

MY STORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TREE PLANTING PROJECT IN THE NEBRASKA  
SAND HILLS

By Charles A. Scott

As a Senior year student in the Kansas State Agricultural College, Manhattan, Kansas, I agreed to accept an appointment as a Student Assistant in the Division of Forestry, U. S. Department of Agriculture, effective July 1, 1901, as tendered me by Mr. Wm. L. Hall, then Chief of the Section of Tree Planting.

I was instructed to report for duty at Kearney, Nebraska, on July 1 st., to serve as cook and teamster for a reconnaissance survey party, whose duty it would be to make a thorough survey of the Sand Hill region of Nebraska to determine if it would be practical to plant trees in the Sand Hills, and if there was any assurance they would grow to a size to be of any practical value.

The salary paid Forest Student Assistants at that time was \$300.00 per annum, but in as much as I was to serve as cook and teamster, I was allowed \$15.00 per month additional pay.

When I arrived at the Mid-way Hotel in Kearney, I met Mr. L. C. Miller, who was the No. 2 man of the survey party. The others who were to be members of the party reported within the next 24 hours, including Mr. Hall, who had come out from Washington to help assemble the necessary equipment and to start us on our summer's work.

The personnel of our party included:

Royal S. Kellogg - Chief of Party - Fay, Kansas  
Louis C. Miller - 2nd in Charge - Stillwater, Oklahoma  
Frank G. Miller - Red Oak, Iowa  
Hugh P. Baker - St. Craix Falls, Wisconsin  
John H. Hatton - Groton, South Dakota  
E. P. Bailey - Hinsdale, New Hampshire  
Charles A. Scott - Westmoreland, Kansas

All of us were recent college or University graduates. R. S. Kellogg and Louis C. Miller were experienced men in the Division, having served at least part of a year. The other five of us were beginners.

We spent five days buying and assembling our equipment, which consisted of a team of frisky young mules, wagon and harness, six old, well broken dependable saddle horses, saddles and bridles. Picket ropes and pins and nose bags for all the animals. Two tents and poles, eight cots, a sheet iron cook stove and the necessary kettles and pans, enough tin plates, cups and cheap knives, forks and spoons to serve eight. We anticipated some callers about meal time, and we wanted to be prepared to extend an invitation to have a meal with us. We were not disappointed. We had numerous guests.

On July 1, 1901, the rank of Division of Forestry was advanced to the Bureau of Forestry. Hence the change in name from this date.

*We hired a carpenter to make a "Grub Box" and fit it near end*  
We hired a carpenter to make a "Grub Box" and fit it into the rear end of the wagon box. This box was divided into compartments suitable to our needs. One compartment was for the storage of our water bucket, coffee pot and other such articles that could not be packed into the oven of the sheet metal stove. The Grub Box was large enough to carry three or four days supply of provisions. The door of this box was double the length of the height of the box and hinged to the box at one end. There was also a hinge in the middle of the door that allowed it to fold back on itself and make a double door. When open it extended to the rear and unfolded, and served for our table. The extended table was supported by the hinges at one end and a single leg at the other. We stood around the table to eat our meals. Each man was assigned his place at the table and kept the assigned place throughout the summer, regardless of wind or weather, three at each side and one at the end. When we had company the cook ate his snack after the others had eaten.

The last items to be bought were coal-oil lanterns, grain for the horses and mules and a stock of provisions for ourselves.

The wagon was a regulation farm wagon of that time. The inside of the wagon box was divided into three compartments. The grub box was in the back end immediately in front of it there was a bin large enough to hold a supply of grain for the horses and mules. The space in front of the grain box was for our cots, tents and personal baggage. The wagon was fitted with bows and a canvass cover to protect our supplies and personal belongings from the elements. The tent poles were carried in metal stirrups on the side of the wagon.

*cut*

Additional equipment consisted of a cross cut saw and axes for felling trees and cutting them into sections for stem analysis studies of such trees as we might find growing in the region covered by our survey. They were put to good use in the vicinity of Scott's Bluff, Hot Creek and Crawford.

The entire outfit made a full load, there being a place for everything, but everything had to be in its proper place to find room for all.

A very conspicuous feature of most overland parties at that time was a supply of shooting irons and fishing tackle, which was entirely absent in our party. We did not have a gun of any description or as much as a fish hook.

