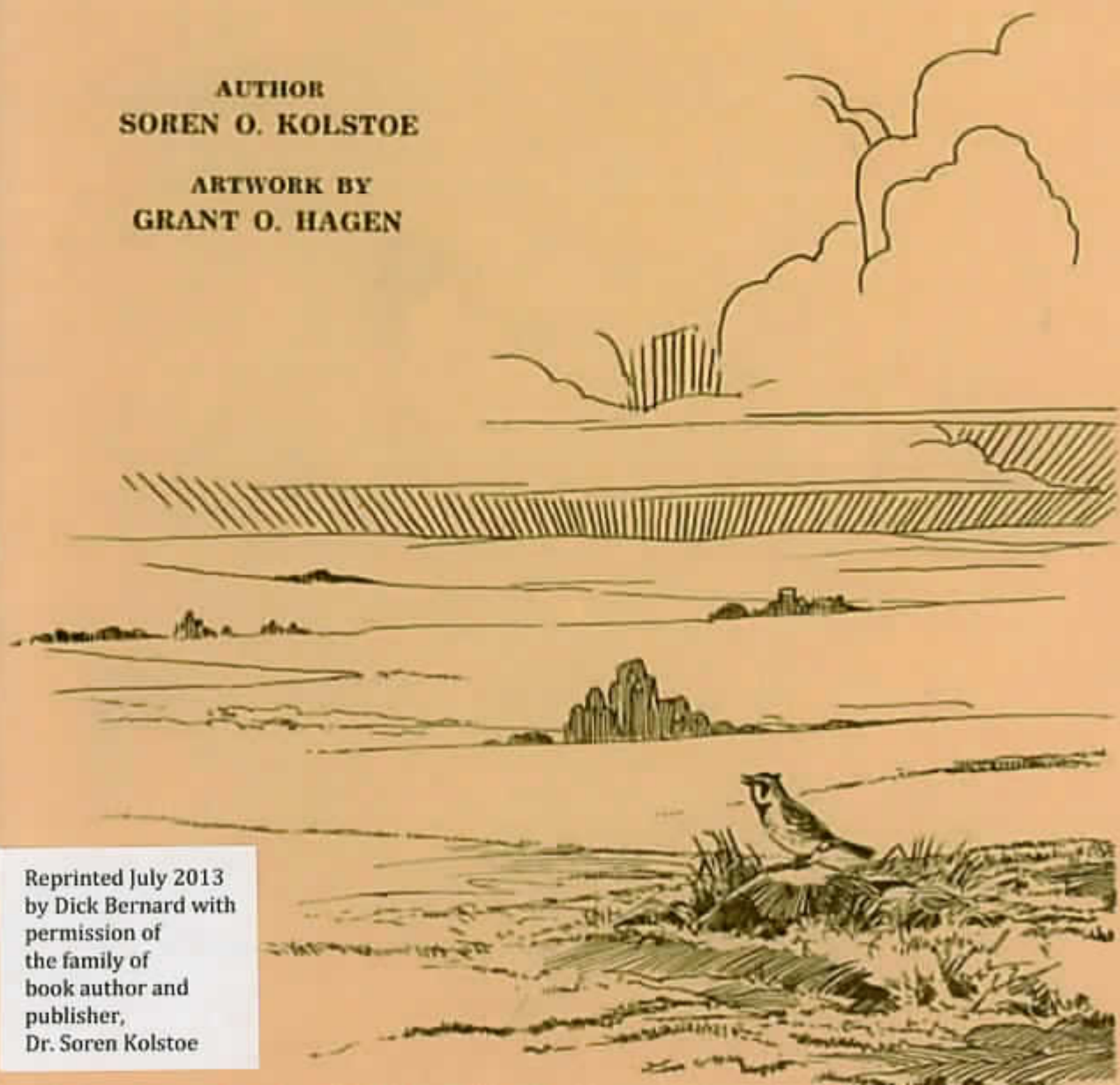


Lyrics of the Prairie

Part 1 of 3

AUTHOR
SOREN O. KOLSTOE

ARTWORK BY
GRANT O. HAGEN



Reprinted July 2013
by Dick Bernard with
permission of
the family of
book author and
publisher,
Dr. Soren Kolstoe



Undated photo of Dr. Kolstoe, taken at a State Fair in North Dakota
courtesy of the Kolstoe family

Blogpost with additional information at <http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog/> July 21, 2013

*

Internet source July 21, 2013: <http://webapp.und.edu/dept/library/Collections/og1213.html>
Dr. Kolstoe passed away February, 1978, Grand Forks, ND.

