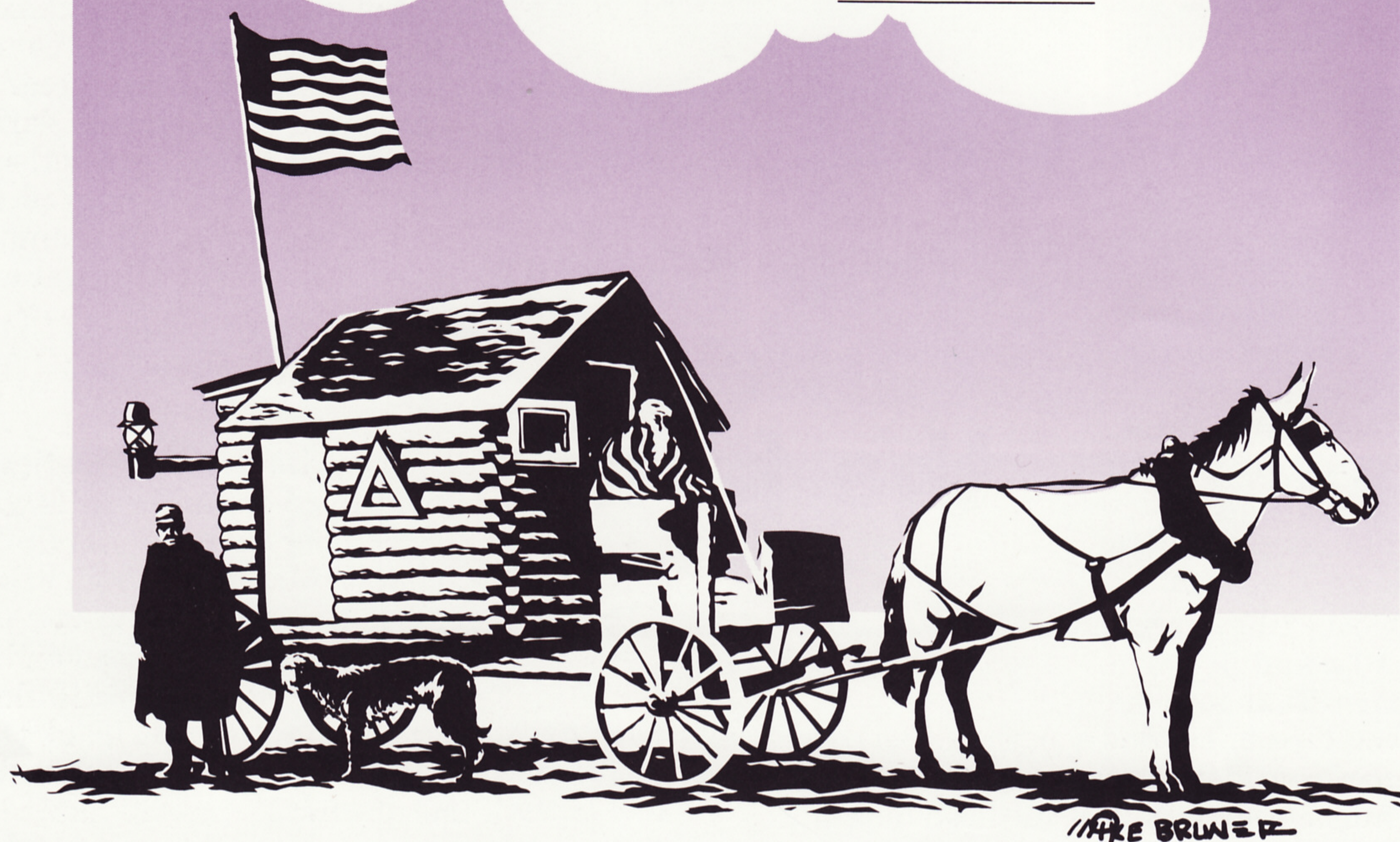


LITTLE MAN WITH BIG DREAMS

by Dan Holtz



Before North Dakota became a state, a little man came west from Minneapolis. He wasn't much more than five feet tall and weighed scarcely more than 120 pounds.

He got off a stage at a place named Frog Point (about 25 miles south of Grand Forks), borrowed a horse and buckboard from the saloon keeper there, and proceeded to found the small town of Buxton.

His is not a name that most North Dakotans readily remember. In fact, most probably have never heard of him. But he was one of the more colorful characters in pioneer days, and he deserves to be remembered.

He was Budd Reeve, the founder and "Sage of Buxton."

And in the more than 50 years he lived there, until his death at 91 in 1933, he made a name for himself. It was not a big name like other North Dakotans' — Lawrence Welk, Louis LaMoure, Eric Sevareid — but an interesting one just the same.

Reeve's beginnings in LaPorte County, Indiana, were far from prominent, though. He came from a poor family and wrote of his childhood, "I was born in one of the worst log cabins that ever stood, and without doors. My parents were poor but highly respectable."

And with a law degree he earned in the 1860's, he must have parlayed that respectability and some native intelligence into a bit of notoriety. For when he came to North Dakota in late August of 1880, he was working for one of the most recognized men in the United States — James J. Hill, the builder of the Great Northern Railway.

Reeve had sold Hill a city block in Minneapolis (reportedly the future site of the old Great Northern depot) for the rights to a townsite in North Dakota next to Hill's railroad. At that time the bed for the road had been graded, but the tracks weren't laid yet.

Reeve established the townsite with the help of some influential Minneapolis businessmen, one of whom was T.J. Buxton, the man for whom the town is named. Buxton was the president of City Bank, and Reeve's enterprise was known as the Buxton Townsite Company.

As general manager for the company, Reeve quickly turned to one of his favorite pastimes, writing, and began to send advertising circulars to prospective settlers. In one, entitled "Horace Greeley, The Young Man, The West, or Buxton," he proclaimed, "Young man, fall into line; come to Buxton and get a piece of land and subdue it with a crop of wheat."

One of Reeve's first projects in Buxton was to build an elevator to hold that wheat. He completed one in 1881, the first between Grand Forks and Fargo, and another in Reynolds in 1883. According to one historical account, he also had the first cross-country telephone line in the territory, between those two elevators.

These, though, were not his only firsts. He was appointed president of the first school board in 1882 by the territorial legislature.

This type of public service is one thing older residents of Buxton still remember Reeve for. Not only did he donate land for the first schoolhouse in Buxton, he also planted trees around community churches: the Con-