

Barton County Historical Society

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<http://bartoncountymuseum.org>

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The Village Crier

Barton County Historical Society

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Museum Memos

We were amazed at how handsome the bronze statue on the courthouse square really is! Dr. Dennis Montagna from the National Park Service and Karen Neuforth took turns inspecting him in a city bucket truck recently. Our sculpture is a real treasure, but we will need to clean him up and take good care of him. He has stood guard for the Union here since 1915. The plaques at the base list some of our first post Civil War members of the Grand Army of the Republic including “colored troops”.

As the Sesquicentennial year comes to a close, we have benefited from a variety of exceptional programs, two sensational quilts, and special displays. We joined with one or more groups to celebrate this unique area and enjoy the fascinating people who have called this home. The theory still holds, try to learn something new every day, and there was much to learn!

The Nominating Committee report, given at the November General Meeting lists nominated directors as Paul Maneth, Ray Schenkel, Lou Button and Reta Brack. Nominated for 1st Vice President is Rose Kelly. The nominees for offices of President and Secretary were not available at the time of that meeting. Nominations from the floor, with consent of the nominee, for any expiring office will be accepted at the Annual Meeting on January 23rd. If more than one nominee for any office is



The Rifleman, a bronze statue by Frederick C. Hibbard, commissioned by Ira D. Brougher, stands guard in Great Bend.

presented, paper ballots will be available upon request. Newly elected members will join others whose terms will remain for another year.

Memberships are being accepted for 2012. Is your's ready to be renewed? Please check your address label. If it is circled, it is time! Your dues, at any level, are necessary for us to function.

Volunteers, like yachts, are still priceless—their worth is far beyond any number available. We have grown and developed through the years because we have many who provide time, effort, and their own expertise. As this year ends, we reflect that we have expanded and experimented with some different approaches. Joining with other area groups has helped us do more by sharing events (and audiences). It provides more for us without spending more time, money, or resources. Ask for more information at any time. It has been a successful year! We look forward to seeing you soon. May all of your holidays be special for you.

Beverly Komarek, Executive Director



Calendar of Events

Dec 11 - Ghosts of Christmas Past, 1-4pm

Dec 25 - MERRY CHRISTMAS

Jan 1 - HAPPY NEW YEAR

Jan 11 - Museum Committee, 1:15pm

Jan 9 - Board of Directors, 7:30pm

Jan 23 - Annual Meeting, 7:30pm

Jan 29 - KANSAS DAY

Feb 8 - Museum Committee, 1:15pm

Feb 14 - VALENTINE'S DAY

Feb 20 - PRESIDENTS' DAY

Feb 27 - Program Meeting, 7:30pm

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Is it time to renew your membership?

Check the top line of your mailing label for a letter designation and date. If it is circled in red, your membership is now due.

S _____ \$15 Annual Individual Membership

F _____ \$25 Annual Family Membership

C _____ \$100-\$499 Contributor

X _____ \$500+ Benefactor

_____ Additional Donation

R is for Reciprocal and L is for Life members

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

WINTER ON THE PLAINS

Karen Neuforth, BCHS Research Coordinator

When I got up on this chilly December morning, the thermometer was reporting 18 degrees. Fortunately for me, I was in a warm house with modern conveniences. What was it like spending a winter out here on the plains when the old forts along the Santa Fe Road were still active? Thanks to diaries, personal accounts and military records, we can conjure up a picture of those conditions and how our predecessors faced them.

A rather colorful autobiography by William Henry Ryus, titled The Second William Penn, recounts the author's adventures on the plains, including his adventures transporting the mails and passengers along the Santa Fe Trail. Although Ryus does not date the incident recounted below, it would have presumably been in 1864 or very early 1865, when Capt. Theodore Conkey, 3rd Wisconsin Cavalry, was in command of Fort Zarah. "Once on my way East with a coach full of passengers, a snow storm began to rage, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, soon after I had left Fort Larned. It snowed so hard that at 8 o'clock we couldn't tell where the road was, and the passengers took it time and about with me running along the road in front of the coach to find the road."

