



Nebraska's Unsung Heroes (Prize Stories of 1939)

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

This article is copyrighted by History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society). You may download it for your personal use.

For permission to re-use materials, or for photo ordering information, see:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/re-use-nshs-materials>

Learn more about *Nebraska History* (and search articles) here:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

History Nebraska members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* annually:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/get-involved/membership>

Full Citation: "Nebraska's Unsung Heroes (Prize Stories of 1939)," *Nebraska History* 20 (1939): 7-37

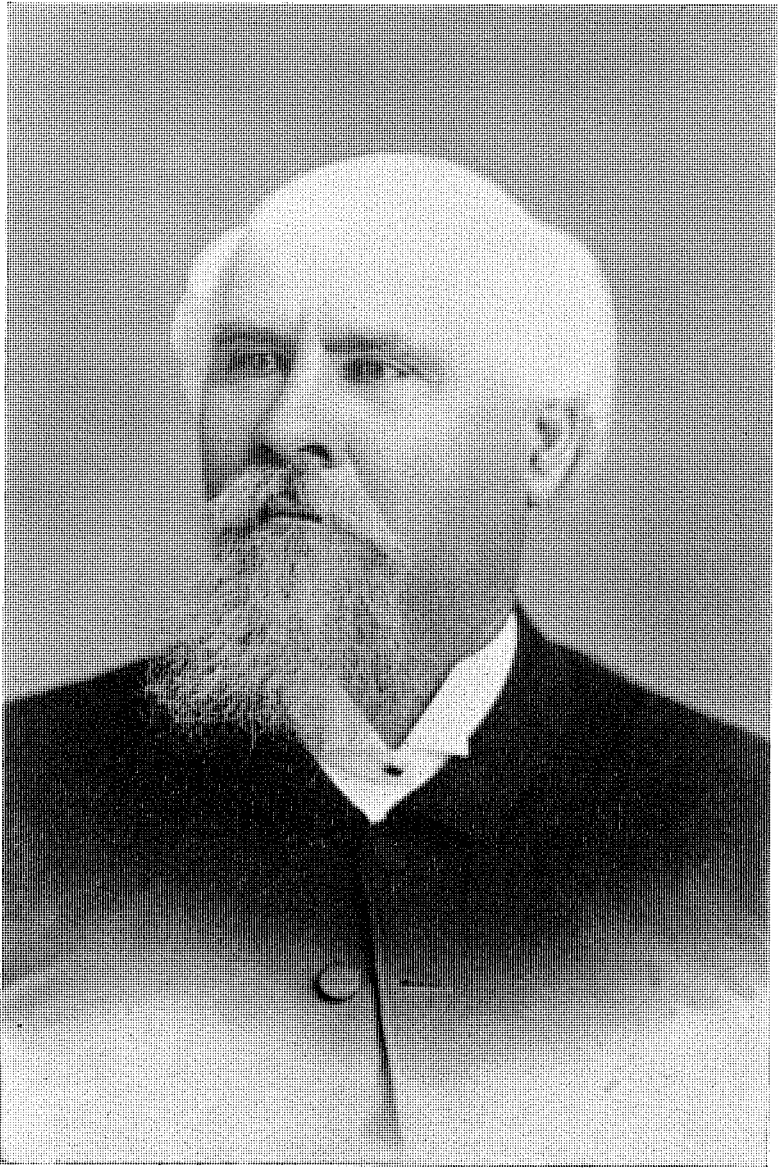
Prize Stories: I. "Charles Wesley Wells," by Mrs. William Whithorn (First Prize)

II. "John Longnecker," by Thomas P Beall (Second Prize)

III. "Jacob Adriance," by Irene Hamilton Scott (Third Prize)

Cataloging Information:

Photographs / Images: Charles Wesley Wells; John Longnecker (2 views); Jacob Adriance (2 views); Adriance's home and the site of his first church services, both in Colorado



CHARLES WESLEY WELLS

Nebraska's Unsung Heroes

I. Charles Wesley Wells

By MRS. WILLIAM WHITHORN, Fairfield*

O for a faith that will not shrink
Though pressed by every foe,
That will not tremble on the brink
Of any earthly woe!

WILLIAM H. Bathurst's prayer for faith was consummated in the life of Charles Wesley Wells, a bearer of Methodism to early Nebraska settlers. Foregoing the comparative ease which might have been his on his Nebraska claim, Mr. Wells early chose the life of a pioneer preacher that he might calm the inner voice which chanted continually, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." He did not shirk the responsibility he felt; rather, he gave to it his strong young manhood and untiring efforts in sixty years of service among other pioneers. He filled his little sphere substantially and is lovingly remembered by those whose lives he touched. But those are passing on, and graves are silent of their occupants' recollections. Therefore, to Charles Wesley Wells we dedicate this brief story of "an unsung hero," that in the annals of Nebraska history his labor for God's kingdom may be recorded.

Born in Johnson County, Iowa, June 28, 1841, Charles Wesley Wells, after moving with his parents several times, first came to Nebraska at the age of twenty-one. In the fall of 1863 the Wells family took a claim in Gage County near Beatrice. The father built the first dwelling in that place, and as a local preacher he became the first pastor there. On their claim they shared the fate dealt all homesteaders by the dry weather, hot winds, and grasshoppers. There, too,

* Winner of First Prize in 1939 Contest, Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska.

Mr. Wells married Miss Amelia Potts of Beatrice on January 1, 1867. Together they sought to gain the wherewithal for a home by following the work of building the Union Pacific from Omaha to the Black Hills.* They did laundry work, cooking, and lime-burning over a period of about a year. Mrs. Wells was a strong and active woman and worked side by side with her husband. In the summer of 1869, however, she contracted the dreaded quick consumption, and died in December of that year. Heart-smitten, the young widower took his child of twenty-one months to her grandparents' home near Beatrice. Of the feelings of that period of his life, Mr. Wells wrote:

"My cherished hopes are now all gone;
My bosom friend hath flown
To find and wear her golden crown,
And left me all alone.
No, not alone: my babe is here—
No mother's love to know,
And I must live her heart to cheer
While struggling here below."

Life was hard and lonely for the young man. He wanted a companion and wished that he might be with his child. On August 13, 1873, he married Miss Mary Stacy of Edgar and took his little daughter Amy home.

Theirs were the lives of a pioneer minister's family. They moved as Conference decreed and sought always to win for God the people they met. Trials and hardships were theirs, but they likewise shared the compensation of a realization of duty done. Four sons were born to the union, but three of them died as small children. With saddened hearts the parents laid the little ones to rest at various stations along their way.