On the afternoon of July 6th, we loaded our wagon, saddled the riding horses, and took to the road, and drove out some five or six miles for our first supper on the road and our first night's camp. We stayed in camp over Sunday and Monday, July 7th and 8th. It gave us time to discover if any items of necessity had been overlooked. We found nothing lacking. On Tuesday morning, Mr. Hall came out from Kearney to take pictures of our outfit, bid us adieu and wish us success in our summer's work.

Our route took us up the Platte River to North Platte, hence up the North Platte River to the Wyoming State line. We turned north at Collins, Nebraska and followed a northerly trail to Harrison and then followed the White River to Crawford, thence easterly to Rushville. From there on we took a southerly course until intersecting the Burlington Railway near Lakeside, at this point we turned eastward and followed the Burlington Railroad to Broken Bow, where we were met by Mr. Hall.

In a conference at Broken Bow, it was decided that the party had accomplished its purpose and should be disbanded. Each member of the party was assigned

specific duties to be performed before reporting in to the Washington Office. Hatton and I were assigned to return the animals and all equipment to Kearney and to arrange for the keep of the animals and over winter storage for the equipment.

During our summers work we frequently deviated from our direct route spending several days at a time making growth studies of trees, especially in the vicinities of Scotts Bluff and the Pine Ridge Region.

From these studies we compiled some valuable data. We found that the Ponderosa pine and Redcedar, native species of the region, made a normal rate of growth, equal to that for the same species in other forested regions. The largest trees of these species had been cut by early settlers years before and used in the construction of their homes and ranch buildings. Many of the stumps of those trees were well over two feet in diameter. By comparison with the largest trees we found we estimated them to have been fully 60 feet in height.

We found Ponderosa pine trees that by count of annual growth rings, were over 300 years of age. All of this was proof that trees will grow and live to attain merchantable sizes.

The pines and cedars were found growing on precipitous slopes and up over the hill sides in soil too barren to grow a stand of grass or weeds that would carry a fire. These were the most valuable species found.

Cottonwoods, Willows and Ash were found growing immediately along gullies and water courses, all were regarded as of little value, excepting for fuel and poles.

After assembling in the Washington Office a report of our summers work was prepared and presented to President Theodore Roosevelt, with recommendations that a considerable area of the public lands in the Sand Hill region be withdrawn from homestead entry and be set aside as Forest Reserves.

our

President Roosevelt approved/recommendations, and in February 1902 issued a Proclamation creating the Dismal River, North Platte and Niobrara Forest Reserves.

- - - - -

This story would not be complete without narrating some of the events of the season's doings. The health of the party was always a matter of concern. A final check showed that the cook was the only man in the party that was indisposed for as long as a half day. On July 19th, He and L. C. Miller were alone for lunch, among other things we ate was a can of Van Camp's Pork and Beans. Soon after lunch we took a plunge in the Platte River. After dressing Miller saddled his mount and rode off on a wide swing to the right of the trail we were following to make observations. I hitched up the mule team and started up the trail we were following. There were no defined highways in that section of the State at that time. Soon after starting out I began having cramps in my stomach. They increased in frequency and intensity until I could no longer trust myself to drive the mules.

They would run away on the slightest provocation. About mid-afternoon, I unhitched, unharnessed and staked the rules out to graze and I took shelter in the shade of the wagon. For about three hours I suffered the most excruciating stomach pains.

When the men did not find me at our designated camp site that evening they took up the back trail, but did not reach me until after night fall. I was still suffering from cramps and so weak I could hardly raise my head. All were much concerned about my condition. We were miles from any town or source of medical supplies. However, three of the boys started in as many directions to ranch houses indicated by lights that could be seen, hoping to find something that might give me relief. In the meantime Bailey prepared a hot whiskey concoction that I could not swallow. In about an hour F. G. Miller returned with a small bottle of soothing syrup, of which I took a liberal swallow. It was past ten o'clock by this time. I soon fell asleep and slept soundly until daybreak. I firmly believe that I had an attack of ptomaine poisoning. I have never since been able to stand the smell or taste of Van Camp's Pork and Beans, nor have I ever before or since suffered such excruciating pains as I did on that afternoon and evening.

