



Buffalo Tales



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THE LONE SOWER: MY LIFE STORY Part II

by Adolph Voss

*My Years as a Student in Grades,
High School and College*

Having arrived in America, the land of the free, and settled down in our sod home near Greendale, the post office, which was at the farm home of Edward Haase, I started to go to school in a sod building across Wood River, about a mile and a half northeast from our place at about six years of age. There were only about fifteen pupils in school. My first teacher was Gilbert Haase. He seemed unable to get the English of my christened name, Ewald, thus said, "Call yourself Adolf." Then, years later, my Latin teacher in Kearney High School said to me, Adolf should be spelled Adolph because it comes from Adolphus. These were my other country school teachers: Bell Chidester, Miss Lowry, Viola Kenyon, Charles Mahan, Arthur Whitties and Edith Lowe.

Our School District No. 108 later built a frame school house about a mile south of the old sod house and on the south side of the river. This building was struck by lightning later and burned to the ground, but was rebuilt. This building is still standing there with its windows boarded up. The pupils all went to the Amherst town school. Amherst was located about two and a quarter miles to the east and a little south from our place in 1891, the year the U. P. railroad was built from Kearney to Callaway. My father and brother, Herman, with our old team, "Doll and Tom," worked on the grade of the railroad for \$3.00 a day which was considered good money in those days.

Having finished the eighth grade in the new building, in 1893 I began to think of going to high school at Kearney. In those days there were no charges or tuition for non-resident pupils. Herman, three years older than I said, "Adolph, you have always been very good in arithmetic and other subjects, so you better go." The economic situation was such that only one of us could go. The crops were very poor in those years because they were badly hurt by a prevailing lack of rain. Our father was willing to help me go, but did not know to what extent he could help me. He took me to Kearney in our buggy, the "old lumber wagon," several days after school had started. I had figured I would go into the High School, of course, but here is what happened. I was taken to Supt. Morey's office where he talked to me for a few minutes, then pushed an electric bell button on his desk, and in a moment the janitor came in, and Mr. Morey said: "Take this boy over to the Grammar Room (8th grade)". He talked to me about the farm and the weather it seemed for the sole purpose of getting a sample of my English and of my grammar. I was disappointed of course, but he did a fine job of putting me in just the spot where I needed to be. It was quite an ordeal for me to sit there among all those city bred and well dressed boys and girls in Kearney High

Buffalo Tales is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Editor..... Gene E. Hamaker

Membership in the Buffalo County Historical Society is open to anyone who has an interest in Buffalo County and its people, or in the history of the area.

Annual dues, payable January 1:

- Family membership.....\$ 5.00
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- Institutional membership. 5.00
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WITH THE SOCIETY

November 15, Regular meeting at 2:00 p.m., Elm Creek School Cafeteria.

A program on *Book Collecting* will be given by Dr. Gary Zaruba at the regular meeting of the Historical Society on Sunday afternoon, November 15, at two o'clock in the Elm Creek School Cafeteria. Members are asked to bring old or rare books for display. This will be the final program of 1981.

Dr. Zaruba is a professor in the Art Department of Kearney State College. Members will remember the fine program given by him at the last annual meeting on paintings by artists that passed through this area during the pioneer trails era.

Special Christmas Displays at the Trails and Rails Museum.

On the weekends of November 28-29, and again on December 5-6 the Trails and Rails Museum will be open from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. Dolls and antique Christmas cards will be on exhibit, as well as a Christmas tree with old-fashioned decorations.

The new Historical Society book, *Tales of Buffalo County*, will be available for purchase, along with other items for Christmas giving.

If any member has a doll, old cards, or antique Christmas tree ornaments that can be included in the display, please get in contact with one of the Board members.

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A project of top priority for 1982 will be the collection of photos of rural school houses in Buffalo County, as well as school histories. We hope eventually to have a picture of every school house that has been built in the county since 1872. This search will take the cooperation and effort of every member of the Historical Society.

