly after joining the staff in 1896, he states.

Publisher Brown called me aside . . . and asked me to buy the *Hub*. I was amazed because I hadn't a dollar to my name. He explained that it was to be sold at a bank receiver's sale and that he had hopes of securing the money to pay for it, but that it was best that I buy it in my own name . . . On the day of the sale he handed me a check for \$1,800, and asked me to make a bid for that amount.

The group at the sale was amazed, they didn't think there was that much money in existence . . . For nearly two years M. A. Brown ran the newspaper and so far as the records went, I owned it."

When Williams decided to go to Lincoln in 1898, he asked Brown what he wanted to do about the ownership. "He asked that I transfer it to his daughter, Mabel . . . The transfer price was \$1.00."

Brown wrote of the transaction, "In 1897, the writer effected a turn by which we had secured entire personal control. The editor, his wife, and two daughters, went to work to rebuild the paper's fallen fortunes."

Williams wrote that Mentor A. Brown was well named. "He was teacher, friend and counsellor." Bess Furman, one of the woman pioneers in the *Associated Press*, wrote of her experience with the *Hub*, "in all my subsequent career . . . I have never found a keener-minded editor than M. A. Brown—I have never met a better all-around newspaper man than Heinie Kroger."

When Mr. Brown died in September of 1932, a large picture of him appeared on the front page of the rival *Tribune*. Under a large banner headline, "M. A. Brown Dies", Vance Beghtol wrote

Ten days ago this writer had lunch with M. A. Brown, dean of Nebraska editors. At that time his humor was apt and alert . . . Nightly his finely written editorials appeared in the *Hub*—the journalistic monument to his foresight and constructive ability . . . a man whose broadness of mind endeared him to those who saw opposite in matters of public and political beliefs . . . with a handclasp strong as his word.

Hugh Brown, who had been managing editor of the *Hub*, took over as publisher after his father's death, with Henry Kroger continuing as editor.

The issue of December 31, 1938, carried the announcement by Brown that he had sold the *Hub* to Ormond and Alfred Hill and Dwight King, "who take possession

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at the close of today's business."

Brown retained the Hub Publishing Company, in the same building, later selling it to Fred Carlson, a veteran of the print shop. Dewey King became a partner for a number of years before selling his share to Harold Morris.

Dwight King, who had been owner of the *Franklin Sentinel*, became editor of the *Hub*, Alfred Hill was to be the acting publisher until his brother Ormond could wind up his affairs in Kansas City. Both had been active in the publishing business for some time, all three of the men were from Kansas.

The country was still feeling the effects of the depression. Ruth Erickson King, who was a teacher in Kearney High School, remembers that several teachers were wondering how the new owners would pay for the paper, "since the price sounded ridiculous to them." Because of the depression college students were *Hub* carriers.

The economy improved during the war but the employee situation was worse. Ruth states, "Dwight recalls that part of the time he and Sylvia Armstrong were the only ones in the news department."

Dwight left in 1950 to become editor of a paper in New Kensington, Pa.⁶ Fred Pruitt was editor for about a year after which E. E. Chittenden became editor and later publisher until his retirement.

The *Hub*, which was sold to The *Omaha World-Herald* in 1984, is celebrating its one-hundredth anniversary this year.

NOTES

1. Tales of Buffalo County, Vol. 2.
2. Easterling was county judge for many years.
3. Maupin also worked for the *Omaha Bee-News* and the *World-Herald*. He was editor of the *Hastings Democrat* in 1932-34.
4. Cunningham returned to Iowa with his family. His son, Ralph was a publisher at Shenandoah for many years and was publisher of *Where Buffalo Roamed*.
5. Kroger was editor of the *Hub* for many years and his wife Esther worked in the advertising department. She was also in the Chamber of Commerce for a number of years.
6. King retained his interest in the *Hub* until its recent sale. He is now publisher of the *Holdrege Citizen*. In 1982 he was chosen Nebraska Master Editor-Publisher for the year.

SOURCES

Kearney newspapers in the archives of the Kearney Public Library, K.S.C. Library and the State Historical Society. Basset, *History of Buffalo County*; *Biographical Souvenir of Buffalo*, *Phelps and Kearney Counties*; *Where The Buffalo Roamed*; *Kearney Writers of Fame*, by Ella L. Bessie; Letter from Ruth Erickson King, 10-2-88; Interview with Ward Minor.

My thanks to the staff of the archives of the State Historical Society for their help in tracing the complicated changes of names and owners of Kearney newspapers.

Editor's Note: In the September *Buffalo Tales*, the captions under the pictures on pages 1 and 5 were reversed.