

# Sweetwater

## A History of Sweetwater Nebraska by Linda Wilke

Settlement began about 1873. Land north and west of Sweetwater was open range. Two theories about the name, Sweetwater, are 1) a wagon upset in Beaver Creek spilling sugar, and 2) the water in this stream was less alkaline, therefore sweeter, than other water around.

Some first settlers were:

The Crostons – Civil war vet from Maryland who had married (eloped) a southerner. After living in Grand Island for a time the family purchased a squatter's claim in Hazard Township just across the Buffalo County border in Sherman County.

James T. Roberts family – Had been friends and neighbors of the James Brothers in Missouri before coming to this area. James worked for the UP in 1867 as it was being constructed. Brought his family from Nebraska City to Grand Island and then on to the Beaver Creek in Sherman County near Sweetwater.

Rev. William Robert (Bob) Hodges family – He came in 1873, one of the first to settle in Beaver Township. Hodges rode for the Olives in Texas and here. He was the “fiddler for many of the early social events around Sweetwater. He knew only three songs.”

John McGee Ranch – On route for those going north from Kearney or west from Grand Island. In 1874 it was a stage stop between Kearney and Loup City. It cost \$2 to go from Kearney to McGee's ranch. In 1874 the McGee Ranch was officially named Sweetwater. It was probably a sheep ranch. When Erastis Smith (founder of Ravenna) came to this area he rented a house in Kearney for his family to stay in until he finished a home for them on the homestead. But the floor collapsed under the weight of their possessions. So he loaded up and they went to McGee's Ranch and stayed until the dugout was completed – 5 Smiths, 4 McGees, 2 rooms. John and Ami Ketchum traveled and used maps to determine the route from Kearney to the Black Hills in 1876. The McGee family moved in 1876 northwest out of Buffalo County.

James Goff – Mercantile business and farmer. May have been the original owner of the Sweetwater townsite. May have had a store from 1876-1878 between the departure of the McGees and arrival of Henry Beyer. His wife, Jane, was elected a director of the Sweetwater Milling Co.

Bridge over Beaver Creek – Logs across the creek were covered with poles and brush, then hay, sod and dirt. It would serve until the next flood.

Mid-1870's – drought, lack of supplies, Indian scares, prairie fires, grasshoppers.

Timeline of events:

1876, Sept. 25 – John McGee still operated his stopping place. Ami Ketchem lived with the McGees doing blacksmithing and horseshoeing.

1876, Oct. – Judge Wall traded a horse for McGee's improvements on his claim.

1877, Autumn – First clash between the cattlemen (Olives) and settlers.

1878 – Henry Beyer family came to Sweetwater. Henry was a merchant and postmaster until 1892. Friend and wife came to visit. Beyers lived over the store. Hung a blanket to divide the room, each family taking a side. The two men drove to Kearney to get supplies, returning late at night. Put up the horses and fell into bed. Great commotion by wives and children. Men were in wrong beds.

### 1880's –

1880 – Norwegians came from Chicago area

1885 – Occupations on census included farmers, general store owner, clerk, servant, two blacksmiths, miller.

1886, Summer – Chicago Burlington Railroad was built from Grand Island to Broken Bow.

Beyer moved his store half a mile north from Beaver Creek to the railroad. Herman and Henry Wilke operated a mill on Beaver Creek, the Sweetwater Mill.

1888 – There were three mills in operation. Two were south of the store and one farther west.

1890's – The town now had a millinery shop. Family named Oyster spelling changed to Eyster.

1890 – Cyclone hit Sweetwater. The Sweetwater Mill was destroyed.

1893 – Andrew Rosvold homesteaded on west edge of Sweetwater.

1898-99 - Much of Sweetwater that had been destroyed in the cyclone was not rebuilt until this year.

1899 – Andrew Rosvold and Herman Wilke rebuilt the Sweetwater Mill.

### 1900's –

1900 – Baseball team. Census occupations: miller, grain dealer, baker, carpenter, blacksmith, retail lumber, hotel

Fires – Business buildings made of wood. Several fires burned 2-3 businesses at a time in 1896, 1917, 1924, 1927.

