

Little

DUST COVER



American Scene

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THE DUST BOWL

AND THE MIGRANT

BY GUY LOGSDON

Edited by Savoie Lottenville

"It covered up our fences,
it covered up our barns,
It covered up our tractors
in this wild and windy storm.
We loaded our jalopies
and piled our families in,
We rattled down the highway
to never come back again."

Guthrie. *"The Great Dust Storm."*

Cover: *THE RATTLER*, Lithograph by Alexandre Hogue

"I was there not only while the dust bowl was being set but also when the curtain rose revealing its fury. I painted what I saw and experienced. I had no thought of castigating anyone."

Alexandre Hogue
February 10, 1971



SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 1935, WAS A CLEAR DAY IN GUYMON, OKLAHOMA. THE TEMPERATURE WAS A NEAR RECORD HIGH, IN THE UPPER 80'S,

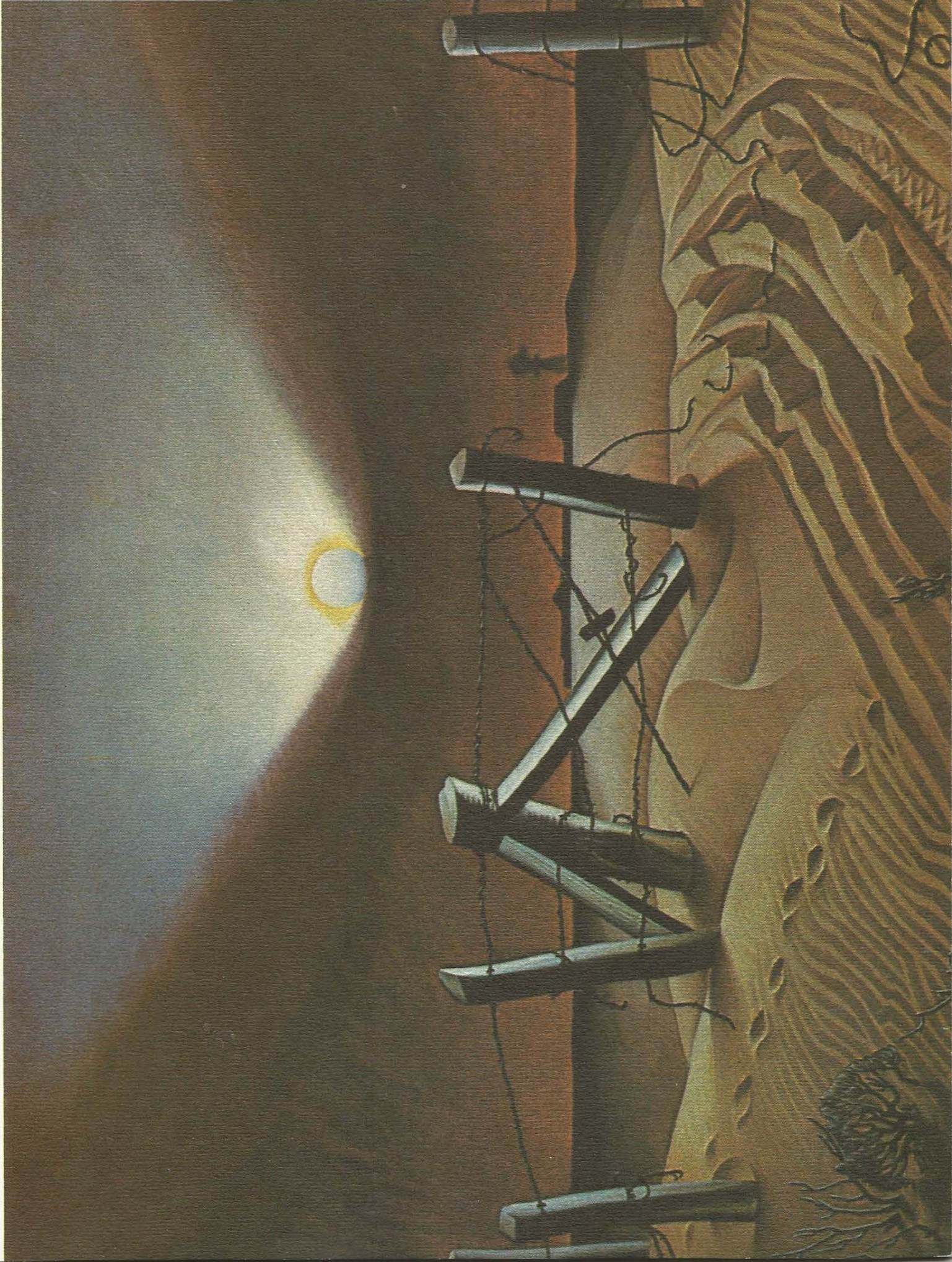
but the citizens did not move with cheerful optimism that usually accompanies early spring warmth. Instead, many of the people determinedly moved toward the Methodist church for a "rain service." These beleaguered folk were entering their fourth year of drought and dust storms, with each year becoming drier than the last and each dust storm becoming more destructive than the one before. Following a bumper crop in 1931, there had been no relief. The drought and dust storms had struck with relentless fury.

