

# The Kearney Boom

## Some Factors Leading to the Boom

### 1880's Events Leading up to the Boom Period

1. **Good weather** - "Rain follows the plow"

2. **Homesteaders**

- a. Native born Americans - From east – Mainly Wisconsin, Iowa, Indiana  
Second or third move for many – census records of children's births  
Civil War veterans  
No land available at home after the war  
Been away from home once, not afraid to leave again  
GAR Posts – Kearney (2)  
Joe Hooker Post #28 – Shelton  
G K Warren Post #113 – Gibbon  
Cedar Mountain Post #220 – Ravenna  
Jewett Post #228 - Miller
- b. Immigrants – When did your immigrant ancestors arrive?  
Answered RR & Land company ads for free land.  
Bad Economies (crop failures)  
Wars (1860's & 1870's) Prussia vs Austria then  
Franco-Prussia war – continued military service required.

(Kearney had been the junction; became a rural town supporting an agricultural economy)

3. **Kearney Canal** –

For Irrigation or Industry?

- First mentioned by homesteader in Elm Creek area in 1873
- First proposed to Co. Board of Supervisors by farmers in Jan 1876
- Kearney Board of Trade – 1881 - water for city, power for milling & manufacture
- Controversies  
Usage – power, fire protection, irrigation  
Financing – 1) City or 2) private or 3) partnership of both

**Canal was a joint effort**

Kearney Canal & Supply Co. \$100,000 capital @ \$20/share; 5,000 shares

Had to be 2/3 subscribed, 25% (\$25,000) paid to come into existence

(A sign of problems to come)

City of Kearney – \$30,000 bonds authorized in city election

Construction

1882 – Started in fall – 2 miles completed before winter

1883 – Continued in Spring – 12 more miles

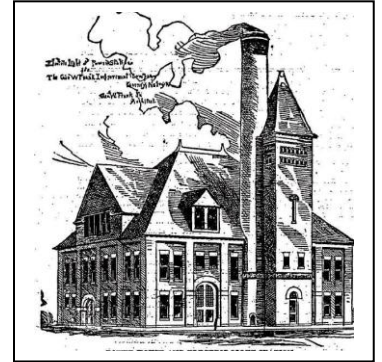
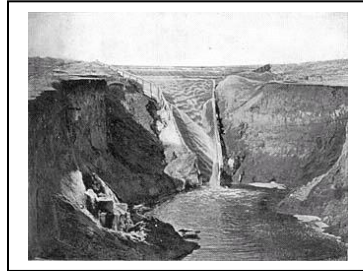
1884 – More work done, running out of money

Conflicting reports on -

How much had been spent & if it was done or not

1885 – George W. Frank bought 4/5 (\$80,000) of stock in Kearney Canal & Supply Co  
More work done on canal,  
Contract let to drive pilings in embankment of reservoir

1886 – Canal was finished in June but tailrace was not quite done yet  
(Wasteway – where water runs over when reservoir is full)  
Washed out  
Soon repaired



1887 – Construction of the ice house on Kearney Lake  
– Kearney Canal & Supply Co. got franchise to build an electric plant  
– Kearney Electric Light & Power Company formed  
First electricity from steam engine until power plant completed  
Done September 1888 - 75¢ per lamp per month

1888 - H. D. Watson (and maybe some other eastern investors) bought 1/2 Frank interests

## Three Men Instrumental in Building the Boom

### 1. William W. Patterson –

1831 – Born in Warsaw, NY.

1838 – Orphaned at 7

1838-1843 – Lived with Judge Peter Patterson 7 yrs.

