

Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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KEARNEY BOOMERS IN 1889

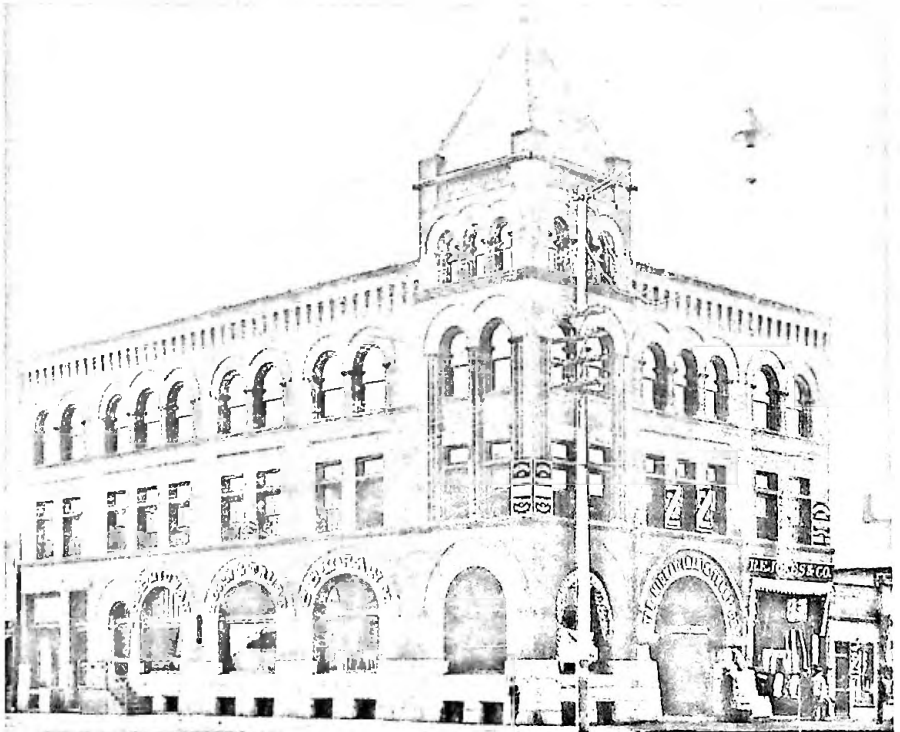
by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

The 1880s ended, and the great Kearney boom, started in the mid-80s, continued "full steam" into the 1890s. Much was accomplished in 1889; more would come in the 90s.

The *Kearney Daily Hub* of August 3, 1889 noted the city's progress in its columns:

It has been only a little more than a year since the people of Kearney opened their eyes fully to the advantages which nature had put in their hands, and yet it is safe to say that in that short space of time the wealth of the city has more than doubled and at least fifty percent has been added to the population.

(Continued on Page 3)



Midway Loan & Trust Company, 1889

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. 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 Burgland; Treasurer, Philip S. Holmgren, Directors: Frances Link, Barb Avery, Edna Hehner, Viola Livingston, Jim Cudaback, Michael Stauffer, Glen Wisch, Chad Anderson, Colleen Parker, Chandler Lynch III. Publications Chairman: Alice Howell.

Trails & Rails Museum

706 West 11th Street

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WITH THE SOCIETY

The Christmas Tree Walk was again a success. Thanks go to all of the organizations that participated and the members and friends who donated to the raffle sale and all those who gave of their time to staff the event. Without all of you it would not be possible. Besides having fun and having many guests who had found the TRAILS & RAILS for the first time, we did make a nice profit. If you know of any organization that would like to take part next year, have them get in touch with me or a member of the board. Now is the time to start planning.

The winner this year was the Kearney Garden Club. There was a tie for Honorable Mention, Amherst Centennial Committee and Soil Sisters Garden Club. Congratulations to all three. Every tree had votes and I would have given the prize to all if I could have.