The church was packed as the congregation lifted its prayers, seeking divine intervention for moisture. The minister, the Reverend R. I. Wells, told the seekers that "Good rains within three weeks mean a harvest; God rules all and our last resort is prayer." By late afternoon the skies were darkened, but not by rain clouds. The worst of the "black blizzards" hit Guymon.

The Guymon congregation did not know that the blizzard had hit Dodge City, Kansas, and was traveling in a southerly direction leaving in its path the greatest destruction, damage, and injury ever inflicted by a dust storm. Total darkness that lasted for forty minutes struck Dodge City at 2:40 p.m. The temperature fell more than thirty degrees within this time, and the relative humidity decreased to less than ten percent. Total darkness was followed by three hours of partial darkness with only occasional breaks of light, and then the skies slowly lightened, but continued troubled until after midnight.

At Beaver, Oklahoma, only 67 miles northeast of Guymon, the temperature dropped from 80 to 63 degrees within 15 minutes. Throughout the storm area a 50-degree drop in temperature within a few hours was experienced, for northeasterly winds from Canada had swept down the Great Plains with a velocity of 45 to 70 miles an hour. Within a few hours the drought-dust-storm region was covered with topsoil from the Dakotas, western Nebraska, and from central and western Kansas farms. Dust was driven

DUST BOWL, by Alexandre Hogue. Oil, 24" x 33", 1934—International Business Machines Collection



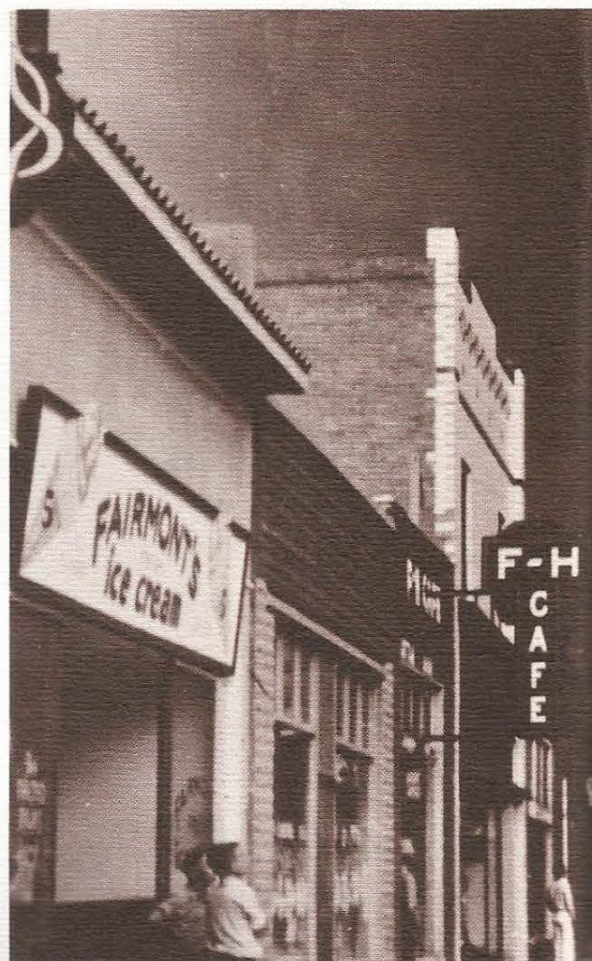
along the path, and in the southern Great Plains region it developed into billowing black clouds that threw western Kansas, the entire Oklahoma Panhandle, the Texas Panhandle, southwestern Colorado, and northeastern New Mexico into almost total darkness.

The cloud was described as extending east and west in a straight line as far as the eye could see. It moved with "a rolling, tumbling appearance, something like a great wall of muddy water." It rolled forward and downward, and the "lower front was lined with columns of rapidly rising dust, as though these were forced out by the falling heavier air layers above and behind." Hundreds of birds racing for their lives were seen in front of the cloud; the smaller, weaker among them were swept under the cloud, while the stronger ones, such as ducks and geese, seemed to escape. Following the storm, birds were entirely absent and jack rabbits in great numbers lay dead across the Plains region.

By the spring of 1935 the nation had become aware of the dust storms being endured by the citizens of the southern Great Plains region; this was mainly due to the storms that had occurred in May, 1934. On May 3, 1934, visibility in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, had been reduced to one mile by dust from the drought area. On May 12, 1934, a "duster" moved approximately 300,000,000 tons of soil from the drought-stricken area, and the air currents carried this soil across two-thirds of the eastern part of the continent into New York and Washington, D. C., and out over the Atlantic Ocean some 500 miles.

