

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BESSEY NURSERY

by  
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President Roosevelt approved the report of the Reconnaissance Survey Party on the Sand Hill Project, and in February 1902 issued a Proclamation creating three Forest Reservations in the Sand Hill Region of Nebraska. These were known respectively as the Dismal River, the Niobrara and the North Platte Forest Reservations.

Prior to the issuance of the Proclamation, Mr. Hall called me to his office for a conference. The result was, I agreed to accept an assignment to another summer's work in Nebraska.

The plan was, L. C. Miller was scheduled to survey the boundary of the Dismal River Reserve. I was to be his handy man and help him in every way I could until such time as we could locate a desirable Nursery site. I was then to withdraw from the Survey party and begin the development of the proposed nursery.

In the mean time Miller and I were scheduled to assist Z. L. Bliss in securing data on the growth of Catalpa trees in the "Yaggy Plantation", near Hutchinson, Kansas.

We three left Washington on March 14, spent about a month at Hutchinson making growth studies of the Catalpas.

Miller and I were scheduled to make a reproduction survey of the Ponderosa pine in the Black Hills of South Dakota until the season warmed up in Nebr. We arrived in Lead on May 2, and spent a month going over the Hills on foot. We found plenty of seedling pines from 2 - 3 years old and upwards on the out over areas that had been protected from fire, on burned over areas there was no reproduction.

While eating our lunch on the "Nemo Burn", one nice warm day, Miller asked me how I would proceed with the job, if it were given me, to reforest the entire tract of several thousand acres. I had a plan quite well in mind and outlined a method by which pine seed could be sown on freshly fallen snow, from horseback. That was before the days of planes. I believe the plan was reported down the line to Secretary of Agriculture, Wilson, for adoption. Four years later I was sent to the Black Hills to secure a ton of pine seed for experimental seeding of the Burn. It was sown the following year and a wonderfully firm stand of seedlings was secured. I saw this area again in 1936 covered with a dense stand of sapling pines 20 feet and over in height.

On June 2, 1902, Miller and I reported at Kearney, Nebraska to reassemble the team of mules, saddle horses and camp equipment that Hatton and I, of the Reconnaissance Survey party of 1901, had left there for keep and storage.

On June 6, Joe Thornberry, our new cook and teamster, and I started overland for the Dismal River Reserve. Miller came by train and met us at Dunning on our arrival, June 13.

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set up camp about 5 miles up the Middle Loup River from Dunning, near the Moyer homestead residence. We called on Mr. Boyer and found him willing to give us such information as he could. He advised us to contact Mr. John Mandeville, an old timer who knew every hill and blowout in the community. He had the reputation of being the only man who could go into the hills and bring home a deer. I met Mr. Mandeville in Dunning and engaged him to ride the hills with me the following Monday, June 15. During the days ride he took me to some 10 or 12 known Government corners and gave me their legal description. The furthest west corner he showed me was on the knoll only a few rods south of the Ed Sands ranch house, 1 mile due west of Halsey.

During the day's ride I introduced the subject of deer on two or three occasions. Mr. Mandeville was rather reluctant to talk about deer. However, when I asked about the probable number that ranged in the hills, he assured me he knew of 2, a doe and a fawn, but there might be 3. He had seen a young deer later that he thought to be too large for the fawn he had seen earlier in the season.

I gave him quite a lecture on the shame and pity it would be to kill the last deer in the hills. That, if they were protected for a few years, they would increase in numbers, to the point where they would be common, and an asset to the community. He did not respond enthusiastically to that line of argument. Before we dropped the subject for the day, I stretched the truth a trifle, and said, that as a Forest Ranger, one of my duties was to protect "Wild Life", within the Reserve. I was not a Forest Ranger, but that title meant more to the public than "Forest Student Assistant". In as much as I was to have charge of the development of the project, the protection of Wild Life came under my jurisdiction.

