

What Was it Like?

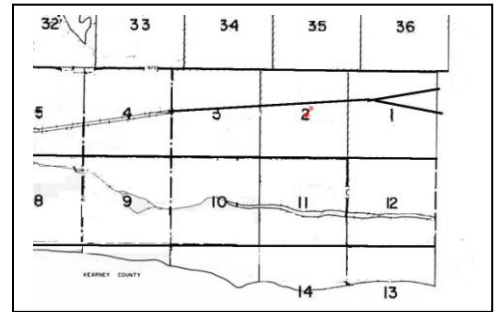
Imagine

Wide expanse of prairie from Platte River over the hills

Single railroad track far east as the eye can see - on west

6 blocks west - UP section house, near railroad on south side

Farther west and south – Smith's 16 x 16 shanty



1871 - Word spread

Burlington platted a town at junction - summer of 1871.

People began arriving.

George Norris family – One of the first – 1871

From Red Oak, Iowa – friends of the Asbury & Louisa

George & Anna

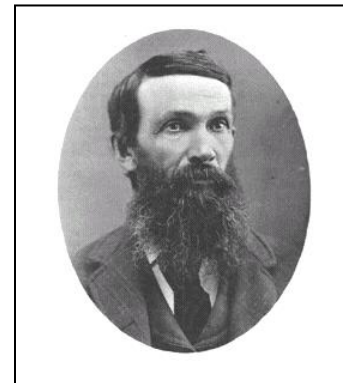
Hannah Jay, Anna's mother

Evan Jay, Anna's brother

(possibly 1st, followed by rest of family.)

He filed in 1871

Hannah & George filed in 1873

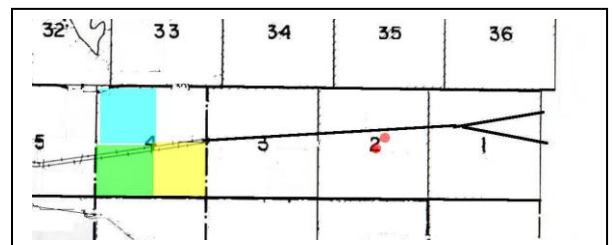


Claimed land in Section 4

George – sw ¼ Section 4;

Evan - se ¼ Section 4;

Hannah - nw ¼ Section 4



No Kearney yet, lumber hauled from Gibbon for house

George was in dairy business for 12 years.

Accumulated over 900 acres of land in the area including Evan's piece in Sec. 4

Sold that ½ section land to West Kearney Land Co.

Evan was a lawyer – moved to Eustis and was a community leader there.

First Church service –

Mid-October, 1871, Methodist, Bishop White came from Omaha

Class of 5 – Grandma Jay, Alfred Gay, Mrs. Sydenham, Asbury & Louisa

End-February, 1872 – Sunday School organized

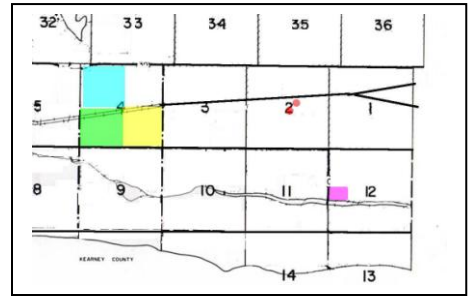
Louisa had every lady in 10 miles north of Platte save 3 that summer

[That's what she said in her diary]

1872 - Collins homestead –

Moved there July 5, 1872

"cozy little home nestled down in the grass a few rods from the river bank ...all so quiet and everything so nice clear, with beautiful green grass arranged around, the birds sing in the air, the gentle murmur of the Platte so close by one side." [from Louisa Collins' diary]



Junction Completed - early September of 1872.

B & MR had no depot at first – box car for telegraph & tickets

UP would not stop until they got some land

Shared first depot building until UP built its own

Incorporation

Kearney Junction incorporated November 30, 1872 –

Pop. Over 100

City of Kearney Incorporated December 3, 1873 –

Pop. Over 400?