This storm was lighter colored than a "black duster" or "black blizzard;" for its origin was the strong southwesterly winds. These winds picked up the lighter colored soils of west Texas and New Mexico as the former moved northward into Colorado, Oklahoma, and Kansas. They were not as spectacular as the "black blizzard," but they covered larger areas since they attained ceiling heights of 10,000 to 14,000 feet and were carried by upper air currents. The spectacular black blizzards were usually associated with northwesterly winds that traveled at a high velocity, with a ceiling of about 7,500 feet. These storms often covered lengths of over 600 miles and widths of over 100 miles.

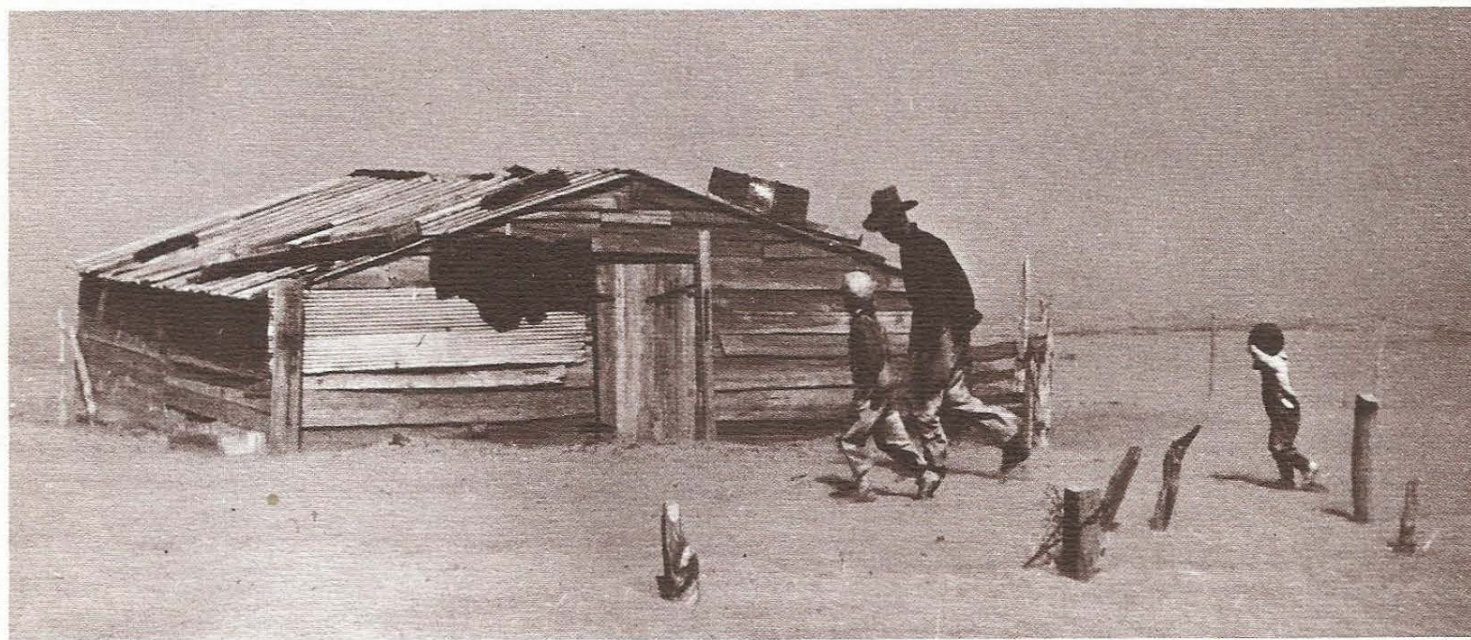
Newsmen traveled to the drought-dust-storm states in order to report about the storms, and when the black blizzard hit on April 14, 1935, an Associated Press staff writer, Robert Geiger, was in Guymon writing a series of articles. In his April 15 release for the Washington, D.C., *Evening Star*, Geiger wrote:



Street scene looking toward approaching dust storm. Elkhart, Kansas. 1937. F.S.A. photo.

Farmer and sons walking in the face of a dust storm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, April, 1936, by Arthur Rothstein for F.S.A.

Photos Courtesy of the Library of Congress.





AVALANCH BY WIND, by Alexandre Hogue. Oil, 33" x 45"—Commissioned by Encyclopedia Britannica and now in the University of Arizona Museum, Tucson, Arizona.

"Three little words—achingly familiar on a Western farmer's tongue—rule life today in the dust bowl of the continent.....If it rains....."

Geiger used the term "dust bowl." This was the first time that it had appeared in print, and within three months "dust bowl" was being used throughout the nation. The area that he so ably described was "the western third of Kansas, southeastern Colorado, the Oklahoma Panhandle, the northern two-thirds of the Texas Panhandle, and northeastern New Mexico." This was almost identical to the dust bowl boundary listed by the Soil Conservation Service as having suffered severe wind damage by 1939.

