



# Buffalo Tales



## ROOTS OF BUFFALO COUNTY — THE GERMANS AND AUSTRIANS Part III

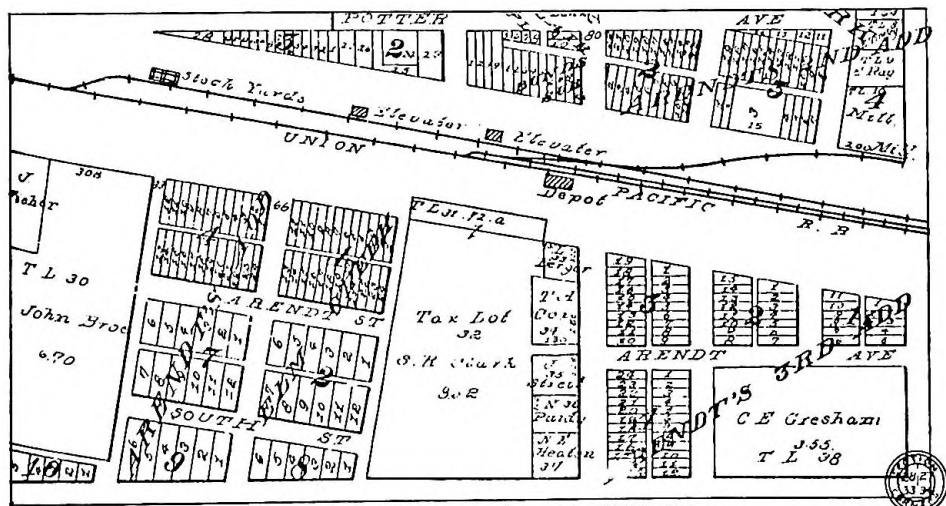
by Margaret Stines Nielsen

John P. Arendt came to America in 1851. He married Catherine Tyler in Burlington, Wisconsin. After serving in the army during the Civil War, John and his family came to what was the original site of Elm Creek in 1870. Catherine ran a store in their home and John was in the "Mercantile and Lumber" business until he retired in 1876. He was also the second postmaster starting in 1872.

John bought land south of the Union Pacific railroad tracks, and a few blocks adjacent to Front Street, a mile east of the original town. He began platting and selling town lots at the same time that Catherine's brother, John Tyler, was platting lots north of the railroad in the same location. Arendt was also one of the early county commissioners. The couple had seven children.

John Heider also came from Wisconsin to Elm Creek, taking a homestead in 1874. He worked on the Kearney canal and acquired more land. However, he became discouraged; trading part of his land for an overcoat and a little cash, he returned to Wisconsin. Later, returning to Elm Creek, he traded land for a spring wagon in which he drove to Kearney, where he met Anna Streit. The couple were married and had three children. They later sold their land and bought eighty acres near Elm Creek.

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Arendt's Additions as shown in 1907 Atlas.



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

(308) 234-3041

### WITH THE SOCIETY

After a busy summer, our tour to DeSoto Bend and a ride on the train out of Fremont will take place on October 1. If you have missed information on this you might get your name on the waiting list in case some one cancels at the last minute.

Many things have been done at the Museum. The new watering system is in place. The church is being worked on and will be open for viewing at the Fall Fun Day, which will be over by the time you get your "Buffalo Tales". New displays have been added. The entire area is now fenced in. The grounds are looking good. Mike Stauffer, a new board member, has spent much time at the Museum doing volunteer work. He has painted the Merry-Go-Round, worked on the wagons, and the outside displays, plus many other things too numerous to mention. We appreciate your help, Mike.

The Museum is now closed for the season with the exception of the Fall Fun Day and The Christmas Tree Walk. We will also be open on Saturday, September 23rd during the State Historical Meeting, which is being held outside Lincoln for the first time. We are, of course, open by appointment during other times.

As in past years, new 1990 memberships can now be purchased and will include the September, October and November/December issues of Buffalo Tales as a bonus. Urge your friends to join now, or use this as a fine opportunity to give a gift membership.

The Buffalo County Historical Society has learned that longtime member Viola Mueller is leaving Kearney to live near her daughter in Hillsboro, Missouri. Viola and her late husband Will joined the Society when it was first reorganized in 1972. Both have served several years on the Board of Directors. They contributed many artifacts and archives to the Museum, and were a valuable source of research of the early history of the Amherst-Watertown-Miller area.

We will miss you, Viola, and wish for you the best of joy and happiness in your new home.

Margaret Hohnholt, President



The Amherst centennial committee is seeking a picture of the early St. John Capistran Catholic Church of Amherst. Please contact Mrs. Irene Mollard, Amherst, NE 68812 or Mrs. Alice Howell, Editor of Buffalo Tales, Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848.

