

E. Rignell of Los Angeles, California, wrote, *“My first time into Kearney was during the Construction of the Burlington into Kearney in 1872 before Pass. Trains were first on into Kearney. So I have seen the wonderful groth of your town Since the first inhabatnc [inhabitants] lived in Tents and quickly constructed Board shacks.”*

Apparently the Rignells came back to live in Kearney in the 1890's because Mrs. Rignell's mother, Mrs. Samuelson arrived here from Sweden for a visit in 1896

Mrs. Gordon Davis was living in Omaha when she included this rhyme in her letter.

*“When people ask me where I'm from  
I sure use no blarney –  
And in accent real loud  
I say, I'm from Kearney.”*

Mrs. Davis tells us in the signature of her letter that she was formerly Elizabeth Parkins. Unfortunately we have not been able to find any other information about the Parkins family.

Harry Innan [Inman?] was living in Synary, Washington when he wrote his letter in which he says, *“I remember the Indian scares Grasshopper and Prairie fires in the seventies.”*

Unfortunately, so far no information has been found about this writer.

H. D. Hoon of St. Louis, Missouri,

Homer D. Hoon was born in 1867 in Illinois. The family came to Kearney from Iowa. As an adult he worked as a clerk in a coal office in Kearney before moving to St. Louis. Mr. Hoon recalls, *“My first School, day were in a two story frame building on corner a. ave. and 11. st. or 12. st. I believe called now 24 st. then the first brick School building in K. was built in 1881. where I finished my Schooling.”* That first brick school was Old Whittier, located in the center of the block bound by 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Av., 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> St., directly south of present day Central Elementary.

Mrs. Mary Yourm of Marble, Indiana tells us, *“I came out to Kearney in 1878 and lived there for five years....When I first came out there we often saw Indians on the street and when my brother-in-law – C. F. Bodinsen built his first home in the 200 block in Kearney it was considered out in the country.”*

Carl Bodinsen owned a grocery store from 1878 to 1889 when he bought a hardware store in Kearney. He built his home at 24<sup>th</sup> and A]

Albert O Sumption began his railroad career in Indiana about 1880. From there he went to Salina, Kansas before coming to Kearney. While living here he worked for the Union Pacific Railroad as a traveling auditor from about 1910 to 1915 or later. Frances, apparently his second wife, wrote from Colorado Springs, Colorado, *“The M E Church was a place most dear and helpful to me as we would meet there from time to time with the ladies of that organization.”*

*“The Nineteenth Century Club was always an inspiration to make and keep our homes in the best and nicest way. As well as to refresh our memories along the many wonderful things in art and Literature.”*

After the turn of the century the club changed its name to Kearney Women’s Club. The organization still exists in Kearney today (2006).

William J. Weaver was a Kearney native. He was a hotel manager in Roseburg, Oregon, where he lived with his wife and his brother, Rodney and Rodney’s wife , when he wrote back with these memories.

*“I was born in Kearney June 19<sup>th</sup> 1884 and my people moved back to York State in 1890. Therefore my recollections of Kearney are rather hazy.*

*“If my memory served me correctly Central ave. is the main St. and runs North and South. Ex Mayor Nathan Campbell now long deceased, lived at the extreme North end of this street [on the present day site of Good Samaritan Hospital]. The court house which my father, H. S. Harding helped to build was at the South end of the Street and the Jail South of that.*

*“We lived two blocks East of the Jail not far from the horse and cattle corral of ‘Cap’ Black. And next door North of us lived Policeman Ketchum. Then right near lived Miss Mabel Pettis who married Will Osborn and he afterwards moved to Central City Nebr. I believe, where he ran a hardware store until his death.*

*“Near them as I remember lived a family named McKelvey who had a son named Clarence. He taught me a lot about Indian life and warfare, especially warfare with me on the receiving end of the string.*

*“My father built a planing mill about two blocks South of the Jail. This mill burned down in 1890. He also owned a ranch near Minden, Nebr....One of my strongest recollections is of the big fire that destroyed the Midway Hotel. One man was killed by jumping from a window as I remember. Another recollection is of the cyclone of 1889 that did so much damage to Kearney and wiped out a small village, which I think was called Cripple Creek. [??] That same winter there was a big three day blizzard and two prominent young men who had been out hunting were found frozen to death in a granary out on the Prairie.*

*“I also dimly remember Professor Wambaugh who was music teacher in the schools. and the building of the cotton mill on the shore of one of the Lakes.”*

[ The cotton mill was built near Echo Lake, renamed Cottonmill Lake west of Kearney, but not on the shore.

“Cap” Black was Joseph Black, a Captain in the Civil War. He and his family came to Buffalo County in 1875. He owned a ranch on the South Loup River an additional land on an island in the Platte south of Kearney. From 1885 to 1888 he had business interests in Kearney. He was mayor of Kearney in 1884 and also served on the school board and the library board. He was county treasurer for two years and later served as a county commissioner. He superintended the construction of the county courthouse. From 1895-1898 he served in the state senate.]