1844-1845 – Attended a seminary school (2 years)

1846-1847? – Lived with Uncle George Patterson – guardian & ex-gov. of NY (1 year)

1847? – 1849? – attended academy to prepare for college

1849? – 1856 - Worked in dry goods store instead of going to college (prob. 18 yrs. old)

Store owned by Cousin Augustus Frank

Got military and engineering training

1856 - Age 25 – Minneapolis – saw water power potential

Real estate business before & after Civil War

1870 – Corning, IA

Worked C. B. & Q Railroad, founded Creston, sold lots

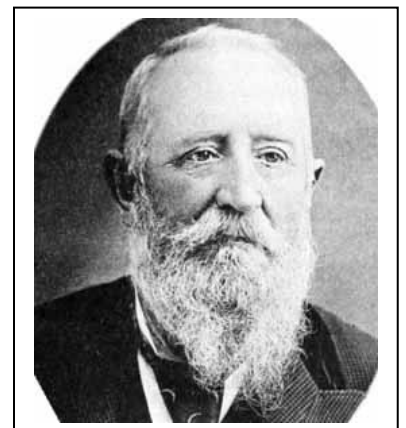
1871 – Laid out Lowell

Tested soil & found underground water

Came to Kearney to stay that summer

1872, Feb. – Superintendent of Collins Sunday School

1879 – Married by Rev. Collins to Pattie Giddings,  
seamstress from Lincoln



Engaged in real estate business  
For Railroad  
For Perkins & Harford  
Privately – bought town lots, farm land  
– part of ne ½ Sec 10 – tailrace goes through  
– quarter section along railroad 8 miles toward Gibbon

1893 – Died and is buried in Kearney

(Augustus Frank was brother to George W. Frank  
George was living in Corning, IA when Patterson moved there.)

## 2. George W., Frank –

1830 – Born in Warsaw, New York - Mother - Jane Patterson Frank

1854 – Had a dry goods store with brother Augustus  
Also had land dealings

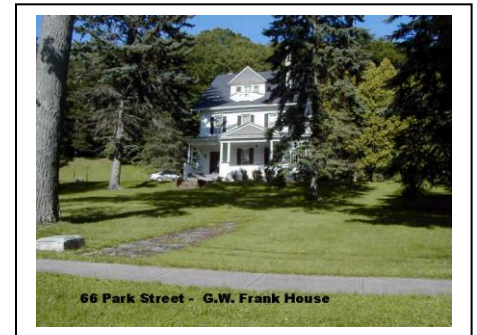
1868 – Built a house in Warsaw – 2 ½ story, Italianate  
Remodeled in 1901

1869 – Left Warsaw and went to Corning, IA  
Corning, laid out in 1857, but dormant for 12 yrs  
Built another mansion by an artificial lake he created  
Considered the largest lake in eastern Iowa.

1885, August – Purchased half interest in Kearney Canal, moved to Kearney

1889 – Built a 3<sup>rd</sup> home

1906 – Died at the home of his daughter in Lincoln



## 3. Henry D. Watson

Said to be from Greenfield, Mass.

1888 – Bought ½ of Frank holdings

1889 – took charge of the Watson Ranch  
Proprietor of *Kearney Enterprise* newspaper, *Hub* rival  
Made frequent trips East to bring potential investors to Kearney

1895 – Frank & Watson separated businesses

Post-Boom Period – continued to manage ranch but empire fell apart

1905 - Cultivated friendship of writer Gene Stratton Porter.

He & wife visited her and husband in Chicago.

The Porters visited the Watson Ranch.

H. D. showed her around

She took photos for article for *Country Life in America* magazine

His best fields (Industrial School's best fields)

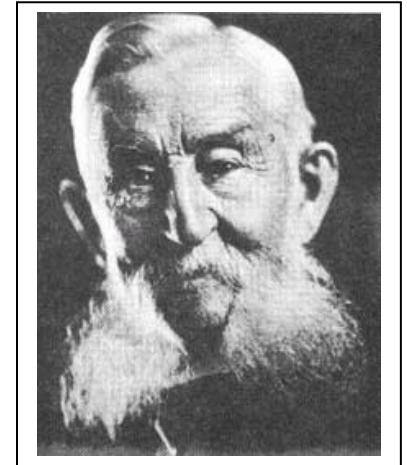
His celery farm (Black's celery farm)

The ranch home (Frank House)

The ranch manager's home (Juan Boyles house – country club house)

Lawsuit followed publication

Some files say Watson had to pay damages – magazine did not print retraction



When asked “How did you manage to interest Eastern capital in this project?”  
He said in a joking manner, “There is a sucker born every minute, all I need is one a week.”

