

Poor Farm

Some background information about the Poor Farm

Location: Go four miles east of Kearney to Poole Road (Buda School corner). Turn north and go four miles. The farm was located on the northwest corner of that intersection

Poor Farms were **the forerunner of welfare and care homes**. They were owned and operated by the county. Buffalo County's Poor Farm was **established in 1878** when 160 acres was purchased in Center Township. Later another 80 acres on the north was added. Livestock and crops were raised and the inmates were expected to help with the farming. Inmates were there because they **could not support themselves because of ill health or had no visible means of support or no relatives** who would take responsibility for them.

There was a **3-story [counting the basement] house** on the farm with the dining room in the basement, sitting room on second floor and sleeping rooms on third floor. Plans for house were drawn by an architect who designed it so it could be doubled in size by building a mirror image. The second half was never constructed. I saw the plans once among papers the archives got when the move was made from the old court house to the new one, but don't know where it is now.

From the *Hub*, 1889

The poor farm building was erected by W. T. Scott, contractor and D. B. Marston, Frank Rice, H. H. Bowie [on county board of supervisors from Logan Township] and W. J. Stearns. The building is located on an elevation, the north side of the farm overlooking the Platte Valley. It is a very comfortable frame building two stories and brick basement. The entire building is neatly furnished and will accommodate the county poor very comfortably. There is **also a barn** on the premises.

Kearney Daily Hub - Oct. 24, 1889

Superintendent of Poor Farm

The county board of supervisors this afternoon elected Mr. Powers, of Logan Township, as superintendent of the poor farm at the salary of \$750 per annum. Supervisors Benschote, Killbie, and Bohrer were candidates.

W. A. Downing, P. Frame and S. T. Trott are the committee in charge of the poor farm and are invested with the power to discharge the superintendent for just cause.

The building will be furnished as soon as possible and is expected to be ready for occupancy in about three weeks time.

Kearney Daily Hub - Oct. 4, 1893

Mrs. Anna Francis, aged 77 years, died at the poor farm Sunday of old age.

Kearney Daily Hub - Jan. 22, 1896

Poor committee reported to Co. Board that superintendent and his estimable lady were well adapted to their positions, the inmates well cared for, supplied with food, clean beds, and

everything needed to make their stay as pleasant as possible in an institution. The stock on the farm was in good condition and well cared for.

Kearney Daily Hub - July 10, 1900

Henry Downer, of Grant Township, was elected superintendent of the poor farm by the Co. Board

Kearney Daily Hub – Oct. 15, 1901

At a meeting of the County Board of Supervisors

“Roe made a report on disappearance of Mike Murphy from poor farm August 13 and subsequent search by himself and Sheriff Funk, but nothing had been heard from him since last seen immediately afterward when passing the Snaveley place on Wood River. Report O. K.’d by Sheriff Sunk. [Funk, Sunk, which was correct????]

Kearney Daily Hub – Oct, 12, 1905

Mr. Downer was superintendent of the poor farm. He had just finished threshing.

A January 1909 report to the county board had six men and one woman living there. A 1909 Gibbon newspaper article reported four inmates living there but in harder times there were more.

Kearney Daily Hub – Jan 21, 1910 – County Board was going to inspect the Poor Farm. There was talk of disposing of the property and using the proceeds to build a combined home for the poor and a hospital. The house at the poor farm is not well suited because it is two story with bedrooms on the 2nd floor and dining room on the 1st floor. Those living there have to be assisted down the stairs at meal times.

Kearney Daily Hub – Feb 23, 1910 – Article gives an itemized inventory of what is at the poor farm. There were three inmates.

Kearney Daily Hub – 1914

The secretary of the State Board of Charities and Corrections reported on a tour of inspection of the Buffalo County jail and poor farm....

The poor farm had 240 acres about 10 miles northeast of the city, on which was a large, practically three-story building. The basement was used as a kitchen and dining room. There were four rooms in the basement and six on each of the other two floors. The building was not in good repair with plastering coming off, and was badly in need of paint both inside and out. The county furnished everything used on the farm. The inspector recommended that the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors should tear down the building and build a smaller and more convenient house, one not to exceed two stories at most. He said, "it is a mistake to have a poor farm building of three or four stories, unless an elevator is used. It is hard enough for anyone to climb two or three flights of stairs, much more so for the people usually found at the poor farm.”

