

NEBRASKA FOLKLORE PAMPHLETS

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J. Harris Gable, State Supervisor

Robert E. Carlson, Editor

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PIONEER TALES

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All of these hoaxes, tall-tales and experiences have been obtained from interviews with Nebraskans who pioneered in the State. They have never been printed and their editing, in an attempt to retain their original flavor, has been kept at a minimum.

HORSE TRADING TALES

(Grant Dehart, of Lincoln, came to Nebraska in 1879 with his parents. He says that their first home, south of Central City, was a sod house with a dirt floor which could only be kept free from dust through persistent sprinkling with water.

Mr. Dehart, who is now over 80 years old, looks and acts like a typical pioneer, partly because of his wide-spread moustache which, in an age of electric razors, brings up memories of covered wagons and six-shooters. He likes to talk about the Nebraska of the '80's and '90's; and, as he gets into the swing of his stories, his speech and thoughts become as sharp and clear as those of a much younger man. Mr. Dehart is a born story-teller who instinctively inserts both atmosphere and humor into his tales.

He likes, in special, to relate his and his father's horsetrading experiences in an age and section of the country where trading horses was a game of wits as well as an exchange of chattels.)

STUMP STUCKER

A neighboring horse trader, who lived ten miles from our place, pulled into the yard one morning, driving what seemed to be a fair to middling good work team. The off-horse, however, aroused my suspicions, although he was a big-boned gray who was as sleek and well fleshed as a ripened watermelon. In fact he was too sleek. If he had acted sick I would have thought he was bloated. But some horses look that way for no particular reason. Father, of course, was circling around him in his best professional manner, but then he did that to every horse he saw. Anyway, Kingman apparently wasn't bent on a trade. His coming looked like a sociable drop-in that so many folks were in the habit of doing in those days. Besides, he said he was on his way on an important errand elsewhere.

But father, who was becoming interested in the gray, didn't listen to Swapper's talk about leaving.

There was something about the gray that had captured his eye. I suppose it was his sleek appearance. The same sleek appearance that had aroused my suspicions.

So, knowing of father's interest, I wasn't surprised when he went into the barn and brought out an

eight-year old bay mare he had traded for a few months before. She was a good piece of horse flesh except for her bad habit of riding the single tree (letting the other horse do all the pulling) when doing team work.

Swapper, as soon as father began showing her off, forgot all about the hurry he had said he was in. Instead he sat down and slowly filled his pipe with corn cake.

"I tell you, Dehart," said Swapper, now leisurely puffing away on his briar, "I'm not hankering to part with Gray Bill. He's too good a hoss. But, as a personal favor, I might be willing to trade for your mare if you will throw in a little boot--say \$15.00."

This offer started my father and Swapper off into a typical horse trader's argument, with Swapper trying to keep his original price where he had placed it and father attempting to cut it down to what he regarded as a more reasonable figure.

They finally struck a compromise of \$7.50 and it looked like a trade. I noticed that father was now in such a hurry to finish the deal he neglected to ask some of the usual trader's questions about hidden defects. His only one was when he asked, "Your gray ain't wind-broke, is he?"

Swapper, in an insulted tone, answered: "Look here, Dehart, you'll find that hoss has more wind than any hoss you ever had."

Well, this answer settled the deal. They made the swap. Our bay was harnessed and hitched in jig time. Father led Gray Bill off to the side while Swapper got into his buggy, gathered up the lines and then, after mumbling something about being in a hurry, went away rather suddenlike. His actions still seemed queer to me, but I didn't say anything.

Father, after Swapper had left, took Gray Bill into the barn and tied him in a stall that had a straight pole running across. It was now eleven-thirty. The horse trade had taken most of the morning, so I didn't see how Swapper could have been in a hurry after spending so much time with us. Father, however, thought he had done a good morning's work; but I reserved my conclusions. Gray Bill still seemed too perfect. He was so sleek that he looked more like a shiny over-sized toy horse than the real thing.

About half an hour later we all sat down to dinner, but only had time to pass the food around before an infernal racket started in the barn. It sounded like a dozen bellows and a hundred frogs all blowing and croaking in unison. It went "Ooph ker chug, ooph ker chug," then, for variety, reversed itself to "chug ker ooph, chug ker ooph." Hell had certainly broken loose in the barn.

Ma was the first to jump up. She yelled, "Pa, that's your new horse. You and your smart horse swapping has gotten us a stump sucker."

Sure enough, when we got to the barn we found Gray Bill with his jaws clamped on the pole that ran across the manger making the most unearthly noises I have ever heard. He was sucking wind like a cow pulling her foot out of the mud.