### **Frank & Watson Business Differences**

– must have been going on almost from the time Watson bought in

1895 – Settled through arbitration

#### Frank got:

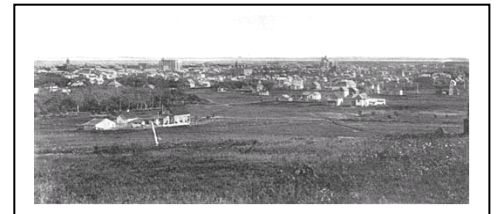
Frank Improvement Co. properties  
Canal & Water Supply Co.  
Electric Co.  
Electric Street Railway Co.

#### Watson got:

Heavy holdings of city property  
West Improvement Co  
Kearney Land & Investment Co  
Capt. Anderson & Keck ranches and various farm  
land from Kearney to Stevenson Station

But did any of this have any value at that time?

## **Life in Kearney during the Boom**



### **Boom Period Society**

Many who came here were young men who had graduated from eastern colleges.

They came with their ideas of social customs.

Opera House and Midway Hotel provided facilities for their events.

Winter parties in hall over the *Enterprise* or at the Midway

Pavilion at Kearney Lake – Dance above, store private boats below - Toboggan slide beside it  
Big GAR reunion summer of 1889 – reenacted battle of Monitor & Merrimac on Kearney Lake

Card parties and dancing parties in homes

Parties of one kind or another weekly

Shoe social - All ladies behind a screen, tips of shoes showing. Gentlemen choose a shoe.

### **Organizations and Societies**

“The Assembly” – A club at the Midway

Tennis, croquet, riding in summer

Dancing club in winter

Pavilion built on west 26<sup>th</sup> St. –

had observation tower on top, equipment storage below

Tennis and croquet courts laid out

Bachelors Protective Union – an active organization of young single men

Benevolent, Secret & Other Societies (in city directory)

[No TV for evening entertainment. Go to a lodge meeting]

Kearney Chamber of Commerce

State Businessmen's Men's Assoc

Modern Woodman of America Hope Camp [an insurance company]

Kearney Typographical Union #109 [more than one newspaper in town]

Bricklayers Union #7

Knights of Labor

Ministerial Association

Preachers' Aid Society West Conf. of M. E. Church

National Guard

Sedgwick Post #1 GAR – three groups

Soldiers & Sailors County Assoc. (met at GAR hall) Daughters of Veterans of America

Kearney Boating & Park Association

Kearney Musical Society

Masonic organizations – 6 divisions

Knights of Pythius organizations

    Dilworth Assembly #2, K of P sisterhood

Oddfellows – 5 different organizations including

    Daughters of Rebecca & Naomi Rebecca

Foreman Lodge #12 of A O of U W

I O of G T

Jem Lodge #14

WCTU

Women's Relief Corps of Nebraska

YMCA

    Ladies Auxillary YMCA

## **Interesting Events**

### **March 23, 1890**

--All parties having manure are permitted to haul the same and throw it on the nearest corner of the Industrial School farm. That is, of course, if it is not filled with tin cans and other rubbish that would injure a farm. They are glad to get it on this farm and persons should haul it there as it is as close as places they usually find.

### **April 10, 1890**

The statue of justice was placed on top of the new courthouse.  
Nine feet tall, blindfolded, balance in left hand, sword in right.

### **June 12, 1890**

The buffalo head was placed in position on the courthouse. Made of sheet metal.

