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NEBRASKA FOLKLORE

→ Febold Feboldson →

# NEBRASKA

# FOLKLORE

PAMPHLET EIGHT

LEGENDS

OF

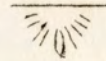
FEBOLD  
FEBOLDSON

1850 1850  
1850 1850



ANTOINE  
BARADA

1850 1850  
1850 1850



FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT  
NEBRASKA SEPT. 15, 1937

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NEBRASKA FOLKLORE PAMPHLETS  
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FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT IN NEBRASKA

Prepared in Cooperation With the State Superintendent of Public  
Instruction

Number Eight  
PART I (Concluded)  
FEBOLD FEBOLDSON

by  
Paul R. Beath, Gothenburg, Nebraska  
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PART II  
ANTOINE BARADA

Lincoln, Nebraska  
Sept. 15, 1937

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PART I (CONCLUDED)  
FEBOLD FEBOLDSON

Editor's Note:

The following pages are a continuation of excerpts from a manuscript written by Mr. Beath concerning Nebraska's foremost legendary character, Febold Feboldson. A few tales have appeared in the Prairie Schooner, Southwest Review and Omaha World-Herald, to whose editors Mr. Beath makes acknowledgment for permission to reprint.

VIII

JUST WIND

The first thing a stranger asks when he visits the great plains country for the first time is "Does the wind blow this way all the time?" And the native always answers "No, sometimes it blows hard-or." That is, the average native makes this reply. But Bergstrom Stromberg would probably make the stranger listen to his story of the musical wind.

At a rally of old timers up his way Bergstrom was asked which he thought was worst for the country: grasshoppers, drouths, floods, tornadoes, Congress, or Wall Street. As everyone expected him to say one of the last two, it was quite a surprise when he answered that the musical wind was the most demoralizing thing which ever hit the great plains.

It came during one of the presidential years. Bergstrom didn't know which one, because his Uncle Febold had forgotten to tell him when he told him the story. Anyway, about the first of August just when the farmers were beginning to harvest their biggest crop in years, there suddenly sprung up a cool breeze from the East. The men harvesting were of course glad to cool off. As soon as they relaxed they began to hear music everywhere. It was mostly music for those old time circle two-stops and square dances.

Harvesting was over then and there. Everyone began dancing and singing to that musical wind. It lasted until the second Wednesday in November and then stopped all of a sudden. Then word came from the East that Wall Street had gained control of the country again. Febold had a sneaking idea that the politicians started that musical wind to keep the farmers' minds off politics.

"And I don't trust these here radios, neither," said Bergstrom. "You can't never tell what kind of wind is goin' in the other end."

Not to be outdone by Bergstrom, Eldad Johnson had to tell another of his wind stories. It seems that after the famous blizzard of '44, which was twice as bad as the one in '88, Febold went out to milk his cows, but he couldn't find them. However, he did find that the wind had been modelling things out of snow. There were snow images of cows, chickens, horses, rabbits, pigs, sheep, dogs, and even a perfect snow man. Febold was always a thrifty sort of cuss, so he collected these snow animals with a view to selling them to a museum or side-show. He gathered them all into his yard.

But weather is a tricky thing. The next day turned warm and before Febold could get his snow images down into a cool cave the snow melted. The snow horses became real horses, the pigs real pigs, and the snow man Eldad's grandfather.

"There was just one thing peculiar," said Eldad. "The Rabbits didn't melt. When I was a boy it used to be fashionable for people to place them on their front lawn for every dog in town to bark at."

The mention of Eldad's grandfather reminded Herebold Farvardson of the trick which the wind once played on that worthy gentleman. The old man was blown off a windmill and lit flat on his stomach. Of course the wind was knocked out of him, and he was apparently dead. Anyway, Febold built a coffin and sent for all his relatives to come to the funeral the next day.

The funeral procession hadn't got half way to the cemetery when a hurrican hit it and blew everybody back to the old home place. When Febold started to look for Eldad Johnson's grandfather he found him climbing down from the windmill. The wind had blown life back into him as well as blowing him back on the mill.

The only thing the old man said to Febold when he reached the ground was "That consarned wind is sure fierce today, ain't it?"

IX  
FISH

Fishing nowadays, to hear Bergstrom Stromberg tell it, isn't what it used to be when he and his Uncle Febold used to fish in the good old days. Many a night Bergstrom used to be kept awake by dog-fish barking under his bed. Methods of fishing, too, have changed considerably.