Although still very weak when I awoke, I got up and prepared breakfast for our party. Kellogg knew that I was in no condition to perform my usual work, however we were camped on a dry hillside, without water for ourselves or our team and mounts so we broke camp and moved on about five miles to the camp site I was supposed to reach the evening before. We set up our tents and made camp for over Sunday. After preparing lunch I lay down and slept all afternoon.

Comments on the personnel of the party are in order. Every man in the party was a gentleman from the soles of his shoes up. Every man was a perfect specimen of manhood, physically and morally. Bailey was the only man in the party that carried a bottle of whiskey with his personal effects, but I never knew of him indulging in a drink. I never knew of a single man ever losing his temper during the entire season. Not one of the men ever kidded me or cast a reflection regarding my position (cook and teamster). I believe every man in the party regarded me as their equal in most lines, and readily granted that I was their superior in botanical lines, which was proven on two distinct instances. There was considerable rivalry in identifying unusual species of trees and shrubs and it was common practice for the men to bring specimens into camp to be exhibited and discussed and identified if possible. I had a copy of Gray's Field Botany in my belongings that was consulted when necessary.

On one occasion one of the men brought in a section of a stem of a shrub he had found. It was perfectly straight and cut to the proper length for a cane or walking stick. He challenged any of us to identify its species. It went the rounds of the party without being recognized. I asked for a second look at it, on closer examination I recognized it, and asked the exhibitor what he had done with the thorns he had cut off. He asked what thorns I referred to. My reply was, "the stipular thorns you cut off." His reply was, "Well tell them what it is." It was a wild rose stem. The same man on another occasion brought in an unusual leaf and challenged us to identify it. It went through the hands of all the others. I was cooking supper at the time, but was also listening to the conversation of the group.

I heard F. G. Miller say, "refer it to Scott, he will tell you what it is". When presented to me, I did not as much as take it in my hand, I recognized it at a glance, and said, "if the exhibitor calls that a leaf, I have little respect for his knowledge of Botany". It was a terminal leaflet of a rank growing sprout from an Ash stump, and was fully three or four times the size of an ordinary leaflet of the species. After that Baker never mutilated a specimen that he brought in for identification.

Every man in the party appreciated the handicaps under which I prepared our meals. The sheet iron stove was only a degree or two better than on an open fire. Our fuel was just what I could gather between meals. Sometimes we had dry wood and sometimes we did not, I cooked more meals over a fire of cow chips, than of any other kind of fuel. When the supply was abundant, I would gather up two or three gunny sacks full of them and carry them in the grain bin in the wagon to use in an emergency. We experienced some rainy days during the season and the cow chips in the wagon was the only dry fuel available.

A difficulty that I experienced was that of cooking and serving a meal on rainy days. They were usually short and simple, consisting of bread and butter, canned fruit, and coffee served in the tents. Where the going was good our favorite meal was baked potatoes, prime rib roast, brown gravy, bread and butter, a choice of canned fruits, and coffee. Eggs were also a favorite item in our menu and were usually available at any ranch or farm house along our route. During the following winter in Washington when I would meet one of the men of our party, his greeting would be, "well, Scott, let me know when you are going to serve roast beef, baked potatoes and coffee and I'll come over".

Every man in the party was always willing to give the cook and teamster a helping hand when it was needed. One morning our route required crossing the Platte River. I was considerably concerned about how the mules would behave if we were to encounter some soft sand. I made it a point to have a private interview with Kellogg and called his attention to the predicament we would be in if we should encounter a drift of soft sand. He asked for my solution of the problem. I told him I wanted the six men on horseback to help pull the wagon. Each man could take his picket rope, fasten one end to the wagon tongue and the other to his saddle horn and by all pulling together we could probably get through without difficulty. This was a new stunt for the riders, but they recognized the problem we were up against and approved the plan. The river was running a full flow of water and the crossing was not marked, excepting by the trail leading in at one side and cut some little distance upstream on the other side. The channel was probably 150 or 200 yards in width. At my suggestion, Kellogg rode across and then came back to lead the way for the wagon. The crossing was made without any trouble and every one was delighted. It was readily admitted that the old cow ponies knew more about pulling from the saddle horns than the riders knew about it. We resorted to the same tactics when re-crossing the river later, and also when we encountered soft sand in the Hills.