## Midway Hotel fire – March 24, 1890

### Businesses in the hotel:

Barber shop    Saloon  
Hatter         Tailor  
Attorney      Physician  
9 real estate offices  
Insurance agent  
The Frank businesses



Fire started on roof caused by sparks from the smoke stack.

### 1 fatality –

Harry Deming was property and baggage man for Worden Dramatic Co. staying there

Jumped feet first but hit a wire which turned him.

Awning was held to catch him but he fell through

Lived until 11 p.m.

Mother, widowed, lived in South Omaha.



### March 27, 1890 – 3 Days Later

Coroner's Jury verdicts:

1. **Henry Deming** - “,,in our opinion, the said Harry Deming having his clothes on and shoes upon his feet, and from the evidence of Edgar Glenn, it is our opinion that he was sufficiently notified, but owing to the smoke and confusion did not heed the notice.”

2. **William Schreve** fell off a pile of lumber, death was accidental, the lumber was blown over by a severe wind.

### April 17, 1890

Debris from the Midway Hotel was put on South Railroad between Central and A  
Cleaning in preparation for rebuilding had begun

New one completed in 1893

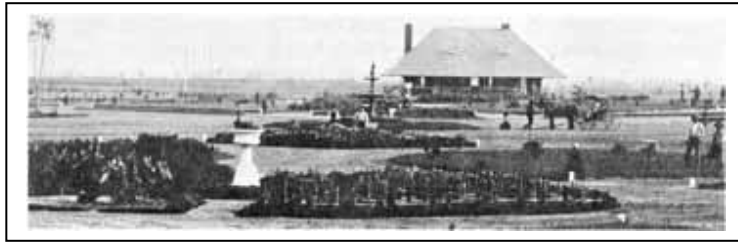


## West Kearney

A town in Section 4 - George Norris sold his land

Platted cattycorner

Had its own depot and park in the center



Big houses built there



## Support Businesses

### Electric Street Railway

Horse drawn line possibly started in July, 1889

Street car barn was on Central Ave

Plans for electric railway began in 1889 –

6 cars powered by electricity

Add 10 miles of track and use as much of the old as possible

Go 12 miles per hour

Would take \$75,000 to make the change over

Issues –

Build track on side of street? – neither side wants it

Complaint about fence around Opera House – horses too close to motor car

Construction -

Building track on the south side

Old tracks on Central torn out to make way for the new

*Cut* the UP rails to let the street car rails through





Route –

East 25<sup>th</sup> to Calkins residence, north to 27<sup>th</sup> St., east to East Lawn  
West to Kearney Lake & garage in Power Plant  
South on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave to Riverside Park

Start date – July-Aug 1890

Apparently operated on whatever lines were finished

End date –

Unknown 1893?

After closing the cars possibly went to Boulder, CO

## Utilities:

**Kearney Gas Co. -**

**Nebraska Telephone Co.**

**Kearney Water Works**

City water & Sewer lines were put in during the Boom

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**Carriage & Wagon Makers** – 7 (some did blacksmithing also)

**Harness Makers** – 5, one was a woman

**Cigar manufacturers** – 5, one a woman

Usually had a store also. Some worked on second floor of downtown businesses

**House Movers & Raisers**

## Hecht Beef & Pork Packing Company

Location: Packing house on Central,

Slaughter house on tail race south of 11<sup>th</sup>, east side of tailrace

Years of operation:

1879 - Involved in court case suing someone for payment for work he had done.

1891- Hecht died

Comments:

Before July 1, 1889 – packing house on Central burned.

Aug. 10, 1889 – Lost 45 acres of vegetables to hail, worth about \$2000.

Aug. 21, 1889 – ordered a carload of meat to sell during GAR reunion week

Sold very little and took a \$250 loss.