First Arrivals in the New Settlement

Young single men – went home to marry and bring wives here.

Married men – came with wives and families.

Other married men – came alone and when a home was ready, sent for their wives and families.

Not enough shelter at first

Men, some women, slept on the prairie, some in tents

Weather in summer and fall of 1872 was mild – Not really cold until Christmas

Stayed mild until April 1873 - blizzard

What to build first? Business? Residence?

Most first residents lived in the back of their stores or upstairs.

Spare space rented out to others

Construction material

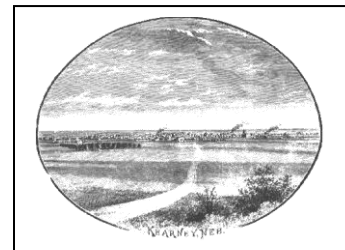
Places of businesses – lumber, shipped from Omaha by rail

Many homes – sod.

Town platted with streets & lots

Reality - Streets were winding paths

Houses were built here and there



Flora – Mrs. Dr. Dildine,
Came in 1874
Deer and buffalo rubbed on the corner of the house.
5 years later (1879) streets still not been laid out, still trails.
One ran close to a residence - wagons tore off siding from corner of house.

Who comes to a new town?

Builders –

Some were building their own places of businesses
Others contracted to build for a businessman.

David Webbert – carpenter

Arrived July, 1872 from Ohio with wife and children. (age - mid-40's)
Kept constantly busy putting up buildings.
(Died in 1893 – buried in Kearney Cemetery)

Henry Achey (age 22) – came as builder,

Built bridges, homesteaded south of Odessa

Arrived September 1872 with lumber to build a drug store

Wife (Regina, age 18) came with their infant son a couple of weeks later.

They stayed with David Webbert couple of weeks

Mrs. Webbert (Mary) cooked meals for some 40 laborers.

Regina Achey recalls in Come Back Letter:

“The first week I was staying at Mr & Mrs Webbert’s home –There was a carpenter’s work bench standing near the house. One morning I was standing out in the Yard. To my great astonishment I saw one of the top boards raise up & out crawled a man. Well, I called over Mrs. Webbert & she laughed & said that fellow had made him a bed in the bench. He had blankets in there & when ever he went to sleep in it, he would draw the board over himself so no one ever suspected that it served as a shelter for a bed.”

Acheys found a room over Smead’s saloon until the fire.

1st store –Dart’s store - first general store –

North of 24th, near 2nd Ave (west of old Catholic church)

Francis Hamer - first lawyer - arrived April 1872

Set up business in a corner of the store.

This picture – Moved to 2215 Central –

Mrs. Brown’s Spotless Chop Shop

2nd store – Drug store – F. G. Keens & Nightengale

Probably sold some general store items also



Hotels –

- 1871 – Junction House – Smith shanty in Section 2 , later moved to 18th St. & 1st Ave.
1872 – Harrold House (Becket) south of track one block
1872 - Grand Central north of track at RR & Nebraska (RR & A where C of C used to be)
Also stable for Pioneer Stage Lines which came to the hotel
1873 – Commercial Hotel across the street (McCue’s bldg)
Metropolitan Hotel – south of Kearney, later moved to 21st & B

Six by 1877 (within first 5 years)

More General Stores –

P. W. Wilson – Nov. 2, 1872

Lived over store @ 10th & Wyoming (21& Cen.)

1. Not enough workers to build both
2. Protection from Indians

Bodinson – 1878

Sons gathered buffalo bones and made into fertilizer
which they sold around the county



Saloons – three by end of 1872; “several” by Sept 1873

Smeads, 3 blocks north of track

First Fire

Smead’s saloon - April 1, 1874.

Upstairs rooms rented.

Possessions scattered on the ground after being saved

Pawnee rummaged through & took Mrs. Achey’s brightly
colored shawl

Men, after fighting the fire, made him return.



Louisa Collins wrote in her diary.

“The first fire in our town today. Smeads building burned to the ground. Three families lost nearly all their goods, but there is sweet with the bitter. The worst whisky & gambling hole in town burned with it.”