Joseph Weber fought in the Franco-Prussian War where he received a wound that affected him all his life. With their sons facing conscription, Joseph and his wife Catherine<sup>1</sup> secretly left the country with their four children. They also made the trip to Wisconsin, and on to Elm Creek where they homesteaded in 1877. It is said that while his sons worked the fields with their horses, Joseph pushed a wheelbarrow to Lexington for provisions. Nine more children were born to the Webers. At some time after Joseph's death the family changed their name to Weaver.

John and Mary (Kruetzer) Nitchie, of Austria came with their six children and John's brother, William, by rail to Kearney in 1884. They found transportation by horse and wagon to land six miles north of Elm Creek where they spent the night on the prairie. Their first shelter was a dugout. Mary walked to town to buy flour, carrying it home on her back. John and William also worked for the railroad in Nebraska and Colorado. Three more children were born in Nebraska. John Nitchie, Jr. built the town light plant in 1910.

Gustave Sullwold of Stemmen, West Germany, came to the United States in 1869, locating on a farm near Seward. In 1884 he bought a farm between Elm Creek and Odessa which he also farmed, commuting between the two places for a number of years. In 1895 he bought additional land from the Union Pacific. The Sullwolds had eight sons.

Valentine Echemacht, a native of Munich, came to Philadelphia at the age of twenty to visit relatives. After the death of his mother, his father and two sisters also came to this country. In Germany Valentine made patterns for bedspreads, linens and other items. A descendant, Alice Shell-Knight inherited the pattern book he had made. Valentine married Anna Maria Harter in Philadelphia and the couple lived in Schuylkill County for a number of years, where their eight children were born. After their son Henry moved to a homestead near Shelton, the Echemacht family followed him to Buffalo County in the early seventies, where they homesteaded northeast of Miller.

John Thiede came with his parents to Wisconsin from Mecklenburg, Germany in 1870. Nineteen-year old John went to work in a factory in Columbus, Wisconsin. There he married Ella Schweisow (Lizzie), also of Mecklenburg.

Lizzie's sister Minnie and her husband Henry Zarrs came to Armada township and bought 160 acres of railroad land three miles northwest of the Greendale post office. With them came the sisters' mother, Sophia Schweisow, and their two children. Henry, a bricklayer, manufactured bricks from the clay on his farm and built a two story brick house overlooking the Wood River valley. The house on a hill was a landmark for anyone traveling between Miller and Amherst.

The Zarrs moved to Kearney for a time where Henry joined a crew building the Midway Hotel. When the railroad was built through the Wood River Valley Henry moved his family to Watertown, where he established a brick yard.

John and Lizzie Thiede followed the Zarrs to the county in 1881 and John filed on a claim across the river from the Zarrs family. John's mother, Johanna, who accompanied them, filed to the east of them. In order to prove up on her claim she slept in a sod house on the farm three nights a week, with her grandson Edwin to keep her company.

The Thiedes also bought land in Armada township where they built a large frame house. They had six children.

1. a sister of Joseph Heider.

Lizzie was alone in the house one day when Ira and Print Olive appeared at her door and asked if they could spend the night. The next morning when they asked to pay her with a \$20 bill, she had no change and told them not to worry about it. They also borrowed a rope which they told her they would leave at a neighbor's house, but it was never returned. A year later they appeared again with a herd of cattle asking for shelter for themselves and bedding for their herd. John was home this time and agreed to put them up. Shortly after that the Olives left the area.

William F. Muller, born in Belgrade, Germany, married Wilhelmina Reimer, also of Belgrade and they came to New York in 1866. Moving to Iowa in 1867, they had four children, then came to Juniata, Nebraska where Wilhelmina died in 1884. William married Matilda Schultz Kappel Johnston in 1886.

In 1891 the family came to Lowell, then moved to a small house in the Watertown area. When their son Will married Jennie Quail they moved into the house, and the senior Mullers moved to a farm ten miles northeast, and then to a farm now owned by Howard Muller. William and Matilda had twelve children.

Most German immigrants moved to the rural areas of Buffalo County, but in Kearney several of the early business men were Germans. Frederick J. Switz was born in Borgsdorf, Prussia. He came to this country with his parents in 1856. He learned the trade of chair making in Cleveland, Ohio. During the Civil War he served under future President James A. Garfield. After his discharge he went to Auburn, Alabama where he was a partner in a furniture factory.

He closed out his business and moved to Kearney in 1874 where he started a furniture store, "also undertakers and supplies". In 1913 he incorporated the Switz Paint and Glass Company. Mr. Switz had married Emma A. Rawson in 1872 and the couple had three children. After Emma's death he married Phoebe (Mrs. Homer) Allen.



Switz Building, 1889, 2301-03 Central Avenue.