In 1901 the Reverend Charles Wells was appointed to Ong, and there he and his family made their home until his death on March 8, 1927. Although he had left his work at three different times because of a voice ailment, he had spent sixty of his eighty-five years in the ministry. Mr. Wells

* "The Black Hills" here mentioned is the range west of Cheyenne in Wyoming—not the more familiar range in South Dakota. —*Editor.*

was an active student throughout his life, and until a very short time before his death he preached funeral sermons and rendered many other services to the church. His community felt the severe loss of a "singularly lovable man, having the good will of even those wrongdoers whose actions he denounced, but whose souls he loved."*

Mr. Wells' death marked the end of three-quarters of a century of a life lived as a Christian, for as a lad of ten he had been converted, joining the Methodist Episcopal church at that time. Seven years later his church granted him an exhorter's license, and in that capacity he worked toward satisfying his call to the ministry. The call was very strong and he felt that refusing meant the loss of his soul. "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!" ever sounded in his ears. In 1867 he was granted a local preacher's license at Blue Springs, Nebraska, and in that office he did preaching in different localities, traveling on foot six and seven miles through the dust and under a scorching sun to some of his appointments. But his call meant more. He felt that only by giving all of his time to the ministry could his mind be put at ease.

Records of the 1871 Nebraska Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church list C. W. Wells as one of eight admitted on trial that year, and show that he was appointed to "Fair Berry." The following year he was one of the six continued on trial and was returned to Red Cloud, to which town he had been transferred during the previous year. Of Mr. Wells' willingness to accept the decrees of those in whose hands he had placed himself, John B. Maxfield, presiding elder, wrote in his conference report: "Like a true soldier who has taken upon himself vows, he no sooner learned my wishes than he mounted his horse and 'moved to the front.' God's blessing rests upon men who shake hands with ease and comfort, bidding their friends farewell, and, taking their lives in their hands, thus go forth bearing precious seed. I need not add that he has been eminently successful, for 'God was with him' and he must needs succeed."

* *Bladen Enterprise*, March, 1927.

The conference in 1873 saw this "disciple of the Cross" ordained deacon and assigned to the Lyons Circuit. And the succeeding conferences found him sent to new places distant from his parents and former friends. But with his wife and daughter he joyfully sought new followers for Christ in whatever outpost of Zion the appointive powers saw fit to send him. Eighteen months of service at Lyons (the conference changed from spring to fall) saw a removal to Riverton. Norfolk, Oakdale, Albion and Schuyler followed in yearly succession. Bishop Gilbert Haven in 1875 ordained him elder. Then in 1881 came a transfer to the North Nebraska Conference, where he labored for three years. The years of '83 and '84 found him back in southern Nebraska supplying the Edgar Circuit, which included Clay Center and Glenville. Everywhere he worked the presiding elder reported favorably of his labor and example as a minister of the gospel.

The Conference Minutes of 1887 show that Mr. Wells was reentered into the conference in full connection. Then followed five years of service at Davenport, the people earnestly requesting his return year after year. The success of his work there is recorded in the District Superintendent's words: "Davenport is one of the most spiritual charges we have in the district."

Belvidere was his next appointment and there he served one year. Ten more years he gave to the work as supernumerary preacher—one not employed for regular service but in case of need. The need for Wells in the work and his need for the work were strong, however. Ong was his field of endeavor during most of this time, though he also supplied at Strang, Angus and Oak in various years.

The Conference of 1903 offered Mr. Wells the garland of service well rendered. He became superannuated. Residing at Ong, however, he continued his work. Until 1908 no other minister was appointed to Ong. C. W. Wells "supplied," even managing in 1907 the removal of a church building some twelve miles as a nucleus around which to gather a strong band of Methodists.

But through the years of younger ministers' trials in Ong Mr. Wells remained faithful to the cause and gave his staunch support to that which was right. During 1913 when the appointed minister resigned, this old soldier of the Cross responded to the request of his people and served out the year.

September, 1920, found the septuagenarian attending the conference held in Omaha. His spirit was strong in the work. And the year he passed his eighty-fifth birthday the conference moved closer to his home (Hastings) and he again answered roll. That was the last time, for when conference season came again, C. W. Wells had responded to God's roll call. His wife, always a co-worker with him in his ministry, willingly enduring the hardships and privations of those days—the grasshoppers, droughts, and meager stipends that were the experience of most early toilers—outlived him by seven years. His two children, Mrs. Amy Hughes and Frank Wells, residents of Hastings and Harvard respectively, are still living.

Preaching the gospel in the days of Nebraska's early statehood meant more than is conveyed by mere words. Above all, it meant self-denial and an uncomplaining yielding to the lot of all pioneers. David Marquette in his *History of Nebraska Methodism* remarks: "C. W. Wells, . . . who was one of the most faithful and efficient pioneer preachers we have had, received from the people for the first seven years of his work less than an average of \$175 a year. His experience could be matched by scores of others." The preacher's own records for his second year of labor show \$132 as the amount received. He was single then, but when married he fared little better—in 1877 he was paid \$159, and most of that was in commodities. In 1876 he reported only \$30 in money. The pioneer preacher and cash met but seldom.

Yet the missionary never complained for lack of cash; his parishioners seldom had more. And "the frontier preachers of Nebraska are used to Indians, buffaloes, elk, deer, antelopes, turkeys, prairie dogs, grasshoppers, bedbugs, fleas and sod houses," as Wells himself enumerated the inconveniences he encountered. Early in his ministry he learned that to succeed as a Methodist preacher in a new country he must

have "get, grit, and grace" and fear neither "debt, dust, nor devil." And our friend possessed those qualities, for he was the one sent when the presiding elder said he needed someone with "sand in his craw." His companion was likewise endowed with the qualities necessary for that life; she reported having had "a very nice time" teaching the sod Star School south of Ong when not bothered by either rain or snakes. The roof was neither rain-proof nor snake-proof, and sometimes boards were laid in the "soddy" to keep the children out of the mud. But, both of them possessing the energy and love of God necessary for successful pastoral work, they became endeared to the hearts of all with whom they worked.

Preaching has always required much study, but Mr. Wells carried a double burden on that score. At some places he was required to preach to lawyers, doctors and school teachers, all of whom had had better early advantages than had he. Thus, feeling the need of further study of elementary branches of learning along with his conference studies, the situation impelled him to do double work. Nor was studying easy. The atmosphere created by cold rooms, single-room sod houses, and large families which he might find at places where he boarded, was not conducive to such work. But he plodded on. He tells of poring over his books many times as snow sifted through the roof, so that he was compelled to throw something across his shoulders and bend low over the books to keep them from being soiled.

Such was the life of an early Nebraska preacher. But all those things that look like hardships were external factors, which, if the heart is right, cannot touch the inner happiness and satisfaction gained. On his very early work at Red Cloud Mr. Wells looked back with affection as he recalled preaching at the house of "Brother Knight"—a house covered with poles and dirt and with a floor of native soil. There they "sang, prayed, preached, ate and slept, all in the same room, and had a glorious good time." At another appointment on the circuit the winter services were held in a dugout on the creek bank, whereas in summer the people worshiped under the branches of two large oaks. Under those trees Mr. Wells preached, held Sunday School and helped make the woods

and hills ring with songs of praise and plain gospel sermons. Years later he said: "I often wonder if the echo of my voice is not still heard in that new country." It was with a thrill of joy, too, that he recalled being preacher in a country where the first persons ever baptised in the Republican River were those converted at one of his early revivals. He remembered well the many happy hours spent among the warm-hearted early settlers in dugouts and sod houses.