When Febold first came to the plains country the Dirtyleg Indians were fishing with tobacco for bait. When the fish came up to spite the Indians hit them in the head with their tomahawks. But the Civil War stopped the supply of tobacco and nearly ruined the fishing. Febold, however, came to the rescue with his California raisins. Raisins didn't make the fish spite, but they put iron in their blood. The Dirtylegs then simply picked them out of the water with magnets.

The year Febold had the boat concession at Diamond Bar lake he developed an entirely new system. He would never allow lines or hooks to be used. The method of fishing was to whistle and the dog-fish would jump into the whistler's boat. If the fisherman whistled too often the fish would sink the boat and escape. Thus greediness was always punished. If Febold saw that someone was going to get away with more than his share, he would whistle under his breath and the fish would jump back into the lake.

Febold's expert knowledge of fishing once came in handy in the beginning of his great fight against the pernicious California influence which once threatened to depopulate the country. When the great California gold rush started it made Febold peeved to see California draining all the people and money out of the rest of the country, so he started in to catch some of the suckers for himself. It was about that time that P. T. Barnum made his famous remark: "There's a sucker born every minute and every sixty seconds one goes to California."

Since the gold rushers were rushing gold it was up to Febold to discover gold in the plains rivers. This he did by stocking the rivers with Peruvian moulting goldfish. These fish, which also fooled the Spanish during their conquest of Peru, shed their golden scales every week. The bottoms of the rivers soon glittered like a Californian's account of his adopted state.

The minute a '49er would see this glitter he would unsling his dishpans and go to work. But Febold finally decided it was no use trying to hold them, because after working forty or fifty years they would move to California anyway.

The strangest fishing tale in Bergstrom's collection concerns Febold's conversion of Carrie Nation from boozing to throwing bricks through saloon windows. One day Febold went fishing and forgot his bait. He was about to go home when he saw a snake with a frog in its mouth. Like all heroes of former times Febold could

speak with animals. He offered to trade a drink of whiskey for the frog which the snake had in its mouth. The snake was willing and the trade was made.

Febold hadn't been fishing with this frog ten minutes when he heard something between thunder and the rattle of a rattlesnake behind him. He turned around and there were ten thousand rattlesnakes each with a frog in its mouth, and each wagging its tail like a contented pup. Febold didn't stop running until he reached Kansas. There he met and converted Carrie Nation. And so great was Febold's influence that Kansas has been dry ever since.

## X

### TIMBER WOLVES

Every year that the great plains are plagued with grasshoppers Bergstrom Stromberg is sure to insist that the climate is changing again. He always clinches his argument by saying that he has also noticed an increase in timber wolves. According to Bergstrom's logic grasshoppers feed the flying fish which in turn feed the timber wolves whose very existence indicates that the reforestation of the prairies has set in. Nature, he argues, has always worked that way ever since his Uncle Febold upset nature by trying to exterminate the grasshoppers.

For years Febold had tolerated the 'hoppers, because they were the natural enemies of the government experts who tried to run them out of the country. But when the pests ate up a hundred Dirtyleg Indians in one day something had to be done. Febold first tried to catch them in large sacks of buffalo hide, but the sacks were soon eaten up. Enraged at this trick he grabbed a handful and tried to drown them in the river. The fish ate them so fast that Febold nearly had his hand bitten off.

This gave him an idea. He imported a flock of flying fish to fly over the plains and eat up the 'hoppers. Soon the fish became a worse nuisance than the insects. The next step was to get timber wolves to catch the fish. And to keep the timber wolves happy Febold had to plant cottonwoods all over the prairie which was of course not a prairie any more, but a cottonwood wood.

So the grasshoppers would have stayed exterminated and everybody would have lived happily ever after, if the Southerners hadn't been so grasping as to want more cotton and more slave states. A group of Southern planters hired Febold to experiment with Cottonwoods and sent him an army of negro cotton pickers.

The first week was a big success. The negroes picked the cotton off the cottonwoods as far as they could reach. Febold knew that niggers are too lazy to climb trees, so he had to use some other method. He brought the cotton within reach of the pickers by bend-

ing the trees double and sticking their top branches in the ground. The Southerners thought Febold was pretty smart, that is, they did until the next year. For when they came back in the spring those cottonwood trees had grown back into the ground and had completely disappeared.