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There will be a Book Repair Workshop at the Kearney Public Library on Thursday, January 25, at 7:00 p.m. This is a hands-on session. Please call the Library for more information or to pre-register by January 20. No charge.

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A general meeting of the Historical Society will be held on January 28, at 2:00 p.m., at the First Lutheran Church fellowship hall. Dr. Michael W. Schuyler, member of the KSC history department, will give the program on the "Ku Klux Klan in Nebraska" and their activities during the 20s. Mark your calendar. Although this is Super Bowl Sunday, by starting the meeting on time, you will be home by game time at 4:00 p.m.

Margaret Hohnholt, President

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Sixteen months ago there was not a residence in Kenwood; prairie grass was growing where the pressed brick works and canning factory now stand, the water works (8th Ave.) marked the west line of the city, and on the east there were not half a dozen residences between the fourth ward school (Emerson) and the fairgrounds. . . . West Kearney was farming property. East Lawn a dead investment. . . the morning *Journal* was the only daily newspaper in the city, and while all hoped, few believed that Kearney would ever secure many more important manufacturing industries. . . .

. . . If any citizen of Kearney is beginning to tire in the great undertaking to make this the principal city between the Missouri River and the mountains, let him take any single street and count the new buildings that have come in the last year.

The achievements of 1889 were indeed unbelievable, and to note all of them in this brief article is an impossibility. According to the *Kearney Enterprise* of December 22, 1889, statistics of the year showed that the city gained 3000 people during the year, making a total of 12,000; postal receipts showed a gain of nearly fifty percent, a gain that brought about the introduction of free delivery to Kearney patrons. Railroad business, both freight and passenger, increased one hundred percent; banking capital and bank transactions nearly doubled; nearly a million and a quarter dollars were spent on new buildings, and nearly 500 new dwellings were erected.

Downtown Business and Government Buildings. Work was completed in 1889 on the new city hall with its impressive clock tower, and work continued on the new Buffalo County Court House. On Central Avenue the Switz Building on the northeast corner of 23rd Street and Central was completed. Across the street on the southeast corner, the handsome and finely equipped Midway Loan and Trust Company building was constructed. Its basement and three stories were outfitted for offices, with the best of sanitary plumbing, electricity, and a passenger elevator run by electricity. A tower at one corner of the building rose 75 feet high. The foundation and a part of the first story were stone, above which was pressed brick with stone and ornamental terra cotta. "The handsomest yet erected," says the *Kearney New Era*.

Two blocks south, at the southeast corner of Central and 21st Street, another imposing bank building was constructed—the new quarters of the City National Bank. Most of the first floor was occupied by the bank, and the remainder of the three stories and basement was fitted up for offices. The building was of pressed brick. It had large plate glass windows, several richly-ornamented open fireplaces, water pipes to every room, steam heat, and both gas and electricity. It also had an elevator run by electric power.

The large wholesale and retail grocery house of Coddington and Sons at 2005-07 Central Avenue was built and opened for business during 1889. Also, three Coddington residences were constructed in the Kenwood area.

A 4-story 40' x 80' addition to the Midway Hotel was built during the summer, and the Hamilton Loan & Trust Company, a construction of red Colorado sandstone at 2119 Central Avenue, was completed.

Churches and Homes. Three new church buildings were started, two of which were completed: Trinity Methodist Church of south Kearney, at 17th Street and Avenue B, and the Christian Church at 25th Street and Avenue C. Although plans were made and

excavation started on the new Baptist Church, it would not be completed until 1890. The *New Era* of April 13 reported the organization of a German Presbyterian Church, with services to be held in the old first ward schoolhouse.

Of the 500 residences said to have been built during the year, few were mentioned in the newspaper columns. The \$40,000 mansion of George W. Frank, Sr. was completed and occupied. The home of contractor W. T. Scott at 2103 3rd Avenue and the A. J. Snowden home in Kenwood at 1404 10th Avenue were noted, as was the \$9,000 residence of Mrs. Flora Dildine at 2702 Central Avenue.