That evening when I paid Mr. Mandeville for his services, he extended me his hand and said, "Mr. Scott, if you will see to it that no one else shoots a deer within the Reserve, I'll give you my word of honor that I will help you protect them, and that I will not shoot another until they are plentiful". I am sure he kept his word. I never heard of another deer being shot on the Forest Reserve until the deer hunting open season of 1945. The first time in the history of the State that there ever was an open season on deer in Nebraska.

When protected from hunters, the deer population on the Reservation increased rapidly. By 1945 it was estimated that there were hundreds of animals roaming the National Forest. They were a menace in the nursery. It was deemed necessary to reduce their numbers. An open season was declared in the fall of 1945. Five hundred hunting permits were sold. Hunters came to Halsey from far and near for the three days of open season. By official count, 368 deer were shot and taken home by the hunters.

During the 6 years I spent on this project, I saw but one deer, a beautiful 7 or 8 pronged buck. Mr. Will Black and I raised it in the brush, near the Black ranch home on the Dismal River, in 1905 or 6.

C. June 19, Wallace I. Hutchinson joined our party, coming direct from the Yale School of Forestry, New Haven, Connecticut.

On the following morning, June 20, Miller, Hutchinson and I began the survey of the boundary of the Dismal River Forest Reserve. It was a 3 man survey crew. We rode out on horseback each morning, carrying the necessary equipment and our lunches. Upon reaching the point where we were to begin work, we would picket our horses and proceed on foot. Miller was the compass man, and was always the last man to leave the starting point. It was his duty to bring up the saddle horses and equipment to the next location. In this way we kept our mounts and equipment within easy reach.

Our camp was moved from time to time as our survey advanced and favorable camp sites located.

On June 21, 1902, while in camp near the Boyer residence there was a heavy white frost that killed all tender vegetation. On this same date we moved our camp to a location  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles west of Halsey, and located it on the present location of the Bessey Nursery.

On June 25, we moved camp to a site about 3 miles east of Thedford, on the north side of the River and also the north side of the Burlington Railway track. This location was well in advance of our survey, and we occupied it until the party was divided on July 12. Wm. H. Mast, J. C. Blumer, H. D. Scudder, and R. V. Reynolds joined our party while camped here. The selection of the Nursery site was also made while located here. It required a trip to the U. S. Land Office in Broken Bow to determine the ownership of the site I had chosen for the Nursery. Miller made the trip by rail, and found that the site had been filed upon for Homestead Entry some years, prior, but the claim had never been perfected, and that at that time it was listed as public land open to homestead filing. Miller and I believed there was but one thing to do, and that was to take possession of the site under the pretext that it was a portion of the Reservation.

On July 12, we divided the party, Miller, Hutchinson, Scudder and Reynolds continued with the survey, while Mast, Blumer and I prepared a supply 2 X 2 X 24 inch stakes, carved the legal descriptions of the survey corners we had established and followed back over the surveyed line and set them. These were temporary pine stakes but they served the immediate needs.

Miller and I took the local train to Halsey, Sunday morning, July 13, to look over the proposed Nursery site before making a final move. After a thorough going over, we concluded that it was by far the most desirable and convenient site available, and made our decision final. Miller returned to Thedford on the evening train. I remained in Halsey.

On Monday morning, July 14, Mast and Blumer came down from Thedford on the train with a tent, cots and baggage.

A carload of 8 foot Cedar posts arrived in Halsey that morning, billed to us from some point in Virginia. I hired a local man with team and wagon to unload the posts and haul them across the River to a point where I thought they would be safer than in a pile in the railroad yard.

The same man hauled our tent, cots and luggage to the nursery site, where we set up camp. We stopped at the Ed Sand's ranch headquarters on our way out, and made arrangements with Mrs. McNichol to board the three of us. Mrs. McNichol was a good cook and we fared well while boarding with her.

We had kept the Washington Office fully informed of our activities. All went well until I received a telegram from the office telling me to cease all operations on the nursery site until it could be withdrawn from homestead entry and be proclaimed a part of the Forest Reservation. We followed instructions. We ceased grubbing out brush, but we did peel the carload of Cedar posts.

