

# Barton County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1091  
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www.bartoncountymuseum.org

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# Village Crier

Vol.17, No. 2  
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Newsletter of the Barton County Historical Society



**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

## Calendar of Events

### March

- 8 - Daylight Savings Time Begins
- 9 - Board of Directors, 7:30 p.m.

### April

- 2 - **Volunteer Orientation**, 1:00-3:00 p.m.
- 6 - Museum Committee, 1:15 p.m.
- 7 - **Museum/Village Summer Hours Begin**
- 30 - Easter Sunday - Closed
- 16 - GB Chamber Coffee, 9:30 a.m.
- 27 - Program Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

### May

- 4 - Museum Committee, 1:15 p.m.
- 11 - Board of Directors, 7:30 p.m.
- 18 - Program Meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 25 - Memorial Day

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## Is it time to renew your membership?

Your membership expiration date is printed on the top line  
of your mailing label.

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 Annual Individual Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 Annual Family Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$100-\$499 Contributor
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$500+ Benefactor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Additional Donation

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Look on the top line of your mailing label. A letter, followed  
by /2008 is your membership expiration date. S is for  
Single, F is for Family, C is for Contributor, X is for  
Benefactor, R is for Reciprocal and L if for Life members.

## Museum Memos

There were no speed bumps. Didn't we just finish hanging ornaments? Then, when we just ran in the New Year, how can it be time to reopen with summer hours?

Volunteer Orientation ushers in the new season. We welcome back our best-in-the-business volunteers and greet other folks who want to get acquainted, to see if they would like to join us. Spend a couple of hours and we promise you will meet interesting people, learn a few things, and have your own personal tour to see what's new. Ah, and bring your best friend or next-door neighbor -- no reservations necessary.

As the Wetlands & Wildlife National Scenic Byway begins to take shape, small flags out on the grounds have appeared to signal the area for our designated sign. You will want to check it out, of course.

Plans for a summer program -- or two -- are pending. We will let you know. How else could we practice saying pergola if we didn't have another lawn party? Make sure your favorite lawn chair is ready to go.

Our photo files are getting tidy, thanks to intensive care by former chairman Melba Haines, who returned from Oklahoma to clean them up. Don't ask why she didn't get finished in a week, even though she recruited relatives to assist. (Hurry back, Melba!)

Thanks to the following members whose support is so vital. Their confidence keeps us working to improve.

Henry Burmeister  
Joe Danek  
Randy Suchy  
Barbara Schmidt  
Donna & Dale Oliver

Jean Cavanaugh  
The Unruhs at Best Western Angus Inn  
Ray & Sheryl Cheely  
Drs. Roger Marshall & Jodi Hendrickson  
Don Whelan  
Jack & Lee Messick  
Ralph & Pollie Stalcup  
Great Bend Chamber of Commerce  
Community Bank  
Dominican Sisters  
M&F Plumping  
A. Wm. Shafer, M.D.  
Stueder Contractors  
Central Kansas Medical Center  
Dr. Don & Helen Reinhardt  
George & Marjorie Miller  
First Kansas Bank  
Adams, Brown, Beran & Ball, Chtd.  
Roy & Marcia Westhoff  
John & Dr. Marta Edmonds  
Robert Parrish  
Elizabeth Evans  
Jim & Kathi Armatys  
Marc Huslig, D.D.S.  
JoAnn & Elward Hiss  
Joe & Darlene Boley  
Lou Button  
Farmers Bank & Trust  
William & Marlene Ernsting  
Pat & Marion Lightfoot  
Maurice & Norma Hammeke  
Kiwanis Club of Great Bend  
Charles & Sandra Stos

Lots of exciting things are happening and we look forward to having the opportunity to provide you with a great place to visit, to learn, and to enjoy for many activities. See you soon!

*Beverly Komarek  
Executive Director*

126 Years Ago, Great Bend & Barton County Endured a Terrible Scourge

## Tragedy & Triumph: Smallpox

This winter, 126 years ago, Great Bend and Barton County began one of the most tragic periods in local history. On Nov. 12, 1882, a young man named George Gillmore arrived in town aboard an AT&SF train from New Mexico. Although not mentioned in the local newspapers, Gillmore was simply returning home. In 1880, the federal census showed Gillmore and others living with an older man named John Howell in Beaver Twp. Now, two years later, Howell was living in a shanty in the northeast part of Great Bend and that is where Gillmore headed after leaving the train.

When Gillmore returned home, he was sick with a fever and Dr. Lightfoot was soon called in. According to the newspaper accounts, Lightfoot diagnosed Gillmore's illness as "mountain fever" and, having already made plans to move to Albuquerque, the good doctor did so, having sold his practice to Dr. Dunn of Ellinwood. However, Gillmore's illness continued to worsen and Dr. White was called in to attend to him on Nov. 21.

Dr. White's immediate diagnosis was of a far more dangerous nature than mountain fever: smallpox. As was the law, Dr. White notified the authorities and quarantined the shack where Gillmore and Howell lived. During all of this, Howell, then aged about 72 years, nursed Gillmore night and day. On Nov. 24, Gillmore died and the city council instructed Dr. White to bury him, which was done with the assistance of Howell, "on Friday night after dark." According to the newspapers, "Gillmore was buried in a street some 300 feet north of the old ice house in the northeast part of town."