ELWYN B. ROBINSON DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
CHESTER FRITZ LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA 58202

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS COLLECTION

COLLECTION: OGL#1213

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: 1974-1990

DATES OF SUBJECTS DISCUSSED IN THE INTERVIEWS: circa 1900-1983

SIZE: 1.25 linear feet, plus 58 audio cassette tapes

INTRODUCTION

ACQUISITION: The Oral History Interviews Collection was deposited in the Orin G. Libby Manuscript Collection in 1990 (Acc.#90-1723).

ACCESS: Available for inspection under the rules and regulations of the Department of Special Collections.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains oral history interviews recorded on audio cassette tapes, as well as transcripts of most of the interviews. The interviews were conducted from 1974-1990, mostly by members of the Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections. The subjects discussed in the interviews range from circa 1900 to 1983.

What follows is a short summary of each interview, as well as a listing of the audio tape number for each recorded interview and the box and folder location of each transcript.

Soren Kolstoe

Interviewed by John Davenport, March 31, 1976

Dr. Soren Kolstoe was a long-time faculty member at Valley City State Teacher's College, and also wrote poetry. Kolstoe was born in 1888 in Norway, and grew up near Thief River Falls, Minnesota. He was a hunter and an environmentalist. Kolstoe donated a collection of approximately 400 eggs to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck. He devised a method of mounting and storing the eggs that prevented breakage. Kolstoe said collecting eggs requires a license, and to get a license, the eggs have to be used educationally or scientifically.

Kolstoe has been active in the Valley City Boy Scouts, a member of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation, the Audubon Society, the Isaak Walton League and Ducks Unlimited. He retired from teaching at Valley City State College in 1958. Then he worked for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, visiting schools and organizations and giving presentations on various species. Kolstoe authored a book entitled *Lyrics of the Prairie*, which combines poetry and pictures. In the interview, Kolstoe recited some of his poetry.

The events discussed date from his childhood, in the early 1900s, to the 1970s.

Interview: Audio Cassette Tape #834 and 835

Transcript: OGL#1213, Box 1, Folder 14 (31 pages)

Additional info

About Artist Grant O. Hagen

Lyrics of the Prairie is undated and was apparently self-published by Dr. Kolstoe and the business relationship between Mr. Hagen and Dr. Kolstoe is unknown. There are internet references to other work by the artist; he is apparently deceased, and may have been born about 1922 in Minnesota.



DEDICATION

*Lovingly dedicated to the memory of my wife —
through the years, graciously patient with a husband
enamored with the things of nature.*

*Happy trails!
Soren O. Kolstov.*



OUR LEGACY

*Nature wrought through ages past
To build this wondrous land.
Its soil is deep and richly stored;
There's wealth on every hand.*

*Its flyways teemed with migrant birds
And scores remained to nest,
The wildlife of these fertile plains
Was 'mong the nation's best.*

*Then stalwart men moved on the plains
To claim them as their own,
Their wives with warm but sturdy hearts
Made every shack a home.*

*And thus was built with hearts and hands
With courage and with toil,
A legacy of human worth
As rich as prairie soil.*

*The shacks made way for modern homes
To dot the fertile plains;
But wildlife still can flourish here
Where habitat remains.*

*This is our home, our legacy,
And guard it well we must,
A duty and a privilege
A solemn, sacred trust.*

THE PRAIRIE

*The majestic sweep of the prairie;
The endlessly rolling prairie;
It billows along
Like a lilt in a song,
As far as vision can carry.*

*The winds that sweep o'r the prairie;
That skitter and play on the prairie,
Are refreshing and free
As a breeze from the sea
And seldom seem sodden and dreary.*

*Grain now grows on the prairie
Where grasses once covered the prairie;
But loving the land
Keeps erosion in hand
And safeguards the strength of the prairie.*

*More precious than ought on the prairie;
Are the people who live on the prairie.
Big hearted and kind
As any you'll find
And they cherish their homes on the prairie.*

*The magnificent sweep of the prairie;
The wide-spreading, home-dotted prairie!
God prosper each farm,
Each ranch and each town
On the length and the breadth of the prairie.*