When breaking camp, Kellogg, usually designated one or two of the men to help take down the tents and to load the wagon with equipment before leaving for the days trek. On the Monday morning that we were breaking camp on

Willow Island, Bailey was assigned to the duty of helping me. The preceding day had been unmercifully hot and we had resorted to about anything we could think of to make ourselves comfortable. We had staked our camp rather late Saturday evening. Saturday had been hot and the men were tired and hungry. I prepared supper rather hurriedly and failed to remember to take a nest of pans out of the oven before firing up. When I did take them out they were really hot, and I set them aside without separating them. I had no occasion to use them on Sunday, and they sat out in the blazing sun all day.

Monday morning when Bailey was helping me, he picked up the nest of pans and saw that the solder on some of them had melted and had adhered to others. He let one, "Yep," at the top of his voice, and called, "Scott, By-gorry, (his favorite slang word) look here, it was so hot yesterday it melted the solder and these pans are stuck together". I dropped my work and rushed over to him to see the phenomenon. I agreed it was blistering hot yesterday, but never dreamed it would melt the solder. When around the supper table that evening, Bailey had the story of the day. Of course I confirmed the fact the solder had melted and that the pans were stuck together. I gave the other men the facts of the case later. When the sitting was right in Washington the following winter, some of us would tell how hot it was in Nebraska last summer, in Baily's presence and he would invariably tell the story of the solder melting and sticking the bake pans together. He believed it to be a fact throughtout his life.

We had not been on the road very many days before the matter of shaves and haircuts became a problem. On a \$25.00 per month salary it was an item. We all had some personal pride and we did not relish the idea of going to a barber shop in our camp garb for a hair cut. F. G. Miller, Baker, and Hatton solved the shaving problem by allowing their beards and mustaches to grow. The rest of us could not stand it for more than a week without a shave. I shaved myself and I believe Kellogg, L. C. Miller and Bailey did likewise. During a haircut discussion one day I volunteered the information that I had been our family barber for several years and had kept my father and three brothers out of the doghouse during that time, and that if the group would chip in and buy a comb and shears, I would keep their hair trimmed, if they would sit still to let me cut it. The comb and shears were forth coming. L. C. Miller was my first demonstration. It took place on a hot Sunday forenoon. It was too hot to sit bareheaded in the blazing sun. The only shade we could find was under a wagon bridge across a small stream of water. The bridge just spanned the channel, and the water was from about six inches to two feet in depth. Each of us rolled our pants legs up as high as we could get them. Miller secured an empty wooden box for a seat. It was difficult to find a footing for it to set on. If he eased up to change his position, the box floated from beneath him.

In spite of the handicaps his hair was cut. The cut was heartily approved by each members of the party. From that day on there was scarcely a Sunday but what I cut hair for one or two of the men, but never before or since have I cut hair standing in water knee deep.

The season's work was thoroughly enjoyed by every member of our party. Some of the men really wondered what it would lead up to. Others felt secure because it was giving them a toe hold that would ultimately lead to something

worthwhile. But at the best there were some dull drab days and we needed some stimulants to keep up our spirits. Sundays were our worst days to live through; and we adopted a practice of joining in a song service to enliven our spirits. Baker, Hatton and F. G. Miller had very good voices. Baker had sung in choires and Glee clubs for a number of years. The rest of us could carry tunes after a fashion. We usually started out by singing college songs and southern melodies with which we were all familiar, and ended up by singing all the Gospel Hymns any one would suggest. After a few rehearsals we would not have taken a back seat for any Barber Shop Quartet.

Hatton proved to be the tender hearted one of the group. When we happened to tune up on the right, or perhaps I should say the wrong love song. Hatton would withdraw to his tent and have a good cry. He never objected to the rest of us singing anything we cared to, but the stress we put into sentimental songs was more than he could bare, and he always felt relieved after having a good cry.

I think all of us were corresponding with favorite girls, but Baker and Hatton were the outstanding cases. Baker wrote a letter to his lady friend every day, regardless of wind, weather, or the work at hand. Usually he wrote after the rest of us had gone to bed. Hatton did not write so often, but if he did not receive a letter from his lady friend the day he was expecting it he would go to bed sobbing that night.