Arriving at Fort Zarah about 10 o'clock that evening, Ryus ordered an escort for his stage the next morning and was threatened with arrest on Conkey's orders. The next morning, according to Ryus' version, he went down to confront the Captain: "Their quarters was a little dugout in the side of the hill along the river bank. They had a gunny sack for the door, and I went into the first room, which was used for a kitchen, and the cook told me to go to the next room, it had a gunny sack door, too, the First and Second Lieutenants were in there. They told me to go on to the next room that the Captain's headquarters was in the other room." (If you are curious about the decidedly unfriendly exchange between Ryus and Conkey, I suggest you read his book, since our aim here is to discuss winter life on the plains and there is limited space for this column.) Conkey finally conceded the battle and provided an escort for Ryus' stage, "I got my escort of fifteen soldiers at last and after getting the teams hitched, off we started, the soldiers in advance to break the roads. That is, as a matter of fact, all the use

we had for them. We could travel very well when they had ridden ahead and broke the snow so we could follow the trail."

A correspondent using the pseudonym 'Kiowa', wrote to the Soldier's Letter, the 2nd Colorado Cavalry's regimental publication, from Fort Larned on January 23, 1865: "Since my last, we have been visited with a snowstorm, the most severe I have experienced in several years, if ever! have often read of such storms on the plains, hope only to read of them hereafter. It commenced to snow on the night of the 20th, having had high winds for several days previous; it continued with unabated fury until late at night of the 21st; we are nearly blocked up at present; yesterday and today have been quiet, though very cold. A scout arrived here Saturday evening; were out about thirty miles when the storm came up; they were in luck to be no farther. -- An escort numbering forty-two men, with a train which left here on the 18th for Fort Lyon, were attacked by about 300 Indians, seventy miles out; lost one man killed -- private Joseph Fields, Co. F; his remains were brought in today. Private Donihue, Co. M, and one man named Cole, belonging to 1st Colorado Cavalry, wounded; the former seriously. They all suffered severely from cold; were obliged to burn a portion of the train to keep from freezing."

M. Wisner wrote from Fort Ellsworth on that same date: "Company L left Fort Riley on the 16th, and arrived here on the 19th ult. Distance traveled, 90 miles. We shall proceed to erect huts, or 'burrow' in the ground, whichever way is deemed most expedient. If the kind of weather we have been having for three days past continues, underground apartments will suit us best. The fact is, it has been decidedly 'balmy'. Thermometer and our nose, the only instruments running; and they run down without indicating the temperature of the atmosphere. ... We have plenty of Buffalo meat, and to use a 'classical phrase' -- we like it; or in Colorado parlance, its 'bully'! (A friend at our elbow, suggests that, 'that must be owing to the Sex of the "Animules!"') We already feel qualified to judge of any part known to modern epicures. The boys have behaved first rate -- have not stolen the farmer's chickens, nor married their

daughters; attend church regularly -- Sundays excepted! ... My ink is frozen -- in fact, there's nothing in camp, but what is frozen, including my feet -- I will close to warm them."