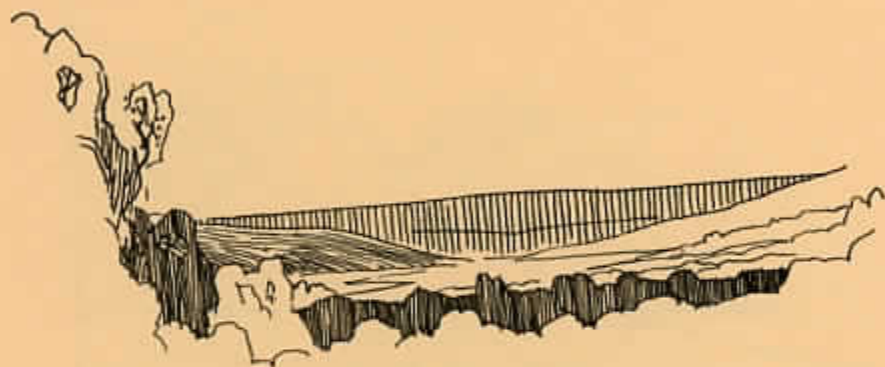




THE RED RIVER VALLEY

*Flat, fair and fertile,
It stretches ever onward, lush and green.
Fields, flocks and farmsteads
Enhance the bounteous richness of the scene.*

*Grain, groves and cornfields;
A mammoth garden spot is here unfurled.
God's gift to mankind;
A horn of plenty for a hungry world.*



TURTLE MOUNTAINS

*This landscape smiles, a mild and placid smile.
Her wooded hills run onward mile on mile.
The lakes and pools that nestle in her vales
Provide a subtle deepness to her smile.*

*But ages past the scene was grim and bleak;
A glacial ice sheet gouged the frozen earth,
Bore its mammoth burden toward the south
And dumped its ugly load of rocks and dirt.*

*Erosion's force with firm artistic touch
Sets its hand to smooth the ugly piles.
God planted trees, and grass, and flowering shrubs,
And fashioned for our eyes a land that smiles.*

*And now at last, a wearied Prince of Peace
When saddened by a world of strife and guile,
May look this way, and here at last may find
A garden spot of peace on which to smile.*

THE OLD MISSOURI

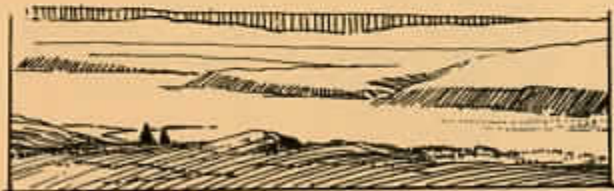
*The old Missouri, ages old,
Flows stately on its journey to the sea.
It twists and turns, it loops and bends,
But calmly sure of what its goal must be.*

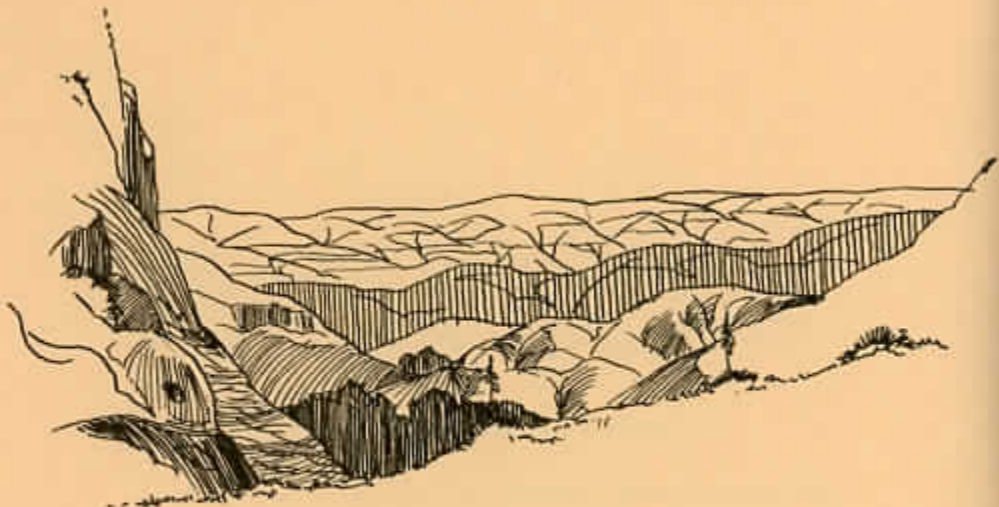
*Long ago, earth's records show
The river journeyed north to Hudson's Bay,
But glacier ice moved slowly in
And firmly sealed its ancient, northward way.*

*The seaward urge was never lost,
It merely sought another spillway out.
With titan force it set to work
And gouged its present channel to the south.*

*Then tiny man with puny hands,
Contrived to build a dam across its course;
The river halted just a bit
And loaned to man a fraction of its force.*

