

## The Buffalo Hunt - 1871

This story began in the Autumn of 1871, when two young pioneers felt the urge to hunt a few buffalo for their winter's supply of meat, and see some of the prairie country to the west. This vast expanse of grassland paradise lay all unexplored before them. There had been no white settlements made west of Red Cloud, only a few homesteaders living on Walnut Creek.

Thus it was, that Dave Heffelbower of Red Cloud and Joe Holcomb of Walnut Creek, yoked Dave's oxen to the wagon, loaded the axes and grub box, the guns and ammunition and started west. Day after Day they traveled following buffalo trails and keeping to the contour of the Republican river. They found plenty of dry wood for bonfires to cook their food, and slept under the wagon at night.

They had gone a long way when they came to a bend in a creek, a high bank to the west and north where a huge cottonwood tree had fallen on the bank of the stream. Here, they thought would be a fine place to make camp. They would have protection from the cold winds, and plenty of dry wood for camp fires.



So here they camped for some time, occasionally shooting a buffalo, putting the meat and hides in the wagon, and exploring the country around the camp site.

When their wagon was filled they started back home. It seems they had stayed a little longer than anticipated, and the oxen traveled slowly with the wagon loaded with buffalo meat and hides.

When they were about half way home Joe Holcomb decided he could make better time if he walked on ahead of the slow moving oxen. He had promised his mother that he would be in Beatrice, Nebr. at a certain time to meet her. She was coming from the East to visit him. So he left the wagon and came on to Red Cloud.

Shortly after he had arrived back in Red Cloud from meeting his mother in Beatrice, there came a severe blizzard from the north, sweeping the plains and leaving high drifts of snow in its wake. Joe decided not to go back and try to find Dave, as it would be a difficult trip, and surely no one, situated as Dave was could have survived such a storm. But Dave had drifted to the river and found shelter behind some fallen trees and brush. He had lived, but both his feet were partially

frozen. He stayed by the camp fire until warmer weather came and he was able to walk again.

In the meantime one of his oxen had strayed and he would be unable to get home without it. Then, one day he noticed an encampment of Indians on the river bank, he walked over to them and found they were of the friendly Pawnee tribe. He told the Chief of his predicament and asked him to watch his wagon and ox while he went in search of the one that had strayed. The Chief, very obligingly took some of his braves and camped near the wagon until he returned with the oxen which he had found down the river.

He started home, but it was a long hard journey, and he had to dispose of half the meat and hides in the wagon to lessen the load for the oxen. In due time, he arrived at the dugout on his claim west of Red Cloud, glad to be home again.

This event took place before the famous Indian Massacre which occurred between the Sioux and Pawnee Indians, west of where the city of McCook now stands.

The creek where these men camped is <sup>known as</sup> Medicine Creek, - and the town nearby is Cambridge, Nebraska.

- Mrs. Geo. Hefelbower  
1958