Additional national attention had been received through the power of the artist's brush, for Alexandre Hogue, who was reared near Dalhart, Texas, started gathering information for his famous wind and water erosion paintings as early as 1931. In 1933 Hogue completed "The Grim Reaper," which aroused the wrath of the West Texas Chamber of Commerce, and each successive work sparked more regional negative reaction which in the long run turned in his favor. The paintings were displayed in various art galleries around the nation, and in Europe and South America. In 1937 *Life* magazine printed an article about Hogue along with reproductions of some of his works.

Drought, wind erosion, and dust storms were not new to the people living on the Great Plains in the 1930's, for severe droughts have appeared in cycles at various times through all of the Plains regions. High winds always are experienced in April, particularly in the southern Great Plains, and a variable steady-breeze-to-high-winds is a Plains characteristic. Dust storms have been reported since the first travelers crossed what was labeled by American cartographers prior to 1860 as the "Great American Desert," but no storms in historic times were as severe as those in the mid-1930's.

The Great Plains area was a vast grassland that had supported and existed compatibly with the American Indian and the buffalo for centuries. The native grasses were able to withstand the cycle of droughts, winds, and rains; they held the Plains together.

The first westward movement, that of the trapper-trader frontiersmen, made little change in the grassland balance. However, the second phase of westward migration, that of the cattle industry, thrived on the short-grass country. Cattle had always been a part of the second phase of frontier movement. In the absence of transportation, or even of adequate roads, on the frontier,

cattle, swine, and sheep could transport themselves to market. The Texas cattle herds that were rounded up and trail-herded to the rail heads for the markets of the North in the late 1860's, together with the disappearance of the buffalo in the early 1870's, created a market condition which greatly increased the pressures upon open grazing lands. The industry thrived on grazing rights and open range, and consequently overgrazed the short-grass country. Cattlemen who owned land and who had a life investment in the land were less prone to overgraze. The greatest destruction came from the cattle companies that took the form of corporations owned and controlled by European and eastern investors who were interested only in quick profits.

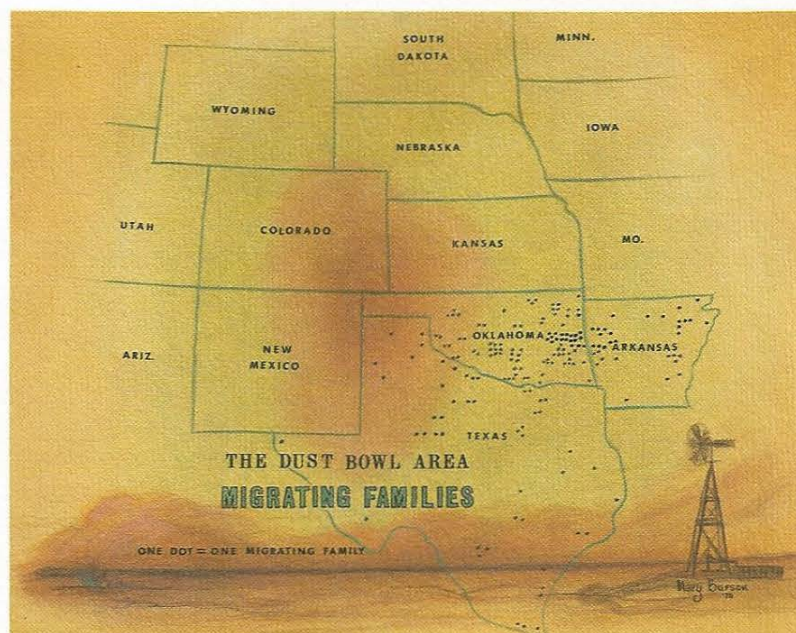
Following the cattle came flocks of sheep that virtually destroyed the grass by eating the grass nub. When cattle overgrazed they delayed the growth of grass, but the sheep killed it when they crowded a range. Moreover sheep require less water than cattle and, therefore were more apt to remain on a dry range longer.

When transportation and roads on the frontier allowed easier access to markets, the farmer and his plow became a factor in the destruction of the grass. The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged the farmer to claim 160 acres. As the Plains gradually were closed to the Indian and as railroads crossed the land, the plow crowded out the cattle and the grass. In 1916, the homesteader was allowed to claim 640 acres, a greatly enlarged domain made necessary by the discovery that smaller units on the Plains could not support a farm family; the small Plains farmer had disappeared by the mid-1920's.

The farmer who plowed the Plains had to employ dry farming methods, since he was breaking the soil of a semi-arid region. The dry farm crop that thrived best on the Plains was wheat. The limited rainfall actually created the hard-grain, high-protein character of the wheat that came to be produced on the Plains. The Plains wheat area is the hard-grain center of the nation because the maturity period is usually dry. Therefore, the wheat farmer was accustomed to and wanted the dry climate. Following World War I the market for wheat, which was an excellent cash crop, boomed.

