



Kansas State University Libraries
New Prairie Press

Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal

2023 - Transportation in the Flint Hills

The Tale of the Volland Store

Greg Hoots

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sfh>

Recommended Citation

Hoots, Greg (2023). "The Tale of the Volland Store," Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal.

To order hard copies of the Field Journals, go to shop.symphonyintheflinthills.org.

The Field Journals are made possible in part with funding from the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation.

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.



Volland Store Opening, 1913
Otto Kratzer

THE TALE OF THE VOLLAND STORE

After creation of Kansas Territory in 1854, Euro-American settlers from the East jumped at the chance to obtain the newly available land.

On May 30, 1867, Franz Fritz acquired a land patent from the United States government that gave him property in what is today the town of Volland in Wabaunsee County. On the same day he acquired the property, Fritz sold the land to Henry and Barbara Volland, who were among the numerous German immigrants who had settled Washington Township just west of Alma.

Throughout the 1870s, the number of towns continued to grow in Wabaunsee County. Each community anxiously awaited the proposed route of the first railroad to enter the county. Although the Manhattan, Alma and Burlingame Railroad built the first rail line in 1880, it was not until bonds were approved for the Rock Island Railroad in 1887 that towns in Washington Township experienced the growth heralded by the railroads.

As the Rock Island bought right-of-way for its line, it also planned towns along the route that could provide water and fuel for the steam engines. One of these towns was Grafton, platted on property acquired from the Vollands nine miles southwest of Alma. The railroad constructed a depot, water tower, coal chute and cattle loading pens along the rail line where it passed through the new town. The first post office there opened on September 20, 1887. On January 7, 1890, Henry Volland successfully petitioned the State of Kansas to change the name of Grafton to Volland.

The Vollands established a one-room store on their property. For a short time, John Cromer operated this store. However,

on March 22, 1904, Barbara Volland sold the property, including the store, to J.W. "Bill" Kratzer of Alma. Bill Kratzer had worked for his brother, Gustav, at an Alma grocery before purchasing the Volland store. Bill Kratzer made his youngest brother, Otto, a partner in the business. Volland became a bustling center of commerce, with farm goods and cattle shipped out on the trains and manufactured goods from the East imported for settlers. It was a perfect climate to promote growth for aspiring merchants like the Kratzers.

Their store prospered and grew with the town so much that the brothers purchased land across the road for a new building. The Kratzers held a grand opening at the new two-story brick store, Kratzer Brothers Mercantile, on October 16, 1913. Hundreds of people attended the event.

The new Kratzer store became the centerpiece of Volland, and Otto Kratzer became a dynamic, driving force in the

community. While the store offered groceries, dry goods, hardware, and farming and ranching supplies, it was also the social center of the community. Since it was located halfway between Alma and Alta Vista, the Kratzers installed an Alma phone line on one wall and an Alta Vista line on the opposite wall. Long before many rural farmers had phone service in their homes, they could make their calls from the Kratzer store.

Bill Kratzer died in 1930, leaving Otto Kratzer and his wife, Mabel, as the only owners of the store.

In 1945, the railroad closed the Volland depot due to a lack of freight and passengers. The passing trains snatched Volland's outbound mail from a hook by the tracks and threw the inbound mailbag to the ground for the Volland Post Office. Otto became the postmaster of Volland, operating out of the store. Cattle trains continued to stop at Volland, providing transportation for the thousands of cattle that grazed on the rich Flint Hills

VOLLAND IN PHOTOS

Shortly after acquiring the first Volland store, Otto Kratzer purchased a folding Kodak postcard camera. He began taking photographic postcards of events and people around Volland. This was a vocation and hobby that Kratzer enjoyed his entire adult life. He created a portfolio of thousands of images of life in Volland that now reside in the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, where they may be viewed upon request.

pastures during the summer months. The loss of the depot was disquieting to some in the community; however, they adapted to its absence.

In 1955, in another blow to the independence of the community, the U.S. Post Office closed its Volland office. The mail would be delivered by a rural carrier working out of Alma. No one would ever use a Volland address again.

Once more, Volland survived. Otto continued to operate the store; however, with rail service discontinued, he had to drive to Topeka to purchase goods for the store. As he aged, he found the job of maintaining the Volland store increasingly difficult.

While Volland had been fortunate to be platted by the railroad and to have the advantages of being on the rail line, it had not been so fortunate with regard to the State Highway Commission of Kansas. During the 1950s, when the commission defined the major state highways, it had Kansas Highway 4 to Alta Vista paved, leaving Volland on the unpaved, older Kansas Highway 10. The benefits of commerce favored towns on the paved highways. The gravel K-10 was just another challenge for Volland and Otto Kratzer.

In 1959, the railroad discontinued using cattle cars, so cattle trains no longer stopped at Volland.

As the population of the rural areas continued to shrink and competition from stores in Alma and Alta Vista became tougher, the Volland store began to decline. Otto was unable to carry the stock that he once could. He began to feel the desperation that thousands of small general store owners across Kansas were feeling in the 1960s, with the coming of the urban supermarket. Faced with near constant downsizing, Otto continued business throughout the 1960s as the family lived upstairs above the store. In 1970, Mabel died, leaving Otto alone to face the waning days of Volland. In less than a year, Otto died on April 21, 1971, one day short of his 87th birthday, having spent 67 years as a storekeeper in Volland.

The store closed immediately after Otto's death. When Otto's son Vernon locked the door, Volland, the town that lived and died with Otto Kratzer, officially became a ghost town.

But ... that's not the end of the Volland story! See the next page ...

The original version of this story, written by the late Greg Hoots, appeared in the 2011 Field Journal. The story has been edited for use in the 2023 Field Journal.