



# Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

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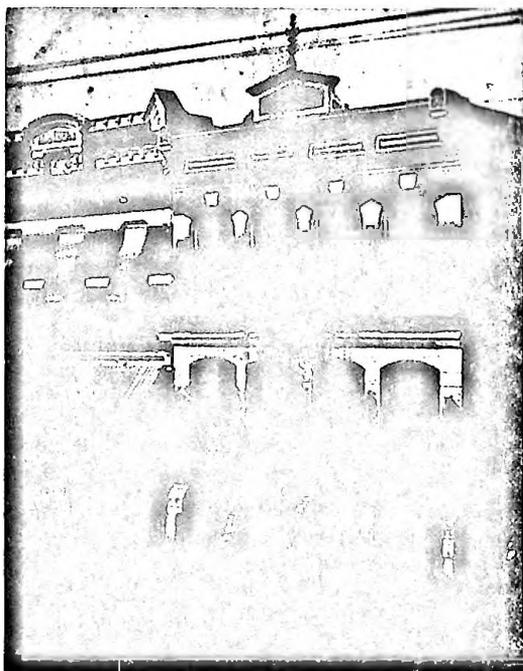
## EARLY POST OFFICES IN BUFFALO COUNTY

Ever since there has been government in this country, there has been a postal service. Benjamin Franklin was Colonial Postmaster General for the colonies under the British Crown from 1735 until 1774, and on July 26, 1775, when the U. S. Postal Service was established by the Continental Congress, Franklin was appointed the first Postmaster General.

Early mail service was a luxury. In 1800 it cost six cents to send a single sheet letter 60 miles—this when a full course dinner at the inn cost twelve cents. The first post roads followed rivers and shore lines, and were covered by riders on horseback. Later waterways also became post routes, and finally, railroads became official mail carriers. Being a rural postmaster was a family affair in the developing nation, carried on from the home or a community store. Sorting of mail and collection of postage was only part of the job; provision had to be made for feeding and refreshment of horses and drivers, and putting them up overnight.

Envelopes and gummed stamps were not used until 1847. By this time the postal service was traversing highways and trails to the Rockies, as far as Texas, and by sea

*The Kearney post office 1888-1891, 2111 Central Avenue. It was later located at 15 West 22nd Street until the present post office was completed in 1910.*



Buffalo Tales is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Editor ..... Gene E. Hamaker

Membership in the Buffalo County Historical Society is open to anyone who has an interest in Buffalo County and its people, or in the history of the area.

Annual dues, payable January 1:  
Individual membership .. \$ 2.00  
Institutional membership .. 5.00  
Sustaining membership .. 25.00+  
Life membership ..... 100.00

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Buffalo County Depot Museum Phone ..... 234-3041

*WITH THE SOCIETY*

A walking tour of four Kearney churches will be sponsored by the Buffalo County Historical Society on Sunday afternoon, August 27. Beginning at 2:30, participants will first visit the First Church of Christ, Scientist, at 23rd Street and First Avenue. From there the group will move to St. James Catholic Church at 24th Street and First Avenue; from there to St. Lukes Episcopal Church at 2304 Second Avenue, and then to the First United Presbyterian Church at 22nd Street and Second Avenue.

Tour members may leave their cars at the Platte Valley State Bank parking lot, which is convenient to each of the churches to be visited. The tour is open to friends and members of the Historical Society, and there is no charge.

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The display panels are in place at the depot museum, and the parking lot is paved. The museum is open from 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. each day, and we have had visitors from New York, Idaho, Maryland, Wisconsin, Colorado, Iowa and Kansas during the past month.

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Note: Names of post offices and postmasters, and dates of first appointment, are taken from a microfilm of the original records furnished by the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Buffalo Tales would welcome information on any of these early post offices, especially Alliston and Watsonawa.

via Cape Horn to California, and on to Oregon Territory. In an effort to increase the circulation of news over the nation, the rate for newspapers was only one cent within a state, one and a half cents outside, regardless of size. In 1851 it was decided that weekly newspapers would be distributed free within the counties where published, accounting for the rash of county weeklies that developed wherever newspapers were printed.

The area containing Buffalo County was not much involved in the postal service or newspaper circulation until the westward migration over the trails and the establishment, in 1848, of Fort Kearny. Letters and newspapers were officially carried by stage lines, but wagontrain masters, freighters, and the emigrants themselves were the bearers of messages and news. When gold was discovered in California, there was an overwhelming demand for rapid communications with the east, which resulted in the organization of the Pony Express. Operated by the freighting firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell, these picturesque riders, "young, skinny, wiry fellows, not over 18, orphans preferred," according to the ads, delivered mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. For a year and a half, 1860-61, the Pony Express carried 30,000 pieces of mail over a riding distance of some 650,000 miles—a glamorous page in the history of mail service in the nation.