Harrison Harding (Harry for short) lived in Lockport, New York, when he wrote on stationery for H. H. Harding, Grocer, *“The only thing I regret in returning to Kearney is the fact that my old birth place was located on an island in the Platte River, and I was*

*born in a sod house. Now the old sod house has been replaced with a beautiful new wooden one and I dislike that."*

Mrs Susan A. More Simonson of New York wrote "*...my Uncle L. R. Moore, was the Pioneer settler at Kearney 1872. established. First Bank helped to found city of Kearney Member first City Council he established the first lumber yard built the first brick building the upper story being the only Opera house in town The first bank was known as More's Bank owned the first hotel the Grand Central, furnished the lumber for the bridge across the Platte south of Kearney. He was considered a very able man."*

Elsie (Mrs. Harry) Bristowe of Huntington, West Virginia remembered, "*When I just came to Kearney in 1902 to take a position as House Mother in the Kearney Military Academy. I was a very homesick lady. I used to watch the trains go by the school – in their way to California – my old home – and long to be on them."*

Mrs. Emory (Elizabeth) Barber of Alhambra, California, was 79 years old when she wrote her letter. Emory was born in 1837 in New York. Elizabeth came from England where she was born in 1844. She and Emory were married in 1865 and had two children, one died young, the other grew to adulthood. Emory was a carriage maker when they lived in Kearney and Elizabeth was a dressmaker. They stayed here until about 1920. Elizabeth wrote, "*We came to Kearney in the Spring of 1890, the day the Midway Hotel burned, and for about ten years there were many good Substantial improvements – such as the new Midway, the Baptist Church, the Canal, Cottonmill, Paper mill, Vinegar factory, and many other enterprises – Then we came to a standstill –*" [That should be two years, not ten years. Then the Boom Period ended and Kearney did indeed come to a "standstill.]

Asa B. Laughton apparently came to Kearney in 1893. He was a carpenter by trade but he was also a law enforcement officer. In 1910 he was a Buffalo County deputy sheriff and in 1917 he was the Chief of Police for the City of Kearney.

He was living in Grand Island when he responded to his "Come Back" letter with these memories of Kearney. But that was apparently a temporary move. By 1926 he and his wife, Maud, were back in Kearney and he was again a policeman for the city. Then he apparently gave up his law enforcement duties and devoted his time exclusively to carpentry. He continued to work as a cabinet maker until a year or so before his death.

Both Asa and Maud were residing in St. Luke's Nursing Home when they died, Asa in 1957 at age 88, and Maud in 1966 at age 85.

*"30 years ago the public road left almost the hart of the now city, and run directly north west for Riverdale.*

*"30 years ago Sun Flowers grew all a round where now stands the State Normal School....*

*"30 years ago has saw Central Av. Change from a hit and miss tumble down shack and a little better to almost a solid row of business blocks, with business buildings.*

*"30 years ago has seen the streets so wide, changed from a sea of mud and stalled teams, to paved Boulavard and swiftly moving Automobiles."*

William Brady and his family were part of the Gibbon Homestead Colony. His death was the first in the newly established Gibbon community. He left a wife and four children. Mrs. Brady remained on the homestead and proved it up in her own name.

William's son, James A. Brady, wrote, *"We landed in Gibbon in '71 with the Homestead Colony and my father, Wm Brady, was successful in drawing choice one in the homestead sites. The county seat was located at Gibbon and had it not been for the strong-heartedness of some of the colony promoters the terminal of the C. B. & Q. would have been at Gibbon instead of Kearney. My father lost his life in a brick kiln [kiln] accident in building the county court house, and my mother homesteaded the farm now located at Gibbon, Neb., which we still retain in the family."*

Dr. Charles L. Dildine was one of the prominent early citizens of Kearney. At the time of his death in Dansville, NY on July 13, 1886 he was in practice with Dr. Hoover, another prominent Kearney physician. His widow, Flora, and their children, Grace 7, and Harry 2, continued to live in Kearney after his death. He had owned some farmland which provided her and the children with a source of income. Flora

was living in Los Angeles, Calif. at the time of this anniversary celebration. She wrote

*"It was the year 1874 my husband Dr. C. L. Dildine and myself landed in Kearney. At the time there were not more than fifty people all told. The only sidewalk was a platform in front of the Grand Central Hotel and the A. L. Webb hardware store. The first stood across from where the U P Freight depot now stands. The other at the NE corner of Central Ave and 21<sup>st</sup> Street. The fur(?) [first] houses looked as though they had been just dropt down anywhere, as the so called streets, were merely winding paths. You can imagine how I felt coming home from New York state where at that time every home had its yard fenced in here Deer and Buffalo often came and rubbed themselves on the corner of the house.*

