

Aged Pioneer Preacher Starts Out Again With Wife to Trek Over Nebraska and Dakota in Old-Fashioned Team-Drawn Wagon-Home of Early Prairie Day

Motorists on Modern Trail May Wonder on Meeting Ancient Conveyance and Hale Octogenarians Within—Star Wanderer for 40 Years as Preacher-Farmer Is D. S. Hulburt.

April travelers on the Kearney, Ringview and Pierre auto trail, which runs north and south in Nebraska and South Dakota, will rub their eyes and look again and wonder whether a 19th century Rip Van Winkle has waked, when they pass a man with heavy, long, white beard, driving an old-time covered wagon with a breaking plow on behind—about such an outfit as was an everyday sight on the prairies anywhere from 25 to 60 years ago.

Should any Manhattanite chance to be traveling that trail for the first time, expecting to see the wild west of the movies and the novels, he may accept the sight as a matter of course. But the men who drove the wagons when the nation was moving west, were at least fairly young, while the beard on this man's face gives token of the 80 years he has lived.

Why does this octogenarian, with his wife who is in her 70th year, thus set forth in the manner of bygone days? That question can be answered only by asking another—why has he, from early boyhood, kept pace with the frontier, never content to remain till the country became settled and the population stable?

Sixty-four years ago, with his father's family, he followed his uncle to new and untried lands in Green county, Wisconsin, where it was confidently predicted, for instance, that apples would never grow, though a splendid fruit country later developed there.

In September, 1863, he migrated to another newer community, where he had purchased a farm 13 miles due north of Cedar Rapids, Ia. In 1881 he went to Neligh, Neb., then the west end of what is now the Chicago & Northwestern railway, and having in the meantime entered the ministry he organized two churches in that vicinity. As soon as their buildings were completed, the urge of the frontier pulled him farther west.

In Sheridan, Daves and Box Butte counties, in the northwest of Nebraska, he preached for a few years until there came the call of the wilderness—what was then the great, almost trackless sandhill country in the north central part of the state. Thither, with covered wagon and broncho team, he took his wife and three boys, and for two years the wagon was their only home while

cowboys and scattered homesteaders had the gospel preached to them.

Eighteen years ago, with the older children almost ready to begin life for themselves, he went away back into the sandhills in the middle of Loup county, to a spot that is even now 25 miles from the end of the branch line railway which after a fashion feeds that country, and took a homestead.

Now Bound to Dakota.
This April, with the wife who has shared his life for nearly 40 years, with covered wagon, a team and the plow that broke the sod on the Kinkaid homestead, he is starting north-west to where three of his children are pioneering on Indian land at Athboy, S. D., and where he expects to make his home until the call comes to the great "Undiscovered Country." He is not looking for that call soon, as he is still good for a 10-mile walk, and expects to make his own living for some time yet.

When D. S. Hulburt reached Neligh, Neb., the end of the railroad, in 1881, he came with a missionary purpose. He went out 18 miles to where three Seabury boys, with their wives (six Baptists) lived on adjoining "claims." He took a homestead and built so that the three families were all within a half-mile of his house.

There was not even a schoolhouse within five miles, but seats were made and put in his kitchen so that Sunday school and preaching services were held there before the roof was finished, and more than 60 persons attended some of the services in that 12 by 16 foot room. In this same room a church was organized, of which he was pastor, and there also he taught the children of the neighborhood in a three-months "subscription school."

Some who attended the services said that they would prefer to go to a public building and the young pastor said, "Let's build a church." They said he was crazy, but he had his way. One of the neighbors, called an infidel, subscribed a cow. She was sold for \$25, which was the first money in the building fund.

When the minister's father in Wisconsin took sick, he started back in an open, one-horse buggy and made the trip across Iowa, crossing the Missouri river on a ferry at Niobrara, and the Mississippi at Dubuque.

Old-Time Incidents.
The changes that 41 years have wrought are well illustrated by the fact that the ferry at Niobrara waited while a drove of cattle were made to swim the river, to provide meat for Indians. The government had bought a lot of wild cattle, so unused to human beings except cowboys that they would have killed an unmounted person if he had appeared among them. They were herded into a large, high-walled enclosure with a steep chute running out into the river. A bunch of cattle would surge up the chute, and the driver and back to the bank they had just left.