Built a grandstand for viewing parades and other events connected with the reunion

Sept 30, 1889 – Large hotel built for the packing house moved to 19<sup>th</sup> & Central Ave

Oct. 11, 1889 – Erecting several tenement houses near 2<sup>nd</sup> ward school

Aug 1890 – Started work on new building

For a year tried to keep business going –

bought packing house supplies

shipped a ton of meat west

Front page ad for vegetables, ham, bacon and lard, & cold storage rental



Sept 12, 1891 – Wm. Hecht in serious mental condition due to financial reverses  
Sept 23, 1891 – Died at asylum in Lincoln  
Sept 25, 1891 – Funeral at Congregational church, burial in Kearney cemetery  
Cause of death given in cemetery records as exhaustion.  
He was 38 years old

## Brick Yards (5)

### Hibberd Brickyard

Site of Kearney Catholic, football field;

A to B, 37<sup>th</sup> to 39<sup>th</sup>

Years of operation: 1880 - 1932

Comments: Also made paving bricks.

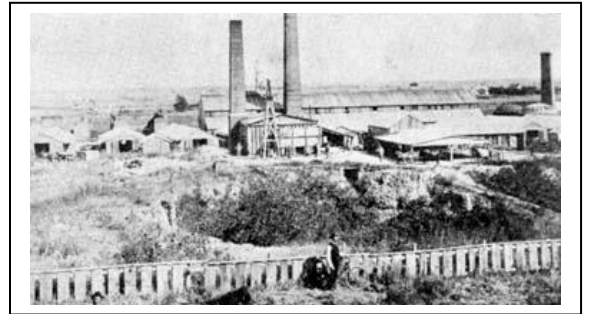
Victim of depression

Richard Hibberd died at age 88 in 1932

Electric trolley ran to the brickyard.

Small houses were built by Hibbard near the brickyard and rented to workers.

After the Bust, many of those houses were moved to the country



### Billy Mannix Brickyard

East of Hibberd, between B & C

Eventually taken over by Hibberd

1891 – Mannix bought the Winsor Hotel.

### S E Coleman Brickyard

North of Hibberd on 4 acres for drying yard, kilns and pit

Operated about 1886-1888

In 1889 city directory Coleman was listed as a brick mason.

### Kearney (Pressed) Brick Company

South of Campus Lutheran (along Kearney Canal tailrace)

Operated July 1889– 1892

Clay dug from side hill where Kearney Country Club stands

Claimed to be first in the world to be operated by electricity.

Electric motor car went to top of grade by clay pits & carried clay down to kilns

A UP railroad spur carried finished bricks away



### Hurley Brick Works (West Kearney Brick Yard)

Near the cotton mill

(maps put it south of the cotton mill, on west side of tailrace)

Operated about May 1890 – Sept 1893

Furnished the brick for the Andrews building.

Sept 23, 1891 – Hurley and employee came to blows in a disagreement.

Hurley appeared in police court and paid a fine of \$9.70

Sept 25, 1893 – A. S. Hurley shipped his household goods to Hamburg, IA



## Suggested Reading

Buffalo Tales [bchs.us]

PART I. THE KEARNEY CANAL 1875-1886 – June 1978  
PART II. THE KEARNEY CANAL 1887 AND AFTER – July 1978  
KEARNEY - MINNEAPOLIS OF THE WEST – September 1978  
THE WATSON RANCH - Part I. – October 1979  
THE WATSON RANCH - Part II. – November 1979  
KEARNEY'S PROPHET: COL. W. W. PATTERSON – May 1981  
A VIEW OF KEARNEY IN 1888 – January 1989  
KEARNEY BOOMERS IN 1889 – January 1990  
1890 IN KEARNEY – January 1991  
INDUSTRIAL BOOM REACHES ITS ZENITH – July-August 1992  
BRICKMAKING IN KEARNEY – September-October 1993  
MORE ON BRICKYARDS – November-December 1993  
CAMP HENRY A. MORROW: The G.A.R. Reunion of 1888 – Nov.-Dec. 1995

Biographical Souvenir of the counties of Buffalo, Kearney, & Phelps  
[rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nebuffal]

William Wallace Patterson (includes portrait)