*This was the year the Last(?) at Fort Kearney was torn down. The Rail Road station being (Kearney Junction) now called Buda. This same year the U. P. had finished a new depot four miles west of nothing called Kearney it stood where the freight depot now stands. The new depot did not have an agent as yet, Two men happened along having tramped if [in] frome some where in the East to Denver and back this far looking for work, one of them, Mr. Jay Keller knowing something of telegraphy, secured the position of agent. (As a comparison between then and now, there were only four a day for passenger and freight each way. The rate of speed being 20 miles for passenger trains 15 for freight. ...? ... I once asked a train man [why] they did not make better time on such a level road, he said they would get such a momentum they would turn over there not being curves enough to keep them balanced.[]) This other man no other than the Hon. Alexander Graham Bell, continued on East. You all know what happened since. This and the following year was the grasshopper years you have heard of."*

William G. Barker homesteaded on the southeast quarter of section 18-11-15. In 1923 he was living in Racine, Wisconsin, and wrote back, *"My first acquaintance with Kearney was in February 1878 where I was there with a party of Racine Land Seekers*

*and I think it was my Selection of Land north of Kearney that caused so many Wisconsin people to settle in Buffalo County – among them your fellow townsman, Emil Tollefsen. I would also add that my settling in Buffalo County proved one of the best Business Ventures ever made. The U. P. Building was the only Brick building in the Village. We stopped at the ‘Becket’ house about one block south of the U P track – and it is still there....”*

Mrs Price(?) Sanders says, *“I was born in Kearney on March 16, 1872. Received (sic) my education in the Kearney Public Schools, being a graduate at the Kearney High School in 1891, & was a resident of Kearney until 1893.”*

[Andreas’ History of the State of Nebraska, 1882, says the first child born in Kearney was a son, named Kearney, born to Mr. & Mrs. V. B. Clark in the fall of 1872.]

George Milbourn was a very early settler in the Elm Creek area where he homesteaded on the northwest quarter of section 20 in Elm Creek Township. D. T. Hood, who he mentions in his letter, was a neighbor who homesteaded on the northeast quarter of the same section. They were about two miles northwest of Elm Creek. The Washington and William Milbourn families also lived in the same area.

In Gene Hamaker’s Buffalo Tales article about the Kearney Canal he writes, *“When the idea of such a canal was first formed is unknown, some would say as early as 1873. There is no clear evidence, however, that a need for a canal was recognized until 1875. The hard times and grasshoppers of the mid-seventies may have inspired the appearance of supporters before the Buffalo County Commissioners in January of 1876.”* Milbourn’s letter substantiates the 1875 date.

When George Milbourn moved to Kearney he went to work for John D. Seaman. Seaman had come to Kearney in 1873 and about a year later established a farm implement and grain business. At the time he wrote this letter Milbourn was living in Fairland, Oklahoma.

*“I passed thru there on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of October, 1872 on my way to my fathers homestead 2 1/2 miles north east of Elm Creek, where I lived until 1876 working on farm, railroad and carried mail.*

*“I carried the first mail from Kearney to Loup City and up the Middle Loup to New Helena, Custer County. Also did quite a little hunting of deer, antelope and elk among the gulches of the country north of Elm Creek to the South Loup river. On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1876 I captured a DEAR that has been my constant companion and advisor ever since.*

*“During the summer of 1876 I farmed but the heavy freeze on June the 5<sup>th</sup> and the dry weather and grass hoppers following, I failed to raise anything so had to go to work by the month. I moved to Kearney and worked for J. D. Seaman 6 months for \$25.00 per month, and the balance of 5 years for \$40.00 per month selling machinery and buying grain. During my 8 years residence in Kearney I served as Councilman, and city marshal under Mr. Nathan Campbell who was mayor at the time. I worked 2 ½ years at the Union Pacific as a messenger boy, freight clerk and baggage man.*

*“About 1875 Mr. D. T. Hood and myself went before the County Commissioners and advocated the building of an irrigation ditch to Kearney from West, and from that the*

*project was finally put through. So you see I did my bit in helping to make Kearney what it is.*

*“...I was born in Stark County Ohio Nov 15<sup>th</sup>, 1852. My parents moved to Ill. In the spring of 1854 and settled in Woodford County. In the spring of 1872 we moved to Elm Creek in covered wagons.”*

W. F. Mills was the general manager for the city and county of Denver Water department and Secretary of the Board of Water Commissioners when he wrote his letter. He had past through this area on the Union Pacific train in 1867 and then in 1888 had come to Kearney to live with his small family. This family was enlarged by the birth of another child while the lived here. He wrote that *“During the last thirty years Kearney has grown substantially. It is a home city of real folks, surrounded by ideal agricultural country, its citizens progressive and forceful in taking advantage of all its possibilities and overcoming many of the natural obstacles incident to an inland, prairie location. All that any city has you possess. It is a fine place to live, with educated people, good schools, ample water power and a low tax rate.”*