But to infer that the early pioneer minister was always greeted with open arms is misleading. The Wells' reception at Norfolk was an example of the direct opposite. There being no railroads in that region, he had taken his wife and children the three days' journey in the buggy, hiring their goods taken through by team. Arriving before the goods, they could not set up housekeeping, and they asked directions to the home of "Brother G." (at the time a steward in the Methodist church) with whom they had been told they could stay. But "Brother G." showed by every action that the new preacher was not welcome even to the circuit, much less to his home. Because of his wife and sick babe, Mr. Wells strove to overlook the outright unkindness displayed by the family in eating alone after the minister's family had eaten, even though there was an abundance of both room and dishes. But when Mr. and Mrs. Wells returned from town the next day and saw Mrs. G. wading through mud toward a neighbor's to escape being home when they came back, and when they found their things piled on the porch and the house locked as against a thief, they knew that the unkindness could not have been imaginary. Mr. Wells said that was one of the greatest trials of his life—being turned away from the home, not of an enemy but of one who should have been his best friend, with but little money, a very sick child, and no shelter from the night. However, back in town they found a real friend of the church who gave them a royal welcome, and the general kindness with which the whole parish received them was, they believed, heightened by Brother G's inhospitality.

Beneath all the hard surface there was romance in the life. Mr. Wells and Miss Stacy first met at the Star School, which she taught, when he went there to help a local preacher

conduct revival meetings. And from that meeting blossomed a happy companionship, one which had its beginning almost entirely in letters.

There was pathos in his life, too, in the many heart rending experiences such as one he described.

"One day, on my way to town, I drove down to the edge of the water, and saw, in the middle of the stream, a forlorn-looking woman in a covered wagon without a team. I called and asked if she wished to be taken across. She answered: 'The wagon is fast in the sand. My husband has gone to town for help to take it out, and I can't leave, for my dead baby is here with me.' It was a sad sight, that mother, alone with her dead in the middle of the river!"

There was tragic humor in his life, too, in an experience that was his in a doctor's home. The medical man, though not a Christian, wanted a minister to come when he was seriously ill. After a long conversation the doctor asked that Mr. Wells pray. But the wife, not expecting to die at that time, wanted no praying in the house. Though she said nothing, the preacher "could see that she was not in a praying mood." While he knelt beside her husband she went about the house attending to her work, banging everything that was capable of being banged. But the Lord heard through all the banging and the man became well, only to forget his sick-bed vows and go back to serving the devil.

Again there was humor, yet embarrassment to this young minister, when he found it necessary to support a drunken woman away from the house where he was the only man present. While at dinner in the Lincoln home where he was entertained during Conference, the woman had come to the door making complaint about something that happened to her. In a moment she dropped down on the doorstep and lay there as if dead. The lady of the house tried to persuade her to get up and go home; when that failed, Mr. Wells threatened to call the police. Her feeble attempts to rise solicited his pity and he helped her to her feet, but finding her unable to stand alone he had to help her home. "How mortified I felt," he exclaimed, "walking beside a miserable, drunken woman, and passing respectable people who knew nothing

of the circumstances! As soon as she was in a chair in her own room, I left the house about as fast as a preacher ever gets away from any place, meanwhile looking about to see if anyone was watching me."

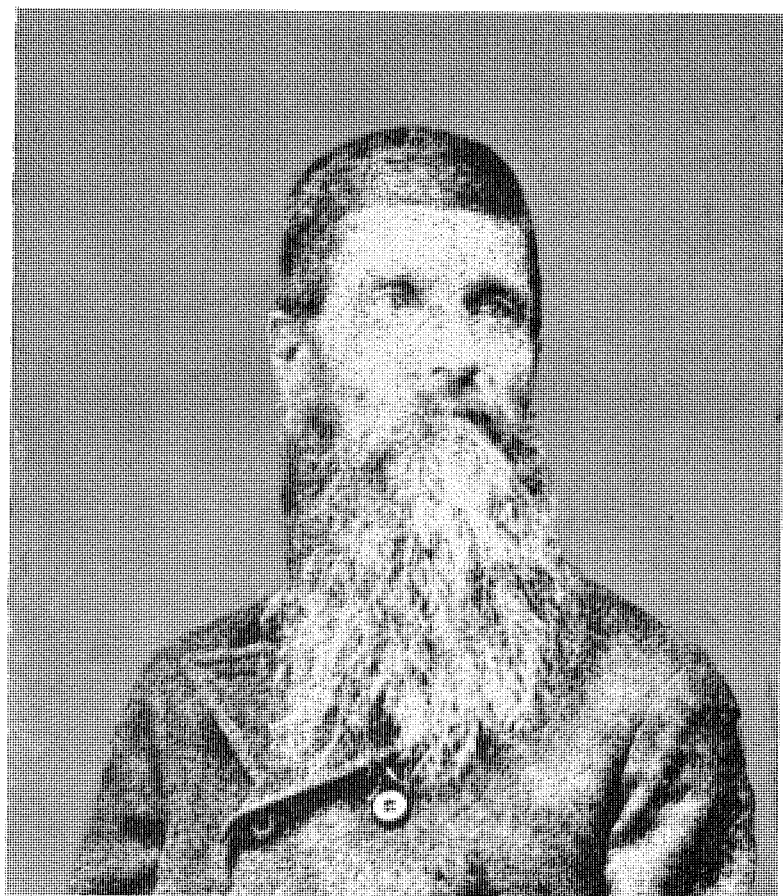
Pioneering in those early days was hard. The itinerant had no trailer-house to ease his way. Mr. Wells, without even a tent, once went with his family for a week's camp-meeting in an improvised abode fashioned of a header box and a cloth. Yes, pioneering had its difficulties, but there was a thrill in being the subject of a remark like this: "No matter how high the river is, Brother Wells will cross if he has to take a pony under each arm and swim over." All these experiences rounded out the life and character of Charles Wesley Wells.

In his own words Mr. Wells expressed his satisfaction with his lot as carrier of the gospel to the frontier: "Yet there is a glory in laying the foundation of our beloved Zion in a new country that many Eastern preachers know nothing of. I have no disposition to envy the comparatively easy lot of our Eastern brethren; but I do sympathize with them in their loss of the glory there is in laying the foundation of our Church in new fields, upon which others may build."

As Mr. Wells looked back over his ministry in his closing years, he found more comfort in calling to mind the places where he had laid the foundation for his "beloved Zion" than in thinking of communities he had later served. Laboring at the outposts, he felt, brought a richer reward than did laboring in fields of ease. "I have learned by experience," he said, "that the darkest clouds have the brightest lining."