Newspaper – *Kearney Junction Times* - Oct 12, 1872

Cunningham’s Journal Bldg at 24th & 5th Ave.

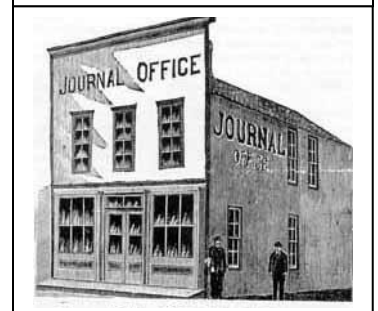
Multipurpose two-story building

Business upstairs

School, Methodist Church; Presbyterian Sunday School,

Literary Society downstairs

Cunningham’s Journal Bldg.



Lumber yard – **L. R. More** – a man of many firsts (more on him later)

More businesses south of railroad north at first

General store owner, Bodinson, built house at 24th & A - out in the country.
Not many houses west of Wyoming (Central) Ave.

Captain & Mrs. Black wanted to get away from the rush and noise of town
Built house at now 21st St. and 4th Ave.

Pawnee Indians

Common sight in streets and lounging on depot platform.

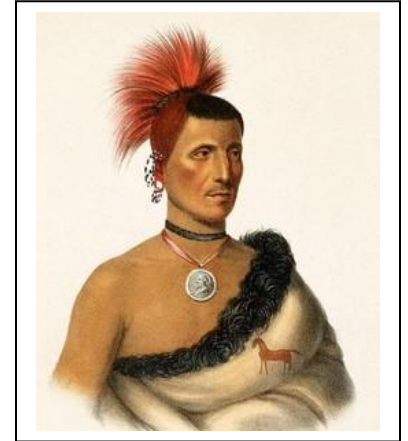
Large group came through Kearney in Sept. 1872 on their fall hunt.

Came back in October

Braves rode the horses

Women walked, leading pack horses.

Most had a child strapped on cradle board & another child or two hanging on.



Weather

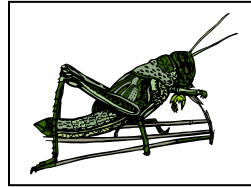
Winters – Blizzards – April 1871 & 73

Summers – dry, especially 1874 & 76

Grasshoppers destroyed crops and gardens

Prairie fires roll down from north and west.

Fire guards were plowed around the farmsteads and around town



Some early Businessmen

L. R. More - Arrived in 1872.

First bank

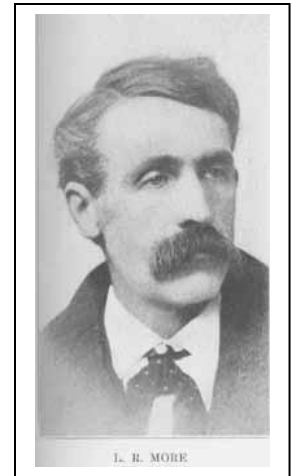
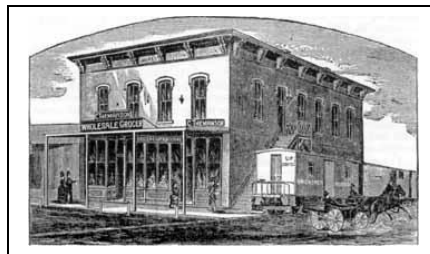
First lumberyard

First brick building, south of railroad tracks, west side of the street.

Upper story - More Opera house.

Owned Grand Central hotel.

Board platforms in front of it and in front of Webb's hardware store (21st and Central) were the first sidewalks in Kearney.



F. G. Keens

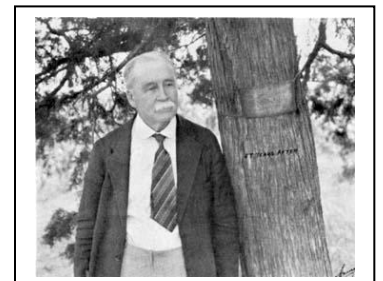
Came in 1872, age 19-20

With Nightingale built the second store, a drug store.