It was a sight to see and I couldn't help but laugh, "Yep, you've got a wind-sucker there for fair."

Father was raving mad. "That skunk, Swapper, knew about this."

"Well, didn't he tell you Gray Bill had more wind than any horse around here?" I asked.

The horse was blowed up like a balloon and still going strong. I thought he'd bust, but he didn't. That was why he looked so fat and sleek when Swapper drove him in. The old rascal had

stopped the horse at a post and let him suck wind just before he came to our house.

We thought we could bring him out of his wind sucking habit by keeping him away from wooden fences or poles, but that was a difficult thing to do. Then, too, he wouldn't eat much, so, as soon as his "wind-pressure" went down he looked like a walking skeleton. I doubt if he ate more than half a dozen mouthfuls of hay a day. . . .just enough to keep from falling over.

The first thing father did the next Sunday morning was to drive over to Swapper's place with the stump sucker. To his surprise Swapper was unusually lenient for being a horse trader. He offered to exchange the bay mare for Gray Bill provided he could keep the \$7.50. Father was glad to get out of the deal this easy.

Later we learned that Swapper had traded his stump sucker to nearly every newcomer in the county. Swapper always got him back, keeping, of course, the money that had been involved in the transactions.

TRADING BY MOONLIGHT

A few years after father's horse trade with Swapper I got a job in a water mill near Central City. When working there I made a horse trade with Swapper for what looked like a fair saddle horse whose name was Baldy. This horse was a smooth bald-faced bay whose only apparent fault was that he had ornery eyes. I thought I could handle him if he got nasty, so his mean expression didn't bother me. It looked like a good deal.

But it didn't require a long time to find out he was just as ornery as he looked. He behaved fine at first, was so gentle that he could have been a ladies' horse. But our "honeymoon" was soon over with. One evening, when I was leaving Central City after visiting friends, I found myself sitting on Main Street in a puddle of water with a bunch of loafers whooping and laughing around me.

The horse, who I soon began to suspect was the devil himself, didn't run away. Instead he stood still and actually looked amused as I started to get up. I managed to ride him home that night without being thrown a second time, but only because I didn't let him take me by surprise.

The next morning I fixed up a bucking stick, which is a crotched stick that is fastened to the belly band and runs to the bridle bit rings. This arrangement kept him from getting his head down so he could buck.

I am now anxious to get rid of Old Baldy before everyone in the neighborhood caught on that he was a bucker. So, with this in mind, I rode him one night to a party given a few miles south of the mill where I hoped to meet someone who would be interested in a trade. I took off the bucking stick when I got near the place and tied him at the pasture gate which was located some distance from the house. This was done to keep too many people from seeing and asking questions about him. The less advertising you do with a bad horse you wish to sell, the better off you are.

Lem Troost, who was a newcomer to the neighborhood, showed up at the party a little later and we got to discussing this and that. Finally we got on the subject of horses.

Lem said, "I sure got a bang-up smooth four-year old filly out there."

That remark of Lem's got me interested, so I began bragging up the bald-faced bucking boy

Swapper had pawned off on me. Pretty soon we wandered into the yard to compare horses.

There was a good moon, which made Baldy look sleek and racy. Even his eyes had a gentle look. Lem immediately fell in love with my horse and wanted to ride him; but I was scared he would get hurt and at the same time I didn't want to say anything about Baldy's bad habit of bucking.

Finally I gave into Lem's request; but before I let him mount I wheeled Baldy around so he would start off in the opposite direction from where he was standing. I had found he wouldn't buck when I did this if he wasn't ridden for too great a distance. I also told Lem my horse was used to me but might resent a stranger riding him at night. This was a hint for him to be on his guard. Lem mounted while I held my breath for fear he would be thrown off. But nothing happened. Baldy behaved like an angel, which made Lem fall more in love with him than ever.

Lem, after his ride, took me to a side of the barn where his horse was hitched. She wasn't as big as Baldy but looked good. I rode here around the yard in order to get the feel of her. The only thing I regretted was that there were too many rigs around to put her through a fast pace, which is the best way to test a horse.

We traded even, without any boot. Lem seemed anxious to get away after we had exchanged the saddles on our new horses. I would have noticed this more, and become suspicious, if I hadn't been of the same mind. The party, which was still in progress, was forgotten by both of us.

Lem was the first to leave. I wondered what would happen to him on his way home if Baldy began bucking, but I didn't actually worry because Lem was a good rider who wouldn't get hurt, much, if Baldy decided to give him a spill.