Could Charles Wesley look back upon his namesake he would be proud of God's servant who carried on Methodism. He might well look over the record of the Reverend Charles Wesley Wells and credit him with

"A faith that shines more bright and clear
When tempests rage without;
That when in danger knows no fear,
In darkness feels no doubt."



JOHN LONGNECKER

This picture of a fine pioneer layman-farmer is used in preference to a more modern photo in our files. Speckled and worn, it belongs to the period. Understanding eyes will read the character of the man through the patina of time.

II. John Longnecker

By THOMAS P. BEALL

It was in the summer of 1898. I had been recently "discharged" from one of the small colleges in Nebraska, and, thinking perhaps that Greeley's advice might still be good. I wandered as far west as McCook, then a young, thriving railroad town.

Upon my arrival there I became acquainted with a congenial traveling salesman who frequently drove a little bay horse to a two-seated runabout and made the small towns around McCook as the representative of a wholesale grocery firm in Omaha. On my first Sunday morning in the village I was asked by my friend to take a ride into the country. As there seemed to be an excellent prospect for a pleasant day, I accepted the offer with eagerness and delight. We followed a more or less zigzag course into the northeast, viewing on either side of the road vast stretches of prairie pastureland and an occasional field of corn or wheat.

The end of the journey was a little church located on rising ground. As we moved along the weed-bordered and grass-grown road with deeply cut wheel tracks, the church, on the corner of an acreage enclosed by a wire fence, came clearly into view. Numerous wagons and buggies of various descriptions almost completely encompassed the premises. The horses were tied to hitching posts that were quite close together. Children were leaving the building as we drove up, which indicated to us that the Sunday school had been dismissed. As we entered the church we observed that it was well filled and that all was very quiet. The minister stepped to the platform at the farther end of the room, and services were begun by the announcement of a hymn which the congregation took up at once. The text of the sermon that morn-

* Winner of Second Prize in 1939 Contest, Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska.

ing was from Mark 4:38: "And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow; and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?"

At the close of the services there was a period of cordial greetings and handshaking, during which time I was introduced to a large number of men and women. It was apparently pre-arranged that my friend and I should be entertained for dinner at "Brother Longnecker's" home, about a mile from the church in a southeasterly direction. As I recall quite clearly now, after the passing of more than forty years, the residence was of modern architecture and seemed newly painted. The grounds were exceedingly well kept for a country home at this time and in this part of the West.

In the living room we were welcomed by a very gracious lady, our hostess. There I was introduced to the four sons, all in their early twenties, and to the two daughters who were still in their teens. The family of eight were all at Sunday school and church that morning. This, indeed, was the usual custom.

A few moments only were free for casual observation. Evidences of culture and refinement were seen on every hand. The furnishings were modest but in good taste. Well chosen paintings and pictures were artistically arranged; book cases were filled with standard literature; current periodicals lay invitingly on the tables.

As we repaired to the dining room and were seated at the long table, questions came to me as to the probable frequency of meeting other such groups, and how it could be possible to find so much of courtesy and true hospitality in an environment far removed from the ideal. Here at the head of the table sat the host, Mr. Longnecker, a man of less than average height and build, with abundant hair and a full beard just turning grey; keen, alert eyes, and of deliberate and correct speech. The hostess, a woman of more than ordinary intelligence, used the mother tongue correctly and elegantly but with a strong Southern accent. The sons and daughters, as they sat almost silent around the table, deported themselves with true manly and womanly behavior. And it was at once apparent, too, that upon an especial occasion there

was no prearranged procedure or conduct which departed essentially from their daily custom. When the minister offered a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing, and while each bowed the head reverently, one knew that here was a family group, the members of which were bound by an unusually strong spiritual tie.

John Longnecker was born at Mayslick, Madison County, Kentucky, March 16, 1844. He became a Christian early in life. In his youth and early manhood he was strong and vigorous of body, and ambitious. Indeed, only such were able to survive the strenuous life of the later Western pioneer. He responded to the lure of a developing empire and determined to be one of those who would blaze a new trail. He reached Nebraska City in the fall of 1871, where a company was being formed for the purpose of making settlements "somewhere" in the Republican Valley. Comprising the party that went forth to file for a homestead or to lay out a town-site were John Roberts, J. F. Black, W. W. W. Jones (later a state superintendent of schools), John Longnecker, L. W. Sitler, William Byfield, Frank Usher, William McKinney, J. M. Davis, and Lathrop Ellis, a surveyor. These names are well known to the historian of Red Willow County.

The party left Nebraska City November 9, 1871, by way of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad (now the C. B. & Q.), arriving at Sutton November 10. The overland journey was begun the next day; and, after encountering a severe snowstorm, they arrived at the mouth of Red Willow Creek on November 22. Mr. Longnecker filed for his homestead the northwest quarter of section nine, township three, north; range twenty-eight west of the sixth principal meridian, in what later became Red Willow County, Nebraska.

Mr. Longnecker then returned to his home in Kentucky and married Miss Katherine Owens, of a prominent Kentucky family, on February 2, 1872. She had received the usual education of the cultured families of that day and possessed the well-known hospitable nature of Southern women. At this time she was less than the average in stature and build, and of not too strong a physique—for the rigors of a pioneer life.

These two adventurers left their homes in Kentucky on April 13, 1872, by way of Cincinnati and St. Joseph, arriving at Nebraska City on April 28, where they remained for eighteen days. Here preparations were made for the wagon journey of three hundred miles westward. The route selected was by way of Lincoln, the Platte Valley, Old Fort Kearny, and a trail across the divide between the Platte and Republican rivers.

Of this slow, wearisome, perilous journey, the Longnecker's left an almost daily record. The seemingly limitless stretches of uninhabited and uncharted prairie, the constant fear of Indians, and the frequent and unmistakable evidence along the way of famine and death were supreme tests of the courage of those who ventured into this strange land. "The newness of everything was unpleasantly prominent," states the record. "The idea of the immensity of it all . . . was impressed by the ever-lengthening prairie—a suggestion of Eternity; the sun seeming to drop suddenly out of sight, and the twilight changing to nightfall, with stars so bright but so far off." This closing scene of the evening "subdued reason," and the "nerves were made to feel the power" of an enveloping darkness and loneliness.

These two young people, leaving home and kindred for an untried experience in a new land, possessed strong elements of Christian faith. Their journey put to the test the genuineness of that faith; and the record shows that on their way to a promised land they succeeded in grounding so strongly a trust in God that it endured to the end of their earthly careers. His daughter Katherine wrote to me: "When food and clothing were very scarce, father did not know how he was going to make things go. He put his faith in God and talked to Him, saying, 'Father, if you do not help me I do not know how I shall get along.' It was this wonderful childlike faith that helped his children all through life." I quote again from the record: "Our motto in starting out was to take everything as it came to us and make the best of it." That was perfect faith in God.