*But when man's work shall crack and fall,
As crumble it is sure to do some day,
The old Missouri unperturbed,
Will still be flowing seaward on its way.*





THE BADLANDS

*A mighty chasm rends the solid plains,
The prairie seems to teeter on its brink.
A vast expanse of tower-pierced terrain,
Where scoria-sided canyons interlink.*

*A battle ground where nature's forces met
And gouged the earth in wild and frenzied fight—,
A fairy land with beauty unsurpassed,
Where form and color vie to charm the sight.*

*We know not when or how some fateful spark,
Ignited seams of coal within the earth.
It fused the rocks, it changed the clay to brick—,
Nor rain nor snow could check its torrid work.*

*And there it lies; a work of strange design—,
Where nature's wonted features seem reversed;
Where fire and water dropped their ancient feud,
And etched a mountain range down in the earth.*

BADLANDS CEDAR

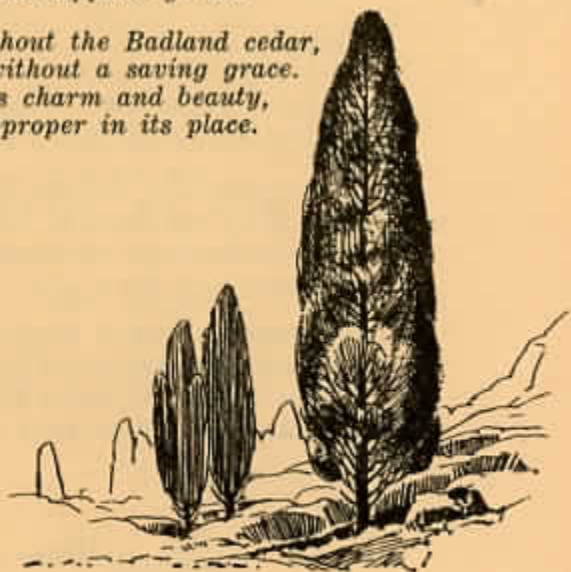
*Badland cedar; juniper it is,
But somehow we prefer to call it cedar.
It stands erect, in chastened dignity;
As green in winter as in summer weather.*

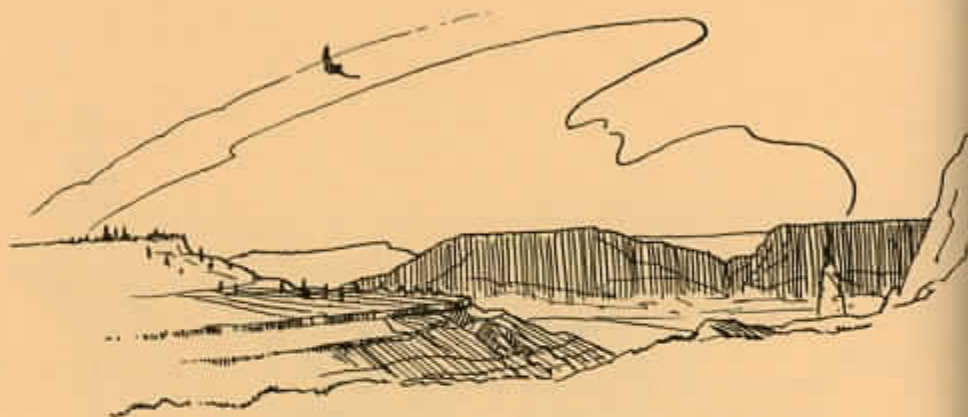
*Its tiny leaves cling firmly to the twigs
As if afraid to venture out alone.
Each tiny "berry" simulates a fruit
As if too shy to call itself a cone.*

*In summertime, its bustling broad-leaved neighbors
Blur its beauty with a fluttering screen.
But when the rest stand gaunt and shorn of glory,
Our tree remains in steadfast, gorgeous green.*

*It has no urge to flaunt its lovely presence,
No hectic growth to dominate the scene
It staunchly clings to barren crag and wasteland,
A precious gem of gorgeous sapphire green.*

*The Badlands scene, without the Badland cedar,
Might well look harsh without a saving grace.
It is a thing of gracious charm and beauty,
So chaste and clean, so proper in its place.*





THE BUTTES

*They stand in mystic silence on the plain,
Wrapped in dreams of ages long since past;
The scattered remnants of an ancient plain
That braved erosion's forces to the last.*

*The awesome story of creation's work
Is plain to read as writ in shale and stone;
Of ocean depth, of mighty upward thrust
That raised the ocean floor into the sun.*