After Lem had left I started for home on my filly and was delighted with the way she handled herself. I put her into a trot and then a gallop. We were breezing along at a good clip, feeling extra good, when for what seemed no reason at all, she stumbled and went down. At first I thought it was an accident, but a little later it happened again--twice in one mile. I got skinned up that time, so went easy the rest of the way. I knew now that Lem had put over about the same thing on me that I had on him.

The next morning I found out what was the trouble with my new horse, although it took another bad fall to do it. She had a crooked foot which worked all right at a slow trot but when she went into a gallop the foot turned in, causing her to hit it with her other foot. She went down every time she did it.

Lem found out about his side of the trade the next morning when Baldy pitched him into the road. He didn't hang onto Baldy long after that had happened. This time he traded for a one-eyed old pelter who had the heaves.

Lem and I laughed over the way we thought we had out-smarted each other. We figured we had broken even, so remained friends; only we didn't trade any more horses.

CLAY BANK

One day, when I was in town, an Irishman came up to me and asked if I would like to see a real horse. I guessed that he was fishing for a trade, which, of course, I was always willing to consider. Horse trading, as you have no doubt suspected, was in my blood. It was a game of wits which I couldn't have given up if I wanted to.

His clay bank (Buckskin) was hitched next to my filly. She looked good and when I rode her she seemed sound as a dollar.

The Irishman then rode my filly around the block. Fortunately he didn't ride her fast, so she didn't stumble. He came back satisfied with her performance. Then he asked about the skinned place on her foot where her other leg had been hitting it. I explained that away by saying, "Oh, that's where the flies have been gnawing at her."

We traded even, after which I left town in a hurry. Even then it wasn't fast enough, because as I turned the corner I saw the Irishman dusting himself off in front of the saloon from a bad spill the filly had given him when her trick foot gave way. He wasn't mad then because he figured it was an accidental stumble, like the one I had the first time I rode her. Later, after he had discovered the true fault of his horse, he wouldn't speak to me for over a year.

I got the best of that trade. The clay bank was a prize without any faults. I kept her for several years.

THE DEVIL HORSE

One morning, in the middle '80's, I was approached by a shiftless trader, known as Ripgut, who always had a large string of half-starved trading stock around. He got his nickname from his seasonal habit of cutting slough grass (known as ripgut) with which to feed his bony plugs.

On this day he showed up with a fair looking gelding. The horse wasn't beautiful to look at, being a dirty gray, but was unusually smooth and well fed for coming from Ripgut's stock. At that I wouldn't have paid any attention to Ripgut or his horse if I hadn't had a brown mare I wasn't so keen about.

Ripgut started talking trading in a big way. "In this horse," he said, "you will find a good rider and worker that is as sound as a United States dollar."

I knew the horse couldn't have all the perfections Ripgut claimed for him, but he looked good enough for a trade.

Well, that horse turned out to be worse than I had ever thought it possible for any horse to be. Most horses, even the very bad ones, have only one nasty trick but this horse knew the whole book. He was a balker, would sit down, lay down, walk backwards, and kick. I didn't know any one horse could have so much cussedness in him.

But I made up my mind to do something with this gray if it was nothing else than to shoot him. So I started working him, but the work turned into a battle of wits between the two of us with the horse on the winning side.

He was as peaceful as a dove when I first hitched him to the wagon, but the moment I took up the reins and began driving he balked. Then to make matters worse, he turned his head in a high-hatted manner to see what I was going to do about it. Finally I got him to moving but only until we came to the top of a hill where he came to a dead stop for the apparent purpose of looking over the country. After a considerable delay he began moving again. Then, after we had travelled a mile or so he decided to lay down. This time I hit him with the whip, which, instead of making him behave, caused him to walk backwards until the rear of the buggy was pushed against a tree.

I was now good and mad, so again reached for my whip. I wound the lash around my arm and hit

him over the ear with the loaded stock. The blow stunned him enough to bring him down on his knees. Apparently he had now had enough because he didn't create any more trouble that day.

The third time he balked was on the section line west of Central City, when he just stopped and refused to move. He didn't sit or lie down as he had done previously. Again I reached for my whip, but before I could hit him he had pushed the buggy backwards into a ditch, after which he pulled out as rapidly as he could; apparently with the idea of throwing me out of the wagon. Fortunately I had a good hold on the seat or he would have succeeded. The old boy was learning new tricks. He must have worked all night thinking out this new one.