So that's why, Bergstrom says, the plains states became free and not slave. It is also the reason that most of them execute their death penalties by the electric chair and not by the rope. A rope is no good without a tree. Bergstrom says that if the truth were really known it would be found that J. Sterling Morton, the rope manufacturer, inaugurated Arbor Day, April 22, so that he could sell the prairie states ropes for executing criminals. However, you can't lick the power companies.

But alas for the poor timber wolves! When the cottonwoods disappeared they were at a loss for a home. They tried to migrate out of the great plains, but they were stopped on the east by the Mississippi, on the south by the Rio Grande, on the west by the Rockies, and on the north by the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police. Finally, they returned to the plains to die of homesickness for their native woods.

Luckily Febold was kind to animals and couldn't bear to see the timber wolves suffer. He tried to explain to the wolves that the trees were just under ground. He dug up a few to prove it. As soon as the wolves caught the idea, they all began to dig themselves in among the buried trees. Because of the lack of sunlight each succeeding generation became smaller than the one before. Today they are only a fraction of their former size and are commonly known as prairie dogs.

## XI

### DROUTH BUSTING

If you want to make an old time plainsman sore, just remind him that geographers used to label his part of the country the Great American Desert. If you try it on Eldad Johnson you will hear some very uncomplimentary things about map makers. The most he will admit is that there are a few drouths now and then, but that they are nothing like they used to be before his Uncle Febold got after them.

What the plains country needs, he always insists, is a good old drouth buster. Back in the early days there wasn't a drouth ever came out of Kansas which Febold couldn't bust in 24 hours. In fact, Febold was just too good at drouth breaking. As soon as he got a reputation, the state of California hired him to stop their earthquakes. Eldad says there must have been some trouble about salary or something, because California seems to have quakes about as often as the plains have drouths.

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One year the weather began to get hotter and drier and drouth-ier every day. Febold was always a good natured cuss, but this drouth was beginning to spoil his fishing and it made him rather peeved. "This here sorta thing has gotta stop," said Febold to himself, and began to think. Febold was always a fast thinker. In a few minutes he had more than a hundred ways of busting a drouth. He decided to use the noise method, because he remembered that it generally rained after battles, national conventions, and such like noisy affairs.

How to make enough noise? That was the problem. The Dirtyleg Indians were too lazy and the white settlers were so dry the couldn't speak. But Febold wasn't a man to be stumped, especially when he wanted to go fishing real bad. He hit on the idea of making use of his fishing companions, the frogs, who always had good loud voices. However, a frog won't croak unless he's good and wet. This difficulty was overcome in a minute.

Febold hypnotized a couple of frogs and told them it was raining. They began to croak with joy and started spreading the news. Soon every frog in the country began at the top of his voice and in a few minutes there was enough noise in the country to give the Dirtyleg Indians' Rain God a headache. According to specifications, down came the rain and made everybody happy, including the frogs and Febold.

That was only one way in which Febold used to bust drouths, and it wasn't a very good way at that. It could only be used once a season, because so much water came down that all the frogs and not a few livestock were washed down to the Gulf of Mexico. It took a whole year for them to get back and ready for Febold's next experiment.

"Nope," said Febold, "I'm afeard 'this here noise method is a little too hard on the country. Next time I'll have to use something gentler."

This "something gentler," according to Eldad, was the best thing Febold ever invented, because it's automatic. It not only turns on the rain, but turns it off, too. And it's still working today just as good as when Febold first tried it out, because it's based on human nature and human nature's always the same.

When Febold started out to study this drouth problem the first thing he noticed was that people were always talking about the weather. Everybody kept saying "What a wonderful thing it would be if we'd only get a good rain." And then they'd run and look at the thermometer and say "O dear, O dear." Then they'd wipe their brows and look at the sky and start the whole thing over again.

Now Febold wasn't much of a social lion and had never even heard of Emily Post. Eldad says he doubts whether Febold even know it wasn't good manners to keep talking about the weather, but he did know one thing and that was that a watched pot never boils. No more



would it rain if people kept talking about rain. If people had to talk, let them talk about something except the weather.

The moment he grasped this fundamental idea Febold knew he must keep people's minds off the weather and make them talk about something else. This wasn't as easy as it seems. Movies, baseball, automobiles, and radio stars hadn't been invented yet. Of course, people might talk about love, but they didn't. They sang about love, and singing didn't count. Febold at length decided to try out his own favorite indoor sport and believe it or not, says Eldad, it did the trick.

