

Kearney Daily Hub, March 11, 1911 –

Auction at Watson Ranch – selling farm machinery, horses, mules and harness. Largest farm sale ever held in Buffalo County or central Nebraska.

Kearney Daily Hub, June, 1916

1733 Ranch was planning to raise ostriches

Notes From Archives File About the Barn

From article in *Country Life in America*, Jan. 1907, by Gene Stratton-Porter
(Based on information provided by H D Watson after he had lost the ranch in bankruptcy but he gave her a tour of the place pretending it was still his.)

“Mr. Watson built the world’s largest dairy barn, 317 feet in length and 96 feet wide, with every modern convenience, stone floors, room for 350 cows, each in her own separate stall, and set all his followers to feeding their alfalfa to cows, and shipping butter, cream and cheese to the great markets.”

Caption under picture of barn in *Hub*

300’ long, 100’ wide, 56’ at highest peak, stanchions for 400 cows. Torn down in 1935

Hub picture July 34, 1975 –

Caption says Watson constructed the barn in 1900 to prove that alfalfa was an excellent feed for cattle.

(source unknown) –

“The large dairy barn constructed on his ranch and publicized as the largest barn in the world, even though it is reported to have been only about one-third of the size of the structure planned for the site, was until its razing in 1935 a landmark.”

July 13, 1993 *Hub* reported the 4000 square feet remainder of the barn was blown down. The property was owned by Dean Beavers.

Buffalo Tales article about the Watson Ranch by Phil Holmgren, October 1979
(file includes both a photocopy of the BT article and Phil’s typed manuscript.)

Barn was designed by Professor Oscar Erf, Ohio State

Teams could enter the second floor from the east or west at the north end.

900 tons of hay could be stored

Silo connected to north end

“In the original plan, the barn was only the first of three units to be built”

Was to be a 1200 cow unit.

Watson wanted to build the whole thing but Prof. Erf persuaded him not to.

First floor – 200-300 stalls; 400 stalls.

Some accounts said there was also room for calves plus the horses needed

Feed and refuse handled by trolley

“Watson’s method of financing has been described as taking from Peter to pay Paul but never giving Paul as much as was taken from Peter.”

(footnote in typed version says cow herd was augmented by taking cows on consignment. When payments were smaller than expected or skipped, the owner could get the cows back and be glad they did not get a feed bill.)

McCook *Daily Gazette*, June 22, 1959 interview with man who had been foreman in early 1920,s.

He said, “after they finally got the big thing down, there was lumber stacked shoulder high in every direction.”

The Watson Ranch – Part I, *Buffalo Tales*, by Phil Holmgren, October 1979

The ranch was commonly described as extending from Kearney to Odessa, from the Platte River to the hills north of what is now Highway 30.

W C Scoult, a partner, said there was 7,000 acres, other reports put it at 10,000 acres, probably exaggerated

The headquarters for the ranch was 5 miles west of downtown Kearney. Highway 30 goes through the middle of where the buildings used to be. The main ranch house was on the south side of the road. The original part of the 40-room house was build as David Anderson’s home. He sold his land to Watson. South of the house were maybe 15 small houses where the married employees and their families lived. The single men bunked upstairs in the ranch house.

The huge barn was on the north side of the road. Beside it was the creamery where the milk was separated. The skimmed milk went to the calf barn. There were also a number of buildings for the many farm implements and the buildings for raising poultry. A schoolhouse was also on the north side of the road.

Products:

Corn
Wheat
Alfalfa
Fruit

Alfalfa grew under drought conditions

1893 – raised 15 acres of alfalfa, increased to 3000 acres

1896 – 3000 tons of alfalfa but could not sell it.

1897 – sold 1000 tons to sheep feeder for \$3/ton & gave him all the old hay in the stacks.

Watson started feeding sheep, cattle, and work horses to show how good the hay was.

Like so many things Watson did – big but inefficient and, therefore, not financially successful.

Could not harvest so many acres of alfalfa efficiently because of lack of equipment and men.

Established dairy operation to use the alfalfa. Brought in a carload of Holsteins from Iowa State Ag. College to form basis of herd which grew to 400.

Cream and milk went to the UP dining cars.
1903, spring – Creamery burned; not rebuilt

The Watson Ranch – Part II, *Buffalo Tales*, by Phil Holmgren, November 1979

Crop rotation with alfalfa, corn and wheat

Alfalfa grown for seed – better seed from alfalfa in hills than in the valley

Feeding operation: Cattle and sheep from western ranches

Extensive gardens, mostly for use by farm employees

Fruit trees – cherry, peach, apple, plum – grown north of the buildings on the hillside

Annual cherry picking day – announced in paper. \$1.50/bushel you pick, or \$2.50 if picked for customer

Children under 15 had to be accompanied by a parent who would discipline them (“paddle them if they got smart”)

Had 1500 people one year who picked 625 bushels of cherries

Poultry raising built up in later days of the ranch

3 story chicken house

Hatchery

Best of poultry raising project happened after Watson left as manager

Watson introduced the Chinese Pheasant

Many visitors, prominent people invited to dinner.

Also large size gave feeling of public property

Trespassers hunted game. Stealing sheep was popular, butchered on the property

One employee had himself appointed game warden

Continued after ranch was broken up and sold

Core of ranch bought by Woods Bros who renamed it the 1733 Ranch

“Huge 1733 Ranch Barn, Known Over Nation, Being Torn Down,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, March 18, 1935, page 3.

Crumbling foundations, no longer considered safe.

William Wright, owner of 580 acres of original ranch, mostly north of Kearney Canal.

Some lumber purchased from Emil Tollefsen at Gilcrest Lumber

Most shipped from west coast

Carload of hardware from Denver

Silo at rear, built into side of hill

Could hold silage from 160 acres of corn
Tromped down by mules.

Most of lumber considered worthless
Some salvaged and sold.