I didn't have any more trouble for a week. Then, one evening when we were hitting it off for home in a light buggy, one of our local dandies pulled up beside us with a spanking outfit and started to pass. My cuss of a horse immediately saw red and would have raced if I hadn't held him down to let the other fellow get around. He didn't like it a bit, and I, too, sorta hated to hold him back. It was an insult to his running abilities. Besides, there was something about his determined spirit I liked.

As the buggy passed us he ceased being insulted and became mad. The first thing he did was to stop dead, after which he lifted his heels over the single tree and trace in preparation to letting go with both feet on the target, which was the dash board. The best I could do in the face of this violent attack was to crawl out of the buggy at the rear just as he kicked a hole in the dash board and ripped the back cushion of the seat into shreds. If I had remained in my original position I would have been killed. The horse then gracefully pulled his legs back in the shafts, after which he turned around to survey the damage. A mischievous gleam was in his eyes, but I didn't do or say anything as I crawled back on the seat. In a minute we were on our way as if nothing had happened.

Yes that horse was unique. But he went the way of all horse-trading horses. I traded him for a filly who became wind-broke after any extra effort.

SKUNK OIL AND THE PUNKIN

(Grant Essex, of Lincoln, who is 80 years old, says he was told the following tall tale in Chase County during the 1880's.)

One of the first men I met after I had settled in Chase County, in the '80's, was an old fellow who had a claim on the Stinking Water River. He was a character who did a little bit of everything, from trapping and hunting to farming, but what he excelled in the most was lying. He could think up more lies in less time than anyone I have ever known. And I have heard some pretty good deviations from the truth in my day. But this man was the champion.

I don't recollect his real name, nor would it matter if I did, because to everyone in the community he was known as "Skunk Oil." He had been given this name because of his constant claims that a skunk's oil had the power to cure all diseases. Besides, Skunk Oil carried a bad order with him, caused, I think, by his lack of interest in bathing. Then, too, he was constantly sweating, even in the coldest weather. It wasn't a pretty sight--or smell. But it was, so to speak, Skunk Oil's "trade mark," and as that you had to accept it.

One day when I was out looking over the land in preparation for spring plowing, I saw Skunk Oil ambling along an old buffalo trail which led past my place. I had only met him once before, so I knew I was in for another lie, since a newcomer to the County was always legitimate prey for Skunk Oil.

But Skunk Oil, after our preliminary greetings were over, fooled around a while, talking about his and that before he got around to the whopper that I knew he was itching to tell. You see I had met up with him once before, on the first day of my arrival in the County, so I knew what he was leading up to. He finally got started by asking what I thought of the country and its possibilities. I answer by telling him I didn't think anyone could raise much but grass and, with luck, maybe a little hell.

"Man you're plum wrong there," was his reply. "Ever hear about them punkins I raised over by the river? Well, you ought to have seen them."

I saw he was starting to warm up to his subject, so I looked doubtful and said I didn't think they'd grow over there.

He didn't reply for a moment or so because he was busy biting off a chew of navy plug that apparently was as tough as leather. Then, after he had succeeded in chewing off a big piece, he slowly replied: "I didn't think they would grown there myself, so I didn't attempt planting any punkin seeds. But one day, when I was dropping some corn seed along the river seven or eight punkin seeds showed up in the poke of corn. So I just naturally planted those seeds with the corn and forgot about them. The corn grew up and by the middle of the summer was better'n shoulder high. But I didn't go over to the field for a long time. I believed in letting good-enough be, so let the corn take care of itself. Besides I was having a great deal of pig trouble at this time."

"How was that?" I asked.

"Well, I had an old sow who had a litter of eleven little pigs that I turned loose to forage for themselves. It saved me the trouble of feeding them. For awhile they stayed near the soddie, but one day they didn't show up and it was the beginning of no end of trouble. I spent several weeks looking for them, but couldn't find so much as a trace of their whereabouts. Along in September I went to my corn patch, by the river, and what I saw nearly made me doubt my sanity."

"Why, what had happened?"

"The eight punkin seeds that had been mixed in with the seed corn I had planted had started growing in a big way, like the bean in 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' only for me they followed the ground. One punkin vine was especially big. It was at least eight feet thick and took off across the river like a big green snake, disappearing in a thicket on the opposite side of the river bank. This vine was so enormous that its top was above my head. I followed it to the bank, where I crawled upon it and walked across the river. It made a natural bridge which was strong enough to hold a team of oxen.

"Well, believe it or not, I followed this vine for seven miles into the open prairie, where, at its end, I found a tremendous punkin which must have been thirty feet high. It was a beautiful reddish-yellow, ripening in the fall air. From a distance, with the sun shining on it, it looked very much like a harvest moon. I had never seen anything like it before and probably never will again.

