



Buffalo Tales



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LOTTIE GOVE NORTON: GRANDE DAME OF FORT KEARNEY CHAPTER, DAR

by Pamela Nelson Long

Charlotte Gove Norton was the organizing regent of Fort Kearney* Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution in 1908, and her devotion to the DAR was threaded throughout her lifetime. She was an energetic lady with great personal drive, and she believed in equal rights for women before it became popular for the "distaff side" to enter the business world, to promote civic projects, to mark historic sites, and to be active in the affairs of her community and state.

Lottie, as she preferred to be called, was born May 16, 1859, in Tomah, Wisconsin. Her ancestors were from the New England states. Her father, the Honorable Elijah Atwood Gove, was an eminent jurist, and her mother, Maria Louisa Haynes, was a writer. Lottie graduated from Minneapolis (Minnesota) High School; later she attended a Catholic convent, and then a private girls school in London, Canada. Lottie married Charles Oliver Norton of St. Paul, Minnesota in 1885; he was a native of New York State. They came to Kearney soon after their marriage, during the early settlement of the area. Mr. Norton established a banking, insurance, real estate, and abstract business. Of the Nortons' three sons, only Oliver Gove survived. He was a pioneer in his own right as an automotive engineer, having spent most of his professional life in the Opel Division of General Motors in Europe. Oliver married but there were no children.



LOTTIE GOVE NORTON

Born 1859; Died 1936

*The "e" is used in the spelling of Fort Kearney since it was too cumbersome to have our city spelled differently in correspondence with our national headquarters in Washington, D.C.

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WITH THE SOCIETY

Happy New Year! We look forward to new accomplishments in 1983. Last year was a fine year for the Historical Society, with larger attendance at the museum; preliminary examination and filing of the courthouse records in our archives (thanks to members of the Genealogical Society). Also, collection of county school photos and histories, moving and renovation of District No. 1 schoolhouse, cleaning and repainting Engine 481 - all spearheaded by Museum Board Chairman Maynard Envick. The foundation is ready for the Freighters Hotel, which will be moved to our grounds this winter.

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Now is the time to renew your memberships; many have been received. Please save us the cost of a second notice by remitting this month.

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Congratulations to Marian Johnson, curator of the Frank House and vice-president of our Society, who has been appointed to replace the late Dorothy Weyer Creigh as one of Nebraska's two advisors to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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Plans for a January meeting are indefinite at this time. Announcement will be made in the newspapers and by radio if and when a meeting will be held.

Lottie became a widow after eleven years of marriage while she was still a young woman. She had followed very closely the details of her husband's real estate business, paying particular attention to land values. It was said that Mrs. Norton became the richest woman in Nebraska dealing in farm and ranch lands due to her vast knowledge of Nebraska's soil. She foresaw the possibilities of the expansion of the great Platte Valley, which laid the foundation for her immense fortune, a result of shrewd and sagacious buying. At one time she had the honor of being the only woman in the State of Nebraska to belong to a commercial club. Not all of Lottie's time was devoted to business. She would plunge into philanthropic projects and the amazing mass of detail connected with a number of patriotic, genealogic, and historical societies.

While Lottie was small physically, her personality was dynamic. She was ambitious and could be domineering. She was also well read, aristocratic, and refined. She loved beautiful things and especially enjoyed collecting exotic Chinese objects, such as oriental carpets and carved furniture. A glance at some of her menus will reveal she was a connoisseur of the art of European chefs. Lottie entertained with great flourish, at one time having served a banquet to sixty-four guests in her own home. The writer interviewed Mrs. Wessie Wilder, who knew Lottie and who told of helping with the serving at her fabulous parties. The young girls looked forward to Mrs. Norton's parties and the opportunity to be "in on the action". Wessie remembers, "Mrs. Norton was a hostess of elegant style, and she had all the accoutrements—spacious home, sterling silver, fine china—to do it right!" The Norton home was located on the corner of 22nd Street and First Avenue in Kearney where the Elks Club now stands.