The Chief of our party was a good friend of Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Brown during college days, Mr. Brown was at this time Superintendent of the Pine Ridge Indian Agency. When we were in the vicinity of Crawford, Kellogg rode over to spend a Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. Brown. He reached the Agency late Saturday afternoon. The entrance gate was closed and locked. Kellogg dismounted climbed over the gate and proceeded to the Brown home. An Indian guard took him in tow and locked him up for infraction of the rules of the Agency. Kellogg did his best to explain his mission, but rules were rules with the Indians, and Kellogg served time in the lock-up until late that night, when the Brown's came home. But to conform to the rules a 50¢ fine was paid. Kellogg did not enjoy such a reception, but the rest of our party agreed it was the best joke of the entire season.

I often laugh at a foolish stunt that I pulled off one afternoon when we were in camp in the hills south of Gering, making an intensive study of the rate of growth of the Ponderosa pine in that community. I had often heard of the rip-roaring fires that pitch pine knots made. On the afternoon in question, I had decided it was time to have a pitch pine knot camp fire. I took an axe and went up into the hills, and found a dry pitch pine tree trunk lying on the ground. I cut the limbs off up to the desired point on the trunk, then cut the top of the tree off. I returned to camp, harnessed Lula, our little mealy nosed obliging mule, picked up a chain and took a single tree off the wagon and started for the pitch pine log. Lula didn't understand just what was going on. She did not want to leave Myrtle, her mate, or the saddle horses that were all on picket ropes near by. However, after considerable persuasion we got to the log. Myrtle and the saddle horses were within clear view about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile distant and between 300 and 400 feet below us in elevation. While I was putting the chain on the log, Lula let out a bray. She got no response, but kept her eyes on the group of horses and her mate.

When I turned her to the right place to hook the tugs into the singletree, she stepped around most knowingly and obligingly and stood perfectly still until I took up the hitch rein, and said "Now Lula we are going home with the log". She stepped right up very obligingly, when she heard a noise behind her, looked over the blinds of her bridle and saw the log moving. She made a dash and jerked the hitch reins out of my hands, and went down the hill on the dead run with the 10 or 12 foot log rolling and bouncing behind her. I had visions of her running through the herd of horses, dragging the log behind her and getting the horses all tangled up in picket ropes. To my great surprise, when she came to the first horse she stopped, stalk still, and did not move another step until I walked down and unhitched her. I carried several armfuls of pitch pine wood the remainder of the way into camp, and we had a camp fire that night that brought cheer to our hearts.

This incident recalls another that occurred about the same time. I had driven over to Scotts Bluff for camp supplies. It was a cool afternoon and the mules were feeling frisky. When coming down grade to the Platte River bridge on our way out to camp. Lula let out a squeal, whipped her tail around in a circle, kicked up her heels and started running. Myrtle took the cue and they were off to the races. I made no effort to stop them, the road was clear ahead. After running less than a half mile, they began to slacken their speed.

I considered it a good time to give them all the running they wanted. I applied the persuader, we crossed the Platte River bridge and into Gering at a dead run. I presume those who saw us that day, thought they were seeing a run-away.

At the time our party was disbanded at Broken Bow, it was decided that one of our old saddle horses was not worth what her winter's feed bill would amount to. She was given to a local boy who promised to take good care of her. Some two years later, in a check-up in the Washington Office, the roan mare was found to be missing on our property lists, and I was called upon to give an accounting for her. The records of the property list had to be cleared. Condemnation blanks were sent to me. I was required to appoint an appraisal committee to appraise the value of the animal, and then advertise her to the highest bidder, for cash in hand. All of which I did without getting out of my office chair. This performance was repeated at least three or four years, before the matter was disposed of. I never succeeded in getting a bid for her.

Two of the saddle horses must have died during the winter of 1901-2.

I fell heir to only three of them and the mule team when L. C. Miller and I organized the 1902 surveying party. These five continued to do duty as long as I was in charge at Halsey, which was until December 31, 1907.

CHAS. A. SCOTT,  
Cook and Teamster, for the  
1901 Reconnaissance Party

All dates in above story were taken from my 1901 diary, still in my possession. January 11, 1951.