School. the overgrown, crudely dressed "rusticus" that I was.

In about my second week of school, a fire broke out in the saloon building where I roomed on the second floor. It was two a.m. My room was already full of smoke when I woke up and flames began to appear in the hallway. I grabbed a few of my belongings and crawled out of a window which put me on the flat roof of a lean-to shed intending to walk down to the lower end and then jump, but smoke was all around, and as I walked down, I went too far to the right and stepped over the edge with my right foot and fell into the alley. Apparently not hurt too much, I walked out to the street in my night clothes. A Mr. Becket, who ran a small cottage hotel across the street took me in. The fire department had put out the fire before the few things and my clothing were burned. So I missed school that day.

My four years in Kearney High School were very eventful. I played center on the school's first football team in 1894, coached by Supt. J. E. Morey. I began to room in old vacant houses rent free. I lugged nut coal in a gunny sack on my back to those houses to keep warm and to cook, but cooked mostly on a little double wick kerosene stove. One time, as I rode a bicycle over twenty miles from home to Kearney late on a Sunday afternoon, I found all my few earthly belongings set outside because the house had been occupied by a new renter. They permitted me to sleep there that night and I found a "new" old house the next day. Almost from the first, I began working part time after school hours at Haase's grocery store on main street. I was never paid money for my services, but I would take what I needed of staple groceries and put it in a bag so Mr. Haase could see what I took. I was sort of a self-paid clerk and never was called down for taking too much.



Wm. C. J. Voss home near Amherst 1904. "Soddy" was in clay bank northeast of this house. Note bicycle on which Adolph rode to high school in Kearney.

This story tells you only a small part of the hardships I had to face in the five years in the Kearney schools. The strenuous part was always getting from my home to Kearney and back. I rode a heavy old clumsy bicycle for quite awhile until it gave out completely. Many times I walked all the way both ways. For awhile my folks took me about half way in our old buggy pulled by a small horse we had acquired and whose name was Pony. I worked part time on a farm along the Platte River setting celery plants and later in the celery harvest at fifteen cents an hour. My slogan was "Keep Going."

Having finished Kearney High School in the spring of 1898, I was hired by the Haase store to run their one-horse delivery wagon for \$20.00 a month, but to save all the money I could, I kept right on batching and living in vacant houses. With the money earned and saved, I started at the University of Nebraska in the fall, being partly led by the erroneous idea that I would wear a cap and gown from the start. There was no tuition, only a \$5.00 registration fee. I roomed in the same room for the four undergraduate years at the home of a Mr. W. H. Hunt, whom I had known at Kearney. This room was only \$5.00 a month, the number of which was 1260 Vine Street. Four massive columns have been erected on this lot (not in my honor), but part of the coliseum which was built later. To be able to keep going at the University of Nebraska for the four years, I got all the part time work I could—even mopping floors in the Old University Hall, which has been torn down. I received fifteen cents an hour.

I played football for Nebraska from the very beginning and soon got on the first team. I played under coach "Hurry Up" Yost. Subs were called "Scrubs" in those days. In the fall of 1901, my senior year, all players on the first team were given life passes. I got No. three. This was the only thing I ever got for playing. It is a silver-plated metal plate date 1901. I carry it with me in my billfold to verify my age, now 91. By the way, I should add that after playing four years as an under-graduate and teaching four years, I played again in 1906 under John Wilson as Captain and Coach Foster. I was sitting on the bleacher seats watching football practice with books under my arm when "Dog" Early Eager, football manager, saw me and urged me very strongly to play again. The team was short of line men. After he promised me a complete new playing outfit, I agreed to play a fifth year. The Missouri Valley Conference at that time still permitted post-graduate students to play. It seemed in those days the players liked to play ball well enough to play without pay or bonuses. We even had to furnish a part of our togs.