Solomon D. Butcher, the photographer of sod house fame had a photography business here in Kearney with his son for a while. He was living in Franklin, Nebraska, when his invitation arrived. Part of his response includes the dates he was in business here, *“...I lived in your city for over twelve years from 1902 till about 1924....”*

Mrs. Roy M. Harrop of Omaha wrote, *“I was born in Buffalo County, am a graduate of the Kearney State Normal School, and my father, W. S. Dow, was an early pioneer, coming there at the age of seventeen, with his father, a veteran of the Civil War, when Kearney was termed a ‘clapboard’ town.”*

[In 1880 William S. Dow, 18, was living in Schneider Township with his father, Charles, and family.]

Elwood E Forsythe of Council Bluffs, Iowa, says, *“During my residence in Kearney from 1874 to 1878, law and order was an unknown quantity.”*

Frank Bills, general yard master for the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad in San Bernardino, California, wrote, *“I was born in Shelton Nebraska Oct. 30, 1879 and some of the old pioneers will recall as that as being the day General Grant passed through Shelton on his memorable trip around the World My grandfather escorted the General from North Platte to Omaha the Grandfather being the late Patrick Walsh of Shelton.”* Patrick Walsh had been stationed at Ft Kearny. In 1869 he homesteaded on a quarter of land which included the site of Shelton. Walsh was one of the organizers of the county in 1870 and was appointed postmaster of Wood River Center. He informed the Postmaster General that because of confusion with other post offices with similar names, this post office would be named Shelton and “you will please govern yourself accordingly.”

Elizabeth Looker Brown of Council Bluffs, Iowa, wrote, *“I will say that my father Dave Looker came with his family of two little girls to Kearney in 1875 I was about 4 yrs*

*old at the time and remember distinctly that Buffalo Bill and his Indians had just arrived in town, starting out with his first show coming direct from North Platte to Kearney. It was no uncommon thing to see Indians on the street every day. Kearny consisted at that time of two Hotels, the Grand Central and the Commercial – These sat across from the Depot between that and our home were a large Livery Stabel where we watched the stage coaches come and go.*

*“...my father died nine years ago and is buried in the Riverdale Cemetery a corner that he donated from his farm.”*

George Allen Beecher was Bishop of the Missionary District of Western Nebraska headquartered in Hastings, NE. He lived in Kearney from the time he was a small boy until he had completed his university courses. Here are some excerpts from his letter.

*“I arrived from Illinois with my mother and sister on a stormy night in the Spring of '83, when we found it exceedingly difficult to secure lodging. The old Grand Central Hotel and Atkin House, just opposite the old Union Pacific Depot, were overrun with land seekers. One courteous gentleman surrendered his room to accomodate my mother and sister. I slept on the writing table in the hotel office with a Webster's Dictionary for my pillow. A traveling troupe was playing Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' in the Opera House over what is now Gilcrest Lumber Yard office. I was awakened at three in the morning by a gun duel between two of the members of this troupe, who had imbibed too freely and were evidently bent upon reproducing the grave scene....*

*“When John Low came out from England and went on his first hunting expedition on the Platte with Alvin Siddenham, he mistook a long-eared borrow [burro] near the old wooden bridge for a jack rabbit, and only the sudden with holding of his evil intentions by the strong arm of Siddenham prevented the poor donkey from paying the penalty. John was carrying messages for his uncle, Henry Gibbons, the Union Pacific, agent at the time....*

*“Among the ancient and historical remembrances of Kearney might be mentioned the electric street cars, two in number, during the days of the 'boom', when on the arrival of every passenger train one car would stand on the south side and the other on the north side of the tracks. In this connection I might mention the fact that long before other towns in the State knew anything about publicity, Kearney was laying the foundations of her future greatness by various methods of advertising. In spite of the passing of the street cars with the ruins of the 'boom days', she has recovered a thousand times strong and proven herself worthy of leadership among the cities of the great and growing empire of Nebraska.”*

A. W. Smith of Van Nuys, California, wrote, *“I first saw Kearney 53 years ago [1870]. I was one that witnessed that great and memorable Blizzard of April 1871. I was permitted by the family wher I staid to bring our four horses in the Sod house of one room. We thus saved their lives.”*

*“When I get back to the Home Coming I expect to mingle with other old timers and recall a few things to memory. F’rinstance: The strenuous campaign for the sewer bonds; the cotton mill campaign; the burning of the Midway hotel; the time we printers on the old Journal went out on strike; the co-operative daily we printers conducted for a few weeks, until our business manager lost all our cash reserve in a poker game; and the famous political campaign of 1890....”*

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