

The Acheys Remember Kearney's Early Days

Edited by Mardi Anderson

The October 12, 1872 issue of the *Kearney Junction Times*, (this was the first issue of the first newspaper published in town), lists some of the original businesses and businessmen in Kearney including Henry H. Achey, carpenter and builder by trade. Henry H. Achey and his wife, Regina, originally from Pennsylvania, had married in 1870 when Henry was 22 and Regina was 18. Two years later the Acheys and their infant son moved to the recently founded town of Kearney Junction.

Henry constructed many of Kearney's early buildings and bridges. In 1876 he contracted with the county to build a wagon bridge across the South Loup River near present day Poole and another one over Beaver Creek near Erastis Smith's homestead at present day Ravenna. The Acheys were related to the David Hostetler family and took a homestead near them at Stevenson, now Alfalfa Center, in Odessa Township about 1880. By 1900 they had moved to Salt Lake City, Nevada, where Henry was again working as a contractor and builder.

The Achey letters are part of the "Come Back Letters" housed in the Buffalo County Historical Society's archives. Their letters to the Come Back Club in August 1923 were written from their home in Spark, Nevada. The first letter is from Henry and the other is from Regina. Punctuation and paragraphing have been added to make it easier to read these letters. The spelling and capital letters, or lack thereof, have been retained. Both letters have the same handwriting and same spelling, leading us to conclude that both were probably written by the same person. One spouse probably dictated his/her letter to the other.

Gentleman i wish to thank you for the kind Invitation wich you Send my Wife & my Self To Visit you Town on Sept 11....i am 77 years Old....i come To Kearney on the 6 of Sep 1872 From Lincoln Neb with a car Load of Lumber To Build 2 Buildings one for F G Keens & James Nitengale & one for a man By the Name of Williams[.] we unloaded the Lumber Slept on the Prairie on Ground & got our meals at the Harold House the only Hotel that was thier & it was just Partly completed Had no comodations to Sleep. the Lumber was Howled From Lowell Neb To Build it[.]

the first Election that was Held in Kearney Precint was held in the old Junction House on Section 2 Befor it was moved to Hear[.] Ney(?) Buffalo Bill or Bill Cody & Mr Ashburn of Gibbon were the candadats for the Legislature[.] i voted for Buffalo Bill & he was Elected But He did not qualify as he Had an offer of the US Goverment For a Scout at a Salori of one Hundred & Twenty five Dollars Per Month So Mr Ashburn qualified[.] as i Remember Pady Walsh was Elected County Comisiner & C(?) (?)ompson was Elected Sherif & Asbury Colins County Judge the Rest of the Candidates i Have forgotten thier names[.]

in Reply to Mrs. Dr. Dildine in Regards To the old Junction House it was moved To Kearney & one night a man that was Drunk Set his Bed on fire & He Burned to death & the Building was Partly Burned But was Rebuilt & Later on it was Totally distroyed By fire & I do not Agree with Mr. Flehearty as to the first Hotel that was Build in Kearney as Being the Grand Central Hotel as the Harold was the First Hotel their[.] Was Build By the Murphy Broth & the U. P. R. R. did not stop at Kearney as Have a Station untill

the B & M deeded them one Half of the Lots in Section one then they Build an Noos Ark that they called it a Depot[.]

we Had Quite a Time in getting a bridge a cross the Platt River[.] the King Bridge Co & the Clark Co. got in litigation But we finely got it as the Courts Desided in our Favor and an old Gentleman came From Boston Mass & he had Brought some of the Bridge Bonds[.] he was Dessed in a White Sert & Prince Albert Coat & a high Silk Hat & as it Happened that day thier were quite a good many Cow Boys 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 Run a round Jim Kileys Saloon to get to the Comercil Hotel[.] But he Encounted a nother Bunch & they made a nother dive at Him & so finely he Run in the allie of the Comercil Hotel Run 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 Be Came of the Intres Bonds[.]