The introduction of the tractor following the War made it possible for a farmer to cultivate thousands of acres instead of hundreds; more small farmers in the grain-belt were displaced. Also, more land was broken, and the one-way disc which pulverized about four inches of the top soil became a profitable means of dry farming. In the 1920's large harvesting machinery dis-

This map graphically illustrates the region most affected by the "Dust Bowl" and the origin of some families who requested relief in Imperial County, California, from 1935-37. It does not represent the total migration of families from the region shown.



placed a large portion of the migratory work force that followed the annual wheat harvest throughout the wheat belt.

With these developments it was no longer necessary for the farmer to live year-round on the farm. He could live in town most of the year and go to the farm only to plow, plant, and harvest. Again, the one-way disc made it possible for this suitcase farmer to thrive; he would buy or lease great tracts of land to cultivate. He and his colleagues were interested only in the crop and the money it produced; they felt no responsibility for the soil.

The farmers who lived on their land, rather than in the city, had made limited provision to curb wind erosion, but they were able to see the problem and adapt more readily than the suitcase farmer when problems arose. However, they, too, succumbed to the immediate profit of abundant production following the War; they were hardly untouched by greed.

Through the decades, while the cattlemen, sheep herders, and farmers battled over possession of the land with its accompanying profits, destroying the grass, the cycles of drought and increasing dust-storm intensity were ignored, except as they affected immediate cash profits. The southern Plains had experienced a drought beginning in 1890 that became severe from 1892 through 1895. When it was broken by good rains, the settlers soon forgot its effects and enjoyed a decade of adequate moisture. Another drought

from 1910 through 1913 hit the southern Plains, with 65,000 acres in Thomas County, Kansas, being severely blown. It was soon forgotten. From 1914 to 1930 the Plains enjoyed, for the most part, above average rainfall. A few dry years and localized droughts were experienced in scattered areas.

In 1926 wheat farmers experienced a bumper crop of 17 bushels per acre. Prices were not as high as the peak price of 1925, but at \$1.16 per bushel the southern Plains crop brought continued prosperity to the region. As a result, most of the suitable land was plowed, along with five to six million acres that should not have been broken. The over-grazed range, followed by small-grain cultivation, left the Plains without the grass which had held it together.

The drought hit the center of the southern Great Plains in 1930 and reduced the yield to 9.5 bushels per acre, and the Great Depression reduced the wheat price to \$0.68 per bushel. The pasture land and cattle industry also suffered.

In 1931 the spirits of the wheat farmers were high, for rain fell at the right time, and a bumper crop of 17 bushels per acre was expected to take up the slack from the previous year. However, the price again fell; this harvest brought only \$0.33 per bushel. But the real tragedy was that the year saw the last significant rainfall in the region for eight years. In 1932 the drought resumed, with increasing record highs and greater wind velocity in the spring of each year. Plains



Once a Missouri farmer, left, now a migratory farm laborer on the Pacific coast. California, 1936.

Photo below shows F.S.A. Migratory Labor camp, with 155 migrant families. One third had no work, two-thirds were finding part time work harvesting spring peas, earning an average (head of family) of \$4.20 per week. Feb. 1939. Calipatria Co.

Insert, three related drought refugee families from Oklahoma on highway near Lordsburg, New Mexico. May, 1937. Photos by Dorothea Lange for F.S.A.

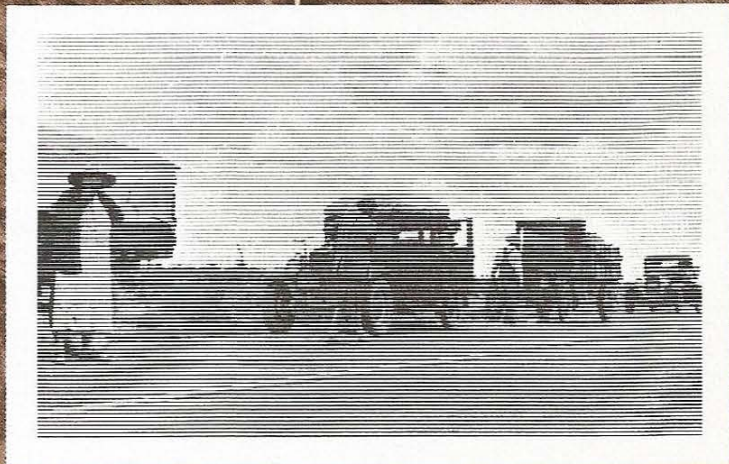
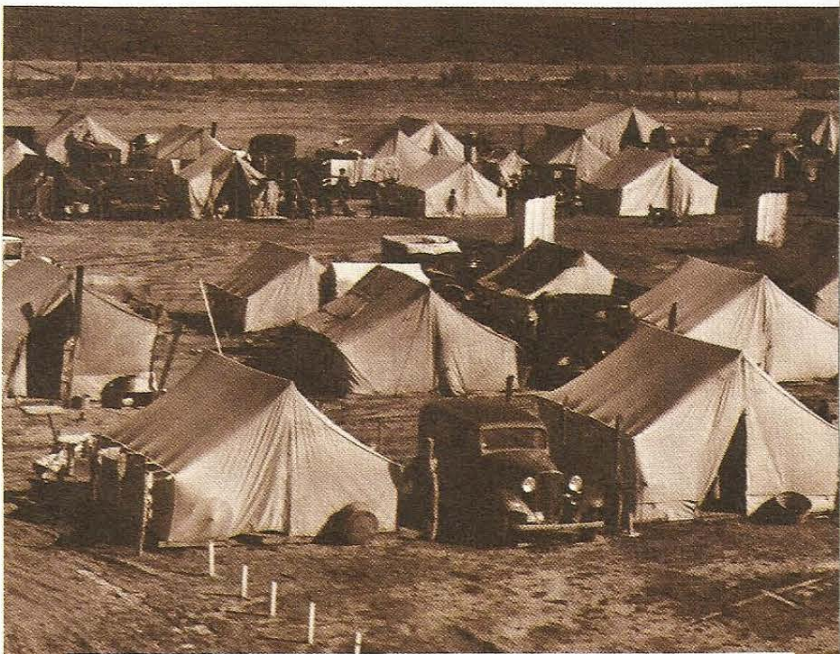
Photos Courtesy of Library of Congress.

