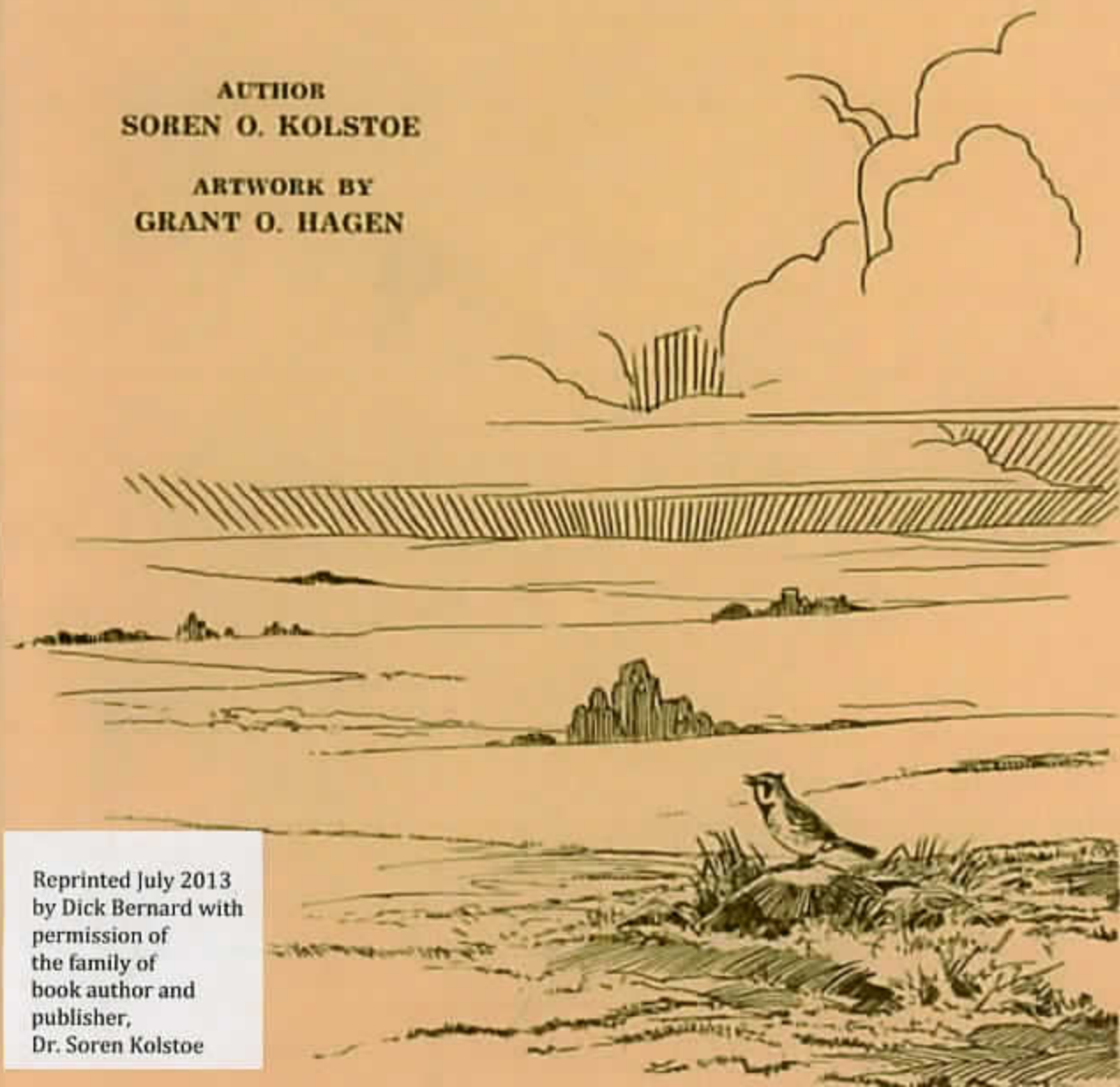


Lyrics of the Prairie

Part 2 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

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

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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 Bismarek. 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.