When the Bridge was finished an old Trapper used to come To Kearney for his Supplys and he had quite a futnie [funny] Team[.] Had a Buffalo & an ox & a cow & a muel wich was his team[.] The[y] Com From Furnic [Furnas] Co[.] at one Time he come wilt [with] Two Buffalo for a Team[.]

i & P W Wilson were Elected as concilman of the 2 ward[.] Mr W was Elected for 2 years & i was Elected for one year & was Reelected after my Term Expired[.] we were the first men Elected on the 2 ward[.] W. M. Thomas was Elected the First city Mrshal of the Town & Mrs Mary Wolher Had a cow & she use to get in fany Mayous garden[.] so the mrshel caught the cow & was going To Put her in the Pound[.] Took her Past Mrs Ws 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 But [better] To Let her go[.]

at one Time thier were quite a few Tuffs as they were called & the Better class of citizen wonted To get Rid of them[.] So one night we got To gether To hunt them & fine them notice To Leave Town[.] Mr Nathan Campbell was Mayor of Town so we made Him our Spokesman[.] We found all But one[.] do not Remember his name As he went by the name Dirty Mike[.] We finely Found him in a Building South of the R. R. Track in the Emty Store Building owned by a man named Seripps[.] So we knocked at the door & Mr Scripp came To the Door & asked him if Dirty Mike was in[.] he said yes So i Pushed Campbell in the door & we all followed[.] went to Back Part of the Store[.] there Sat Dirty Mike[.] so 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 best we Better To To give you 12 hours To leave Town & Mike Said it would suit me a Hell of a lot Better to So we got Rid of them[.]

Lots of funi things Happened in the Early days of Kearne[.] i Sure would Like To Be with you To Talk With the Settlers....”

H. H. Achey Old Settler

As Mr. A Has given you Some Idea if what we Experienced in the Early days of Kearney i will tell you Some of my Experience[.] i come to Kearney From Lincoln Neb on the night of Sep 19 1872[.] got thier at 1030 PM with my 10 month old Roby Roy[.] i was the only Lady on the Train after we Left Hastings[.]

When i got off[f] the Train thier my Husband was not thier To meet me as he Had a miss Take in the date i was To come[.] thier was no Depot[.] the B&M Had thier Telegraph office & Ticket office in a Box car just Room Enough to comodate their operaterss[.] But their were a Big Cowed of men their[.] so Mr. Nitegale come to me & Said well Mrs Achy Mr A didn't Expect you Till To morrow Night[.] so he Said i will Take you To Mr. D. Weberts[.] Will go & Tell Mr A that you Have come[.] he was working At Mr. N Keens Biulding [.]

i sure felt i Had come To the End of the World[.] i Looked around & a way off[f] i Saw a --?--Lights[.] Looked like to me as if it were abut 2 miles away But of cours it was not so very Far away[.] So on our way going we met a Man By the name of Williams & Mr N said there is a man that works for Mr Achy so if he will take you To Mr. Weberts i will go Back as I will go to the Harold House where i have a room[.] So of cours Mr. & Mrs Webart were very much Surprised To See me as they Had Intended to prepare for my coming the next day[.] But they were very nice People & done the very Best for us they could[.] they Had Some 40 Day Borders But Had no Place for Lady Except us[.] most of them slept on the Prairie as their was Lots of work for men as they were Putting out Houses as fast as they could[.] But the weather was nice So they got along very well[.]

So the next thing was i Had Shipped our House Hold goods & Had to get a place To Put them as we did not [want] To Pay Demages[.] a then to a man named Harrington was Putting(?) up a Small House and Room was going to Back so he Rented it to us at 5.00 per week Till we Had got our own House So we could move in it[.] But the Roof was not on the Little House yet But would put it on in a few days[.] So we got a Place to Store our Furniture[.] But was not much of a Shelter if it Had Rained[.] But thank to Rain maker it did not Rain Till we got Better Shelter[.] But we got along Pretty well[.] But i Considered i was more fortunated than Some other ladies that came To Town as Some Had to Sleep on the Prairie as the men did[.] thier was no crossing of the U. P. Track So when we went to get our goods we Had to go To the Junction House crossing which made it almost 2 miles thier and Back[.] Well we got Settled finely & i Sure was glad