When Mr. Hulburt started on the trip to his sick father in Wisconsin, work on the church building stopped. On his return, one neighbor asked whether the work would be resumed, and got this answer: "I guess it will. Hulburt got home, put his horse in the stable, took his dinner in his hand and started on a run for the church."

Of course it was finished. The "infidel" said, "I've heard that you can't make something out of nothing, but this comes as near to it as anything I ever saw." The day the building was dedicated, the pastor withdrew his membership, having secured another minister to serve the church, and sought newer fields.

In Plainview a little church was organized, with six members besides himself. Five of these were women, and the sixth under age and a transient—yet on the day of organization carpenters began work on a parsonage, and 13 months later a church building was finished, with a debt against it of \$1,650 (a large amount in that day and in that new country) with no security.

People Eager for Churches.
The church council that was called had three purposes: To organize the church, to ordain the pastor and to dedicate the building. But a building could not be dedicated with \$1,650 of unsecured debts against it, and when the preacher of the dedication sermon asked the pastor whether they should ask for \$100 contributions from the audience—or even \$50—he was assured that there were no men of that financial caliber there. He asked for twenty-five, and only four responded, including the pastor. He asked for twenty, and secured only four more. He dropped to fifteen, and as Mr. Hulburt says: "That was our size. They just rolled 'em in."

While on the subject of church buildings, let us jump 10 years, and then come back. In the spring of 1894 a little handful of people, of a dozen miles west of Taylor, in Loup county, impoverished by repeated years of drought, had organized a church. A council had been called to recognize the church and dedicate the building, but up to four days before the date set, there was no sign of a building.

A god structure might have been put up if they had begun in time, but this could not be, because 1894 was proving another "dry year" and the ground was too dry to break sod for building. Yet the pastor would not hear of calling off or postponing the meet, and an old house was bought in Willow Springs, a little town 20 miles away, which had been virtually abandoned when the railroad came up to Burwell, on the other side of the river. A number of teams went down, the house was demolished and the lumber loaded and hauled to the church site, everybody in the neighborhood turned out and worked and the building was put together and dedicated on time.

Indian Alarm Excites.
And now go back to Plainview. As soon as the debts on the church build-



D. S. Hulburt, 80-year-old Nebraska pioneer, and his old-time covered wagon. In this wagon—the same one he used in his missionary pilgrimages 40 years ago—he and his wife are starting out from their homestead in Loup county, Nebraska, for Athboy, S. D. Included in his equipment Mr. Hulburt is carrying the same plow he used to break ground on his Kinkaid homestead 39 years ago. The above layout also shows a picture of a little church that Mr. Hulburt built in four days, years ago, near Taylor, Neb.

ing were safe, the pastor moved on west. He said he wanted to make room for a bigger man and, anyway, he felt that he could do better at organizing churches than at running them after they were started. And so he went to the Baptist church at Gordon, where a country schoolhouse was bought and remodeled for use as a church building.

Hay Springs, still farther west than Gordon, called him next, and with headquarters here he organized churches at Box Butte and Lawn, and later spent one winter in Box Butte county to be nearer to those churches.

Northwest Nebraska was just opening up—one of the periodical booms it experienced in the old days when the tide of migration ebbed and flowed with the alternation of wet and dry years. From Hay Springs Mr. Hulburt went out to country schoolhouses to preach, and it was but natural that he should take up government land. In those days, even though one had had a homestead, he could secure another quarter section of land by living on it and paying \$1.25 an acre. He took such a "pre-emption," but before he paid for it a law was passed by congress providing that a person who had proved up on a homestead before a certain date, and who no longer held it, could change his pre-emption to a homestead, and thus save the \$1.25 an acre. Mr. Hulburt took advantage of this opportunity and thus became one of the comparatively few individuals who ever received from Uncle Sam two regular and legal homesteads.

But 15 or 20 years later, having abandoned this land in pursuit of his missionary labors, he became perhaps the only man who has ever had three such legal and regular homesteads. For when the Kinkaid section homestead law was passed it provided that a person who had previously had a homestead, but no longer held it, could take enough more land to make out 640 acres. Having already had two homesteads of 160 acres each, and having no land now, he was entitled to 320 acres in the part of Nebraska covered by this law. In the center of Loup county, including perhaps the highest land in the county, he took his third "claim" and has occupied it most of the time since, while doing Sunday school work and also preaching in the scattered schoolhouses of that region, and in his own home.