Deputy County Clerk

Went with the County Clerk, Joseph Scott, to Gibbon to get county records when Kearney was voted county seat October 1874.

Leading business man in Kearney in the insurance and loan business
President of City National Bank.



Instrumental in bringing "State Reform School" to Kearney, 1880.

He gave a block of land on 17th St. to the Catholic Church
Mt. Carmel nursing home
Officially Mt. Carmel-Keens Memorial home.



Contributed to Kearney Military Academy

Gave money to help build 4th and 5th floors of Good Samaritan Hospital.

Airport completed 3 months before the Army took it for Kearney Air Base - F. G. Keens Airport.

School

No agreement on where to locate a school building

First session in Journal Times -

No desks, students sat on backless benches and leaned against the walls.

No blackboard

No books - Children used whatever books they could bring from home.

County superintendent's visit -

Room is **"poorly furnished and but illy adapted to the purposes of a school."**

Site agreed upon at now 24th and A.

Building erected - blown down. -

Pieces found in area now UNK campus.

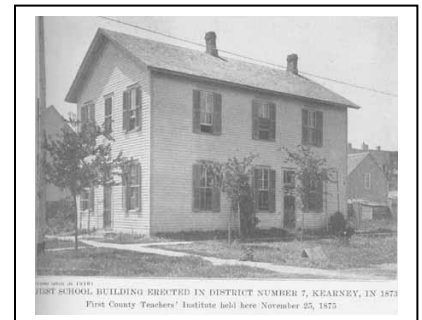
Rebuilt - in the center of the platted intersection.

Moved to southwest corner, now Thurston Heating and Air.

Two story building, one room upstairs and one room downstairs.

Replaced by Whittier

Used as rooming house for a number of years.



Whittier (Old Whittier)

A sturdy brick building built in summer 1879.

Served all grades for 10 years

Longfellow High School, 1890

Emerson, Bryant, Hawthorn, Alcott, Longfellow -

Early school buildings named for famous literary figures

(Whittier was named for James L Whittier, a member of the school board.)

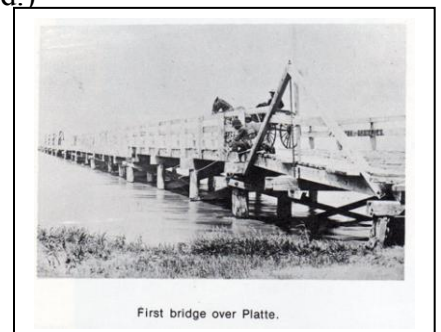


Bridge across the Platte

First bridge at Gibbon, spring of 1873.

Campaign by Kearney businessmen to have a bridge built here too.

Big market for lumber and household goods for settlers in Kearney and Phelps Counties



Finally a bond issue was passed and construction began.
Henry Achey recalled (in his Come Back Letter)

We had quite a time in getting a bridge across the Platte River. The King Bridge Co & the Clark Co. got in litigation but we finally got it as the Courts decided in our favor. An old gentleman came from Boston, Mass. He had brought some of the Bridge Bonds. He was dressed in a white Shirt & Prince Albert coat & a high silk hat. As it happened, that day there were quite a good many cowboys in town. As he went down Rail Road St. a bunch of them spied him and they took a shot at his silk hat. He ran around Jim Kiley's saloon to get to the Commercial Hotel. But he encountered another bunch & they made another dive at him. So finally he ran in the alley of the Commercial Hotel, ran in through the kitchen & asked the clerk when the next train was due East as he was so scared he said, "If I only can get a way alive I do not care what in H--- becomes of the Interest Bonds."

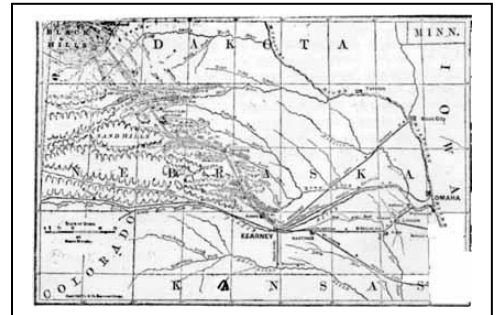
Bridge opened Sept. 29, 1874 - community picnic to celebrate.