*Youthful mountains in the distant west
Poured mighty streams across the level land.
They carried mammoth loads of rock debris
And laid down spacious layers of silt and sand.*

*Erosion, nature's sculptor wrought his craft,
With wind and water at his deft command—,
He gashed the youthful plain with awesome vales,
And fashioned flat-topped buttes to grace the land.*

*And here I stand, a speck of living dust
To view with awe-struck eyes this wonderous land;
A vast domain of buttes and sweeping vales
A masterpiece from God's creative hand!*





A SLOUGH

*It's just a slough, a common cat-tail slough;
Its stagnant smells lie heavy on the air.
It's fringed with sedge, a cottonwood or two,
With clumps of rushes growing here and there.*

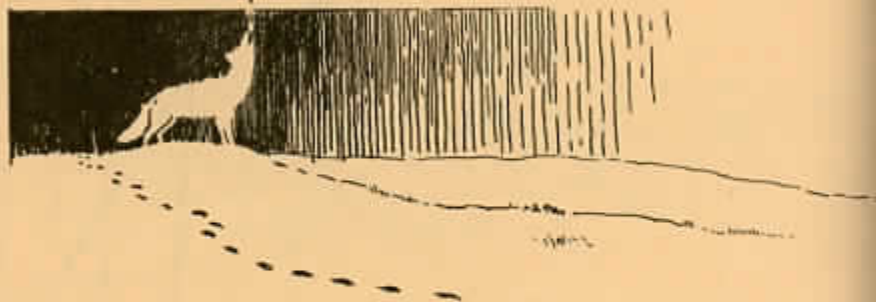
*A mallard duck convoys her downy brood,
With scarce a ripple in her silent wake.
She circles, stops, and dips in search of food,
Her young ones crowd around to share the take.*

*But 'neath the placid surface life is grim—
A bitter feud, a never-ending strife,
Where all the myriad things that crawl or swim,
Contest each other's right to food and life.*

*Now months have passed, the reeds no longer green,
Stand stiffly silent in the early dawn.
The autumn air is crystal clear and keen;
The heavy breath of summer nights is gone.*

*A mallard's quack rasps the startled air;
An answering murmur breaks the silent dawn;
A whirl of wings crescendos to a roar;
They're in the air—the morning flight is on!*

*A hunter crouching tensely in his blind,
Sees hurtling forms against the morning skies.
The slough resplendent in the glowing dawn,
Becomes a scene of glory in his eyes.*



WINTER COLD

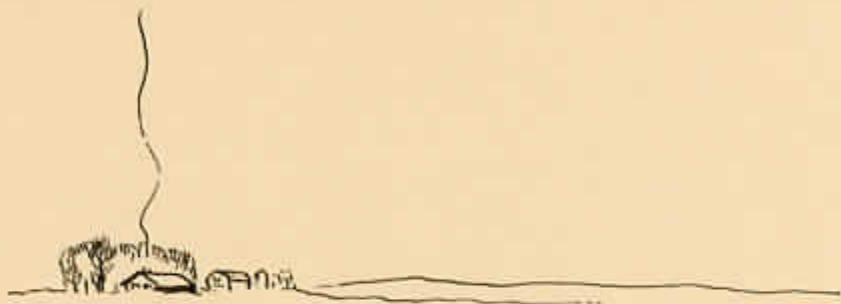
*It's cold and still—a bitter night;
The powdery snow lies blue against the skies.
The wintry stars, aloof and bright
Look down upon a scene of snow and ice.*

*An arctic owl or prowling wolf
May momentarily start a timid flight.
The passing of such specters adds
A weight of eerie silence to the night.*

*The trees benumbed, their blood congealed,
Stand starkly as if waiting for the doom.
Their branches frozen crystal hard
Crack the brittle silence of the gloom.*

*And from across the frozen fields,
A single coyote chants its quavering strain.
The faltering echoes fade away,
And frozen, deathlike silence reigns again.*

*And everywhere the fiendish frost
With thousand steely fingers probes the earth;
To seek and kill each spark of life
That might be waiting for a springtime birth.*