"As I was walking around it, looking it over, I heard a grunting, squealing sound come from its insides. It was a peculiar unearthly noise, which had me scared stiff for a few minutes until I happened to think of my missing pigs. It was them I heard. They were in the punkin, although I couldn't figure out how they had gotten there.

"So I hurried back to the soddie for a saw and axe, which I took back to the punkin. After two hours of sawing and cutting I managed to make a hole in the side. It was hard work, because the punkin's sides were as hard as plate iron. After I had finished making a good sized hole I crawled

inside where, sure's your born, were those pigs. They had growed so it was difficult to recognize them. Must have weighed 200 pounds apiece while the sow probably tipped the scales at half a ton.

"Now that I had found my pigs I was sure hankering to find out how they had gotten into the punkin. Nor did it take me long to get at the secret.

"The old sow had taken her litter to the corn patch where, when rooting around, she'd dug a hole into the side of the vine, and had gone inside, followed by her pigs. Here they had stayed, feeding on the vine and growing along with it. In time it carried them across the river to the big punkin itself. This they made their headquarters. But there were many tracks in the vine itself, so they probably travelled back and forth a great deal.

"The punkin was too big to move, so I left the pigs there all winter and they used it for a snug cozy hog house. I walked over once a week to see how they were getting along. When the weather was nice I walked over on the top of the vine, but when it was cold I lighted a miner's lamp, which I had purchased from an old peddler, and used the inside of the vine. It made a fine tunnel.

"When spring came I hitched the team to my wagon and crossed the river on the vine (it was a perfect road) with the idea of loading on of the punkin seeds for another crop. I took Hank Billings, who lived up the river a ways, along to help me load the seed.

Unfortunately we didn't have a rope and pulley, so were forced to raise the punkin seed with our hands. The seed slipped during the process and caught Hank under it, breaking his leg. Naturally this accident made him good and mad, since it meant he would be laid up for the greater part of the summer.

"So I was not surprised the next day when a committee of settlers called at my soddie and ordered me not to plant any more punkins. They said they were skeered of the punkin taking over the whole county if any more grew like the last one did, and there wasn't any sense in taking any unnecessary risks.

"I tried to answer their arguments by telling them what fine roads and bridges would make, and of the punkin houses and barns that could be made from the heads. But they wouldn't listen to me and burned all my seeds, so I calculate the only punkins we will have from now on will be the ordinary garden variety which isn't good for anything except pies."

A THRESHING HOAX

(Grant Dehart tells the following threshing story.)

Another fellow and I had a threshing outfit in the late '80's with which we threshed grain for the farmers in our part of Merrick and Hamilton counties. Since most of the grain ripened at the same time we were kept busy attempting to cover as much territory with our machine in as short a space of time as possible. Then, also, there was a number of threshing outfits in the same county. This, as was to be expected, created a great deal of rivalry between the different crews. This rivalry didn't always end with friendly banter neither. Skulduggery, sometimes of an injurious nature, was indulged in. But I will tell more about that later.

Breakdowns were another thorn in our side, for us because they created delay when we should be making money, for the farmers because idle threshing help was just as notorious for their eating

capacities as when they were working. Then there was always rain to contend with, not only because wet weather prevented threshing but also because the dirt roads of this period were often no better than tracks became impassable with the heavy steam engines used for furnishing power to the threshing machines.

We had been pretty successful in the season of '88. That is, luck was with us as long as we worked our immediate neighborhood. But when we moved into new territory trouble began. First, our engineer turned out to be more of a mule nurse than he was a steam engineer. He managed to keep steam up, but he did it without babying the engine. Consequently it was being slowly pounded to pieces.

It happened that the Burlington strike was on at this time, so many train engineers were drifting around looking for work. One of these was a man named McGurk, who, when he heard we were having trouble with our engine, walked ten miles from Aurora just to see what the trouble was. He didn't say much at first, just loafed around and looked the outfit over. Then, after a day or so, he hit me for a job by saying he could operate the engine the way it should be run. The moment I found out he wasn't another loafer but a trained railroad engineer I set him to work.

The engine, under his treatment, immediately picked up in speed and tempo. It even gave more power with a smaller amount of coal. Then in the evening, after it became too dark to thresh, he adjusted the rings and tightened the loose piston, which had been causing most of the trouble.

McGurk was a tough guy who wouldn't let anyone get near the engine. He didn't even like it when I, its owner, hung around the machine too much. But I didn't mind his attitude because he kept the engine polished and running like clockwork.

