From the Buffalo County Historical Society, *Buffalo Tales*

1. T. Anderson, Photographer

1982, Vol. 5, No. 9

By Marian Dettman Johnson

Alfred T. Anderson became a photographer’s apprentice when he was 16. This career would eventually produce a historic visual record of an important period in the history of Kearney as well as Nebraska. The young Swedish immigrant had come to this area when he was 10. One of Kearney’s first families was August and Ingar (Timmans) Anderson who left Sweden in 1867, spent some time in Illinois and arrived in Kearney in November, 1875 to open a wagon and carriage manufacturing company. “Father announced I would start my work with J. A. Stridborg at his office on south Central on September 1, 1881,” wrote Mr. Anderson in 1945. The studio was in a small building south of the Harrold House. Within three years the young man was managing the business and by 1886 had started his own studio.

[Then] the Kearney “boom” period brought financial stability to the struggling enterprise. George W. Frank’s son, Augustus, hired [Alfred] to take fifty 8x10 views of Kearney and ordered six prints of each. “For this I was to receive $150.00 which was a huge order for a poor photographer who didn’t own an 8x10 camera.”

The subject matter was to be factories, industries, residences and general Kearney scenes. This commission was accomplished by borrowing a camera from the Geo. Heyn Co. in Omaha. The shots were made by walking to the sites, riding the electric cars when he could, and, sometimes Mr. Frank took him with his horse and buggy. “This order really gave me a start for the people who were investing money in this western project ordered prints from time to time and that went on for ten years. The men with silk hats used to come down and sit around in my little studio ordering views.”

Then in the fall of 1888 a National Guard Encampment west of town drew a Harper’s magazine representative. J. A. Finch, who came to photograph the officers and groups. With his assistance Mr. Anderson used a larger 16x20 camera but explained later that he used a kit to cut the negatives down to 14x17. He sold over 100 of these prints for $1.00. Mr. Anderson was ambitious and filled his home with literature on improving the mind and oneself. A perfectionist and diligent in all his endeavors, he sometimes worked through the night, especially at holiday time. From 1808 Central Avenue the studio was moved to 2111 Central where it remained for 14 years.

The artwork displayed/created here are based on and the accompanying prints are courtesy of the Buffalo County Historical Society/Trails & Rails Museum.

From this collection at BCHS/Trails & Rails Museum, these photographs are Alfred T. Anderson’s first commission through George W. Frank’s efforts to bring early investment into Kearney in the early 1890s.