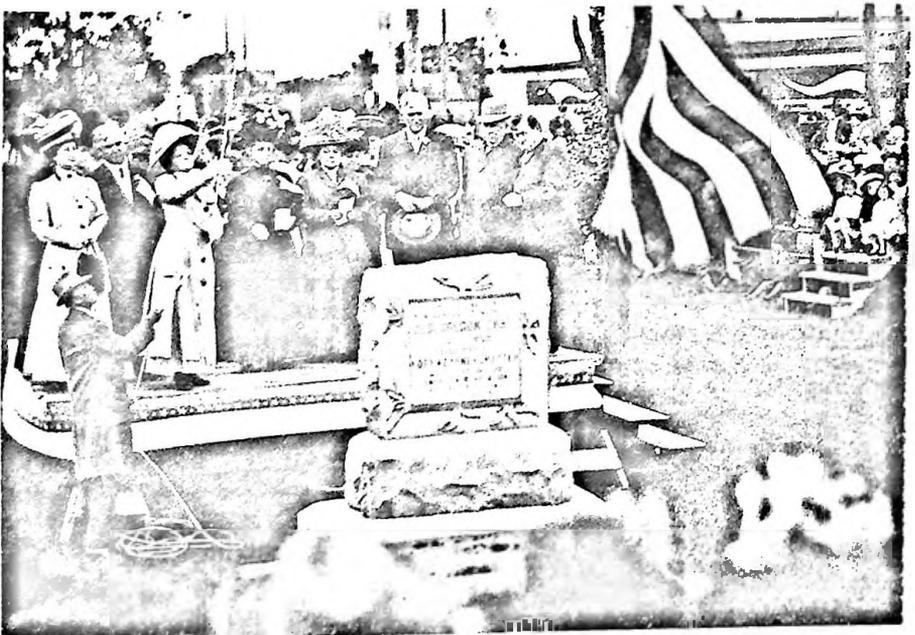


Kearney's first Public Library—1905

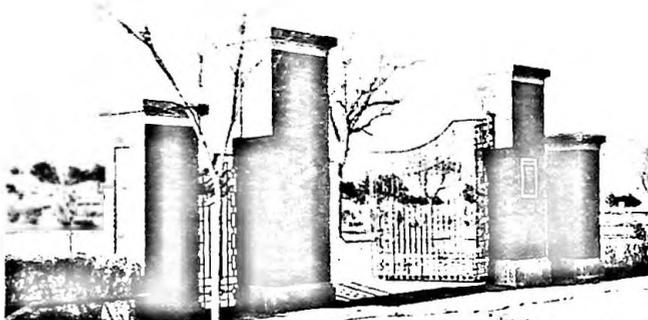
Lottie was civic minded. In 1903 she gave three seventy-five foot lots to the City of Kearney on which to build a library. In the deed it was stated that the lots were always to be the site of a library—or the land reverted to the family. Indeed, today our new library was built on these lots when the old library was razed. It should be noted that Lottie had a talent for writing, like her mother, and she was a member of the League of American Pen Women.

During the period of much political activity to locate a state normal school in Kearney, it was Lottie who entertained the visiting legislators and politicians. Whistles blew and church bells rang on September 1, 1903, when Kearney was named the site of the NORMAL OF THE WEST at 3:15 p.m., on the 111th ballot! Lottie led the rejoicing!

She organized the Fort Kearney Chapter DAR, in 1908. During her term as regent (1908-1911), Lottie and chapter members decided that the historic Oregon Trail should be perpetuated by suitable markings throughout Nebraska. The old trail, so long a narrow ribbon of road forgotten by all but those who traveled it locally, needed to be permanently remembered. The first marble stone to be erected in Nebraska to mark the Old Oregon Trail was dedicated in Kearney by the Fort Kearney Chapter on February 14, 1910, on Central Avenue at Union Pacific Park. Thus the marking of the Oregon Trail was begun by Lottie, with many successive monuments placed throughout Nebraska—and at other places as well.