Railroads. Although Kearney built no new railroads during 1889, both the Union Pacific and the Burlington & Missouri reported a doubling of both freight and passenger traffic. Sidetracks were laid not only to the West Kearney industries, but to the Kearney Milling & Elevator, Downing's coalyards and elevator, Scott's elevator, C. D. Ayres' coal houses and the Kearney Stone Works. Articles of incorporation for the new Kearney and Black Hills Railroad were filed on May 24, 1889, and there was serious talk of a new Kearney, Hutchinson and Gulf Railroad to serve Kearney, bringing fresh fruit and cotton from the southern states.

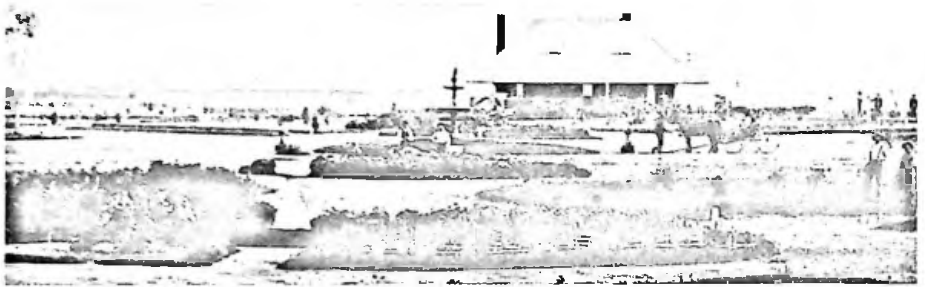
Public Improvements. It was apparent to the city fathers that a major improvement to be addressed in 1889 was that of an adequate sewer system, as well as an extension of water mains. With the prospect of continued rapid growth in population, they were faced with a weighty decision, and finally decided on a system that would cost \$127,000, of which \$70,000 would be provided by a bond issue and the balance to come from assessments upon property. After the bonds were approved, the contract was let and work commenced immediately.

Also approved by the city council was an extension of water mains and installation of fire hydrants to the outer boundaries of the city.

New Power House. The summer of 1889 saw the erection of a new power house close to Kearney Lake. A structure, 65' x 88', three stories in height, built of pressed brick laid in Portland cement would house enough dynamos to supply 3,000 horse power. The new wheel-pit would be built of solid masonry 24 feet in diameter and 42 feet deep. "The structure will clearly demonstrate the use of the canal to investors who visit Kearney, and will be the means of inducing hundreds of manufacturers to locate their works in the Midway City," quotes the *Enterprise*.

With the construction of new buildings of every kind and nature, along with work on the new sewer system, extension of water mains, the development of West Kearney and its factories, the need for laborers was acute. Special trains from nearby towns were run carrying workers to Kearney and return home, and within the city a West Kearney coach ran regularly from the Midway Hotel carrying workmen to their jobs.

West Kearney. By far the largest contributing factor to the accomplishments of 1889 was the formation of the West Kearney Improvement Company which immediately laid out the town of West Kearney, one mile square, two miles west of the Midway Hotel at 25th Street and Central Avenue. A beautiful park containing 10,000 shrubs and flowering plants was laid out in the center of the townsite. A New England style depot was erected on the Union Pacific line. Several stores sprung up on Central Boulevard, and some fine residences were built on Grand Avenue and more were planned. When West Kearney lots were offered for sale early in February, 1889, twelve hundred lots were sold on the opening day.



West Kearney, 1889

However, the key to the remarkable success of West Kearney was the securing of industries. The demand for brick brought about the enlargement of the Kearney Brick Company's yard, plus three new brickyards by the end of the year. An electric railway one mile in length was built to haul clay from the banks of the canal to the brickworks to speed up the brick-making operations.

Seven acres of ground along the Union Pacific in West Kearney was occupied by the Kearney Paper Mill. This factory made ordinary brown wrapping paper, such as used in hardware stores or butcher shops. Straw was the principal ingredient, twelve tons thereof making eight tons of paper. The main machine room was 125 feet long and one story high; the section containing the boilers was three stories. The whole building was of brick construction.