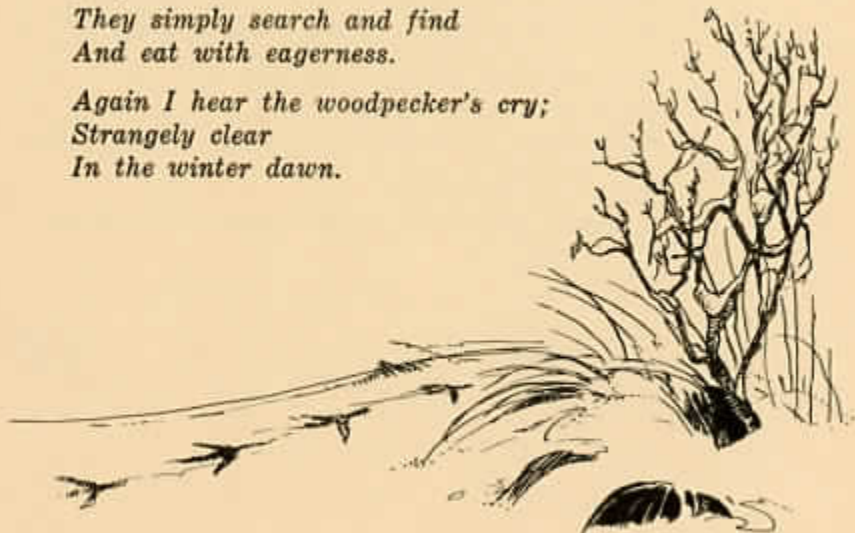


NORTH DAKOTA WINTER

*It's cold this morning;
Still, clear and cold.
White plumes of smoke
Reach towards clean blue skies.
The chalky snow
Creaks with every step.
Yonder I hear a woodpecker call.*

*Wonder how pheasants fare
In times like these.
Snug and warm, I hope,
In snowy beds.
Food is scarce --
They hardly worry--
They simply search and find
And eat with eagerness.*

*Again I hear the woodpecker's cry;
Strangely clear
In the winter dawn.*



THE CLOUDS

*Blue heavens—,
Clear blue heavens!
Not a cloud or fleck restricts the gaze.
The heavens sleep
In deepest calm;
Nothing there but endless, tranquil space.*

*But perfect skies
Surfeit the eyes.
We want fleecy clouds of many forms;
Clouds that move
That change their shapes;
Even clouds that threaten latent storms.*

*And when the storms
Unleash their force
And tumble clouds in angry disarray,
We stand transfixed
With nameless awe
To gaze on heaven's mighty, mad display.*

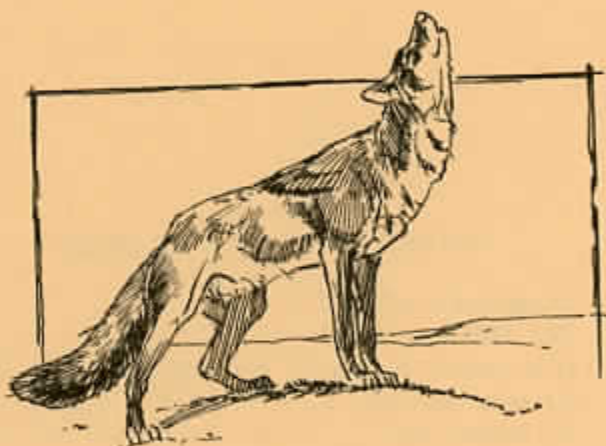
*But when the storms
Have spent their wrath
And sunset decks the clouds in golden shrouds,
We sense again
With reverent awe,
The calm, the strength, the beauty of the clouds.*

WILDLIFE OF THE PRAIRIE

*In nature's scheme,
The "Web of Life"
Is a master drama of grand design.
Its cast is real,
Its action fierce,
Yet outcomes often seem benign.*

*The hunter and hunted
Seem constantly locked
In struggles involving life and death,
And yet in the loss
Of the maimed and the weak,
The species will generally benefit.*

*And so we observe
In the drama of life
As the action unfolds by night and by day;
In the balance of nature
All things work
In a grimly fierce, yet beautiful way.*



THE PRAIRIE WOLF

*The lonely howl of the prairie wolf
Sounds wistful across the plain.
He seems nostalgic for the day
When this was his domain;*

*Before the white man seized his range
And changed its very face,
And left no more upon the plains
Than remnants of his race.*

*He dreams of days when buffaloes
Grew fat on prairie grass;
Survived on winter's meager fare
And braved its chilling blasts;*

*When bighorn sheep atop the buttes
Stood etched against the skies,
And mountain lions prowled the crags
And voiced their chilling cries;*

*When bull elks bugled in the swales
And challenged all who heard
To fight for elk supremacy—
The right to head the herd.*