residents ignored what they had experienced in the past; they were accustomed to occasional drought. Three years went by with increasing dust storms and problems. But the whole nation was experiencing difficulty, therefore, the wheat farmer clung to his hope and optimism... "If it rains..."

Following the black blizzard in May, 1935, heavy rains fell in parts of the southern Great Plains. This temporarily broke the drought but created flooding and water erosion where the grass could not hold the land.

Severe drought resumed in 1936, only this year it was extended into Canada and east of the Mississippi. In the fall much of the drought was broken in the northern region, but it was 1939 before rain returned to the drought stricken area with any regularity. The Dust Bowl was now in its eighth year, with the worst dust storms hitting in 1935.

Not only were vegetation and wildlife destroyed by the dust and storms, but human life eroded away. In 1934 nearly 300 deaths were reported in Kansas as a result of excessive heat. The previous high in mortality of 75 had been in 1931. During the dust intensity an increase of 50 to 100 percent in pneumonia cases was reported. Other respiratory infections and diseases increased, and infant mortality was higher. The dust did not carry any disease, but as an irritant, it contributed to infection and death. A popular term for respiratory problems was "dust pneu-



monia." To combat the dust, the American Red Cross issued gauze masks or dust masks to be used during dust storms and on the days when dust was in the air. The masks also were purchased in many of the areas not in, but adjacent to, the Dust Bowl. Also, inside the homes various methods were used to seal the windows where most of the dust entered. The most effective dust-proofing came from translucent glasscloth over the windows. Plates were set on the table upside down to keep the grit and sand out, and women learned to cook with dustproof methods.

In response to the irony of the Dust Bowl, people of the region, unable to change the situation, learned to find humor in some of their problems. The dust often was called "black snow" or "Oklahoma rain." Jokes and sayings from the period included the following:

"To test wind velocity, fasten a log chain to a tree, and if the wind blows the chain straight, it's a calm day. If the chain pops like a whip, a heavy breeze is blowing. If the tree is pulled up by the roots, it's a blizzard."

"To scour pans, all that is necessary is to hold them up to a keyhole, and they will be sandblasted."

"Why pay taxes in Texas when the farm has moved to Kansas?"

"Since the soil is being rotated by the wind, it will not be necessary to rotate the crops."

"You can tell when a duster is coming by the sneezing of the rattlesnakes."

Some tall tales were told:

"The wind blew away so much soil that postholes were left standing above ground. One farmer hitched up his team and wagon and gathered the postholes and stored them in his barn for future use."

"Dust had to be thrown in the face of one man in order to revive him after he fainted from shock when a drop of rain hit him on the face."

"One man shot ground squirrels overhead which were tunneling upward for air."

"When prairie bullfrogs were put into water to breed, they drowned; they had never learned to swim."

Woody Guthrie wrote that "Dust sometimes gets so thick you run your tractor and plows upside down. So dark you can't see a dime in your pocket, a shirt on your back, a meal on your

table, or a dadgum thing. Only thing that is higher than that dust is your debts. Dust settles, but debts don't."