Farmers in the '80's, as they still do today, didn't pay cash to the crew that helped with the threshing. This help was paid by returning work in kind. It was not unusual, by this method, for the same farmer to follow the threshing machine to a dozen or more farms.

Some of these farmers, especially the young ones, had the tendency to have a smart-alecky, know-all attitude toward the man who ran the steam engine. Perhaps it was because of his position, since he, like a war lord, was the one who had the power to make the wheels go around.

But McGurk, who no doubt knew about the ribbing that was going on about him, didn't say a word to anyone. He just stuck close to the engine, which he was always oiling and polishing when he didn't have anything else to do.

One young farmer, named Ramey, was especially obnoxious to McGurk because of his habit of jumping up on the engine when the engineer was busy elsewhere and giving the steam whistle a few toots. McGurk didn't say anything but gave Ramey some angry looks. This tickled the young farmer, who was just beginning to feel his oats, and caused him to pull the cord with even more vigor.

Then we moved to young Ramey's father's farm, about a mile away, for a big job. Another threshing outfit was operating in the field adjoining our new location. The men, as was to be expected, were sore at us for what they considered an infringement on their territory. They expressed their feeling by making remarks about our broken-down outfit. Then, too, they heckled us with their steam whistle at every opportunity. McGurk didn't say much, but I could see by the way he glared at the rival outfit he didn't like it. Nor was he enthusiastic about having young Ramey around; especially since we were now threshing for his father, where Ramey felt more free than ever to loaf around the engine as much as he liked.

The steam engine, from time to time had to be re-filled with water. For this purpose a tank

wagon was a part of our outfit, at the top of which was a hose that was long enough to draw water from a horse tank or creek, and a hand pump that was used to force the water into the engine boiler. Young Ramey became interested in the tank wagon shortly after we had moved to his father's farm; when, after fooling around with the engine as much as he dared under McGurk's glares, he climbed on top of the water wagon and began experimenting with the apparatus.

McGurk watched Ramey fooling around with the tank's water pump. After watching him a while he said, "That's a pretty slick thing you are looking at."

"Why, what is it?" asked Ramey.

"Well, sir, I don't tell everyone about it because its an invention of my own which I haven't gotten around to have patented yet. But if you promise to keep it a secret I'll tell you."

"I won't tell a soul," promised Ramey, who was now so curious he couldn't stand still.

"Well, sir, that's a water compressor as well as a pump. It not only pumps water into the engine's boiler but also squeezes up the water so twice as much can be stored in the same amount of space. The water in the tank at the present time isn't compressed because I forgot to turn on the compressor screw the last time I pumped it in."

McGurk then talked the young buck into trying out the water compressor by running both the intake and outtake ends of the hose into the tank. Then he proceeded to explain that if he worked the pump handle he would draw all the water past the compressor, which would squeeze the water so the tank would have twice as great a capacity as it had before.

Well, sir, McGurk talked that fool Ramey into standing up on the water tank for over an hour pumping water out of the tank and back in again. No one paid any attention to what was going on because it all looked businesslike.

The rival crew across the way by now was tearing their hair trying to out-do us in the threshing. We, of course, were doing the same thing; consequently both outfits were really knocking out their jobs in jig time, with the whistles of the two big steamers blowing at full blast and the chaff from the straw flying in every direction.

McGurk, during the course of the day, kept becoming more and more angry at the rival outfit. He scowled in their direction every time they tooted their whistle, which was every few minutes. Then, late in the afternoon, he had an idea which, if it worked, would put the rival outfit out of business for a day. So, after watching young Ramey pumping water in and out of the water tank for a back-breaking length of time he called him over to the engine, where he asked him if he had ever heard of a steam engine play notes like a pipe organ.

Young Ramey was interested, so McGurk proceeded to tell him how it could be done with the rival outfit's engine if he would carefully follow directions. McGurk then told him in detail how to sneak out to the other outfit and drop several large chunks of homemade soap into the tank of their water wagon. McGurk added that whistle soap was the best, but since they would have to send to town for it the homemade variety would have to be used as a substitute.

Well, that kid followed McGurk's directions and loaded up the rival outfits water tank with as much soap as he could lay his hands on. He could hardly wait the next morning for the steam engine to start up so he could hear musical sounds.

Early the next morning the rival outfit quickly got its engine to steaming for the day's run; but as soon as they filled the boiler with the soapy water in the tank all kinds of tricks began to take

place. Enough soap formed and bubbled out of the engine's cylinders to furnish washings for a hundred families.