"The next day we came to our 'claim'— and pitched our tent on our Canaan." This was on May 29, 1872. There,

various happy and unhappy incidents took place during their abode in tent and dugout for more than a year. Later they lived in a sod house and then in a log house, but the faithful chronicler says: "Yet these were happy days because we loved each other." That was striking a balance between the hardships, fears, uncertainties, hopes, failures, the keen spirit of adventure, a strong desire for success, faith in an omniscient being, and a love for each other! The balance proved not to be in the red!

The first Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Red Willow County was organized in July, 1873, in the shade of the trees around the Longnecker dugout home. For many years, this group of Christian people met in the widely scattered sod houses and dugouts. "One of the delightful recollections," says the record, "is of the meetings held on the Lord's day in tent and dugout, in sod houses and under arbors, where some sick soul would be cheered and comforted by thoughts of the loved ones in the old homes. . . . They realized that

'Though sundered far, by faith we meet
Around one common mercy seat.'

Mr. Longnecker and others soon felt the need of a permanent place of worship. Their efforts and sacrifices resulted in the erection, in 1884, of the frame church building already mentioned. Here many protracted meetings were held by ministers and evangelists of the Christian church in Nebraska. Hundreds became Christians as the result of these meetings and the preaching of the gospel. There was little regular preaching in the church or pastoral work among the members. The elders and deacons would conduct the services, including observance of the communion, and in this way the work of the church was carried on. The Bible school and the Christian Endeavor society were strong religious forces that held together the older people as well as the younger members. In that community, which extended over a considerable territory, the Christianizing influence of the little church on the hill was definite and far-reaching; and the Christian people who sustained and fostered this one social institution in their midst were grounded in an abiding faith. As one of their

number remarked: "You can always tell the Red Willow young people—their Christian training stands out prominently in their characters. The power of their consecration is shown in their lives. After marriage they have carried their devotion to the church wheresoever they have gone."

For more than a year I was a frequent visitor at the Longnecker home. The domestic atmosphere was not one of sanctimoniousness or weighted with the odors of small gossip. Nor was religion the alpha and the omega of conversation; but the essence of Christian teaching seemed to emanate naturally and unobtrusively as a blessing to be felt and appreciated. The very hospitality of the household—the at-home feeling that one had, and the absence of any assumption of superiority—was the secret power that flowed forth to do good, enhancing respect for religion and faith in God.

Mr. Longnecker was a close student of the Scriptures. He had allied himself with what has been called the "restoration movement," which embodies the objectives of a union of Christian believers as they were in apostolic times: the rejection of human creeds for the divine creed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" the acceptance of immersion as the only baptism and of the New Testament as containing the essentials of Christian teaching. He readily permitted the great scholars of the "reformation" to help him in the understanding of divine truth. The works of Alexander Campbell, profound scholar and eminent preacher, and the writings of James W. McGarvey, noted educator and critic, were his favorites. He kept himself informed upon the current trend of thought in social and political matters as well as in religious affairs. *The Christian Standard*, one of the foremost religious journals of the church, he had read since its founding by Isaac Errett in 1866.

But Mr. Longnecker invariably entered upon a controversial discussion with reluctance, and always refrained from doing so unless urged, seeming to feel that he might be misunderstood in trying to force an acceptance of his own particular interpretation or belief. His sense of tolerance was marked. His conversation was always enlightening; and in a group, whether in the home or in the harvest field, men

would stop to listen with respect and confidence, and go away with a feeling of increased friendliness and regard that seemed lasting. In this way, without any apparent consciousness of doing a good deed, or of saying a kind word, or of offering a substantial piece of advice, his contacts with people counted for righteousness. His daughter wrote to me: "Father and mother were looked upon as examples of sterling character and fine Christian faith."

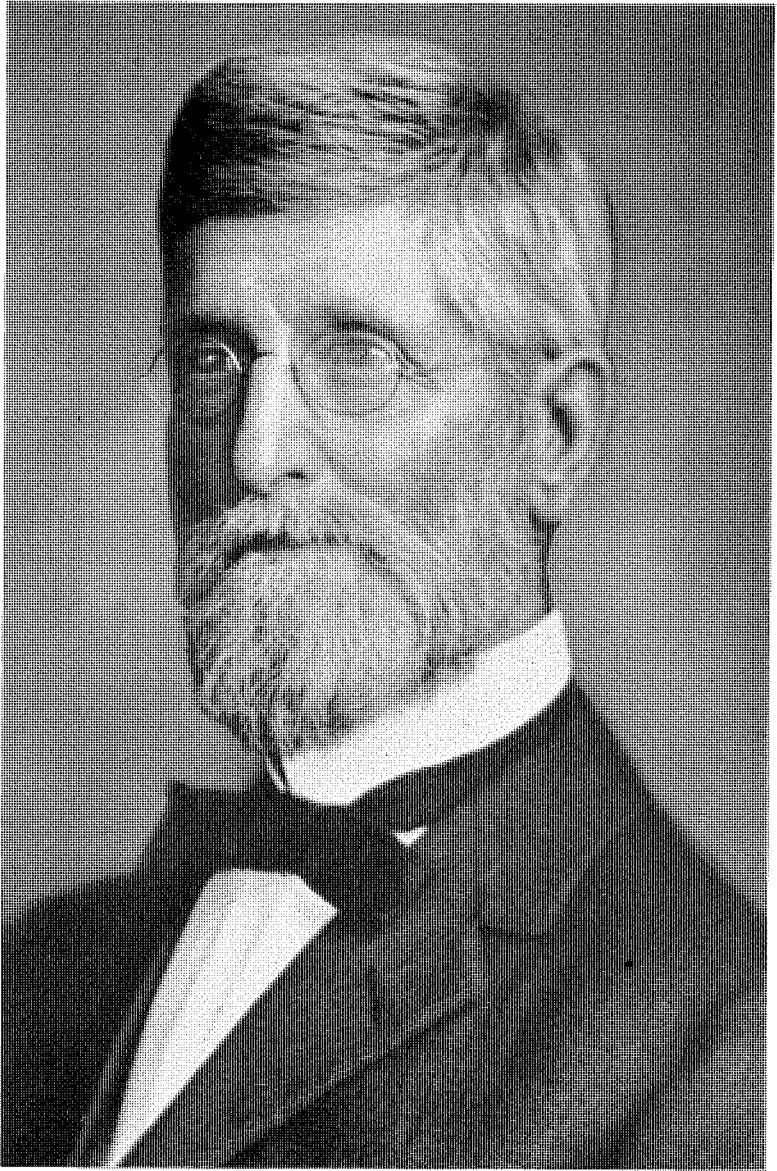
During the years subsequent to the period of my acquaintance with this family, my course of life carried me into association with people of many communities. In these various groups were found many examples of the true faith, but scattered through them with discouraging frequency, like the tares in a field of grain, were discovered people with only the semblance of a substantial trust in either natural or revealed religion. It was truly heartening, therefore, to have discovered a community that was conspicuously exceptional, both in the number of men and women who were devoted to the church, and in the genuineness of their faith in religion. In many circumscribed sections in Nebraska groups of religious people are to be found which have increased in number from the original nuclei and have always been predominantly spiritual, but the Red Willow neighborhood owed its origin and growth to people of various forms and degrees of religious faith or of no apparent faith at all. This was not the exception but rather the rule in pioneer settlements. In the vast majority of communities it remained for the few who were especially endowed to scatter seed of the good news and to cultivate the tender plant of the church. In those areas when a definite and aggressive force for righteousness was lacking, people remained apathetic towards the refining and uplifting influences of Christianity. During the early days, fortunate indeed was that community which possessed a few whose faith and devotion to the church were as "a little leaven" that "leaveneth the whole lump." And sometimes—perhaps often—much power for lasting good emanated from some quiet soul whose conception of religion or philosophy of life was not in proclaiming righteousness with sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, and in long and loud professions, but

rather in offering to a waiting world the example of an humble, trusting and helpful life.