Sometime later Mr. Hulburt read in his church paper of the religious destitution in the great sandhill region of north central Nebraska—the letter he read having been written from Loup county. And he said: "I'd like to go to Loup county—but I can't." Week after week and month after month he said, it until he dropped the last three words. And then, on March 21, 1893, the family loaded into a covered wagon and started on the 250-mile trip over the sandy wastes, part of the way practically without even trails, to Loup county. The plan was to return in about six months, but 39 years have passed and the homestead

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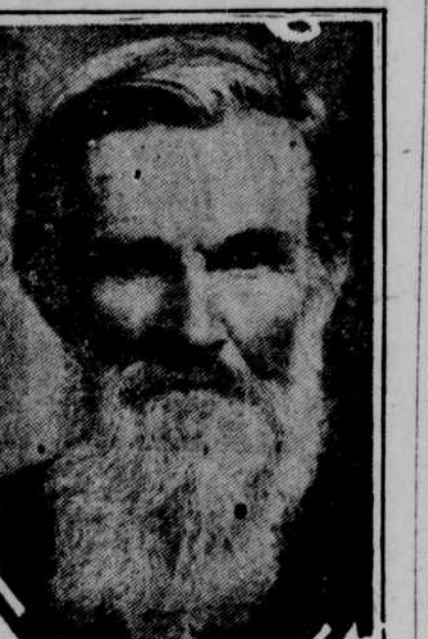
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The missionary family had experiences with prairie fires and sandstorms and other disagreeable things. They were started, while eating, by blanket Indians lifting the flap of the wagon and sticking in their heads in their friendly, unceremonious way.

They camped for three days, in a terrible blizzard, hard by a straw stack and an abandoned stable, keeping the horses in the stable and burning straw in the little stove not only to keep warm, but also to melt snow to provide drinking water for the family and the team.

Sunk in Quicksand.
Fording the North Loup river near Brownlee they were told that there was a little island to cross when almost over. "And keep going when you get across that, for there's quicksand there." Going down off the little island into the water again, one horse fell, and struggling in the water kicked the feet from under the other horse. With both horses down the wagon began to sink steadily.

The first thing done was to carry the oldest boy to shore and send him running for help, to a house that was in sight some distance away. The next, to carry out the rest of the family, disconnect the team from the wagon and get them to shore, attach them by the picket rope (which happened to be new) to the end of the wagon tongue, and make them work. The wagon was out by the time the boy came back with the report that there was no one at the house.

The whole outfit got lost one day when there were no roads and the sky was overcast by dull, low-hanging clouds which absolutely hid the sun. In the sandhills, the surface formation has been wholly by wind, and not by water, so that there is an apparently never-ending array of hills, all with the same general direc-

tion, and with about as much individuality as the waves of the sea. The second day out was the only Sunday they ever traveled and it was a happy family that came across a little creek at 10 o'clock, where a drink could be had, and cowboys told them where they were and how to get to where they wanted to go.

Perhaps it is not strange, with such memories, that the missionary is setting out again, this April, in a covered wagon. Has he chosen lonely places in which to dwell? His spirit has been no less lonely. Has he been a pioneer in the boundless west? He is no less so as a religious teacher. And those are the reasons for the kind of life he has lived.

The world was 6,000 years old when he was a boy and it has been made out of nothing in six regular days. Satan went about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour—and this man, who at the age of 80 is trekking out across Nebraska and Dakota, has now for more than 50 years conceived it to be his lifework to rescue such souls as he could. It is real to him—he lives it. And that is why he has felt called to these desolate places, where other ministers were few or lacking altogether.

He does not read his Bible as he did 60 or 70 years ago. He may not agree with W. J. Bryan on the question of evolution. He no longer believes it literally true that a week's work accounts for all the suns and planets of creation, with the oceans, the trees, the birds and beasts and one family ready-made. He's perhaps ready to give evolution at least half a chance. But he's probably inclined to believe that General Joshua really stopped the sun and the moon till he could finish his battle, as the old Hebrew war song related, and he absolutely believes that when the sheep and the goats are separated at the Judgment some of his neighbors and friends will be among those to live in torment from that time right straight on.

That accounts for the pioneering—some of it. And that accounts for some of the whole story for his staying so long with the homestead in the middle of the sandhills, despite the pleadings of children and other relatives and the protests of neighbors and friends. So at bottom that's why, yesterday, perhaps, and tomorrow, travelers only that north-and-south trail are meeting and passing the covered wagon with the hale old couple and that symbol of pioneering, the breaking plow.

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