

SEED GATHERING IN FREMONT, NEBRASKA (1908-1910)

I began school in Fremont, Nebraska, in the fall of 1896 (Fig. 1) at the age of six and one-half, and started at an early age toward becoming a geographer.



Fig. 1. My first school in Fremont.

At the age of 12 I began a tree and seed gathering business, and was still gathering seeds after finishing high school. It began when I was hired by a local nurseryman to gather cottonwood seedlings, and later, black walnuts, for nursery stock seed.

The streets of Fremont were generally bordered by rows of trees, usually a single species in each platted subdivision, or perhaps a different kind for each street in the subdivision. American elm was the dominant species but silver maple and boxelder were also common. Elm was the seed that I gathered most because I could get large quantities simply by sweeping the seed into piles on the paved streets within a few blocks of the nursery.

On one occasion my tree seed gathering

business culminated in an unusually profitable transaction. One of my high school friends who had graduated one-half year ahead of me started at the University of Nebraska with forestry as his major. He knew of my seed gathering business so when he came home after his first week at Lincoln, he called and asked if I could get 15 pounds of catalpa seed for the Forestry Department at the University. I told him that I had never gathered catalpa seeds, but that I would try. The long catalpa pods hang on the trees all winter so that in early February, when this incident occurred, they were readily available. I lived on Maxwell Street, named for Congressman Samuel Maxwell, who lived at the end of the street. As I look at it now, it would have been more appropriate to have named it Catalpa Street, for catalpa trees lined both sides of the street.

On Saturday morning I hitched my horse to the wagon, drove under the catalpa trees on our block, and was able to reach them from the wagon. In a very few minutes I had a sufficient number of pods to provide 15 pounds of seed. Each pod contained many seeds, each about one-quarter inch in diameter, flat, less than one-sixteenth inch thick, with feathery wings attached to each end. Back at our barn I filled a gunny sack with pods, beat the bag on the floor, and found that the pods were so dry that the seeds separated almost instantly. I sorted the seeds from the split empty pods, and by 10 a.m. I had 15 pounds of fine clean catalpa seeds to fill the order from the Forestry Department. My chum took the bag of seed back to the University. I had no idea what I would receive, but was enthusiastically shocked when I received the University's check for \$75.00 for my two and one-half hours work one Saturday morning.

After graduating from high school in 1908 (Fig. 2) I worked for a grain elevator company, both at Oaks and Superior, Nebraska. In 1910 I enrolled at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. This step would soon lead to opportunities for travel far beyond Nebraska, and ultimately to my future home -- the West. My entire adult life has been devoted to the conservation of natural resources, and in so doing, my interest in things has always included WHAT? WHEN? HOW? and WHY?



Fig. 2. My high school graduation picture.