Right in the midst of one of the worst drouths the great plains had ever experienced Febold began to criticize the government. He lambasted every office holder from the county assessor to the secretary of the treasury. Gradually everybody began to relieve his feelings in this manner. The sport became so popular that one day the weather was not mentioned during the whole 24 hours. The inevitable happened. It began to rain and rained all night. But in the morning everyone was saying "My, what a fine rain. Just what we need." And it stopped then and there as if it was insulted, which indeed it was, according to Eldad.

Nevertheless, Febold had introduced politics as a powerful antidote for weather as a topic of conversation and had reduced the number and severity of drouths considerably. The system doesn't work perfectly all the time, but during presidential years you never saw such a wet country as the great plains.

## XII

### CALIFORNIA

Just why and when Febold went to California and whether he went for good or only for a visit no one perhaps will ever know. Bergstrom Stromberg thinks he's gone only for a visit. Eldad Johnson is probably of the same opinion, but in Bergstrom's presence he always takes the opposite view and gives vent to his exasperation with his native prairies and his own suppressed desire to go to California. All you need to do to start them off is to ask in a casual manner when Febold is coming back.

"He ain't never coming back," Eldad will snap at you in a voice anything but casual.

"How do you know he ain't?" Bergstrom will ask.

"Because any man as smart as Febold would know enough to stay away from this here man-killing, God-forsaken country. If you ain't burned up by drouth and winds hot as hell or frozen out by blizzards and hail storms, you're eat up by grasshoppers, speculators, and politicians. Febold tried his damndest to make this

country fit for a white man to live in. But it can't be done and I don't blame him for going off to California with the rest of the sensible people."

"Whoa, there, ain't you just a little strong," Bergstrom will say. "Remember, Febold ain't no lily-livered cake-eater like you. These here plains is a tough country and it takes tough people to live here and Febold never backs out."

"Just the same he did go to California and he ain't back yet and never will be. Damned if I wouldn't go myself if I only had the time and money. I know Febold was a tough feller and liked a good big job, but he was smart, too, smart enough to know when he was licked."

"Licked, hell! He ain't begun to fight yet. All those tricks he used to pull in the early days ain't nothing to what's going to be done when he gets back. Say, do you really want to know just why Febold went to California?"

"Want to know! Cripes, I do know! And so does anybody else with a lick of sense. He went to get away from here and enjoy his old age without fighting this damned country for a living all the time. I heard he was a bartender at Tia Juana till he made a little money on the horses. Then he bought some steamships trading with China or somewhere. I think he had a fruit farm, too, and was in the movies for a while."

"Rot, you old fool! You ought to know Febold's too big a man to monkey with such things. Horse races, steamships, fruit farms, movies, bah! Do you think Febold would mess around with that stuff? Never! What he went to California for was to study."

"Study what?" Eldad always asks in a tone of utmost contempt.

"Irrigation and forestry," Bergstrom always replies. "Science, you know. Things is done different now. When Febold gets back he's going to put some water and trees on these here plains and no fooling."

"Can't be done," says Eldad.

"You just wait and see," says Bergstrom.

Thus Bergstrom and Eldad are wont to dispute the second coming of their famous Uncle far into the proverbial night, but just why and when Febold went to California and whether he went for good or only for a visit no one perhaps will ever know.

PART II  
ANTOINE BARADA

Editor's Note:

Antoine Barada ranks second only to Febold as a legendary or mythical character of Nebraska. There is evidence, however, that a person by this name really lived, evidence which is lacking in the case of Febold. As to how much of the story given below (written by members of the Project) is true, we do not know.



Antoine Barada was the strongest man who ever roamed the shores of the Missouri River. His name was known and his feats of strength related in all the settlements along the river's bank. One who claimed him as a friend had a decided advantage in an argument where might made right. Even those who had never seen Barada had a greater respect for a person whose cause was championed by Antoine. As his reputation grew, the tales of his prodigious feats of strength became more and more exaggerated by frequent repetition, until, somewhat like Hall Caine's White Prophet, the superman became almost supernatural. In this way it came about that Antoine Barada, "The Bogeyman," was held in greater fear than the real Antoine Barada, and was credited with feats of strength beyond all reason.