Sylvester Weibel, a native of Hohenems, Austria, landed in New York in 1854. He drifted around the country, holding a variety of jobs from logging to steamboating to working as a butler.

Weibel came to Kearney County in 1872, started a brickyard at Kearney in 1872, then returned to Lowell to run a saloon, continuing in that business in Kearney in 1875. He became wealthy, investing in a number of Kearney businesses. He was a major stockholder in the Kearney National Bank.

Gabriel Kramer also came to New York, where he worked as a dry goods clerk. Moving to Chicago, he had a store of his own for about a year, then came to Kearney in 1877. He operated the Kramer Dry Goods and Clothing store for a number of years.

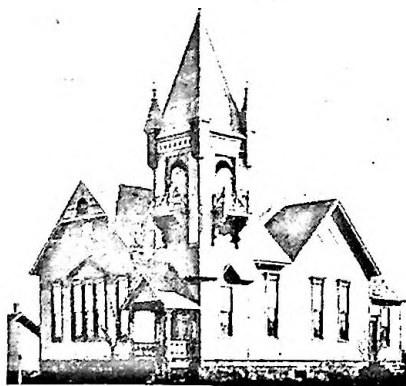
Jacob Gabriel, born in Prussia, came to this country in 1841. He had a varied career as miner, overseer of a cotton plantation, and well digger. In 1872 he came to Kearney where he invested in a saloon which was operated by Casper Cornelius for a number of years. In 1866 he became a rancher.

W. L. Cook, also of Prussia, landed in America in 1869. He came to Kearney in 1881 as a land agent for the Union Pacific. Making a number of trips to Europe he brought many of his countrymen to this country and helped them to settle on railroad land. In 1886 he started a cigar factory.

The Cottonmill lured a number of Germans to Kearney, as noted by the **Daily Journal** of March 1, 1893:

A German family of 16 came up from Grand Island and the oldest thereof are now at work at the Cottonmill. After working a few days the head of the family went back to Grand Island and brought with him 28 others who are now engaged in the mill.

The first Lutheran services in Kearney were conducted in 1889-90 by Reverend Henry Schabacker who traveled from his home in Luce in a two-wheeled horse-drawn cart. He stayed with the Fred Lebharts, conducted Sunday services in a Kearney home, drove twenty miles for another service in a farm home that afternoon, then returned to Luce that night in order to teach Monday morning.



Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church, 1913-1951, 25th Street and Avenue C, Kearney.

**Buffalo County Historical Society**  
**Box 523**  
**Kearney, NE 68848**

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It would be November of 1911 before a group of Lutherans would ask Reverend A. C. Bauman of Poole to be pastor of a mission church in Kearney. Thirteen persons were present when Pastor Bauman was installed on December 3, 1911 at the Swedish Lutheran Church. Those present were the Otto Wiederanders, the Herman Petersons, Erick Oslund, H. M. Kanzler, the Rudolph Nuttelmans and Herman Meyer.

The congregation rented the Swedish Lutheran Church for fifty cents a Sunday. In 1912 they were asked to move because some of the older members of the Swedish Lutheran Church were attending the services. They moved to the Congregational Church until 1913 when they bought the Christian Church at their present location. The church was named Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church in 1913. As with most German churches, services were conducted in both English and German in the early years. A Zion school was organized in 1930. Members helped to raise funds for the purchase of the former St. Lukes Military Academy building in 1956. It was used as a hospital from July 1950 to February, 1952.

A German Presbyterian Church was organized by "Reverend Stark of Hastings and Reverend Bardell" of Missouri in 1889. The group met in the homes of members but the church lasted for only a short time in Kearney.

A German Baptist Mission Church was built at 18th and Avenue A in 1899 and dedicated in 1900 with S. M. Forney as pastor. It was later renamed the Church of the Brethren (sometimes known as the Dunkards). The church was disbanded in the 1960's. It was moved this summer to the grounds of the Trails and Rails Museum.

### NEW MEMBERS

Richard Ikenberry . . . . .Kearney    Harry Beckwith . . . . .Kearney  
Chris D. Hehner . . . . .Overland, MO

### SOURCES

Bassett, *History of Buffalo County; Biographical Souvenir of Buffalo, Kearney and Phelps Counties*; Vohland, Lauer, *The Golden Record*, Vol. 1. *Ravenna Centennial—1886-1986*; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska; Where Buffalo Roamed*; Mueller, Mollard, *History of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Pleasanton on the Loup; Elm Creek, Nebraska—1887-1987; Blessed For Seventy-five Years*, (Zion Lutheran Church); Miller *Area Heritage*. Those who provided information: Donna Kegley, Agnes Stengel, Father Jan Smutny, Elsie Mueller, Ruth Schini, Norma Ahrendts, Irene Muller.