THE BUFFALO

*Strong and stolid—
Dauntless in his strength,
The lordly bison ruled his spacious realm,
In nature's niche
His status was secure—
Nor man or beast could break his regal claim.*

*Wolves would prowl
Near the grazing beasts—
At hand when death or injury occurred.
Savage man
Would kill an errant stray
But lacked the power to control the herd.*

*And thus he stood
Secure and unafraid,
Until the white man broke his ancient reign.
With gun and horse—
Egged on by wasteful greed,
He slew the mighty monarch of the plain.*

*Perhaps he reached
The fullness of his reign—
Perhaps in nature's plan it was decreed,
His native plains
Should be the grazing range
Of herds that better serve the white man's need,*

*Yet we regret
The hard, relentless fate
That bid the bison quit his realm and go!
And oft it seems
At setting of the sun,
We see his shadow in the after-glow.*



THE RED FOX

*The red fox with his bushy tail
Steps cautiously thru the weeds.
He sniffs for danger and sniffs for mice
On which he generally feeds.*

*He hasn't the furious fighting yen
Of a badger, a weasel or mink,
He hasn't the dash and heroic mien
Of his cousin, the prarie wolf.*

*But seeing a fox on a day in the field
As he hunts for his lowly prey,
Gives color and life to the outdoor scene,
And a welcome touch to the day.*





THE BADGER

*Low-slung, groveling badger;
You're constantly digging, digging away.
You're surly and mean by nature,
You snarl at all who get in your way.*

*You're ready to stand up and fight,
And a dog would be wise to let you alone.
Your teeth are savage and strong
And your claws can rip the flesh from the bone.*

*You tear up the prairie sod
And scatter the dirt to litter the ground;
You pock-mark the earth with your holes
And ranchers would rather not have you around.*

*But who are we to say
How this business of nature ought to be run!
The Creator has put you here—
It behooves us to grant you your place in the sun.*

THE MINK

*All the creatures that live in the marsh land
Are plunged into mortal fear,
As the mink emits his piercing cry—
A signal that death is near.*

*They scurry about for cover
But their chance of escape is small,
For the marsh-land tiger is swift and sure
In wielding fang and claw.*

*But he's beautiful in his wildness—
A darksome figure of wrath,
His glistening fur gives a regal sheen
To this harbinger of death.*

*And still in the balance of nature
He has a service to give,
For in nature's logic many must die
In order that others may live.*



THE WEASEL

*The restless little weasel
Seems never to relax;
He's popping in or popping out
Of rubbish piles or rocks.*

*His beady eyes will swiftly note
What happens all around
His smallish ears are set to catch
Each whisper of a sound.*

*He's a vicious little rascal
Who kills beyond his needs;
A terror of the little world
In which he hunts and feeds.*

*No doubt there is in nature
A reason for his kind,
And he fulfills with flashing zest
The job that he's assigned.*



THE SKUNK

*The squat little skunk with his bushy tail
And the stripes along his back,
Seems calmly secure in his potent defense
That nobody's going to attack.*

*He ambles along in his unhurried way,
Hunting his lowly game;
He minds his own business and seems very sure
That I should be doing the same.*

*And I'll stand back with proper respect
As he waddles along his way,
Perfectly willing to honor his rights
And give him the right-of-way.*



RACCOON

*Ring-tailed "coon" with your funny mask,
You perform as nature's clown.
You pry into every corner and crack
Seemingly just for fun.*

*You're sometimes a pest with your snoopy ways
For they frequently lead into harm;
Inquisitiveness is your cardinal sin
And the reason for much of your charm.*

*At times you pay for your pranks with your hide
When your fur is considered in style;
But then again when the market is off,
You go scot-free for a while.*

*You're forever in trouble wherever you go
On account of your mischievous ways;
You're a pest around chickens, destructive to corn
And a nuisance around the place.*

*But the odd little way you wash your food
And the venturesome life that you live,
Makes you an interesting, lovable cuss—
Not too hard to forgive.*