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KEARNEY WOMAN'S CLUB by Dorothy S. Wilson

...At a meeting in 1921 a report was made on the county poor farm where pasture land was rented at \$5.00 an acre, and cultivated land for one-third of the crop. The county poor were cared for at the WCTU Hospital at \$6.00 per week for nursing care. The Woman's Club made donations of bedding and food.

Kearney Daily Hub, Saturday, April 3, 1920

Women Anxious to Sell County Farm

Want Relocate Home for County Charges in City

Women of Kearney expect to be ready of submit to the Buffalo county board of supervisors, at their next regular meeting, a petition signed by five hundred voters, asking the board to take such steps as are necessary to dispose of poor farm acreage and buildings thereon. Sale of the poor farm must be let to a vote of the people and a special election for that purpose can be called only if approved by five hundred voters petitioning for a referendum election on the issue.

All patients and inmates at the county farm have long since been removed to the W. T. C. U. hospital here where they are cared for under a contract entered into between the board and the hospital management. Now the farm and buildings are standing idle and the women taking up the disposal movement are anxious that this step be taken, preparatory to the erection of a suitable place for looking after county charges, either in Kearney or some other central point.

It has been learned that the women, if the poor farm property can be disposed of, will recommend that money derived from such a sale will be used toward the purchase of another building to house county charges, or erection of such home if necessary and in addition the location and operation of a home for incorrigible boys. The entire proposal is expected to be told before the board shortly

The Poor Farm was **closed about 1920**. It was rented out as farm until the land was sold in 1958 to help pay for the new jail.

Kearney Women's Club

A history written by Dorothy Wilson

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Poor Farm Cemetery

According to different sources there are **33 burials or maybe 17 or maybe 11** in this cemetery. As far as we know, there are no records of burials. The only other way of finding out who was buried there is from newspaper articles and obituaries. These so far have yielded **descriptions of 5 burials**.

About **1997** an **effort was made to locate and identify abandoned cemeteries** in Buffalo County and apply to the County Board so that the county, according to state law, would be responsible for at least the mowing of them. **A granite monument identifying the Poor Farm Cemetery was erected the next year. The engraving on the monument reads, "Poor Farm/ Cemetery/ 1878/ Eternal Peace/ Erected 1998".**

The cemetery is located on the **west side of Poole Road a half mile north of the 92nd Road** intersection. A row of a half dozen or so trees mark the western boundary of the cemetery, Poole Road runs along the east side, and a dirt lane providing access to the fields there runs along the south side. The granite monument has been positioned in the center of this rectangle. There are **no tombstones or grave markers except one by a tree** about 12 feet west and 15 feet north of the monument. This is a **cement slab about 15 inches wide with the name ABE which was apparently scratched into the wet cement.**

The cemetery had been **mowed** within the last couple of weeks or so of the time we visited the site on 6-29-2002. With the lack of rain it was hard to tell just how long ago it had been mowed but the brome grass had not grown much.

Known Burials – those six we know of from newspaper death notices or obituaries

Elizabeth Rice – March 1903. 68 years old. Had a nephew at Litchfield who would not take her remains there for burial.

Lewis Snurr – November 1903. A peddler well-known in the county

Fisher (no first name) – April 1904. Stabbed himself in chest. Admitted in Oct. 1903, a stranger on his way to California when he became physically and mentally ill

John Harrison – January 1908. From Pleasanton but no kinfolk

John Satin (Seaton) – Native of Ireland. Gibbon Methodist minister did his service although he had been Presbyterian in his earlier days.

Kearney Daily Hub – Oct. 4, 1893

---**Mrs. Anna Francis**, aged 77 years, died at the poor farm Sunday of old age.

From book of Death Records, 1917 in Archives

--- **Alexander Morrow**, died July 10, 1917, age 78, from Poor Farm, did day labor. Cause of death was suicide by hanging himself in the barn with a rope. Born in Ohio, buried in Poor Farm cemetery on June 12, 1917.