Antoine Barada was the son of Count Michael Barada, a gay Parisian, and Laughing Water, a pretty Omaha Indian maiden, whose romance is said to be one of the most beautiful in history. Since she was of the Omaha tribe, the count and his wife resided in Thurston County, Nebraska. Antoine spent his later years on the reservation with them. He died in 1866 and was buried beside his wife in Richardson County, Nebraska, at the little village of Barada, which was named in his honor.

This Samson of the nineteenth century was no ordinary fellow. The legends of his feats have stubbornly persisted for almost a century, and his varied career as chief, captive, trader, scout and pilot deserves more than passing notice.

He was born in 1807 near what is now Fort Calhoun in Washington County. When he was 7 years old, he was captured by the Sioux and held for 2 years. Some traders finally bought his release for 10 ponies, returning him to his parents. Colonel Rogers had permission from his parents to take Antoine to the Military Academy. In St. Louis he met his aunt, Madam Mousotte, who took him to her home and dissuaded him from any military ambitions. He grew up in St. Louis, living with his aunt. He worked at many places in that city, eventually becoming superintendent of the quarries belonging to Withnell and Coats. He could lift a weight of 1,800 lbs. clear of the ground.

When he was 25 years old, he left St. Louis and rejoined his tribe. In 1836 he returned to St. Louis, where he married Josephine Veien. After a trip to California in 1849, he returned via Panama and New York. He then began to farm in Richardson County, Nebraska, where he raised a family of 3 boys and girls. In 1875 he visited the Black Hills. He often paid visits to his tribe, and in his last years had a strong desire to return to them permanently. His application for allotment of land for him and his family was rejected, however.

When he died, he had friends from the Missouri River to the Pacific Coast who remembered his good deeds, kind words and generosity. He was buried in the Catholic Cemetery east of Barada.

The real Antoine Barada was undoubtedly a man of unusual strength and, like others of his day who lived in this wild country, had many interesting adventures. But the legendary Antoine Barada, the strong man of the river, was in a class by himself. The tales of his super-human feats of strength were like those of the Arabian Knights.

It was said that he discovered Artesian wells in Nebraska, yet this remarkable discovery was entirely accidental and due largely to his great impatience. Like many men of great strength, he had the innocence of a child and the restlessness of a tiger. Once a boat was waiting to tie up while a 40-foot pole was being driven for a hitching post. After watching the pole-driver for some time, Antoine could stand it no longer. He picked up the derrick, hammer and all, and throw it over into Iowa. When he smote the big timber with his mighty fist, the pole disappeared, never to be recovered. Indeed, it went so deep in the earth so that an artesian well resulted, spouting water 50 feet in the air. All in the vicinity would have surely drowned had not Antoine sat upon the hole until everyone had rushed to safety.

Many legends were merely Herculean. For example, when a boat became foundered upon a sand-bar, the Captain simply whistled for Barada. A rope was then thrown ashore, Antoine appeared and pulled the boat out into deep water.

Because of his innocence and good nature, Antoine was a great favorite; no public gathering was complete without him. Picnics in the timbered groves were happy events in those early days. People sometimes drove all day and night to be present at such celebrations. Roast wild-turkey, venison, barbecued bison, and other viands were prepared by the women; while the men pitched horseshoes, played kitten ball, or engaged in other contests.

It was at such a picnic that Barada established an all-time world record as a long distance jumper. Late in the forenoon, while the women were laying the dinner upon split logs for tables, the men engaged in a broad-jumping contest. Antoine, always a modest man, waited until all of the others had competed. The record so far stood at a distance of 10 feet,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches; this, however, was made by a man

who used weights which he throw behind him after he was well clear of the ground. Since this was a new mode of jumping, Antoine made up his mind to profit by this novel method of propulsion. Quickly picking up two boulders of about 400 pounds each, he stepped to the line, swinging one on either side of him. With the third swing he leaped, hurling the stones over into Kansas. Spectators hold their breaths as they saw him disappear into the distance. He had leaped so high and so far that dinner had to be postponed for three hours while he walked back.

But it must not be thought that all of his contests of strength were with the local men in this sparsely settled territory. Antoine Barada met all comers from any point of the world who dared to meet him in any field where strength prevailed.

He was once matched to wrestle with Joan Palos, the Greek wrestling champion. The mighty Palos was notorious for his rough treatment of an opponent. Antoine won the match by pinching his opponent with his toes while he slapped him into unconsciousness with one blow of his ear.

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Nebraska Folklore Pamphlet Number Nine will be issued on or before October 1, 1937, and will contain Sayings and Proverbs.

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