## Page 34 – VIII. CHURCHES

”In February of 1893, a sod church was built for the Sweetwater Evangelical Lutheran congregation. This church was half way between Hazard and Sweetwater as a compromise between members from each town. It had been organized May 23, 1883 by a group of Danes and Norwegians, including Christ Pederson, Hans Pederson, George Newberg, Reinert Reibertson, Jens Spangsberg, Jacob Benson, Martin Thorgrison, Erik Andreas Rosvold, Enoc Nervig and Admund Olson. Every Sunday or Holy Day, church services were held whether Pastor Widvey was there or not. When he was absent, Nils Nilsen would conduct the service. In 1903 the congregation built a frame structure on land donated by Fred Rasmussen. The church structure was moved into Hazard in 1940.”

## Page 37 – IX. CEMETERIES

### (Summary)

There was a private cemetery on the Beyers land a half mile south of Sweetwater. They set aside four acres where they had buried two daughters and gave permission for anyone who wished to use this cemetery also. When it was discontinued several graves were move. Names and dates are given but it does not say where they were moved to.

Another cemetery at Sweetwater which is still in use called the Lutheran Cemetery. The location is not given.

---

From Ft. Kearney Genealogical Society cemetery readings about the Sweetwater Cemetery located in Section 5, Beaver Township – (mile west and half south of Sweetwater)

“Lars Johnson gave 2 acres of land to the Lutheran Corporation for a burial ground. The Norwegians and Danes organized a church in 1882. Later the Danes left this group and organized their own church and cemetery. On July 21, 1892 some of the bodies of the Danish members were moved to their Danish cemetery west of Hazard, Nebr.

In 1917 the Danes sold their cemetery to the Hazard township, Sherman Co. It is now known as the Hazard Cemetery. About 80 are buried in the Sweetwater Lutheran Cemetery. In the 1940's four bodies were moved to the Ravenna Cemetery. In 1882 when this was organized Amund Olson, Reinert Reinertson and John E Johnson were the trustees."

---

From Nebraska Place Names, 1925

**Sweetwater.** This is a station on the Burlington and Missouri River railroad, now the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy railroad, in Beaver township. It is situated on Sweetwater creek from which it takes its name. The creek was so named because of the excellent water which was found there in pioneer days.

---

## **History of Buffalo County and Its People**

by Samuel Clay Bassett

110

### CHAPTER XXVI

HOMESTEADERS IN BUFFALO COUNTY--A LIST OF 1,265 PERSONS  
TAKING HOMESTEAD AND PRE-EMPTION CLAIMS IN BUFFALO  
COUNTY PREVIOUS TO 1880--ARRANGED BY TOWNSHIP AND RANGE,  
GIVING YEAR OF FILING ON CLAIM.

116

### BEAVER TOWNSHIP--TOWN NO. 12, RANGE NO. 15

1873--H. Hughes, J. P. Christensen.

1874--J. Armstrong.

1875--J. E. Nave, J. McGee.

1876--B. F. Parkhurst, H. C. Padelford.

1877--J. W. Herbough.

1878--E. Nervig, W. A. Weller, J. Michie, T. W. Smay, Robt. Hutchinson.

1879--H. Work, W. Lee, Ole Lee, J. L. Miller, T. J. Cocking.

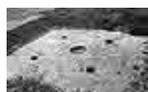
---

## **Nebraska National Register Sites**

State Historic Preservation Office, Nebraska State Historical Society  
<[nebraskahistory.org/histpres/nebraska/index.htm](http://nebraskahistory.org/histpres/nebraska/index.htm)>

in Sherman County

### **Rural Sites**



**Sweetwater Archeological Site [25-SM-04]**

Sweetwater is the type site of the Itskari Phase, a prehistoric Plains Village culture occupying the Loup River basin from the early thirteenth century through the mid-fifteenth century. It includes the remains of earthlodges, storage pits and trash deposits covering a forty-acre tributary creek terrace several miles from the South Loup River near the present-day town of Sweetwater. The Itskari Phase is thought to be the progenitor of Pawnee culture.