"And so the years passed, our family growing larger by the coming of one little urchin after another, until four boys and two girls were what we contributed to the native population of Nebraska," wrote Mrs. Longnecker into the record. To begin with there was Jacob, the eldest son, who early came into the church. When still a small boy his parents gave him a little volume containing the Psalms and the New Testament. One day he carried the book with him to read while watching their cattle graze on the low hills. A prairie fire came up suddenly and the sacred scriptures were left lying in the wake of the burning prairie grass, but were afterwards recovered, bearing marks of the fire. The volume is still kept by his sister Katherine as a memento of one of little Jacob's experiences.

Jacob was always faithful in his attendance at Sunday school. When I met him on that Lord's day he was an efficient teacher in the Bible school, a Christian Endeavor leader, and a young man of exceptional promise of a continued consecrated life. He has measured up to this promise and, like his father before him, is a quiet and effective spiritual force in the community where he resides.

"George Owens," wrote his sister, "was a fine, cultured young man, hard-working and sturdy, a true friend, faithful to his Lord when called home to be with his Master." Holton, the third son, a chemist residing in Denver, Colorado, became a Christian early in life, and began to teach in the Bible school while still in his youth. He and his family are active in the work of the church. Louis Conquest, the fourth son, resides on the old farm, and has been a faithful Christian for many years. Katharine, the elder daughter, accepted Christ at the age of fourteen, became a Bible school instructor not long afterward, and by her example of a consecrated life had much influence with the young people of the community. She became a minister's wife, and with her husband, Dr. J. E. Wilson, rendered conspicuous and valiant service for a number of prominent churches in Nebraska. Gabriella Parry, the youngest of the family, now Mrs. Gabriella Smith, came



THE LAST PHOTOGRAPH OF JOHN LONGNECKER

into the church while a child and continued a faithful student of the Bible. As a young girl she appeared unusually modest and ladylike, and her quiet manner and unpretentious way set an example of Christlikeness before those with whom she was associated. She is still a member of the Red Willow community, where her life continues to be of signal service to the church.

Here then, no doubt, was a single instance out of many where a spiritually endowed soul was called from his own land and from his kindred to journey in peril and hardship to a Western Canaan. He had faith in the new empire of the West. He set his hand to the plow and did not turn back. By the side of his comrades he turned the virgin sod and helped to release a wealth, material and spiritual, that has not yet been counted. He added his strength and wisdom to the promotion of many worthy enterprises in his own community and in his State. He contributed to the cause of truth and justice among his associates. But he could not forget the souls of men. He gave freely of his substance that others in foreign lands might enjoy the blessings of Christian living. He loved his friends and neighbors so well that he did not leave them for over forty years—until his beloved companion was taken away; then he visited the land of his birth for a short time. He came back to his pioneer acres, to the scenes of his early struggles, to his children and his neighbors—for awhile. One dislikes to say good-bye to such a character—truly one of the heroes of early-day religious experience in Nebraska. He died on the old home farm near the Red Willow on November 8, 1923. His companion preceded him on July 13, 1913—perhaps no less a heroine of the pioneer days than was he a hero.



"This print," wrote Mrs. Scott, "was clipped by me from the fly-leaf of an old *History of the Elkhorn Valley*. Every line in it expresses the indomitable courage and determination of the young minister."

III. Jacob Adriance

By IRENE HAMILTON SCOTT, North Bend*

NOT all knights won their spurs in the age-old game of war; not all pioneers gained that title tilling the soil; not all history has been recorded, and not all monuments are made of granite. Strangest of all, those pioneers who most deserve the accolade of knightship were so busy at their appointed tasks that they left behind them scant written records of their achievements, and thus it is that they flit across the pages of history as shadowy figures. Indeed, if it were not for the monuments they leave, their memory would soon be lost. Ah, those monuments! They were not of stone, but of deeds, of humble self-sacrifice, of dogged endurance through hardship and sorrow and suffering, of steadfast courage in the face of physical danger. Great monuments were these and lasting; and the churches that sprang into being because once these men were here, stand yet today as living witnesses to the heroic exploits of those knights of the cross, the first circuit riders of early Nebraska history. Among these Jacob Adriance deserves a prominent place.

Jacob Adriance was born in New York state on October 22, 1835. His parents were farm people and his education began in a district school near by. His father and mother were God-fearing folk and the atmosphere of their home was one of rigid adherence to right-doing. Duty was no byword in that home. For his higher education, Jacob attended Wilson Collegiate Institution of Wilson Village, New York.

When the boy finished at Wilson, his father apprenticed him for three years to a carpenter in the village so that he might learn that trade. Little did he, or his father either, dream that he would later use the skill thus attained in the building of churches in far-away Nebraska and Colorado.

When Jacob was sixteen years of age this carpenter became the converted follower of Another Carpenter, and before

* Winner of Third Prize in 1939 Contest, Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska.

he was twenty a Divine voice called him to service. Listen to what he himself says about this call.

"It came to me, I can't say how: 'The Lord wants you to go a long way from home and preach the Gospel.' Being naturally of a retiring disposition, I said 'No, I cannot do that. I have no qualifications, such as gift of speech and education.' As I thus reasoned with myself, my mind became downcast and gloomy, but in proportion as I yielded to the conviction of duty, my mind was free and my soul peaceful."

For twelve months the boy struggled with that inner voice. Somehow he knew he was not being asked to go to a foreign field, and during the next year he reached the conclusion that he was to be a missionary in the far west of his own country. Then a most significant thing happened.

Jacob's older brother, William, planned to go to Kansas to homestead land. Shortly before William left, the father of the two boys said to his younger son: "Jacob, I have a soldier's warrant for one hundred sixty acres of land out west. This I will give you, together with \$75 in cash, and you may go west with William if you wish."

Now Jacob had never mentioned his call to anyone. His father's offer was entirely unsolicited. Was that mere coincidence, or was it God opening the way for Jacob once he had yielded?

It was a beautiful day, that seventh day of April in 1857, when the two boys left their father's home to make their own way in the world. They traveled by rail to St. Louis and by boat up the Missouri to Leavenworth, Kansas, where William became disgusted with the west and turned back. With Jacob it was different. He was not especially interested in the land anyway. Before leaving home he had looked up the date of the Kansas-Nebraska Conference in the *New York Advocate*, and knew that religious body to be in session in Nebraska City at that very time. He resolved, therefore, to continue his journey up the river to Nebraska City.