thier was a Firm By the name of Mendal Clopp [Clapp] & Cuningham Started a Paper[.] was called the Kearney Times. Mr Rader Cuningham Stoped at Mr Weberts also[.] he would write up the paper & sent it to Mount Pleasant Iowa To Be Printed wich as the main office of the Times[.] then after it was Printed They would Send it To Kearney for Distribution & Mr Cuningham got Lots of Subscribers as most Ever one wanted the Paper[.] We all contributed all the news we could get for Him as Everyone was very much interested & wished To help him with the First Paper of the Town[.] i have one of the Second additions of the Paper yet & cherish it as a Reminder of the Prairie days of Kearney Junction as the Town was called at that time[.]

We sure were a Happy Bunch as thier not classed off as Rich or Poor[.] all were Sociable with one another & all wanted to Get Acquainted with one another[.] About 10 of Set [Sept.] 1872 the Pawnee Indians stop at through(?) and camped for a Short Time[.] their were betwene 400 & 500 of them[.] they were on thier fall Hunt going west – to hunt Buffalo & about the middle of Oct they came back[.] at that time i arrived in Kearney & it Sure was a great(?) sight for me to See Real Red Wild Indians[.] i was not very much impressed with them as they were so dirty[.] the Braves al Rode Ponies

& the Poor Squaws & thier Papposes strapped on thier backs & were Leading Two or Perhaps 3 Ponies loaded with thier Belonges & meat[.] Some Looked So tired & Some Had one or Perhaps 2 or 3 Little girls or Boy Running a Long By thier Side[.] all on foot as the Ponies Had all the Load they could carry[.] when the Boys were about 15 years old they were Braves & did not work Any[.] carried a Bow & an Arrow[.] i sure felt Sorry for the Poor Squaws[.] i Saw them -?-id & Pick Lice of[f] the childrens Heads & Eat grass Hoppers & any thing hat was to dirty for any one to Eat[.]

the First 6 months we Lived mostly on wild meat as we had no bucher Shops But the meat was very good[.] the hind quarter of a 2 year Old Buffalo was much Better than the Tuff Beef Steak we get now a days[.]

in the spring of 1873 we Planted a garden & also in July if i Remember Right the grass Hoppers came & took everything Was in it[.] i Had never saw So many Hoppers in my Life Befor So did not know what to make of then[.] when they Had Eaten all that was in the garden the settled on the Side of the House as much to say we have go Plenty[.]

But that did not stop the Peopl of Coming To the Town as they come in Crowds every Day[.] Seemed To Be Determined To make a Town & they Soon got Buildings up & Soon we got Stores of every kind & Churches & Schools[.] So We Progressed very fast[.] Mr Achy Build 27 Houses from Sep 6 to Dec 25[.] the People never Stop[ped] To aske very many questions but wanted To know How Soon can you [p]ut up a house for me[.] So Every thing went in a Rush & the Weather Shure was fine Till after the Holidays were[.]

i guess i have Told you of any Interest so you can write what Ever of this Letter you See Fit[.] thier all facts[.]

Yours Mrs H H Achy

P S i had forgotten another thing wich Happened the first week i was staying at Mr & Mrs Webbert – thier was a capenters work bench standing near the House & one morning i was Standing out in the Yard[.] to my great astonishment i saw on of the top Boards Raise up & out crawled a man[.] well i called over W & she laughed & said that fellow Had made him a Bed in the Bench & Had blankets in & n-Ever he went to sleep in it He would Drow the Board Over Him Self So no one Ever Suspected that it Served as a Shelter for a Bed[.]

then in a few weeks a Man By the name of Mon(?) Bates Had a Hoiuse Build & Started a Saloon & on[e] Night his wife came on a Train & She was full of Booze so She got off But did not know where to go & So She got a gainst a Telegraph Pole & went To Sleep[.] in the Morning the Section Boss & his men came along & Saw Her & asked Her how She was[.] She Told them & She finally Found her Husband So all well.