The engineer of the rival engine of course discovered what was wrong and concluded that McGurk had had a hand in the business, although he couldn't prove anything.

They spent all morning getting their engine in shape while the rest of the hands loafed around. We finished threshing that day, after which McGurk insisted that the outfit be moved to our next job on the same night. He was afraid the rival outfit would retaliate with similar tricks on him in revenge, and did not wish to take any chances by remaining in the vicinity.

CATTLE DRIVE

(John Allen Moss, of Lincoln, who has lived in the State for over 60 years, tells the following cattle story, which took place in Saunders County in the early '80's.)

An Omaha man, attracted by the prospects of obtaining a rich revenue from emigrants and settlers, built a wooden toll bridge near Ashland in the late '70's. This bridge was a rickety structure which was none too reassuring of being able to hold up the weight of the passing traffic. Horse drawn vehicles could be heard for miles as they crossed, when the hoof beats of the teams mingled with the rattle of loose floor planks.

Travelers appreciated the convenience of not having to ford the river, but many begrudged the idea of paying toll fees which varied according to the skill with which the person crossing could drive a bargain.

A Mrs. Boyd was the toll keeper. Her headquarters were located at the west end of the bridge, near the fringe of a great catalpa grove which stretched along the bank for over 80 rods.

A stockman, whose name was Jim Jardine, and a neighbor named Danley, came to me shortly after the bridge was finished to ask if I would be willing to help bring back a herd of 75 cattle Jim had purchased on the other side of the river.

"By golly, Jim," I answered, "I will help you and I have a good saddle horse who will fit in perfectly for the job; but won't the trip be quite expensive?"

"How do you mean?" Jim asked.

"The toll," I answered. "Won't you have to pay out quite a sum of money in order to get the cattle across the bridge?"

Jim, before answering, came up close to me, then lowered his voice into a confidential tone, "No, it won't be expensive because I am going to talk the toll keeper into making carload rates on this deal."

I could see he didn't know the bridgekeeper.

Mrs. Boyd was waiting for us at the west end of the bridge, ready to collect the toll. Jim, who was now twirling his moustache in his best dicking style, dismounted from his horse. Then, in a hale and hearty manner, greeted her by saying, "Mrs. Boyd, we're going to bring you some big business for your bridge. Now, how much are you going to charge me a head for 75 head of cattle and ourselves thrown in?"

Mrs. Boyd, not much impressed by Jim's tone, answered, "Why that will be the usual rate. Twenty-five cents a head for the cattle and the same for you and your help."

"What," roared Jim, now falling into his usual blustering manner, "ain't you giving us a rate?"

"No, I'm not, and the rate would be the same if you brought over a thousand head. Also, if you wish to cross now you either pay the toll or swim across."

Danley and I sat quiet during the fireworks and waited. Finally, after a pause, Jim reached in his pocket and paid the toll for all of us. At the same time he began fuming over the idea of forking over 25 cents a head for the cattle on our return trip. Nor could I blame him because this was a tidy sum of money in those days.

Danley didn't say much as we crossed the bridge. Nor did I. We just jogged along to the farm where the cattle were located, some miles up the river. The owner, after we had taken them over, remarked they were so river broke that they got around almost as well in the water as they did on land.

Jim calmed down considerably on the way back to the bridge. Apparently he was gradually getting used to the idea of shucking out over \$20.00 in toll bridge fees for the cattle we were driving in front of us.

We got the cattle on the bridge all right, urged on by Danley and me while Jim rode ahead. Everything went according to schedule until the leading steer stepped on a loose plank which banged and thumped. The noise made by the plank caused him to turn back to the head of the bridge, followed by the whole herd. Danley and I whooped and hollered in an attempt to turn them back, but it was no go; they milled past us and stampeded into the prairie.

Then a funny thing happened. They saw the river and made for it like a flock of ducks. Jim, all excited, yelled for us to stop them; but it would have been just as easy to have stopped a cyclone. For one thing they were thirsty. But, instead of coming back to shore after stopping to drink they kept plunging into the river until the water came up to their bellies.

I immediately yelled to Jim, who was still on the bridge with his pony, that we might as well make them swim across the river. Danley and I had ridden into the water with our ponies by this time, driving the cattle ahead of us. They were good swimmers, like their former owner had said, so we didn't have any trouble. Jim kept to the bridge because he didn't like water. I yelled to him as we were approaching the opposite shore that he might as well join us in the water and save the 25 cents he would have to give Mrs. Boyd. "She's liable to want to collect for the whole herd anyway," I added.

But Jim stayed on the bridge from where, as he watched his cattle finish their swim, he looked pretty pleased.

