

## The Smith Brothers

George E. and James A. Smith probably came to Buffalo County in early 1871. They filed on land in Section 2-8-16 which is now in southeast Kearney and were living on their property in May 1871. George filed on the northeast quarter section and James filed on the northwest quarter. The land was prairie with only the Union Pacific transcontinental railroad track running through their claims. They built a sod house on the line between their two claims, possibly at the intersection of all four quarters of that section, with part of the house on each claim. Thus, with one sod house they fulfilled the requirement of constructing an abode on the land on which they had filed.

D. N. Smith (perhaps related but no proof has been found yet) was a land agent for the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad. The Burlington was to build its east-west route south of the Union Pacific route. They were to form a junction with the UP at a point where the UP route curved farthest south before reaching the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian, which today is Cozad, Nebraska. D. N. Smith was to select that spot, which he did in April 1871. Kearney Junction, soon called Kearney was platted at this spot. As with the location of so many towns along railroad routes in those early days, land companies owned by the railroad platted the town and sold lots. With two railroads here, the maneuverings for land ownership became quite involved. (See <bchs.us/BTales>, Feb. 1981 issue.) Apparently as part of this maneuvering on the part of the Burlington to own the land in Section 2, the Smith brothers claimed their land in early 1871 and as soon as they had proved up their claims they sold them to D. N. Smith in November 1871.

We know that both George and James were living on their property in mid-May 1871 because this is when the Collins family came to Kearney. Asbury Collins had accompanied D. N. Smith in April, liked what he saw and decided to move his family here. They became the first residents of Kearney. Asbury and his sons came first, followed by Louisa and a niece who arrived on the train on May 13<sup>th</sup>. Louisa has recorded her arrival in her diary. She tells of "James and George Smith from Indiana who were singing and playing when we arrived." She describes the house as being "sixteen by sixteen and serves us as parlor bed room dining room & kitchen." The next day they doubled the size of the house by building a sod addition onto one side.

This home became the first building in the new town of Kearney Junction and at some times served as a hotel as people began coming here. Both James and George continued to live here, James for at least the next six years and George for most of the rest of his life.

### James A Smith

James is included on the personal and property tax roll in 1872 and noted in the City Minutes book for April 7, 1876 when he lost the election for City Engineer. A local historian in researching and writing about the arts in early Kearney included this paragraph in her article. "The desire for books led to Kearney's first community theater when, in 1876, a group met at the office of L. R. More for the purpose of raising money for a library. Mr. More was named president of the Library Association, and James A. Smith was manager for two plays, to be presented as a money-making project. 'I've Written to Browne' and 'A Little More Cider' were duly presented on July third at More's Hall." Then the *Kearney Times* on Dec. 2, 1876 noted a "Benefit given for Mr. James A. Smith last Friday. Success in spite of weather, local people put on play 'Tottles'".

James was listed as an officer in the IOGT which was probably a fraternal organization in April, 1877. In the last reference found about him, another historian noted a newspaper item on

Sept. 6, 1877 when a "Shoemaker attached some goods bound for Cheyenne at UP depot. Let J.A.S. take boots without paying. (Assumption is Smith's goods attached.)

### **George E. Smith**

George filed on another piece of land about a mile h north of Kearney (S ½ SE ¼ 26-9-16). The southeast corner of this 80 acres is now the northwest quadrant of the corner of 39<sup>th</sup> Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, the second busiest intersection in Kearney today.

He and his wife also purchased lots in Kearney Junction and erected buildings on them. For some time they lived at the corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Avenue D which put them about four blocks east of downtown Kearney. George was a real estate agent for the South Platte Land Co. This was the Burlington's land company. He was also the City Clerk off and on from April 1875 to April 1878 and possibly longer. He must have also had a retail store because one news item in May 1877 said he had added a large variety of musical instruments to his stock and in another place his business is listed as real estate, books, stationery, musical instruments, news depot.

The school census records verify the 1880 census in listing two children, Claude and Pauline, attending the Kearney school. In 1894 George turned in five ground squirrels to receive a bounty of 3¢ each. He is listed in the 1907 Buffalo County atlas as a landowner. But he had disposed of his land by the time of his death because there is no probate record.

The 1900 census record is interesting. Now George is an insurance agent. He and Emma have been married for 27 years which means they married in 1873. Since there are no marriage records for them in Buffalo County he must have returned to his previous home to marry her. Emma has had four children, two are still living. They would be Claude and Pauline. Pauline was still living at home in 1900 and working as a bookkeeper.

There are no records of either Claude or Pauline marrying in Buffalo County. It appears that Claude did not marry. Pauline did finally marry when she was 46. The entire George Smith family had moved to Lake Forest, Illinois, sometime before 1920. When the census was taken that year the four of them were living at 210 Westminister Ave. Claude was an insurance salesman and Pauline was a secretary for a country club. Maybe that is where she met her husband. In 1926 she married Dr. Ben Parmenter, a physician. This was her first marriage but his second. They continued to live in Lake Forest and Claude, still working for an insurance company and still single, lived with them until his death in 1934.

According to the Kearney Cemetery Records George Smith purchased a half plot containing four spaces in the East Field. He reserved the first two spaces for himself and Emma. A son, Paul Clem, was buried in space 3 on Sept. 28, 1880. This would be one of the two children Emma had noted as not living in the 1900 census. The fourth space was used by Claude Van Cleve Smith who died Feb. 28, 1934 at age 56, yrs, 11 mos., 16 days. He died of myocarditis according to the records. Emma was placed in space 1 when she died in Sept 1921 and George was buried next to her on Nov. 17, 1923 when he died at age 80.

### **Sources:**

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Buffalo County Historical Society Archives

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