---

**From the Hazard Website <[www.nctc.net/~hazard/](http://www.nctc.net/~hazard/)>**

*The History of Faith Lutheran Church in Hazard, Nebraska*

Compiled and edited by Lenore King

Originally published in Hazard's *Wheels of Time* centennial book, Ola Criffield, editor

Faith Lutheran Church was organized under the name of Sweetwater Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation by a group of Danes and Norwegians. Attending the organizational meeting on May 23, 1882 were Jens Spangsborg, Jacob Benson, M. Thorgrimson, E.A. Rosvald, E. Nervig, and Admund Olson. Rev. P.T. Hilmen, pastor of the congregation at Newman Grove, occasionally served this congregation until the Sweetwater congregation called Rev. P.A. Widvey. Pastor Widvey served from October 4, 1884 until July 31, 1895. Pastor Widvey lived in a sod house in Round Valley where he also served the larger congregation there.

Rev. P.A. Widvey left the following record of his official duties while he served from November 3, 1884 to July 31, 1895:

162 services; 27 children baptized; 2 children confirmed - Josephine Olson and Alfred Reinertson; 1 marriage - Rosvald and Josephine Olson; 11 interred; and 122 guests at the Lord's Table (a steady growth from 5 in 1885 to 21 in 1894).

In 1903 a frame church was built on two acres of land donated by Fred Rasmussen. The church cost \$1,000. The congregation subscribed \$600 and they borrowed \$400 at no interest. There were now 63 members and 12 voting members. The cornerstone laid in 1903 contained the following:

Confessions of the Synod; Kirkekitende; Luther's Small Catechism; New Testament; County Newspaper; and Congregation's History.

Rev. J.M. Erickson served from 1925 to 1928. He started a Bible School for the children around the Sweetwater area. Rev. Knedson served from 1928 to 1938. He urged the congregation to move the church structure to Hazard which was not done until 1940.

---

*Historic Bridges of Nebraska*

<[www.fhwa.dot.gov/nediv/histbrdg.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/nediv/histbrdg.htm)>

## **Buffalo County**

---

**Sweetwater Mill Bridge/Mud Creek Bridge**

County Road over Mud Creek  
South Edge of Sweetwater  
Buffalo County, Nebraska  
Total Length: 93 ft.  
Roadway Width: 16 ft.  
1-Span, 5-Panel Pin-Connected Pratt  
Pony Truss  
BUILT: 1909 by the Standard Bridge  
Company  
C001034545



In November 1908 the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors adopted bridge plans prepared by the Standard Bridge Company as the county standards. The board awarded an open-ended construction contract to Standard two months later, purchasing numerous small-scale bridges from the Omaha-based company over the next two years. Among the structures built in 1909 was this 80-foot pinned pony truss that replaced an earlier bridge at the Sweetwater Mill. Standard drove new steel foundation piles, fabricated the truss from steel rolled by the Illinois Steel Company, and completed the bridge that year. All but one of the original approach spans have since been filled in, but the Sweetwater Mill Bridge remains otherwise intact.

---

***Volume 14, No. 8 Buffalo County Historical Society November-December, 1991***

**FLOUR MILLS IN BUFFALO COUNTY**

**Part II**

**by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell**

Beaver Creek (now named Mud Creek) was also a source of fine water power for mills in Sweetwater and Ravenna. In 1800 Henry Zulauf and others built the Sweetwater Mill on Section 4 in Beaver Township. Joseph Tritt was probably one of the original founders, also. Henry Wilke and Paul Livingston both settled in Sweetwater around 1883, and they, along with Tritt, were identified with the Sweetwater Mill over many of its years of existence.

This mill survived for many years through several changes in operation and ownership. The *Kearney New Era* reported on May 14, 1887 that one of the "solid improvements on the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad to Broken Bow was the new mill at Sweetwater." It was erected by a farmers' stock company. "The roller mill has a capacity of 100 barrels a day and utilizes the finest water power in the state."

Periodic washouts of the dam were experienced, and a tornado that hit Sweetwater on June 22, 1890, not only destroyed the mill, but virtually wiped out the town. *The Ravenna News* reported:

The Sweetwater Mill, one of the best and finest roller mills in central Nebraska, had evidently been raised into the air, crushed together by some tremendous force, and dashed to the ground again, a series of shapeless ruins."

Several days after the storm a part of the mill's roof was found six miles away.

Reconstruction did not take place until 1899 when Herman Wilke and Andrew Rosvold formed a partnership to rebuild. The Sweetwater Mill continued operation into the late teens.

Two other mills were located on the John Perry property just south of Sweetwater, but details of their operation are not known.