Fort Kearney was the first post office listed in the vicinity of what is now Buffalo County. The record in the National Archives shows: "Fort Kearney, Lewis B. Dougherty appointed P.M., 7 July 1849, Clackemas Co." Mail service at the western military posts was slow, requiring nearly a month for orders to reach Fort Kearny from headquarters in St. Louis, and five weeks from Washington. With the inauguration of the Pony Express, the Fort could receive important communication from St. Joseph, the western terminus of the telegraph, in less than two days.

Three post offices were established in Buffalo County during the territorial period. The first was at **Nebraska Centre** and opened the 29th of July, 1859 with Anan Henry as postmaster. Nebraska Centre was also the location of the Boyd Ranch,



*Luce corner. Note store in which post office was located.*

one mile west of present Gibbon, one of the first landmarks west of the Missouri River on the westward trails, and mentioned as early as 1853. Nebraska Centre was named the first county seat of Buffalo County in 1855, but there is no record of any county activity taking place there.

The second post office was located at **Wood River Center** with Joseph E. Johnson as postmaster and dates from August 20, 1860. Wood River Center was the early settlement established by Johnson on the Mormon Trail. As head of a large Mormon family, he set up his home on the eastern edge of present Buffalo County where he maintained a large outfitting store, hotel, bakery, newspaper office, blacksmith shop and post office for the emigrants on the trails. After three years he and his family moved on to Utah to join the Mormon colony there.

The third, founded May 28, 1864, was situated at **White Cloud**, later to become Wood River in Hall County, but then within the boundaries of Buffalo County. James R. Cook was postmaster.

When the Union Pacific became the carrier of mail, post offices were established along the railroad; the first was at **Kearney Station**, near present Buda, December 3, 1868. Although a busy railroad station carrying passengers to and from Fort Kearny, it did not develop into a community center and the post office there was short-lived, closing March 17, 1869. Other post offices established along the line were:

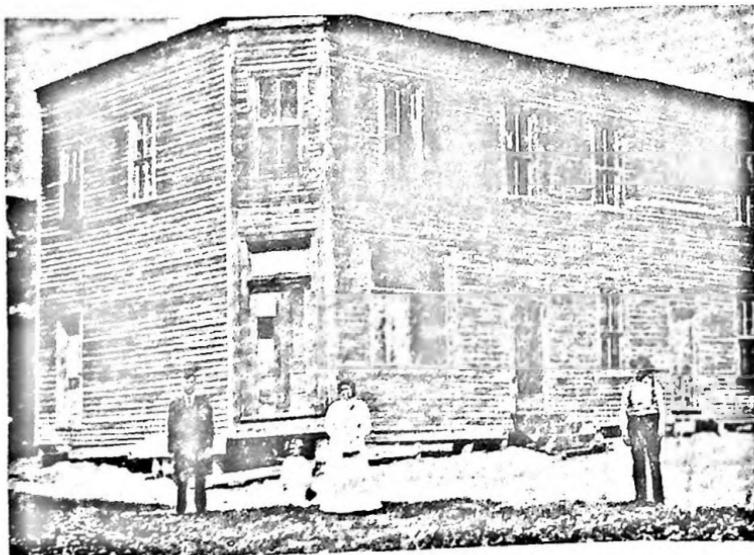
**Gibbon**, Isaac D. LaBarre, P.M., December 4, 1871

**Kearney Junction**, Asbury Collins, P.M., February 9, 1872

**Elm Creek**, Lars Jensen, P.M., June 19, 1872

**Crowellton**, Edward Delahunty, P.M., December 6, 1872

Shelton replaced Wood River Center February 3, 1873, **Kearney** replaced Kearney Junction April 26, 1875, and Crowellton became **Odessa** on February 29, 1876.



*Contain* most office was located in this hotel. The door on the right was the entrance to office.

**Shelby**, established September 19, 1876, became **Buda** two years later, George Flaherty, P.M.

After the junction of the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad with the Union Pacific, the area developed to the north and new settlements dotted the county everywhere. One of the first needs of the rural community was a post office, often in the farm home of the postmaster and changing location with each successor unless or until established in a country store. Mail in the very early days might come only once a week, then two or three times weekly as the county became more settled, and finally on a daily schedule, Sunday mail distribution depending on the church-going habits or mood of the postmaster.