THE BEAVER

*The beaver, nature's master engineer,
Has all the skills his building craft demands;
With no instruction, no apprenticeship,
He works his magic with his teeth and hands.*

*His brain is simple, fashioned so we're told
Not to think but act instinctively,
And yet he seems to sense when problems come,
That he must change, and work creatively.*

*He played a part in opening up the West;
Trappers sought him for his precious fur;
Settlers followed in the trappers' wake
And homes appeared where none had been before.*

*And he is still a baffling mystery,
And we shall likely have to be content
To view his lodges, dams, and woodmanship
As all a part of nature's wonderment.*

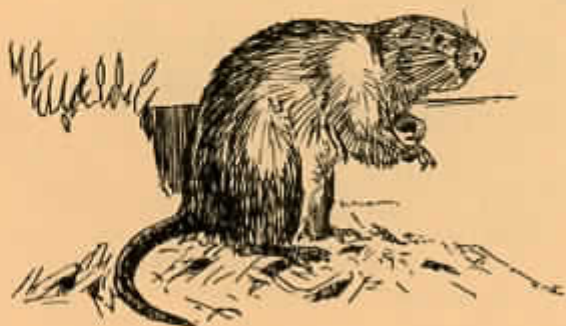
THE MUSKRAT

*Poor little muskrat
In your wet little world!
You're constantly seeking your feed.
You're grubbing for roots
In the muck of the slough
And surfacing only to breathe.*

*And when you're not eating
Or scrounging for food,
Or sleeping your hours away,
You build for winter—
You build right well
And your life has no portion for play.*

*No doubt you've a place
And you fill it well,
In the soggy world where you live;
You're fodder for mink
And man wants your fur
So I guess you've a service to give.*

*And you furnish life
To the bleak little world,
Where you're born, you live and you die;
And so it may be,
That in the nature's book,
You're just as important as I.*



THE WORLD OF MICE

*There's a tensely active world at our feet
Replete with tiny creatures of the night.
Their lives are spent in frantic search for food,
Avoiding noise, and keeping out of sight.*

*The woodland litter teems with mice and shrews
And in the grass lands, jumping mice and voles,
While deeper down within the mold itself
We find the coal-black tunnels of the moles.*

*Most dainty is the little white-foot mouse.
Big-eared to catch each tiny warning sound;
Big-eyed, so in the fearsome dark of night
It may detect what dangers lurk around.*

*Quite different is the vicious, long-nosed shrew:
A tiny bit of savage appetite;
A cannibal, at war with all he meets;
A small but fearsome killer of the night.*

*And hidden in the musty mold below
The groveling mole has little use for sight
He blindly gropes for worms, for ants, for grubs
All through his lifelong, dank entunneled night.*

*We wonder at this tiny, hectic scene,
This grim, relentless, never-ending strife
And yet we know that somehow it must be
A needed strand in nature's web of life.*





THE RABBIT

*Poor little rabbit, big-eyed and scared;
You were born with fear in your soul.
In the master drama, "The Web of Life,"
You were cast in a coward's role.*

*You seldom demand your place in the sun
But scrounge for your living by night;
You nibble, alert to each movement and sound;
Constantly ready for flight.*

*The important role assigned to you
In the over-all master plan,
Is to furnish food for birds and for beasts,
And even for arrogant man.*

*And so, in the role you were given to play,
And for which you seem aptly prepared,
You play your part and you play it well;
Jumpy, big-eyed and scared.*