John Howell became ill about Dec. 1, but was already in quarantine. The school board immediately recommended that all children be vaccinated. There were two meetings of Great Bend's citizens, which urged the city authorities to take immediate steps, to organize a board of

health, and to see that this dread disease was kept under control. However, the city council failed to act in a timely manner and it wasn't until two weeks had passed and four or five new cases of smallpox had appeared that the authorities took serious action.

Meanwhile, word of the burgeoning epidemic had spread to the surrounding countryside and neighboring cities. People from Great Bend were not welcomed on nearby farms and country folks were staying away from Great Bend. Soon, the entire city was virtually quarantined by its neighbors. One newspaper reported that the Ellinwood city council, "Ordered, That a sign board with the words, 'Quarantine: no travelers from Great Bend allowed to pass through Ellinwood,' painted thereon in conspicuous letters, be placed at the forks of the road near the farm of Theo. Stueber, and that a guard or watchman be stationed thereat to see that no one disregard this order." Similar actions were taken by other neighboring cities, including a ban on mail from Great Bend in the city of Larned. That, of course, hurt business and soon the businessmen of Great Bend were up in arms and the newspaper editors were accusing our neighbors of enacting the quarantine just to steal Great Bend's mercantile business. Within the city, there were also accusations and disagreements. The *Arkansas Valley Democrat* of Dec. 9, printed a letter to the editor from Dr. White, who had repeatedly exposed himself to the dangers of the disease and been employed by the city council to deal with the situation.

### A DENIAL

Dear Sir: I notice in your last issue, that the City Council declared the grave of Gillmore, the smallpox victim, a nuisance because of the burial being inside the city limits, & notified Dr. White

to remove it to some other locality.

Now, that is as much as to say: Dr. White is keeping and maintaining a nuisance within the limits of Great Bend City. I, Dr. White, deny the charge as a base calumny!

The facts are, the City Council entered into a contract with me to see that the said Gillmore should be buried in the grave of their own digging, for a stated amount of money, which I carried out to the very letter. Now if there is any illegality in the burial of said Gillmore, it rests with the City Council. Why they should charge me in keeping and maintaining a City nuisance is something incomprehensible to me. Yours Truly, Dr. White.

The Marshal, by authority he claims, of City Council, did serve notice on Dr. White as we stated, and he yesterday, had that "notice" officially signed, in his pocket. Now if there is any "base calumny" about it, it lies between the Dr., the Marshal and the Council to settle it between themselves; we can prove every word we said as truth.

At a city council meeting Dec. 14, it was reported that "Competent nurses are being provided, and all necessary steps are being used to heal the sick and prevent further sickness." Schools were closed, church services were cancelled and public assemblies forbidden. Even the Christmas Masquerade Ball was called off.

On Dec. 15, the *Inland Tribune* reported three deaths up to that point: Gillmore, Howell, and Chris Clink, a carpenter who left a wife and several small children. On the day before, the *Great Bend Register* had mourned, "The saddest burials in the Bend in many a day or night were the burials of John Howell and Christian Klink Sunday night. Dr. Vanpelt and a colored man in the darkness of the night, all by themselves, took the bodies of the dead men to the Potter's field in the cemetery and consigned them to their last, long resting place. True it is the most terrible feature of the devil's own disease, the smallpox, is that our friends must all desert us when most we need their kindly human aid and sympathy."

Among those listed as ill, Dec. 14-15 were Mrs. Louise Alefs, a daughter of C.B. Morgan, Sam Maher, a daughter of Milo P. Parker, and a

child of A. Weiss. A couple of pages later, the *Tribune* reported the death of Mrs. Alefs, who left a husband and two small children, both of whom were themselves ill.

Just to add to Great Bend's misery, rumors and exaggerations were published across the nation. The *Register* of Dec. 21 printed this from the *Milwaukee Bee*, "The disease was brought to the Bend by a colored man from N.M. He died there, and the men who buried him were drunk, and did not bury him deep enough. The dogs dug the body up, according to the report, and scattered portions of it about town."

By the time the epidemic had run its course, the following people had died:

George Gillmore, Nov. 24, 1882, aged 22 years  
John Howell, Dec. 10, 1882, aged 72 years  
Christian Clink, Dec. 10, 1882, aged 35 years  
Louise D. Alefs, Dec. 14, 1882, aged 38 years  
Jessie E. Parker, Dec. 16, 1882, aged 14 years  
Katie M. Alefs, Dec. 23, 1882, aged 4 years  
John P. Alefs, Dec. 25, 1882, aged 2 years  
Gracie E. Parker, Dec. 25, 1882, aged 6 years  
Frankie M. Morgan, Dec. 27, 1882, aged 5 years  
Mary Clink, Dec. 27, 1882, aged 13 years  
W. Stauffer, Dec. 29, 1882, aged 5 years  
Stauffer Child, date unknown  
Tom Brown, Jan. 4, 1883, aged 17 years  
Two Armstrong Children, prior to Jan. 11, 1883  
Charles Legg, about Jan. 11, 1883, aged 3 months

Finally, Great Bend's church bells once more rang out, inviting parishioners to worship on Sunday, Jan. 7. These were the first services held in four weeks. By Jan. 18, the *Register* reported that opening the schools was under consideration and on Jan. 25, it stated that "No case of smallpox in Great Bend and none in the country that we hear of."

In the early 1960s, Great Bend was once again reminded of this tragic time when trenching along the west side of Great Bend Cemetery turned up forgotten burials. Among these were probably some of the unfortunate victims of this epidemic, whose "last, long resting place" in Potter's Field had been forgotten.

Karen Neuforth  
BCHS Research Coordinator