Boat travel was slow in those days and the journey seemed long to the lonely young man. Men and women were drinking, laughing, dancing; and there was he, shut out from

all of it. Right there Jacob Adriance fought his first and last battle with alcohol. He did not drink then, when tempted; he never touched a drop the rest of his life.

When the boat docked at Nebraska City, Conference had adjourned. He decided then to walk to Omaha, where the presiding elder of the area was located. He had in his pocket a local preacher's license, and with it he hoped to be appointed as assistant to some pastor.

When Presiding Elder J. M. Chivington saw the young man, he was immediately attracted to him. Chivington knew men; and certainly he made no mistake when he appointed Jacob Adriance to the De Soto Mission.

This mission was a circuit appointment, which meant that the parish was composed of several towns and included all the farmer-folk living between those towns. De Soto, Cuming City, Tekamah and Decatur comprised the field of his service, together with two or three other places known as "paper towns" because they existed only on the map. The parishioners numbered four hundred and fifty, all very poor, and the prospect of a man's receiving much salary was slim indeed. This troubled Jacob Adriance not at all.

Since the distance he had to cover between De Soto on the south end of his circuit and Decatur on the north was forty miles, his first need was a horse. To secure the horse he sold the land warrant his father had given him for one hundred and sixty-three dollars. Of this sum he spent one hundred twenty-five dollars for a good pony and twenty dollars for a saddle. Some good brother gave him a pair of saddle-bags, and thus he was able to save his remaining eighteen dollars against an emergency. These goods comprised his worldly all. Thus equipped, he set out like a knight of old, and the Holy Grail he sought was the souls of men to offer to his Lord. Like the Son of Man, he had not where to lay his head, unless some good housewife into whose home he happened at eventime offered it to him. To his everlasting credit be it said that, knowing all this in advance, he eagerly began his pastoral work.

The third day of May, 1857, found the young pastor holding his first service at De Soto in the home of Jacob

Carter, a Baptist. His first move was to organize a Sunday School, with a circulating library of books he had bought from M. F. Shinn of Omaha and packed up the river in his saddle-bags. This routine he followed in each new church he established, and only God can measure the benefit thus brought to the children in that raw new land.

It was in De Soto that Reverend Adriance met his first active opposition later in the year. He and "Brother Collins" were holding revival meetings, during the course of which the only unmarried women in the town were converted. This left the unconverted men of the town without dancing partners (for in those days good Methodists were banned from dancing), and the loss infuriated them. The next night as Brother Collins was praying they hurled a dead dog through the window. It landed fairly on the evangelist's back. In his diary Reverend Adriance says of the episode—"The meeting continued." Terse comment, but oh how characteristic!

The afternoon of May 3 saw the young circuit rider at Cuming City some ten miles north, where again he organized a Sunday School. On May 7 he started services at Decatur and on May 10 at Tekamah. The books for the Decatur library were carried forty-four miles in his saddle-bags. Thus the work of the De Soto mission began.

All that year, rain or shine, saw him constantly on the trail. How many lonely homes he visited, how many services he held, how many souls he saved, God alone knows. He never refused a call. When the year closed he went on horseback to Conference in Topeka, Kansas, where he was able to report a greatly increased membership in every church on his circuit.

Reverend Adriance's assignment for 1858 was the Platte Valley Mission. It included the territory from Fremont up the Platte to Columbus, and from there up the Loup to Monroe, a distance of some forty-eight miles. Fremont then became his headquarters, where he boarded in the home of E. H. Rogers. This man, with his brother L. H. Rogers, founded one of Fremont's first banks. The Rogers brothers were members of Mr. Adriance's first church and later became even more closely associated with the young minister.

When the work in Fremont was going nicely, the preacher headed westward until he came to that spot where the Platte makes its greatest sweep to the north. Here he found six families, but only one of them (that of George Turton) was of Methodist persuasion. Nevertheless he organized a class with Mr. Turton as leader.

The next settlement to the west was Buchanan, a "paper town." Here the missionary found a group of Universalists, but at their invitation he held services and both parties were blessed.

Skinner was his next stop, a little settlement two miles east of Columbus. He arrived there in the evening of June twentieth and held services at seven o'clock, then repeated the sermon at eight o'clock for the benefit of one family that had arrived too late for the first service. The fact that he had ridden horseback twenty-two miles that day, and had held three other services besides, made no difference to this true son of John Wesley.

Columbus and Monroe in turn were duly organized and then he began his return journey, this time coming down the Maple Creek Valley in order to reach the little settlement that later became Purple Cane. From there he went on down the creek through Jalapa to the Elkhorn River, where his itinerary carried him through Elkhorn, Logan Creek Ford, DeWitt, West Point, Cuming Creek Ford, and what later became Oakland. All told he traveled three hundred miles, and it took him four weeks to cover his circuit once.

Thus that year passed, and at its end he wrote in his diary: "I close the year with gratitude to God for life preserved, health maintained and abounding grace given, with an increase of love for the church and its itineracy."

At the 1859 session of Conference, which was held in Omaha, he was assigned to the Rock Bluff Mission. But he had been on its itinerary only one month when gold was found in Colorado and men began flocking into the mining camps there. Accordingly Jacob Adriance, by this time a proved man, was recalled from his assignment and sent to the much more difficult task: that of occupying Colorado for Methodism.

It took him and his companion just twenty-eight days to go from Plattsmouth to Denver, with a four-mule team carrying provisions to last them six months. When they arrived, he set up a tent on what is now Eleventh street in downtown Denver and preached the first sermon ever heard in Colorado, using for his text John 3:16.

During the rest of that year he started classes at Denver, Golden City, Arapahoe and Boulder, and when he left for Conference in the spring of 1860, those four classes were the only religious organizations in all Colorado. Thus he won his title—"Father of Methodism in Colorado."

Since by 1860 Jacob Adriance had earned a promotion to the position of deacon in the church, and since the Bishop of his area was holding Conference at Hudson City, Missouri, he attended there that year. From Hudson City he journeyed back to New York to visit his parents and to win for himself a helpmate if he could.

It so happened that Mr. Adriance visited his friends, the Rogers brothers, as he passed through Fremont on his way to Conference, and when they heard of his intended trip to New York they persuaded him to visit their parents in Cardiff while there. It also happened that the Rogers brothers had a sister at home to whom they had written enthusiastic letters about the young missionary. Accordingly, when he arrived at the Rogers home this sister was already greatly interested in him. As for him, it was love at first sight. He began his courtship at once and in just two weeks' time, according to his own diary, he had won her heart, had gained her father's consent and her mother's blessing. Her father united them in marriage, and two days later they started on the long trek westward.

