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The subject of this article, A. H. Burris, became president of SOSU in 1921.

KEEP GOIN' LAD

by Gladys Toler Burris

Alfred's mind skidded. He had no answer.

"Speak up, lad," the School Board Chairman squinted across the table at him. "What makes you think you're *ready* t' be a teacher?"

Something about big, gruff Mr. Callahan, with his booming voice and bushy eyebrows, flustered him. He glanced at the other two Board members and took heart from Mr. Hoyt's friendly nod.

"I have my certificate with me, sir," fumbling in his jacket pocket. "It says I'm ready to teach."

"H'm. Let's have a look at it," he turned up the wick in the lamp, and Alfred listened tremulously as the booming voice read:

"I hereby declare Alfred Henry Burris certified to teach any grade in Lincoln County Schools during the years, 1898-1901.

Signed, this 1st day of November, 1898,
H. W. Hayes, Superintendent, Lincoln County Schools, Oklahoma Territory "

With a grunt, he tossed it aside. "That paper just says you've got enough book-learnin' t' teach. Takes more 'n that to be a teacher. H-m-m." Bushy eyebrows drawn together, he tugged at his red beard. "You've been livin' in Lincoln County quite a spell, accordin' to my Mike."

"Yes, sir," moistening his dry lips. "Over southwest of Chandler. Since I was a kid, 15 or 16. Almost four years."

"Then you otta *know* the kind o' teacher we need," the sudden bang of his fist on the table was like a clap of thunder before a storm. "I'm askin' you, straight-out: have y' got guts? D' you use your head or your heels when the goin' 's rough?" He leaned so close his booming voice was a roar in the boy's ears. " 'n can y' hold your own -when

someone's tryin' to put y' down? *Can you?*"

Windmills seemed to be whirling inside Alfred's chest. "*Can you?*" He didn't know. "Always has his nose in a book," folks said. He'd just wanted to learn-- and be a teacher. But book-learning--wasn't enough--

"You fellows got anything t' say t' the lad?"

And then he heard Mr. Armstrong's slow, easy drawl. "Cal's just trying to warn you, son. We've got a bunch o' rowdies at Old Forest School. They'll bully anyone they can. You gotta think fast and call their bluff. Takes guts."

The quiet words slowed the windmills in his chest. This, he could understand.

"I'll bet you can hold your own, big strong fellow like you," that friendly nod again from Mr. Hoyt. "Your Pa says you played football at the University."

"That's right, sir." He drew a deep breath. "Yes, I think I can - hold my own," and in a sudden surge of boldness, added, "I can outwrestly my older brother, Oliver. He's smart as a whip, and weighs 210. I don't scare easily."

If Mr. Callahan heard, he gave no sign. In the silence, he sat tugging at his beard and staring down at the table, and then, as though talking to himself, mumbled something about Oliver and Mike out coon hunting. It made no sense.

The man was ignoring him. Prickly heat crawled from his neck to the roots of his hair. In the lamplight, he saw his certificate still open on the table ". . . just a paper that says you've got book-learning. . ."

A chair scraped against the floor. Startled, he looked up as Mr. Callahan rose, looming over them.

"Time t' wind up business," he boomed. "Gettin' late, and the lad has a long walk home."

A harvest moon lighted his way as Alfred strode down the road, whistling. They'd hired him, by jiminy. A four-month term at \$25.00 a month. What would Father say to that! Cash, too, not cows or chickens. He could save enough for another term at the University.

The trail grew rough and dark, shadowed by trees. He noticed a clearing at the side of the road, an open field flooded by moonlight. Let's see--would that be the Cansler farm? If he cut through there, he'd be home in half the time. Sure, he'd have to cross Old Deep Fork Creek, but that shouldn't be any problem. Not much rain this fall.

Still whistling, he struck across the field. Mr. Callahan wasn't such an old curmudgeon, after all. He'd shaken his hand and boomed, "Keep goin', lad." And Mr. Hoyt had told him big news. Governor Barnes was all for education — putting a new school up north in Tonkawa, and a Southwestern Normal at either Weatherford or Granite. Made him proud he'd be a teacher here in the Territory. His whistle grew high and clear.

Must be getting near Deep Fork. Trees all around. Not much light here. He made his way slowly, crunching leaves with every step.

Was it an echo? He stood still, listening. No sound. Maybe the wind in the branches. He moved on. The sound again. He stopped. The sound stopped. Someone or something was moving when he moved, stopping when he stopped.

He waited, motionless, every sense alert, his eyes searching the shadowy underbrush, and saw--yes, he was sure of it--the outline of a long powerful body crouching close to the bushes.

He almost stopped breathing. Father had said they still roved the timbered regions. A panther!

The animal had him cornered. No way to reach home without crossing Deep Fork. The minute he'd start down the creek bed, he'd be *below* the panther. Perfect position for it to spring on him.

Quietly, he edged on toward the creek, the great cat gliding in the same direction.

NOW!

In a swift sudden motion, he jerked his jacket high over his head and ran *toward* the panther, flapping the coat madly and screaming like a banshee.

Caught off guard, the animal crouched--- then turned and fled.

"Come on. I'll show you just where it was," he dared his brother next morning, and led three men to the tall trees that bordered Deep Fork: Father, skeptical Oliver, and his hunting buddy, Mike Callahan, who'd spent the night.

"Aw, phooey," Oliver had scoffed. "No *panther's* gonna take tail and run from a kid that flaps his coattails at him. Some other critter, maybe a *rabbit*."

Even when Father said, "It's Old Kickapoo Country. Still wild," his brother had just shrugged.

All night, Alfred had tossed. He had to prove his story. No, that wasn't it... he had to prove...

Wincing there in the dark, he'd remembered that booming voice, "Can you?" He'd held his own with the panther, but that wasn't enough. Oliver had put him down — in front of Mr. Callahan's son, too. "Keep goin', lad."

He'd sat up in bed, then... By jiminy, he'd give it a try.

So in early morning, with the ground still moist from dew, he was down on hands and knees, crawling through the underbrush, ploughing aside dead leaves, trying to line up

the place where he'd run at the animal. It had to show — somewhere--

"Come here!" at last, he gave a triumphant yell.

"See those claw prints? See how deep they are? When I ran at him, he dug in.

"Now, look over here. Same claw prints — HEAD-ED THE OTHER WAY."

Oliver and Mike, by this time flat on their stomachs, were measuring their own broad hands in the huge imprints.

"Well, I'll be doggoned!" he heard Oliver mutter, as Mike scrambled to his feet.

"I'd sure hate to be huntin' *that rabbit*."



A. H. Burris, SOSU President 1921