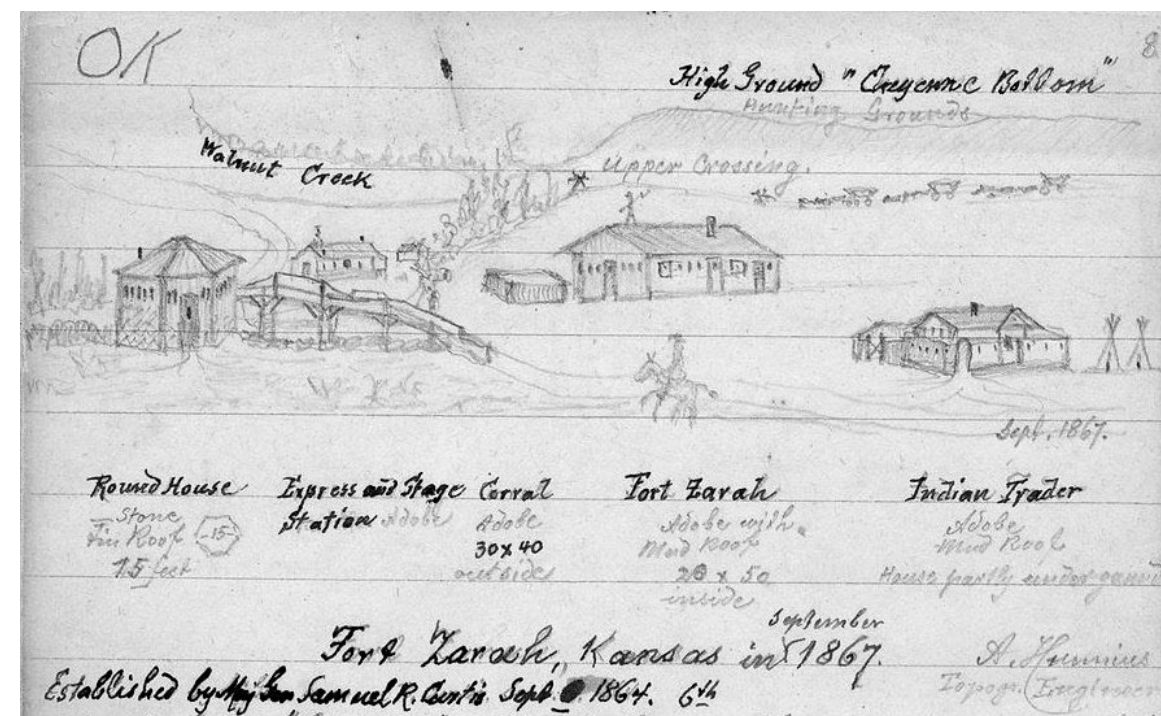
By February 1, 1865, an author using the initials "J.H." reported the arrival of Companies C, E, G, and K of the 2nd Colorado Cavalry at Fort Zarah: "... We had a hard time in making the trip. At Salina, we encountered a very severe snow storm, which continued for one day and night. The boys as a general thing suffered to a considerable extent, more especially K company, who were without tents. The idea of soldiers marching on the Plains, at this season of the year, in such a manner, should not be entertained by military commanders, when actual necessity does not require it. We saw but four or five Buffalo on the road, the severe cold weather having driven them further South."

Our soldier continued: "On arriving here, we relieved several companies of the 3rd Wisconsin Cavalry ... We took possession of their 'quarters,' consisting of holes dug in the ground, and covered with brush and dirt. There is nothing tasty nor fanciful about them, but they are comfortable. The duty at this Post is very heavy, for the amount of men stationed here. We escort the mail coach from here to Smoky crossing, between this Post and Ft. Larned, and about 25 miles of the road to Council Grove -- also, all Government trains passing by the Post in either direction. ..."

"Yours as ever, T" wrote on February 8, 1865 from Fort Ellsworth, "... we have had some cold weather, and heavy winds, which set us to 'cayoting' in the bank. We have plenty of buffalo out here, of the very best quality,

judging by the toughness: we have been out hunting for some distance around the Post; have seen no Indians yet. -- The health of the troops is good here, guess it's because we have no doctor, or medicine at this place."

Of course, winter just seems like it lasts forever, but -- sooner or later -- signs of spring start popping up. Or, it could just be 'cabin fever' -- if you had a cabin. Someone signing off an "X." wrote from Fort Zarah on March 8th, 1865, to report that the stone Block House at the post was finally under construction and tell of the death of Private Dougherty, Co. G, 2nd Colorado Cavalry, "He was handling a pistol in a very careless manner, accidentally shot himself, and died a few days afterwards." But, that wasn't the only news: "Quite a scare was gotten up, in our heretofore quiet Post, on Monday night last. There had been a train camped about one mile below the Post for several days. Having imbibed rather freely of 'bust-head' whiskey during the evening, at about 10 o'clock, p.m., the bullwhackers commenced their ever-favorite amusement of 'popping' whips. The 'pops,' as they reverberated on the clear, still night air, were magnified, by the sentinels stationed around the garrison, into pistol shots, and thinking that Indians had attacked their camp, gave the alarm! The bugle was immediately sounded -- the men were soon in the saddle -- and, under the leadership of several of our officers, proceeded 'to the front.' On arriving at where the train was camped, they found the bull-whackers quietly enjoying themselves, no Indians having disturbed their equilibrium. After giving that noble fraternity a healthy piece of advice, the party returned slowly back to the Post, meditating upon the 'uncertainty of events in a soldier's life.'"



An illustration of Fort Zarah as it appeared in September 1867, drawn by Ado. Hunnius.

Hunnus was at the fort while serving with Major General W.S. Hancock during the Indian pacification campaign of 1867. Hunnius's descriptions of Fort Zarah provide the sizes of the buildings located at the fort, and includes a drawing of the fort.

(From the collections of Kansas State Historical Society)