On August 18, we received a telegram from Washington instructing us to proceed with the nursery work. By order of President Roosevelt the 80 acre tract we had selected for the nursery site had been withdrawn from Homestead Entry and had been incorporated as part of the Forest Reservation.

In the meantime the surveying party had completed the survey of the boundary of the Reserve and had set up camp adjoining ours. The surveying crew then pitched in and helped grub out the brush, clear the site of roots and level the ground as well as possible with the equipment at our disposal, a harrow and garden rakes. The posts were set and the 2 X 4 stringers nailed in place to carry the overhead slatting for  $\frac{1}{2}$  shade.

On August 21, Miller took the train for Crawford, Nebraska to investigate the pine seed crop in the Pine Ridge region. East took the same train, to Alliance, headed for Guernsey, Wyoming to investigate the redcedar seed crop along the North Platte River country.

Miller returned from his Pine Ridge trip on August 31, and East returned on September 5. Each reported finding a goodly supply of seed in the respective regions investigated.

On September 8, H. B. Scudder terminated his services with the Bureau and returned to Illinois to resume his studies in the University.

Dr. Chas. E. Bessey of the University of Nebraska came in on the morning train, September 8, spent the day looking over the nursery site and the surrounding hills. He and Miller took a two days drive out through the hills, returning on the afternoon of September 10. He was very enthusiastic about our project. This was my introduction to Dr. Bessey. Our friendship continued throughout his life time.

Mr. C. C. Wright of Thedford came to our camp on September 9, and informed us that he had been awarded the contract to build a storage house for us. Stayed overnight, returned to Thedford on the morning train. As soon as building materials could be assembled he was back at work. However, the building was not completed until sometime in January 1903. We lived in tents until we moved into the new building and had some novel experiences keeping warm. My greatest difficulty was keeping warm in bed. I was too long for the cots, and the cots were not wide enough to permit me to lie doubled up. I solved the problem at the risk of my life. I dug a hole under the foot of my cot and set a lighted lantern in it at bedtime. I slept comfortably from that date as long as we occupied the tents.

Hutchinson left us on September 20, to resume his studies in the Yale School of Forestry.

On September 23, Mr. Hall visited our camp for the first time. He spent the forenoon inspecting the nursery site and the work we had done to date.

After lunch we saddled the riding horses and rode over to the Dismal River. We stopped at a bachelors cabin, for the night, found no one at home. We took possession, cooked our own supper and slept on the floor. The sun came up bright the next morning and we enjoyed a beautiful autumn day. We spent the forenoon along the Dismal River and rode back over the hills to camp in the afternoon. We borrowed Bobby Reynold's rifle and shot gun for the trip and succeeded in bagging 2 grouse, a hawk and a jack rabbit.

This was Mr. Hall's introduction to Halsey, the nursery site and the recently created "Forest Reserve". He was pleased with conditions as he found them and was enthusiastic about the nursery site and the progress we had made in its development.

In a general conference that evening, Mr. Hall announced he would leave us in the morning, and that Miller would also leave us, to go to Yale School of Forestry and that I would have full charge of all activities connected with the project from that date. He advised that we lose no time in securing a supply of pine seed to be planted in the nursery.

On Friday morning September 26, together with Reynolds and Blumer, we took the train for Crawford, Nebraska. We reached Crawford about 2:30 P.M. and went directly to B. F. Canyon and made arrangements for our meals and lodgings at the Thornton home.

After 4 days work we concluded that we had gotten about all the available supply of cones. We sacked them and stored them in Mr. Thornton's hay loft to be shipped to Halsey when our storage house would be ready for use.

On Friday, October 3, Mr. Thornton took us and our belongings, tent, bedding and etc. to Crawford, and we boarded the train for Rockford, South Dakota. Fred Thornton joined our party, helped us gather cones, and seedling pines in the Black Hills, then returned to Halsey with us a hired hand, and worked for us for nearly a year.