Miss Fannie A. Rogers was eminently fitted for her responsibility. She was the daughter of a Methodist minister. She knew the life, the duties and customs of a parsonage. She was well educated. Last (but by no means least to the impecunious young preacher), she had inherited from a beloved aunt a "hope chest" full of things needed for their new home.

They stopped on their westward journey to spend a week with the groom's parents at East Wilson and a day with the

bride's brother at Dunkirk, New York. From there they traveled by rail to Quincy, Illinois; by boat to Hannibal, Missouri; by rail to St. Joseph, and by steamboat up the Missouri to Omaha. It was a novel and adventurous honeymoon.

When they arrived in Omaha they went to the home of the Methodist pastor for the night, and the next day a friend brought them in a lumber wagon sixty miles over the old military road to Fremont. Once they passed Indians and the bride shrank against her husband in fright. How her heart thrilled at her first view of the Platte Valley from the hill at Elkhorn! When, at Fremont, she was reunited with her brothers and was told that the oldest would accompany them to Denver, her joy was complete.

There were five in the company that embarked for Denver a few days later in a prairie schooner drawn by two brown mules and "Old Jim," a large roan horse, and such a trip as it was! Day after day of peering into the dim distance, night after night sleeping in one small tent under the stars. They cooked on a little camp stove, and on Sundays they camped for the day and held services to which any other campers were welcome.

They reached Denver on June 16, 1860, and by July 8th they were all settled in their first little home in Golden, Colorado. In their diaries Jacob and Fannie mention that first little home. He called it a "rented cabin" and she a "hired house." Its floor was covered with sawdust and hay



This mountain cabin was the "first little home" where Jacob Adriance brought his bride. There the first Sunday school in Colorado was held November 6, 1859; and there the first "Love Feast" a week earlier. Often the minister preached there, and class and prayer meetings were usual occurrences within its walls.

The taller frame building stood on Larimer Street, and there the first church services were held. It was washed away by flood in 1864.

and carpeted with gunnysacks held down by wooden pegs driven in the earth. They had a sheet-iron stove and tin utensils. The minister made a bedstead and a table and put shelves in one corner. For chairs they used the trunks in which the bride's dowry had been packed. They had a good supply of books, and ere long the little house became the reading center of the town as well as a place of prayer. Almost before they knew it their first year of wedded life was past.

The year 1861 found them in Central City, Colorado, where the circuit embraced seven camps. Feed was too high-priced for the preacher to afford a horse, so he walked that year. In his notes he speaks of the services he held as "precious seasons."

In 1862, Reverend and Mrs. Adriance were called east to minister to his aged parents, as two of his brothers were in the Union Army. While there he supplied the churches at Pekin and Youngston, New York. They spent the years 1863 and 1864 at Decatur, Nebraska. In 1865 they again took up the Platte Valley circuit, in spite of the fact that Conference had abandoned the work due to lack of money.

Those years from 1863 to 1872 saw Jacob the carpenter hard at work. He built the first log church at Valley in 1865, "assuming the money part" himself. That year also saw him building the first church at Fremont. In 1867-69 his notable achievement was the first Methodist church at Blair, where he again "assumed the money part." In 1870-72 he built the parsonage at Fontanelle.

In the year 1873 a notable change took place in the Methodist Conference. Before that it met in April. From then on, even to this day, it has met in September. That year the Adriance family were stationed at North Bend, and during the next eighteen months Reverend Adriance started classes at Pebble, Maple Grove and Bethel Chapel.

The year 1874 was the great grasshopper year when, according to the minister, "the farmers put butter with their pork to make it fry." He spent it with a colleague, William Peck, on the Wahoo circuit, which covered all of Saunders County except Ashland. The year held much privation and

coming as it did after many years of exposure, it proved almost too much for our minister. His hearing began to fail.

For four years more he served, two of them in the North Bend, Pebble circuit and two on the Waterloo circuit. By that time he was stone deaf and was forced to ask Conference for the superannuated relation. This was a sad experience for him, for he loved his itineracy and its work. He was then forty-three years old and considered himself far too young to retire, so he turned his mind to a new venture.

During the time he and his wife spent in New York state at the request of his father, he had received from his father a second government warrant for one hundred sixty acres of land. This was located some six miles north of Ames, Nebraska, and to this parcel of land he now turned. He had put some work on it prior to this time and now in 1873, when he and his family came there to live, there was a good grove of cottonwood, elm and walnut trees already established.



The last snapshot of Jacob Adriance, taken at his home in Fremont.

During the years from 1863 to 1878 his family had grown from three to five by the birth of Lily in 1863, Emory in 1869, and Effie in 1873. Myrtle had died in infancy. Behold them, then, as they started out on their last great adventure.

At first there was very little stock and only straw sheds to house that stock, but Jacob had the backing of his wife's brothers. They helped him secure a flock of sheep and a herd of milch cows, and (to make sure that brotherhood and friendship might not part company) they took his note for the amount.

Gradually, as the years brought increase, the debt was paid, permanent buildings took form, orchards grew to fruitfulness, and Jacob Adriance the circuit rider became Jacob Adriance the prosperous farmer. His children were given school advantages. Open house was kept for every preacher who passed by. They attended church at Bethel Chapel four miles away. One by one the children married. Lily became Mrs. Hiram J. Goff of the Mapleville community; Effie married H. A. Burril, a business man of Fremont; Emory received a local preacher's license and spent his few remaining years as pastor at Plainview, Nebraska. During that time he married Ida M. Huff and became the father of one son, William Jacob, who today keeps alive the family name. This phase of their life ended in 1902, when they retired from the farm and moved to Fremont.

In 1909, a signal honor came their way. Methodism in Colorado was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, and Jacob and Fannie Adriance were invited to come as principal speakers for the occasion, being entertained during the month of their stay as guests of the church in Colorado. Thus Methodism honored them, and "he that went forth weeping, bearing precious seed, came again rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him."

It was in the fall of that same year that Fannie Adriance answered life's last great summons and Jacob was left alone in their home in Fremont. Indeed he refused to give it up, and since his daughter (Mrs. Burril) lived next door, his children humored him in this desire.

In 1912 he sold the farm for \$127 per acre, which gave him a comfortable fortune. With characteristic forthrightness he proceeded at once to "settle his own will." A generous gift went to each of his children; then equal sums were given to Wesleyan University, to the Omaha Methodist Episcopal hospital, and to the church board of home missions on the annuity plan. The rest he invested in building-and-loan stock as security for his future.

All went well for ten years; then, with the perversity of old age, he determined to shingle his house. He was just nicely started with this job when he fell from the scaffold, breaking his hip. He was in a cast several weeks but recovered to a point where he again insisted upon going down town. Since he could not walk he procured a tricycle, and a few weeks later a fall from his tricycle broke the other hip. He never left his daughter's house after that, although he lived several months. He was a cheerful invalid, never once doubting the absolute rightness of whatever Divine Providence allowed to occur. On December 22, 1922, he quietly slipped away to his reward.

Thus passed our man of mystery: carpenter, preacher, farmer, pioneer.