

Uncle Sam Provides Homes for Hungry Land-Seekers



Mrs. T.H. Arnold
and her
two daughters
Irene
and
Margaret



North Platte
Crowd in the
Auditorium



Dumping a ton of envelopes on the rostrum.



Curious Landseekers



David Hunter and his force of apple-pickers.

UNCLE SAM had held in his vest pocket just 142½ times as many Nebraska farms to give away as he did October 28, when, at North Platte, he opened his heart and dealt out land, there would have been a farm for every man and woman that applied for one. But Uncle's supply of land is getting shorter and shorter. Meanwhile his people are growing greedier and greedier for his acres.

"Samuel" hesitated a long while before he let go of these two big tracts of land in Nebraska under the lottery system which has grown so popular in government land openings during the last fifteen years. He had a great military reservation in Cherry county that he had no further use for so he decided to let farmers go in and raise potatoes and alfalfa on it, since the cost of potatoes is getting pretty high, even for the uncle's table. Then, besides, he had a tremendous stretch of sand hills in west central Nebraska, where years ago the sand used to drift so that you never could tell whether O'Fallon's Bluff would be in Lincoln county next week or in McPherson or Grant counties. But as the years waited away, grass began to grow on these hills. Cattle began to feed on them and every year the stock yards in South Omaha and Chicago began to get larger and larger supplies of sand hill cattle.

Has Bright Idea

Still it was thought the hills could not be farmed. So Uncle Sam had a bright idea. He decided to make a forest out of the sand hills. So with his long legs he stepped off an enormous tract through the hills of sand. "Verily," he cried, "this is mine, and shall be kept for my very own for many, many years. Here shall I raise Jack Pine; and here in the centuries to come shall the buzz saw start!"

So he planted Jack Pine here and there in this great forest reserve as he called it, but the cattle tramped them out of the ground, and the winds came and blew the seeds into eternity. Eventually the good uncle decided he could not raise timber on this ground, and that perhaps the

saw mill industry would never flourish greatly here, so he said:

"This shall I parcel out to my sturdy sons and fair daughters. Here shall they raise cattle, pumpkins and potatoes!"

And he did October 28, at North Platte. An army of human beings as large as that commanded by Napoleon at Waterloo swarmed to the three points of registration, Broken Bow, North Platte and Valentine, to register their applications for a chance for a piece of land in the government lottery. While 76,689 American citizens paid railroad fare to these places and paid their quarter to register, only 538 farms were possible.

But, was the chance not worth taking? Are we not a race of gamblers? And when Uncle Sam invites us into a poker game for a Nebraska farm, with a mere "2-bit ante" required, are we not a game people? Sure thing.

Besides, why not? For while Uncle Sam has gone on record that his Jack Pine didn't do well in the sand hills, he has not tried apple trees.

Sets Out Apple Trees

Well, in the meantime, an old cattleman, David Hunter by name, set out apple trees some twenty miles northwest of North Platte in the sandy loam in the edge of the sand hills. It was back in 1897 that David Hunter made this experiment. He said nothing about it. We heard a lot about the government's Jack pine, but little about David Hunter's orchard. The Jack pine failed, but during the weeks when the 76,689 land seekers were buzzing around to register for claims David and thirty helpers were busy gathering 15,000 bushels of apples from this orchard. Yes, he irrigates the orchard a little, and one can't do that away up in the distant hills, but still he has sand where he is located. From this orchard of thirty-six acres Mr. Hunter has taken a crop every year since the trees began to bear except one year. "That year," he says, "it was a kind of a bad year and the frost caught me. So I gathered only about 6,000 bushels and lost 6,000."

Mr. Hunter used to be in the cattle business back in 1882. Up in the sand hills he was a familiar figure at the big round-ups in those days. He was a cattle baron, too, for he was once offered

\$957,000 for his herd in the hills. He held out for a million. That winter he took his herd to Montana and lost 75 per cent of them in the blizzard. So with this loss and the cutting up of the government lands that commenced soon after he decided to quit the cattle business and plant fruit trees. This year he shipped fourteen carloads of apples to Chicago.

Barred from Registering

One of those who regretted her inability to register for land at North Platte was Mrs. T. H. Arnold, a widow, who, with her two daughters, is holding down a claim in the heart of the sand hills, fifteen miles north of North Platte and some twenty miles from the forest reserve, where the land was given away. She did want one of the reserve claims very badly, for that would have meant a section. As it is, she is only holding a quarter section. But having filed on her land last April, she was barred from the registration now.

This woman, after her husband died, filed on a homestead out in the lonesome sand hills, and there, without a man on the place to fight off the

coyotes, she and her two little daughters are braving the hardships and are proud of it. Irene, aged 17, is the farmer of the family. Last summer she raised 400 bushels of corn, plowing it, tending it and gathering it, all without help. Big pumpkins, melons and potatoes also did this little family raise, and while little Margaret, aged 10, could not claim credit for raising the corn, she took great pride in her pumpkins and melons.

Don't Get Lonesome

"The land up through the reserve is all very much like my claim," said Mrs. Arnold, and I should like very much to have one of the sections up there. We don't get lonesome, and, in fact, we rather like it. We are staying in North Platte now to spend our vacation. We make the trip to the homestead every two weeks to bring in feed for our horses. We have to bring in hay and corn. My daughters and I put up twenty tons of hay, too, last summer. We could have put up more in the valleys, but we did not need it for our stock."

Mrs. Arnold sold landseekers' souvenir badges during the registration and drawing to make a lit-

tle extra pin money during the autumn weeks while the ranch is not producing.

There was expectancy in the big old auditorium at North Platte on the morning of October 28, and nearly a thousand gathered in the hall to hear the first names read when the government drawing should commence. When the name of Marvin Tritch, a Misourian, was read as the winner of the first claim the crowd gave a sigh of relief. It was to hear the first name that all had been holding their breath. Little Ruth Elder and Mabel McFarland, the two children chosen to draw the envelopes from the great stack of white piled on the floor, scampered nimbly hither and thither, snatching up envelopes at random. They seemed thoroughly to enjoy the operation when once they were well in action. Little did they realize the importance to individuals somewhere in the great United States whether they picked up their envelope here or there. Often they snatched up a handful of envelopes at a time and then allowed them to flutter idly to the floor again like so many leaves until only one remained in their hand. This they would

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