Mr. Achey also remembered

When the Bridge was finished an old trapper used to come to Kearney for his supplies. He had quite a funny Team. He had a Buffalo & an ox & a cow & a mule. He came from Furnas County. One time he came with two buffalo for a team.

Kearney Black Hills Route

Kearney State Bank organized in 1876, C W Dake, president.
Dake lead group to establish route from Kearney to the Black Hills
Miners, supplies go, bring gold back.



Big stir here summer 1876.

- Route laid out.
- Mail contract obtained.
- Kearney to Black Hills stage and mail line established. [Gilbert Fosdick, driver]
- 3 Kearney businessmen took loads of freight that summer.
One was Ex-mayor Nathan Campbell.
Another built 4-tier chicken coop on his wagon
Both spring chickens and "matronly" according to his ad in the paper.

Sidney won – closer on UP railroad to the Black Hills

Dake's bank failed in 1879 largely due to losses in this venture.

Crime

A writer of a Come Back Letter says, *"During my residence in Kearney from 1874 to 1878, law and order was an unknown quantity."*

First Marshall elected - W. M. Thomas.

Everyone had a garden - Most folks kept a cow

"Mrs. Mary Wolher had a cow which used to get in Fanny May's garden. The marshall caught the cow & was going to put her in the Pound. He took her past Mrs. Wolher's house. She come out with an 18

inch steak knife & told him to let go of the cow. He let her have the cow without any argument. He knew Mary & thought it better to let the cow go. [from another Come Back letter]

Andreas, 1890 - Problems with the cowboys.

Ft. Kearny 10 mile square military reservation still government property

Could not be claimed

Cattlemen used it for grazing.

Cattle from here would be taken to the Indian agencies.

Cattle caused damage to homesteader's crops.

Cowboys in charge of the herds would not pay damages.

Worse in town.

Come into Kearney in groups, hit the saloons and then cause trouble.

- Ride their horses in the front door of a saloon and out the back.
- Race their horses up and down the street
- Firing guns at whatever caught their attention or just fire them up in the air.
- A little fun involved also. One boy remembered "The Cow Boys used to pull us on our sleds behind their ponies down Central Ave at break neck Speed."

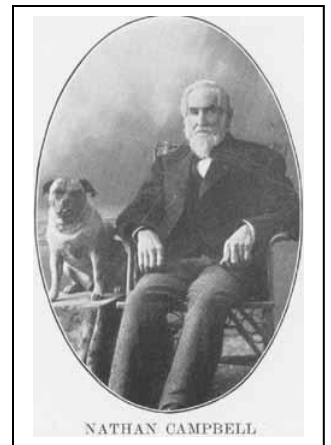
Getting Rid of the "Toughs"

Henry Achey - Come Back Letter:

"At one time there were quite a few Toughs as they were called & the better class of citizens wanted to get rid of them. So one night we got together to hunt them & fine them notice to leave town. Mr. Nathan Campbell was Mayor of the town so we made him our spokesman.

We found all but one.

I do not remember his name as he went by the name Dirty Mike. We finally found him in a building south of the railroad track in the empty store building owned by a man named Scripp. So we knocked at the door & when Mr. Scripp came to the door we asked him if Dirty Mike was in. He said, "Yes," so I pushed Campbell in the door & we all followed. We went to back part of the store. There sat Dirty Mike. Mr. Campbell said, "Is this the man, Achey?" I said, "Yes." So the mayor said, "Well, Dirty Mike, the boys come to haze you, but I told them I thought it would be better to give you 12 hours to leave town." & Mike said, "It would suit me a hell of a lot better too." So we got rid of them.



Not the end of all the lawlessness and cowboy troubles
But things were a little better in town.

David Anderson elected sheriff in 1877

Maggie Anderson stories

- Foiled jail break
- Ride across the prairie