Miles B. Hunt, a pioneer in Grant Township, was postmaster of the first post office located away from the railroad. This was **Huntsville**, established in a school house on the Wood River on October 3, 1873. In 1877 it was moved two miles west and the name changed to **Stanley**. A few miles northwest along the Wood River was **Green Dale** post office, opened April 11, 1879, with Martin V. Esler the first postmaster.

**Prairie Center** in the center of Buffalo County was a very early settlement, and Samuel N. Spry was appointed postmaster there on July 2, 1874. **Berg** was the community center of the Saxon Colony which settled in Schneider Township in 1873; Wilhelm Freyburg became postmaster there February 3, 1875. **Peake**, named for its first postmistress, Jeannie Peake, appointed December 5, 1884, served from various locations in Rusco Township for more than twenty years.

**South Loup** was the first of several names for the settlement on the Loup River which later became Pleasanton. Albert M. Morse was appointed August 24, 1874. However, the office was cancelled in 1877 and it was when Henry H. Clark was appointed in August 1883 that the name was changed to **Riverview**, and then to **Pleasanton** April 18, 1890.

**Sweetwater**, dating from December 21, 1874, was an early postoffice in the north central part of the county, as was **Centennial**, established July 5, 1876 and named for the nation's 100th birthday. **Mahila** in Loup Township was established on the farm of Peter O. Frame on February 23, 1882, and named in honor of Mrs. Frame. (~~Peter and Mahila Frame were the parents of BCHS member Mabel Pine~~). These three post offices received their mail by stage out of Hazard in Sherman County.

An early settlement which grew into a thriving village was **Armada**, first established as a post office October 25, 1875 on the farm of Alden L. Armstrong, the first postmaster. After several changes of location it was located in the country store of W. L. Craven, the first storekeeper of Armada. When the railroad was built up the Wood River valley, the entire village of Armada moved across the river to Miller and the new railroad. **Wrightsville** post office, after one year's operation, closed on January 5, 1887, and its patrons were served by the office at Armada.

**Majors** post office in Cedar Township dates from December 11, 1878 when John McCool was named as its first postmaster. **Waters**, December 5, 1883, and **Pool Siding**, June 23, 1892, were both served from Majors when those offices were cancelled. **Poole** again became a post office on February 2, 1906 and remains in operation.

Erastus Smith was the first settler and first postmaster of **Beaver Creek**, appointed December 11, 1878. When the Burlington built across northeastern Buffalo

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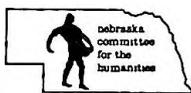
County, Beaver Creek became **Ravenna**, the name change effective July 23, 1886. Other early post offices in the area were **Cherry Creek**, February 14, 1879; **Baker**, March 2, 1885; **Tracnov**, February 1, 1886; **St. Michael**, February 18, 1887, and **Nantasket**, November 9, 1887. Cherry Creek served **Sodtown**, which never had a post office even though it was a busy village in the 1880's and larger than Ravenna in 1885.

Another busy settlement away from a railroad was **Sartoria**, founded by John Swenson who became its first postmaster on January 16, 1880. The post office for many years was located in the hotel. Mail was handled out of Sartoria for over 40 years until the office closed in February 1924.

**Riverdale** became a post office in 1883 with Adam Williams as postmaster. Discontinued late in 1886, Riverdale did not again handle mail until October 15, 1890 after the Kearney & Black Hills Railroad was built. This railroad gave the county several new post offices: **Miller**, July 25, 1890; **Amherst**, October 7, 1890; **Watertown**, October 17, 1890; and **Glenwood Park**, November 18, 1892. It also caused the demise of Stanley, Green Dale and Armada.

The tiny hamlet of **Butler** in the Buckeye Valley had Benjamin S. Gitchel as first postmaster, appointed July 31, 1884. Another active community was **Luce** in Gardner Township, named for John Luce, its first postmaster as of September 28, 1885. **Waltham**, August 1885; **Shafer**, January 1886, and **Gage**, July 1899, were served by the Luce post office when those offices were closed. Other post offices in Buffalo County were **Alliston**, December 1880; **Sharon**, May 15, 1882; **Cartney**, June 1890 and **Watsonawa**, May 23, 1896, the latter applied for and cancelled before appointment. **Denman** was the last post office established in the county. It was opened June 27, 1914.

With the introduction of Rural Free Delivery about 1907 most of the country post offices were closed and rural mail routes established. But while in operation these early post offices contributed greatly to the rural life of the county, not only for communication with the world outside, but also as a gathering place for "oldtimers" and a stopping place for newly arriving settlers to learn about the opportunities of settling in this fast-growing Buffalo County.



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