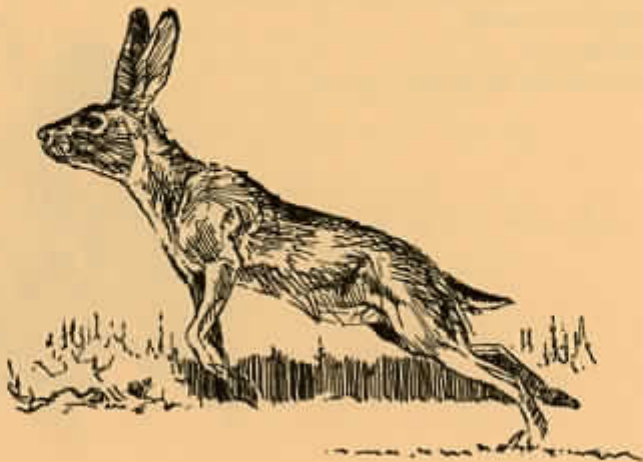
JACKRABBITS

*Jackrabbits loping across the plain
Are creatures of speed and space;
But their deftness and skill makes their breathtaking dash
Seem like an easy pace.*

*They achieve a speed too much for a wolf
And well beyond that of a fox;
But danger still waits from out of the air
If pursued by eagles or hawks.*

*At times, concealment may serve their end,
To escape from a hungry foe;
They have grayness in summer to match the ground
And whiteness to blend with the snow.*

*Life is a series of narrow escapes
And the end is forever the same;
But younger jacks will continue the race,
Loping across the plain.*



THE PORCUPINE

*Slow in motion,
Slower still in mind,
The porcupine pursues his lonely way.
He has no friends,
Not even of his kind—
He seems content if all will stay away.*

*He has no yen
To either fight or flee
And has for neither one the native skills.
He guards his nose,
Defenseless underparts
And trusts his safety to his bristling quills.*

*His wants are few,
Mostly bark and twigs.
He strips the bark to eat the inner layer.
He has a strange,
Obsessive taste for salt
And sweat-soaked boots become a relished fare.*

*At times he seems
To feel his lonely lot
And softly grunts a little plaintive groan;
He chatters strangely
As he trudges on
As if complaining to himself alone.*





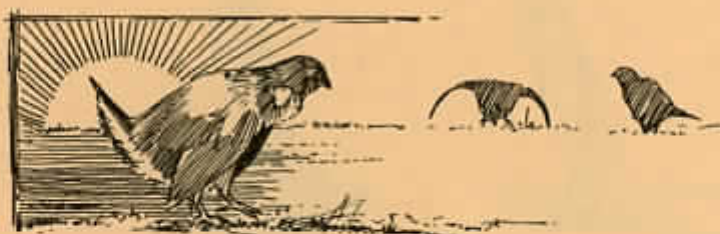
THE EAGLE

*High above the eagle soars
Making lazy circles in the sky.
The earth beneath is far away,
His realm is boundless space, remote and high.*

*And yet he scans with eagle eye
Each bush, each plot of space upon the ground.
He looks for hares, for prairie dogs,
For any creeping thing that may be found.*

*He has a duty to perform—
To keep prolific things in proper check—
Surplus creatures must be caught;
Natures precious balance must be kept.*

*And yet, I like to think of him
Detached from things below, serene and high,
Soaring calmly in the blue
Making lazy circles in the sky.*



THE SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

*The sharp-tailed grouse with its wistful mien
Seems dreaming of a day
When all the prairie was its home,
When nature had her way;*

*Before the plough profaned the sod
And wrought its drastic change,
With fields of grain that left the grouse
Mere remnants of its range.*

*Many fell before the gun
In slaughter unrestrained;
Fire and plow destroyed the nests
Of birds that still remained.*

*But still the grouse holds bravely on
Where habitats remain;
A prized reminder of the day
When nature ruled the plain.*



THE SERENADE OF THE DAWN

*In the eerie hours of the morning
When the darkness begins to fade,
When the inky blue of the eastern skies
Takes on a roseate shade;*

*From out of the shadowy half-light
There comes a mysterious sound;
The prairie chickens are back again
On their ancient dancing ground.*

