

# Squirrel Bounties

Ground squirrels, not tree squirrels, also called gophers

June 2, 1891 – Gophers were unusually bad that year. They eat corn and other crop seeds. The recommendation was being made to farmers to carry a vial of bi sulphuret of carbon (a now unused term, probably for a strong poison) in his pocket along with a wad of cotton. When he saw a gopher hole he could soak a small piece of the cotton with this chemical, put in the burrow and then close up the opening. The fumes would kill the ground squirrels.

They were warned not to handle this chemical around fires as it was highly flammable and not to keep it in the house. It could also be used to kill other burrowing animals such as prairie dogs and rabbits.

October 25, 1892 – In the elections of the fall of 1891 voters authorized the County Board of Supervisors to pay a bounty of 3¢ each for gopher scalps and \$1 for each wolf (coyote?) scalp.

12,000 gopher scalps were brought in during that first 10 months of the year. Boys would bring one or two at a time which got to be such a nuisance the rule was established of a minimum of seven scalps turned in at a time.

300 wolf scalps were turned in.

The scalps were then buried.

July 1, 1893 – Oliver Turnbull of Logan Township turned in 121 squirrel scalps. Article also tells total number of scalps had been turned in for the year.

June-July 1894 – receipt books in county records at Archives for squirrel scalps turned in. Have been listed by name of person with the total number of scalps. Numbers range from several bringing in 1 to 288 brought in by Mrs. D. I. Brown

September 17, 1894 – Up two o'clock on that day warrants had been issued for 684 gopher scalps. (\$20.52) A total of \$3000 had been paid out that year up through September 1. (100,000 scalps)

October 26, 1894 – The September news item raised some questions. A total of \$3,283.75 had been paid out from Jan – August.

Jan – \$40.02	May – \$363.07
Feb – \$79.47	June – \$809.56
Mar – 42.42	July – \$1,101.64
Apr – \$105.80	Aug – \$713.89

County clerk and his deputy never questioned the number of scalps coming in. They have a long chute outside the window where they dumped the scalps and the janitor is to burn them each evening.

Even allowing for \$400 per month which is more than any other month, the county lost over \$1,400. Rumors were that someone had a duplicate key to the box at the

bottom of the chute and was stealing the scalps to be turned in again. The janitor was supposed to have the only key but he was not suspected.

Several boys in town were taken in and questioned by the police but they said they bought scalps from country boys. There was no proof they were lying so they were released. There was also no proof against the person or persons suspected of taking the scalps from the box.

At the next meeting of the County Board an investigation was to be demanded. Both the county clerk and the janitor wanted this to clear their names. Judge Holcomb was also asked to call a grand jury to investigate. The suspected individuals would be called to testify and it was believed some would weaken.

October 27, 1894 – it was factiously proposed that the county's financial woes could be solved by coinage if the gopher scalps at the rate of 16 coins from each skin like some ancient peoples had done.

December 27, 1894 – In 11 months of the year a total of \$3,826.26 was paid out which meant that 127,542 scalps had been turned in.

June 24, 1895 – The county treasurer refused to register gopher scalp warrants. He said there was no law for the payment of the warrants so they were illegal. The Hub called his one of the leading industries of the county since the bounty had been voted in in 1891.

July 8, 1895 – Judge Sinclair upheld the treasurer's position on the grounds that there was no statute authorizing such an expenditure or the payment of the warrants. As a test case the county sheriff, Nutter, had turned in two scalps and presented the warrants to the treasurer to be paid. When he was refused he went to Judge Sinclair asking for a writ of mandamus compelling the treasurer to pay the warrant. The judge listened to the motion, consulted the statutes and denied the writ.

“There was general rejoicing in gopherdom.” The farm boys were not happy to have this source of income cut off. For example, on July 1 the clerk had issued warrants for \$177 for gopher bounties. If these had been paid, the money would have gone into circulation for firecrackers and lemonade for the Fourth of July.

A new motion for hearing was to be made to Judge Easterling.

June 17, 1903 – The concept of a bounty on gopher scalps was not new. In 1872-3 the state of Nebraska was paying 15¢ per scalp. In 1901 someone showed up in the state auditor's office from a Richardson County man with a claim for \$125.75 for 839 gophers killed in 18720-3 by 18 different people. The man presenting the claim was not one of those people.