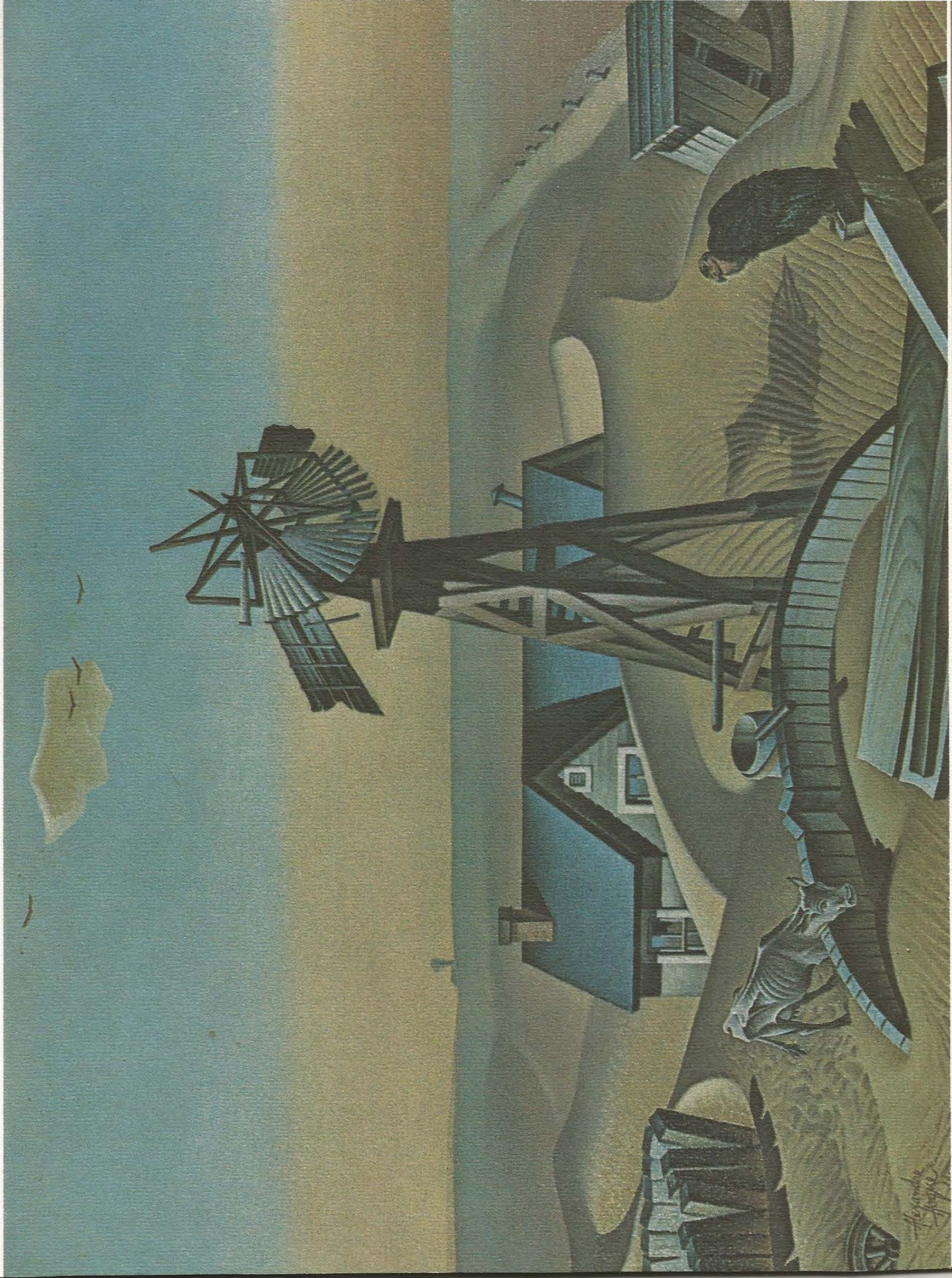
The wheat farmer laughed and cried and stuck to his land.