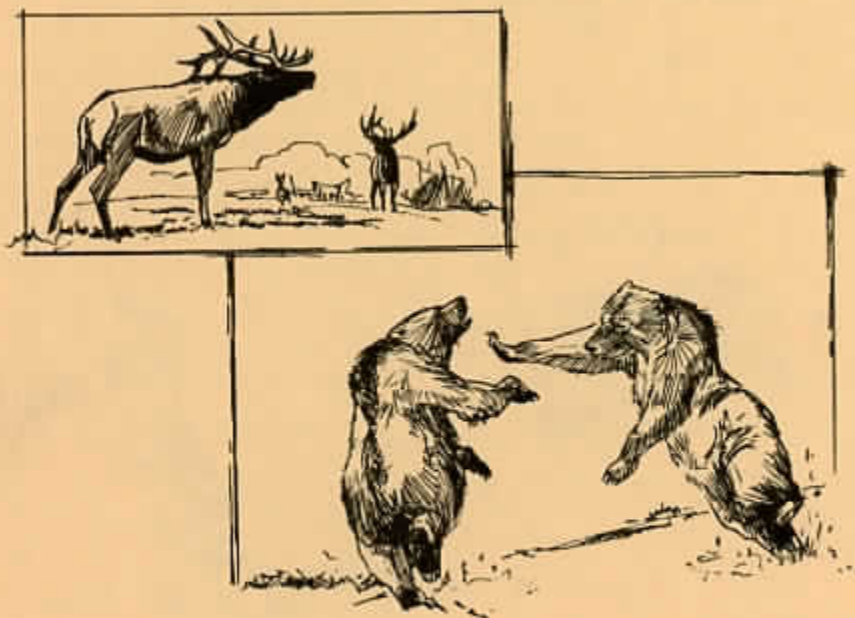
*He dreams, when deer and antelope
Could run the range at will,
With none of white-man's barriers
To hinder, maim and kill;*

*With many mule deer in the buttes
With moose in marsh and hills,
With blacks and grizzlies in the draws
Quarreling o'er their kills.*

*His function was, in nature's scheme,
To keep her standards high:
"From every species take the weak
But leave the fit and sly!"*

*He labored, faithful to his trust,
And every species gained;
He took the old, the sick the weak,
The brisk and strong remained.*

*And now in somber, wistful mood
He dreams of days gone by
And chants his solemn requiem;
Wailing towards the sky.*



SQUIRRELS

*Squirrels shinning up the trees
Or streaking over the ground,
Are a spritely, curious, active clan,
Pleasant to have around.*

*While all the tree squirrels nimbly disport
In their lofty and leafy world,
Ground-squirrels too exhibit the verve
That makes a squirrel a squirrel.*

*The king of the clan is the prairie dog
With his intricate tunnels and mounds;
He fascinates folks with his curious ways
And his queer little barking sounds.
His lesser kin, the flickertail,
Seems charged with nervous zest.
His tenseness shows in the flick of his tail
Even when he is at rest.*

*The thirteen-line and the Franklin squirrels
Follow an easier pace.
Yet ground-nesting birds find them active enough
With their prowling, thievish ways.
So they play their part in their lowly way
As they prowl about on the ground;
Hardly as lively as some of their kin
Yet nice to have around.*





*Fox squirrels and grays with gorgeous tails,
Are superbly smooth and trim.
With their nimble ways they're a joy to watch
As they skip-hop from limb to limb.
They'd be the lords of their leafy domain
If the reds with a puckish glee
Weren't constantly there with their pesky attacks
To drive them from tree to tree.*

*The chipmunk graced with an elfin charm
Is a pert little furry mite.
He's quick as a flash, sparking with life,
Yet mildly disposed to fight.
Most gentle of all is the flying squirrel;
That strange little living kite,
Who hides away during daylight hours
And hop-glides about at night.*

*If ground squirrels didn't enliven our fields
They'd seem rather lifeless and bare,
And groves would lose an essential charm
If the tree squirrels weren't there.
And so in nature's story book,
Replete with life and zest,
The squirrel clan assumes its role,
At par with all the rest.*