Mrs. Boyd stood by her gate watching the drive. Naturally she thought it was an out and out attempt to beat the toll fee. She turned loose on Jim when he came to the west end of the bridge, mad as a hornet. He tossed her 50 cents, then roared back at her, "There, my lady highway woman, take that for your trouble and open your toll gate or I will bust it." But she demanded the bridge toll for all the cattle with the claim that they had used the bridge right-of-way to get across. Jim, in reply, kept roasting her until she finally opened the gate.

Jim had us rush the herd to the buyer near the railroad as soon as we got them up on the opposite shore. His reason for doing so was because of the added weight they had obtained from the water

they had drunk and absorbed during the river crossing. Each animal must have taken on at least 15 pounds of water apiece, which, in addition to the \$20.00 he had saved on the toll fee made a profit of \$75.00 more than he expected.

A FALSE HAIR HOAX

It was the style for ladies during the '80's and '90's to reinforce their long hair with false switches, rats and puffs.

Nebraska women usually obtained this additional hair through the local grocers, who made a side-line out of this form of business. This trade must have been lucrative, with a high percentage of profits, because the storekeepers often inserted ads in their local newspapers that read: WE GIVE PROMPT AND ADEQUATE ATTENTION TO ALL YOUR HAIR EMBELLISHMENT NEEDS.

The ladies who wished to make an addition to their often already abundant locks submitted samples of their hair to the store which, in turn, sent it to Eastern wig manufacturers. Then, in a few weeks or a month, the desired switch or rat would be delivered.

A pioneer lady in Saunders County, who, because of the embarrassing nature of her narration wishes to remain anonymous, has the following story to tell about the hoax that was played on her one day in the '80's when she felt the need of ordering a hair switch. She says:

"Nearly everyone was wearing extra hair in those days because the prevailing style of hair dress required it. I had never worn any hair except my own but was now beginning to feel old-fashioned when I went to church or social gatherings where most of the ladies had enough hair--false and their own--to stuff a mattress.

"But I didn't like the idea of going into a store and placing an order for the additional hair I desired. It seemed to me to be something to be ashamed of, like getting false teeth or artificial breast forms.

"However one morning, when I must have felt unusually brave, I clipped some sample hairs from my head and tied them together with a pink ribbon after which I put them in an envelope.

"This envelope was placed on the front room table where it wouldn't be forgotten when we went to town that afternoon for our supply of groceries. My husband noticed the envelope laying on the table and asked if it was a letter to be mailed.

"'Oh no,' I hurriedly explained, 'it's just a recipe I want to keep.'

"I didn't want him to know what I was up to because if he knew he would poke fun at me and say it was all foolishness. But he seemed satisfied with my explanation so didn't ask any more questions.

"I first bought groceries when I arrived in town that afternoon, then I ambled over to the dry goods section of the store to order my switch. It seemed as if everyone in the store was following me as I did so. Two of the town's cattiest women were ranged along the dry goods counter, where they were pretending to look at this and that but in reality following my movements with their curious eyes. They were the town's most notorious busybodies who were always hunting for a scandal.

"My face flushed with embarrassment as I placed my order to the clerk within their hearing. He wrote down the style of switch I desired, then asked me if the samples in the envelope correctly matched my hair. This was a needlessly foolish question to which I nodded my head. Then he began opening the envelope, which seemed unnecessary in front of the watching women, although I know now it was a natural enough thing to do.

"What I saw when he pulled out its contents made me wish the floor would cave in; because, instead of holding my carefully selected tresses he had a bundle of horse hairs and pig bristles that were tied with the same pink ribbon I had used for my hair.

"The two hussies immediately began giggling while the clerk, after his first stare of amazement, laughed outright in my face. Then the room began whirling around me until I thought I would faint, a habit in style among the ladies at that time. But I didn't faint. Instead I became so hysterical I laughed and cried at the same time. The foolish clerk, throughout this time, kept holding up the carefully tied bundle of horse hair and pigs bristles. After I had recovered from the shock I grabbed them from his hand and rushed out of the store.

"My husband was sitting in the buggy by the store's hitching post. His grin gave way to a hearty laugh the moment he saw me. Finally he stopped laughing long enough to obey my insistent demands that he drive me home. He pretended to be ignorant of the hoax, although I knew he had slipped back into the room after asking me what was in the envelope and, upon seeing its true contents, had conceived the brilliant idea of switching hairs on me.

"I didn't go back to the village for months after this hoax had taken place, because I knew everyone in the community heard about it and was laughing at me."