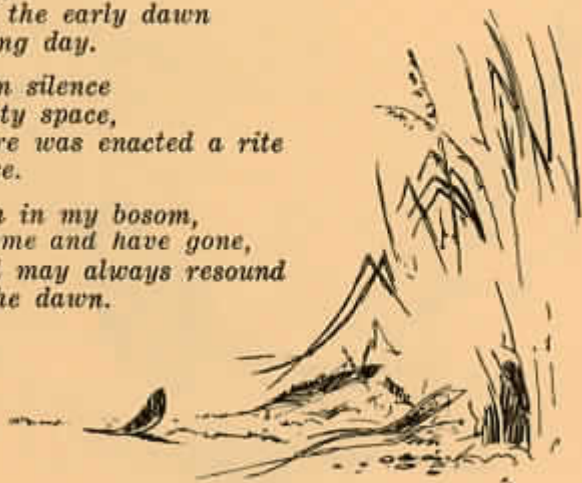
*They boom, they hoot, and they cackle,
They drum-roll the ground with their feet,
They leap in the air in ecstasy
And dance to their own drum-beat.*

*With yellow air-sacks distended
And wing-feathers stiffly spread,
They circle and prance, they dart and they dance,
And joust with lowering heads.*

*Then suddenly all go silent
And quietly fly away;
The frenzied spell of the early dawn
Is lost with the coming day.*

*I sit for a moment in silence
And gaze at the empty space,
Where moments before was enacted a rite
As ancient as the race.*

*And a prayer is born in my bosom,
That as ages shall come and have gone,
This hallowed ground may always resound
To the serenade of the dawn.*



THE RUFFED GROUSE

*The forest stillness is broken
By a muffled, whirring sound.
It seems to have no direction
For it echoes from all around.
A ruffed grouse cock is drumming
His joyous salute to spring.
In a resonant way
The trees relay
The message that it brings.*

*On a windfall or stump in the forest
He takes his solemn stance;
He spreads his tail in grandeur
As a gesture of romance.
He whips the air with his wingbeats
Till it echoes from all around.
It's the timpani
Of the symphony
In nature's joyous sound.*





SAGE GROUSE

*The gray-green range of the drylands
Is the sage hens' native domain.
It's a world of sage and rabbit brush;
A bristling, hard terrain.*

*They glide thru its hidden runways
In search of their sage-bud food;
They're a part of the scene and they seem to reflect
The drylands' secretive mood.*

*Their protective colorations
Cause them to vanish from sight;
They seek their safety in camouflage,
Less often in **daring** flight.*

*This secretive, silent existence
Is their usual living way
Till the intoxication of early spring
Flings their caution away.*

*On a secretly guarded signal,
The sage-cocks from all around,
Will meet for their early morning strut
On their chosen dancing ground.*

*With wings extended in grandeur,
With spike-tails stiffly raised,
Their odd little liquid, plopping sounds
Seem strangely out of place.*

*With oversized air sacks distended
In a way that appears grotesque,
Their fervid attempts at majesty
Become an unconscious burlesque.*

*But when spring has spent her elixir
There's an end to their strutting urge,
And the sage grouse reverts to the secretive life
From which it so briefly emerged.*



HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE

*Little gray partridge, dainty and trim,
You appear refined and reserved.
You smoothly entered our out-door life
And its balance remained undisturbed.*

*You earned your place in the scheme of things
As a check on insects and weeds,
You've earned respect from the hunting clan
With your flashy flight and your speed.*

*You've gained the love of bird-watching friends,
With your natural, gracious charm,
With your interesting ways, your family care
And the way you protect it from harm.*

*So we welcome you to our great out-doors,
And we trust you will thrive and remain.
You're trim and demure, flashy in flight,
The quail of our northern plain.*





THE PHEASANT

*You're gaudy and gay
In your cocky way,
You strut as if owning the place.*

*You cackle and crow
You make quite a show
With your gorgeous color display.*

*You are tricky to hunt
For there is hardly a stunt
That you may not be trying to pull;*

*When you burst into flight
You seem to delight
In doing what no one would guess.*

*But your trim little mate
Is calm and sedate
And behaves in a lady-like way.*

*She flushes secure
And seems very sure
No gentleman ever will shoot.*

*So we welcome you
And your lady, too.
We hope you'll decide to stay;*

*And continue to thrive
And learn to survive
Thru our wintery storms and cold.*

