



7-15-1986

Dust Bowl Memories

Donita Lucas Shields

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

Recommended Citation

Shields, Donita Lucas (1986) "Dust Bowl Memories," *Westview*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 4 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol5/iss4/11>

This Nonfiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.



A dark time in Western Oklahoma history

Dust Bowl Memories

By Donita Lucas Shields

During the Dirty Thirties, not only did static electricity play havoc with auto ignitions, but it also killed young, tender shoots of wheat and other vegetation by destroying the roots.

Every dust storm contained some static electricity, but none were as spectacular as the St. Patrick's Day duster in 1923 and the April 14, 1935 roller. When observing the flashing electrical displays, many people thought there was a big fire in the North.

Those who remembered the 1923 roller described it as an aerial display of crackling colors similar to the Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights. Others called the sight a Fourth of July celebration in the spring.

No one will likely ever know how the measurements came about, but it is claimed that there was enough electricity produced by the 1935 duster to power New York City for 24 hours with enough left over for the state of Connecticut.

Children, of course, discovered a game to play during the dust storms. They would hold hands and form a circle around an iron stove. Whoever stood at the end of the broken circle received a nasty shock.

Both adults and children had an unusual form of entertainment during these dry, dusty years and at the same time attempted to protect their meager

growing crops. Rabbits tended to take over the sparse vegetation in the fields and ate the few remaining green plants. To prevent this over-abundance of wildlife from literally eating families out of house and home, High Plains farmers held a rabbit hunt nearly every Sunday afternoon.

These primitive rabbit drives usually covered an area of 15 or 20 miles as people walked on foot to drive the rabbits into a "V" shaped enclosure of wire mesh fence where the animals were clubbed with anything handy. This activity provided food for the table as well as thinning out the rabbit population, which reached an all-time record of 4,500 bunnies per square mile.

On Black Sunday, April 14, 1935, many of the hunters were caught out in the open when the gritty, windy darkness struck. After reaching the parked cars, most people climbed into the first empty vehicle rather than trying to find their own. After the black roller lifted, they continued the search for their own cars.

According to one newspaper report in THE PANHANDLE HERALD published in Guymon, Black Sunday of 1935 was remembered not only for its static electricity and black dust but also as the day the rabbits got away. (first published in the SENTINEL LEADER-April 18, 1985) 