

## **Grandpa Helsabeck's Saddle Bag**

Robert Alexander Helsabeck, also known, in the first half of the Twentieth Century, as "Uncle Bob" to many folks in Christian churches and churches of Christ in Virginia and North Carolina, was a preacher who often went to his preaching assignments on horseback.

Born in 1870 and graduating from the College of the Bible in Lexington, KY, in 1891, he preached until his death in 1943. Living in the era of transition to automobile travel in rural North Carolina, his mode of transportation often depended on the circumstances of weather, roads, and preaching location; he preached at a complicated circuit of churches in Stokes and Forsyth Counties --- Poplar Springs, King, Capella, and Rural Hall, amongst others. Some of the roads he traveled were better than others, and for many years they were mostly dirt or gravel; weather would help to determine his choice of travel as well. He was, earlier than many other folks, the owner of a Model T Ford, but a significant portion of his travel to the preaching points was on his favorite horse, Prince.

His saddle bag, then, was a crucial item for Grandpa. It carried his Bible, his sermon notes/manuscripts, and some necessary nourishment (Grandma Helsabeck was a wonderful cook and baker). It was often a necessity to ride Prince to some of the places in his circuit, particularly to churches like Capella and other rural congregations in the country, but when the roads were dry he could take the family in a horse and buggy or in the Model T. The saddle bag, however, was ready for the times when it was needed, and it remained in the family's possession; it was ultimately passed on to his youngest son Dennis (William Dennis Helsabeck Sr., b. 1912, d. 2013).

### ***Additional notes of interest re RAH:***

Robert Alexander's father, Augustus Jeremiah Helsabeck, though raised in the Methodist denomination, was baptized in 1858 by an Elder Wilson in the Disciples' church in Pfafftown, NC. Influenced by Alexander Campbell's views re slavery and pacifism, Augustus left his wife and children in the care of the extended family while he spent the Civil War years working on the farm of a cousin in the remote hills of southern Indiana. After the war his third son, Robert Alexander, was born in 1870; the source of his middle name (Alexander) is obvious; there is some speculation that the first name comes from either Robert Richardson or Robert Milligan, since there had been no other "Robert" in the family prior to this son.

The young Robert studied (1887-91) under J.W. McGarvey and others at Lexington's College of the Bible, then returned to his rural home near Tobaccoville, NC (near King and Rural Hall). In 1892 he married Eliza Ann Vest at the Jefferson Church of Christ where his father Augustus Jeremiah was an Elder. He preached for the Watkinsville, GA, Christian Church and later for the Pembroke, VA, congregation, amongst others, and for a short time in Bowersville, OH, where his youngest son William Dennis (Sr.) was born in 1912. After three years in Salem, VA (1913-16), he returned to the home area of NC (north of Winston-Salem, near the Forsyth/Stokes County line). The years 1916-43 were spent preaching in his home territory, traveling on Prince or in his Model T Ford from his home near King to the churches of the area. He is buried in the cemetery of the Poplar Springs Church of Christ near King.