THE PRAIRIE DOG TOWN

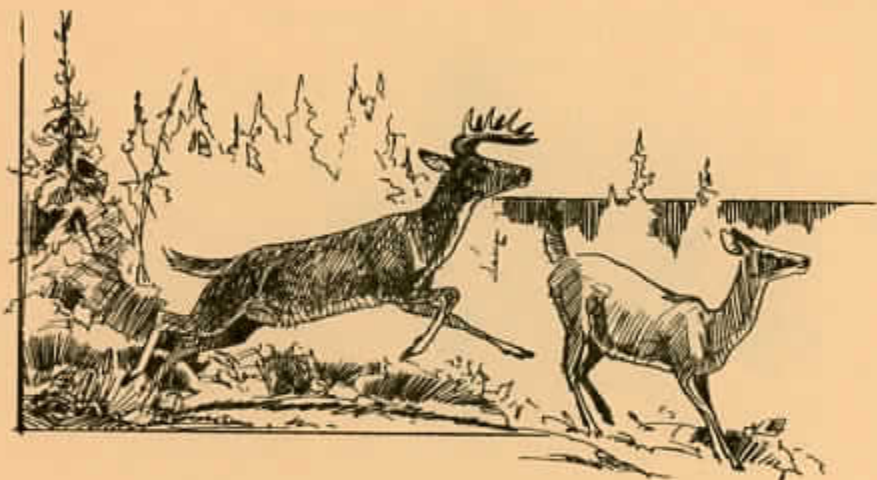
*A prairie-dog town is a spirited place
With everyone on the go;
They're digging and tunneling, building their mounds
And scurrying to and fro.*

*They seem to delight in whistles and grunts
And to give their queer little bark.
This spirited action goes constantly on
From early daylight till dark.*

*Ranchers don't relish their enterprise—
Their tunnels, their holes, and their mounds.
They're a constant hazard to horses and cows,
By hollowing out the ground.*

*But for many, a spirited prairie-dog town
On its bleak little prairie site,
May hold the attention in reverent awe
As a scene from the drama of life.*





THE DEER

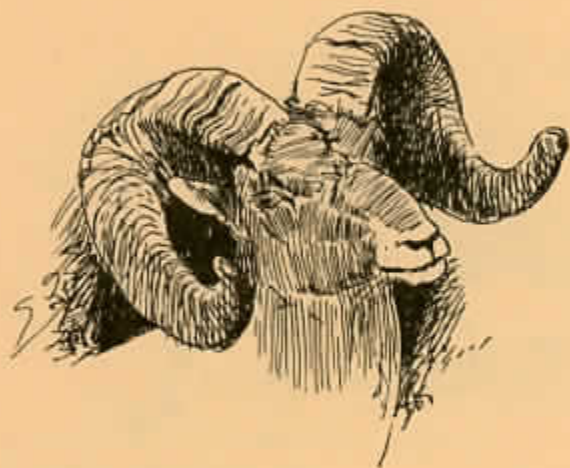
*White-tailed buck with regal crown,
Lordly but lithe as a prairie breeze—
You move with speed yet with consummate grace;
You manage your leaps with astonishing ease.*

*You're holding your ground where others have failed;
The bison, the elk and the Audubon sheep;
Thanks to your speed and your keenness of sense
And the constant alertness you manage to keep.*

*Thanks too, to your doe with her soul-ful eyes,
Who cautiously guards her beautiful fawn;
For she does her part to preserve the race
And insure that the noble breed shall go on.*

*But you're doing more than holding your ground;
You're furnishing quarry for rifle and bow.
You're fast, you're canny, you know all the tricks;
Tricks that only wild wisdom can know.*

*So here is to you, and your gracious doe;
What others have failed you accomplished with ease.
Swift in movement, regal in stance,
But supple and smooth as a prairie breeze.*



AUDUBON SHEEP

*Audubon sheep with massive heads—
Once a proud but now a vanished race.
Your spirits still may roam the buttes
But only rotted bones now mark the place.*

*You deftly scaled the Badland's crags—
You seemed precisely made for this terrain;
Swift and graceful, sure of foot—
A living counterpart to your domain.*

*You fell before the white man's gun—
Your very splendor marked you for your doom!
Trophy hunters had their day—
Heads were hung in shabby cabin rooms.*

*We tried to right the tragic wrong
By stocking mountain sheep to take your place.
We're hoping nature will condone
The introduction of an alien race.*

*But why should we so needlessly
Despoil the very things we could enjoy?
We aren't able to create—
And yet we have the power to destroy!*

THE PRONGHORNED ANTELOPE

*Pronghorned antelope, spirit of the plain,
You move in a realm of space and speed.
But your flesh is sweet, you decoy with ease;
You were marked for extinction, the victim of greed.*

*You're fleet of foot and keen of sense
But intrigued by whatever to you seems strange;
And so, despite your wildness and speed,
You were frequently tricked within shooting range.*

*This ruthless destruction went dimly on
'Til it seemed you would fall to the buffalo's fate,
When in sober reflection we stayed our hand,
Survivors were saved before 'twas too late.*

*So we didn't quite lose you, sprite of the plains,
You've been making a valiant come-back stand!
We find you again on your native buttes
Giving color and life to our western land.*