We spent practically three weeks in the Black Hills, secured about 60 bushels of cones and about 6,000 seedling ponderosa pines 5 to 7 inches in height. Probably they were 5 to 7 year old seedlings. All of these were shipped to Halsey.

The high point on this trip to me, was meeting and making the acquaintance of Captain Seth Bullock, then Supervisor of the Black Hills Forest Reserve.

I called upon him at his office to ask permission to collect the cones and seedling trees. He granted my request very graciously, then began questioning me regarding the purposes for which we were gathering them.

After explaining our needs for them, he admitted he was not aware that pine trees grew from seeds. He was sure he had never seen a pine tree that was less than 5 or 6 feet in height.

During our short stay in the Black Hills it was my good fortune to meet Captain Bullock on several occasions. He always inquired very kindly regarding our success in securing cones and seedlings, and I felt honored to know that he remembered me, and that he was interested in our project.

Upon our return to Halsey on October 23, I found Mr. Mast in good spirits and that he had made good progress with the work while I was away.

Unfortunately my diary closes with my October 23, entry. The remainder of this story will be written from memory.

The cones and seedlings secured came in by freight in due time. The seedling were heeled-in for the winter and covered with hay to protect them from alternate thawing and freezing and also from drying out. They passed through the winter apparently in good condition. The foliage was fresh and green when we uncovered them the following spring, just prior to planting them in the hills. However, they began to show signs of failure soon after being planted. Probably fewer than 100 of the entire lot survived.

We succeeded in getting part of the seed-bed area planted to ponderosa pine seed from the Black Hills in the fall of 1902.

The remainder of the Black Hills seed and that from Pine Ridge was planted the following spring, probably in April. Within a very short time, and much sooner than we had expected to see them, the seedling pines began showing above ground. This gave us a real thrill.

The redcedar seed secured by Mast and Reynolds in the Platte River country was planted under various conditions, part in the nursery and some sown broadcast in the hills. To the best of my knowledge not a seed of it ever sprouted. This was before methods of propagating redcedars were known.

The growth and development of the seedling pines in the nursery was a fascinating process that afforded many thrills. But all was not smooth sailing. The little plants began to droop, and soon to wither and die. They were "Damping-off". We appealed to Plant Pathologists for remedies or preventives, but in spite of all we could do, they continued to die until their little stems became fibrous enough to resist the disease.

From this time on the development of the nursery was very much a matter of routine. We had many hardships and difficulties to overcome and many disappointments to live down. However, there was always enough success to keep us encouraged. Growing pine trees in the Sand Hills was a new venture and we had to figure out <sup>methods</sup> ~~ways~~ that would succeed. Everyone was watching us, and practically everyone was praying that we would succeed.

During the years that I was in charge of the project we had visits from a goodly number of the Bureau Officials, including Mr. Gifford Pinchot, Chief Forester, who spent 2 days with us. He was much impressed with the possibilities of the project and the progress we had made up to the time of his visit. He assured me of his faith in the project and in our ability to carry on successfully.

Dr. Charles C. Bessey of the State University was always a welcome visitor. He did not come often, but he always inspired us with his sincere faith *of in* the success of the project. He accompanied Senator Burkett on a visit to the nursery, and succeeded in convincing the Senator of the soundness of the undertaking, and of the soundness of the Forest Policies of Mr. Pinchot, to the point that he, Senator Burkett, gave the Forest Service Policies his political support thereafter.

Moses P. Kincaid, Congressman from our Congressional District at the time and for many years, spent a day with us in 1907.

He was so completely sold on the possibilities of growing evergreen trees in the Sand Hills that he succeeded in attaching a rider to a bill under consideration in Congress to provide future "Kincaiders" with free trees from the Government Nursery, for planting on their homesteads. This provision was later the inspiration of the "Weeks Bill", now operative for the cooperative tree planting, forest protection and management of private and State owned forests and the Federal Government.