Unveiling the Oregon Trail Monument, June 9, 1910



Memorial Gate at the Kearney Cemetery.

As might be expected, Mrs. Norton became State Regent of the Nebraska Society DAR in 1911. During her two-year term, she doubled the number of members in Nebraska as well as doubling the number of chapters—certainly an accomplishment that will never be matched. Her own ancestry was prestigious and surely it was this fact which whetted her interest in genealogy—her own ancestry and that of others—whom she assisted to join the DAR and other hereditary societies. She was a member of the following organizations: Colonial Dames of America, United States Daughters of 1812, First Families of Virginia, and Society of Daughters of Founders and Patriots of America. Mrs. Norton was a member of the Nebraska State Historical Society and of the New England Historic Genealogical Society of Boston, Massachusetts. She held membership in the Hereditary Order of Descendants of Colonial Governors, and in the Society of Americans of Armorial Ancestry. She served as a member of the International Peace Arbitration Commission. She was a member of the Episcopal Church.

One DAR recalled the manner in which Lottie worked to trace genealogical records. She had a large desk with pigeon holes in it for sorting research data. She used a high board upon which to pin ancestor charts, and she worked from a high stool. Another DAR recalled Lottie's incredible ability to trace a family genealogy, once she knew what line was involved. She also had the habit of pinning newspaper clippings to her clothing and to her curtains and drapes, literally covering her windows with them.

In 1924 when Fort Kearney Chapter planned to erect a gateway to the Kearney Cemetery, Lottie was on the Committee and personally contributed generously to the project. Later in 1926, she donated toward a bronze plaque to be placed on the gateway pillar. In 1927, it was Lottie herself who made the presentation of the gateway to the City of Kearney from the Fort Kearney Chapter during the 25th State DAR Conference in Kearney.

In the stock market crash of 1929, Lottie lost all the money she had in New York banks, and her holdings were considerable! In the autumn of that year, it was noted in DAR minutes that Lottie was seriously ill. Did the shock of a financial loss have a physical effect on her? Whatever the illness, she recovered enough to go abroad in the summer of 1930. No doubt she wanted to visit her son and his wife.

In her declining years she continued to attend DAR meetings and she extended

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greetings at the state conference in 1931, participated in a group program in 1934, and was also honored at that time. Lottie G. Norton died March 21, 1936. In the minutes of the April 3, 1936, DAR meeting, "It was moved, seconded, and carried that the regent appoint a committee to investigate prices and various kinds of plates placed on graves as markers, and that we have a most fitting one for Mrs. Norton's grave." Indeed Mrs. Norton's tombstone in the Kearney Cemetery is auspiciously marked with a bronze plaque inscribed,

Ft. Kearney Chapter



Organizing Regent
Ex-State Regent

During her time, Mrs. Norton was the most influential woman in Kearney. She supported, encouraged, and worked toward the development of institutions in the city of Kearney and in the promotion of agriculture in the great Platte Valley. Throughout her busy, fruitful life, her love for genealogy was always her heartbeat. Certainly she is fondly remembered as the distinguished first lady of Fort Kearney Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution.

SOURCES

Interview with Weslie Wort Wilder, June, 1981; research paper of Emma Jane Wilder: *Nebraska State History of the Daughters of the American Revolution*, June 7, 1894 to February 1, 1929, Mabel Lindly, editor; *Where the Buffalo Roamed*, 1967; and the *Recording Secretary's Minutes*, Fort Kearney Chapter DAR.

Note: Pamela Nelson Long is the immediate past State Regent of Nebraska (1980-1982), and is a past regent of Fort Kearney Chapter (1970-1972).

NEW MEMBERS

- Mrs. Lyle Manchik Grand Island
- Daniel Johnson Ravenna
- David K. Martin Arlington, VA
- Mrs. Raymond Roth . . . Sacramento, CA