My Teaching Years

My diploma was from the Teacher's College, University of Nebraska, in which I took my A.B. degree, 1902, signed by E. Benjamin Andrews, Chancellor. I registered for a teaching position with the University Bureau. Late in September, 1902, I was helping a neighbor thresh, (I was back at our old home at Amherst with my mother and sister, Mattie) and was on top of a straw pile when a man rode up from Amherst to hand me a telegram. This telegram read, "Go to Sargent at once—Eleven grades—\$60.00." The very next day I went to Sargent by train. The school had already started; I met the School Board in the back end of a grocery store behind a high stack of bagged potatoes where I had to make a little speech and apparently it was good enough so that the president said, "Young man, you're hired." A Mrs. McCrae took the 8th grade into the 8th grade room and I got busy with the 9th, 10th

and 11th grades—about twenty pupils—my first real public school teaching.

My first class was in 9th grade Latin—six pupils. Latin was one of my major subjects. So for the rest of the year I had to jump around from one class to another every period of the day. In addition to this, I coached football, basketball—boys and girls, went hunting down by the Loup river for exercise, and sang in a quartet with some church activities. I visited home only at Christmas time. While I was at one end of the long room before a class, a little disorder developed in the far end. A student was passing notes in wads. After this got to my attention, I issued an order that those caught passing notes would be dismissed from school the rest of the day. It so happened, unluckily for me, that Keo Currie, the only daughter of F. M. Currie, ex-state senator, and the president of the school board, was the unlucky one to get caught. I asked her point blank, "Did you pass this note?" She said, "Yes, sir." She got her wraps and courageously went home. When the year ended, I was not re-elected, of course.



**Adolph Max Voss,
University of Nebraska
football team, 1896.**

The next fall five of my eleventh grade Sargent graduates went to St. Paul, Nebraska Business College. They recommended me to President Smith when an opening for a teacher developed. I asked President Smith for \$70.00. He said get over to St. Paul in a hurry. I taught American History, German, and other subjects. Also coached football and played in the little band there. I asked for \$80.00 to come back for a second year. President Smith said he would give me \$80.00 provided I brought two new pupils from Buffalo County with me. This I refused to do and so was left without a school apparently.

I had gone back to our old home at Amherst with my mother and sister, Mattie. During the summer I rode a bicycle to Overton where I knew Ernest Dunaway. We had played together in the University of Nebraska band. He then found out I had no teaching job. He had a Board meeting that night and through my friend's help, I was

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made Superintendent of a twelve grade school at \$80.00. I had two other teachers in the high school, so had only four classes a day, but I had all the coaching of football and basketball. During the two years at Overton, I enjoyed much good wild duck and prairie chicken hunting. Frequent home trips were made by bicycle, starting soon after 4:00 p.m. on Fridays and arriving a little after dark. I always returned on Sunday p.m. I rode rough wagon trails diagonally to the southwest through pastures and over "hill and dale." I was paid \$90.00 a month for my second year and asked for \$100.00 to continue. The Board offered me \$95.00, but I did not accept as I was intending to go back to the University of Nebraska for a year of post-graduate work. This was in 1906.

At the University I earned enough credit for a M. A. Degree, but had great difficulty to settle on a subject for a thesis. I earned more credits in summer sessions while serving as Assistant Inspector of Accredited Schools under A. A. Reed, but was never able, perhaps on account of family duties, to write that thesis. This was one of my disappointments of my student years. By being appointed inspector of High Schools, I became a member of the teaching force when I frequently substituted to handle Mr. Reed's class on "The American High School", using his textbook. My appointment ran from Jan. 1, 1908 to Sept. 1, 1913. At this time the Nebraska Legislature moved the inspection of High Schools from the University to the office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, where it is now. So, you see, I did not lose my job, but my job disappeared. During the summer I took a job with the World Book Company. From then on I was in the commercial world and began to make money faster. Thus ended my years of preparation and teaching.

(Editor's note: Adolph Voss wrote his life story in 1967 at the age of 91. At the time of his death on February 1, 1971, he was living in Lincoln, Nebraska, and was 95 years of age.)

All photos courtesy of Ramona Nutter, niece of Adolph Max Voss.

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