The success of the tree planting project in the Nebraska Sand Hills was the inspiration for the Shelterbelt Project launched under the F. D. Roosevelt Administration, which in my opinion was a most commendable project, had it been wisely handled.

My part in the Sand Hill Tree Planting project was purely in the pioneering stage. It was work that afforded me much pleasure and satisfaction. I want at this time to pay my respects and appreciation to the many budding young foresters who spent from a few weeks to several months in training in nursery work at the Halsey Nursery, later named the Bessey Nursery. They were a fine lot of young college and university graduates, they were a loyal lot, and contributed much to the cause.

To my associates of the years I spent at Halsey, W. H. Mast, R. H. Schockley, LaMoree Besley, Gordon Lord and I. N. Bovee, now deceased, I want to express my deep appreciation and respect. They were loyal and dependable helpers, and men with whom it was a pleasure and honor to be associated.

My story of the pioneer development of project would not be complete without mention of the ranchmen who grazed cattle on the Reserves at the time of their creation. It took some time to get around and meet them and to acquaint them with our project. About the time of the creation of the Nebraska Forest Reserves, the Department of Justice representatives were carrying on a vigorous campaign of prosecuting ranchmen for maintaining illegal fences on the public

domain. Several ranchmen were convicted, fined and given jail sentences. As a result, most ranchmen were up in arms regarding government regulations, or restrictions in the use of the Public Domain.

Most ranchmen regarded the tree planting project as a crazy fool idea and when grazing fees were imposed they were ready to fight.

Will and Fred Black of the Disnal River Reserve were the first ranchmen whose acquaintance I made. We were friends from the moment we met. We soon came to a complete understanding. The longer we knew each other and the more dealings we had, the more we appreciated and liked each other. To this day I say that Will Black was the most likable man I have ever known.

I met Bob Fadis under rather peculiar circumstances. I went to Valentine to meet him. Found him at his home about 4 P.M. A department of Justice Agent was present checking on the location of his fences. Mr. Fadis introduced us. I told Mr. Fadis that I was anxious to see him in private for only a moment or two. We stepped into an adjoining room. I made my mission known. He told the Department of Justice Agent he would have to be excused for the remainder of the day. Fadis got on a country phone line and arranged for a meeting of 4 or 5 ranchmen on the Niobrara River that evening. Then he got his team and buckboard out and we started for the place of meeting, a ranchman's home on the Niobrara River 20 miles or more from Valentine. We reached our destination about 8 o'clock in the evening, cold and hungry. It was a cold afternoon and night. Fadis' team was housed and fed. We were taken in but were not offered a bite to eat or cup of hot coffee. I explained my mission and the advantages of a grazing permit and the provisions it included. Fadis had little to say, the others were belligerent, we went round and round for 2 or 3 hours without getting anywhere. I suggested to Mr. Fadis that it was time to be heading towards Valentine. On our way back Mr. Fadis agreed that I was offering the ranchmen a good proposition and said he would fill out an application for a grazing permit. Three years later he came down to Halsey to tell me that for the first time in his life he had branded a crop of 95% white-faced calves, due to the fact his fences on the Reserve had kept his neighbors bulls out of his herd of cows. Also to assure me that he was 100% for the Forest Service grazing Permit Policy. Others grazing on the Niobrara Reserve were falling in line by this time and I had no trouble with them.

We had some temporary squabbles over division between ranges on the North Platte Reservation, but after going over the ranges with the cattlemen, we got them straightened out. Ed Myres of Hyannis stopped off between trains, at Halsey, on his way home from Omaha a year or two later, to tell me that his string of cattle he had just sold averaged approximately 100 pounds per animal heavier than he had ever had them weigh before. Said it was the result of having had their own range, water and salt supply and that they had not been chased around in community roundups.

Long before I left Halsey, I could call every ranchman grazing cattle on the Reserves my friend and enthusiastic supporter of the Forest Service's grazing Policy.