Just west of the paper mill was the West Kearney Woolen Mill, three stories high, with four looms for weaving plain and striped flannel for woolen shirts. The wool was procured from the farmers in the area. Soon after the factory started operating, the firm opened a shirt business in downtown Kearney on 19th Street near Central Avenue where eleven women were employed to use sewing machines, and one man to cut out the shirts.

Another establishment in West Kearney of large proportions was the Kearney Canning and Pickle Factory which used vegetable products grown in the Buffalo County area.

The crowning triumph announced toward the end of the year was the signing of a contract that assured the location of a cotton mill at the northwest corner of West Kearney. The citizens of Kearney had raised \$250,000 toward acquiring this industry which would employ one thousand or more people. Manufacturers and capitalists of New England would build and operate the cotton mill.

Other Industries While there was a concentration of industries in West Kearney, many others were located in the city. New in 1889 was the Kearney Oat Meal Company at 25th Street and Avenue R on the east edge of the city, and the Metcalf Cracker Factory in downtown Kearney at 2009 First Avenue. Established companies increased their operations, such as the Kearney Milling & Elevator Co., and the Kearney Ice Company. During the year the Kearney Street Railway converted their horse-drawn lines to electric lines, and extended their routes in the city.

Noteworthy Items. The newspapers of the day give first hand accounts of happenings in Kearney in 1889. In addition to the *New Era*, *Kearney Daily Hub* and the *Buffalo County Journal*, a new newspaper, the *Kearney Enterprise*, started circulation in March with H. D. Watson, the proprietor, and Wm. E. Smythe, editor.

Buffalo County Historical Society
Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848

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New Era, Feb. 2: In addition to the manufacturing places in West Kearney, whose electric power will be obtained from the upper lakes, a large hotel is in contemplation to be erected between the two lakes which will have connection with east Kearney by electric street railway and the telephone. (The hotel was never built.)

New Era, May 4: John Barnd platted his residence property, calling it Forest Park. It contains eleven acres with trees all over.

New Era, May 18: E. K. Greene, recently from Montreal, will soon commence erection of a brick building on 26th Street containing six residences and large storeroom. It will have one furnace, electric lights, hot and cold water, and the cost will exceed \$35,000. (Greene Terrace Hall.)

New Era, July 27: Arrangements have been made for the accommodation of fifty thousand people (at the G.A.R. Reunion, August 12-17). The camp is located high and dry adjoining and overlooking Lake Kearney. A thrilling feature of the Reunion will be a naval battle on Lake Kearney. All regularly organized and uniformed bands and drum corps will be carried free by the railroad. A band of 25 Sioux Indians will be in attendance.

Kearney Enterprise, December 22, 1889: Not exactly a public library, but a library for the public, is that for which W. S. Skinner is unpacking a big consignment of books. He has purchased a thousand volumes to begin with, covering a wide range . . . This library will be conducted on a popular membership plan, and is likely to serve, sooner or later, as the nucleus of a genuine public library.

A new institution in 1889 is the Midway College of Business started in November by Steinmann & Murch of Dixon, Illinois. Resident manager of the Kearney school is Prof. C. A. Murch. A suite of rooms in the Barnd & St. John Building has been fitted for the school.

The Midway Military Band was the local band of the day, often mentioned in the newspaper columns for appearing at special functions, of which there were many, and giving weekly concerts on Central Avenue and at the parks and school grounds. Prof. Joseph Benesch was the leader.

A full account of the Kearney Boom would fill a book, and the boomers at work during 1889 would provide a long and interesting chapter of the story.

SOURCES

1889 issues of *Kearney Daily Hub*, *Kearney Enterprise*, and *Kearney New Era*. *Kearney Centennial Book* (1973). Photos: Anderson Collection, Buffalo County Historical Society.