*Volume 19, No.3*      *Buffalo County Historical Society*      *May - June, 1996*  
**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHURCHES  
IN BUFFALO COUNTY**

Part I

by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

Other early Presbyterian congregations were organized at Shelton, Miller, Sweetwater, Sodtown and Berg in Schneider Township. United Presbyterians had early churches in Kearney, Poole and Majors, and a Kearney city directory for 1892 lists a German Presbyterian Church.

*Volume 19, No. 4*      *Buffalo County Historical Society*      *July - August, 1996*  
**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHURCHES  
IN BUFFALO COUNTY**

Part II

by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

A Presbyterian congregation in Sweetwater met as early as 1889 but a church was not built until July of 1903. Lutheran congregations in the area included the Sweetwater community in 1883 and later years, but their church buildings were rural and outside Buffalo County.

*Volume 8, No. 3*      *Buffalo County Historical Society*      *March, 1985*  
**FREIGHTING IN BUFFALO COUNTY**

Part II - "Kearney, The Trade Center for Buffalo County Freighting in the 1880's"  
by Mardi Anderson

The route from Kearney to Loup City passed through John McGee's ranch on Beaver Creek at Sweetwater, on the border between Buffalo and Sherman counties. This was one of the regular stops on the stage route between the two towns. It was also used as a stopping place for freighters who were carrying supplies north from Kearney. McGee had a kind of hotel there for travelers to use.

*Volume 1, No. 5*      *Buffalo County Historical Society*      *May, 1978*  
**RAILROADS IN BUFFALO COUNTY**

by Alice Howell

In 1886 the Burlington's Grand Island & Wyoming Central branch was built across the northeast corner of the county, and Ravenna was founded and became a railroad and commercial center. Although a post office had been established there as early as 1878 with the name of Beaver Creek, it was not until the railroad came that a townsite was laid out. The new town was named Ravenna, which was incorporated on October 12, 1886. It has been a division point of the Burlington and railroading has been a principal industry of the city. Other stations on this branch line in Buffalo County are St. Michael and Sweetwater.

*Volume 1, No. 8*      *Buffalo County Historical Society*      *August, 1978*

# EARLY POST OFFICES IN BUFFALO COUNTY

by Alice Shaney Howell

**Sweetwater**, dating from December 21, 1874, was an early post office 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. These three post offices received their mail by stage out of Hazard in Sherman County.

-----  
[http://search.netscape.com/ns/boomframe.jsp?query=Sweetwater%2C+Nebraska&page=6&offset=1&result\\_url=redir%3Fsrc%3Dwebsearch%26amp%3BrequestId%3D975b737c2d3e2151%26amp%3BclickedItemRank%3D52%26amp%3BuserQuery%3DSweetwater%252C%2BNebraska%26amp%3BclickedItemURN%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.usgennet.org%252Fusa%252Fne%252Fstate1%252Fbanks%252Fbanks5.htm%26amp%3BinvoationType%3Dnext%26amp%3BfromPage%3DNSCPNextPrev&remove\\_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.usgennet.org%2Fusa%2Fne%2Fstate1%2Fbanks%2Fbanks5.htm](http://search.netscape.com/ns/boomframe.jsp?query=Sweetwater%2C+Nebraska&page=6&offset=1&result_url=redir%3Fsrc%3Dwebsearch%26amp%3BrequestId%3D975b737c2d3e2151%26amp%3BclickedItemRank%3D52%26amp%3BuserQuery%3DSweetwater%252C%2BNebraska%26amp%3BclickedItemURN%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.usgennet.org%252Fusa%252Fne%252Fstate1%252Fbanks%252Fbanks5.htm%26amp%3BinvoationType%3Dnext%26amp%3BfromPage%3DNSCPNextPrev&remove_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.usgennet.org%2Fusa%2Fne%2Fstate1%2Fbanks%2Fbanks5.htm) An American Local History Network member site

## Banks Continued, Towns that start with S

Town	County	Bank Name	President	Vice President
Sweetwater	Buffalo	The Sweetwater State Bank	N. P. Mortensen	George Newberg
		Cashier	Assist Cashier	
		Walter Newberg		



## NEBRASKA S-T

### COUNTY SEATS IN CAPS

City or Town Name	Population	County	Area of State	Has Post Office?	Has Railroad?	Has Express Office?
Sweetwater	116	Buffalo	Central	Yes	No	No