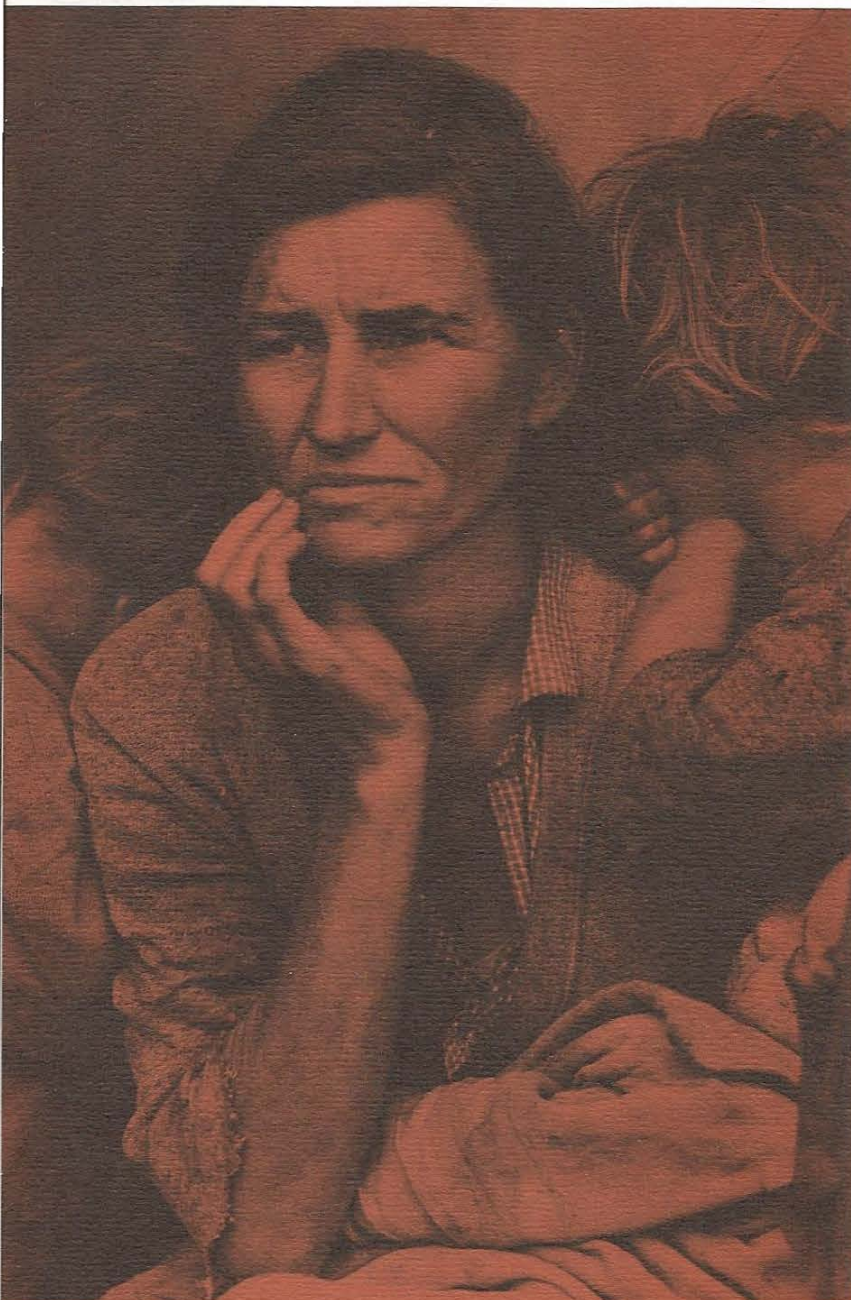
The state that became synonymous with the Dust Bowl was Oklahoma. The image resulted from a variety of reasons—some true and some false. One factor was that Texas and Cimarron Counties, both in the Oklahoma Panhandle, were in the heart of the Dust Bowl. Thus, they received the worst damage, most severe storms, and most dramatic drifts, being in the path of dust storms from all directions. It was in Guymon where Geiger first reported the term "Dust Bowl!" His article and those of other journalists were carried over the wire services with a Guymon dateline.

In 1936, approximately one year after the great black blizzard, a photographer for the Farm Security Administration, Arthur Rothstein, captured scenes in Cimarron County of the Dust Bowl with his camera. The classic photograph that expressed the fury of the wind and dust along with the plight of the farmer was that of a farmer and his two sons walking in a storm toward his barn. Rothstein's photo was eventually seen throughout the world, along with others that he made. Another outstanding photographer was Dorothea Lange, who captured the Oklahoma migrant in the state, on the highway, and in California. Her most famous series was that of the "Migrant Mother," which was photographed in a "pea-pickers camp" near Nipomo, California, in March, 1936. Along with these two the Farm Security Administration sent teams of photographers to capture the Dust Bowl and the migrant, and Oklahoma seemed to be the source of the two problems.

Another factor in the creation of the image was the term "Okie" which eventually was meant to be a derogatory term for any migrant agricultural laborer. The word was occasionally in use as a nickname for Oklahomans prior to the migrant invasion of California. It received its popular usage through the California newspapers in 1935, when Ben Reddick, an editor for the Los Angeles Times sent photographers to the migrant camps. While reviewing the resulting photographs he noticed the predominance of Oklahoma car tags, so in order to identify them, he pluralized the first two letters and wrote "Okies." This was printed in the Times, and soon in the West all migratory agricultural workers were called Okies. Citizens in Oklahoma did not hear or feel the impact of the word until it appeared in John

DROUTH STRICKEN AREA, by Alexandre Hogue. Oil, 30" x 42," 1934—Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, Texas.





Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age 32. "Migrant Mother." February, 1936. by Dorothea Lange for F.S.A.

Photo courtesy of Library of Congress.

Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Wrath was the reaction to the term by most Oklahomans. They thought that Steinbeck had coined it, when, in fact, it is known that Okie was being used as early as 1905.

Battles still rage over the word. While Dewey Bartlett was governor of Oklahoma from 1967 through 1970, he attempted to change the popular usage of Okie into a more favorable connotation. His program was fought not only by his political enemies, and by those who hated the word, but also by tradition. For in Arizona today, an "Okie credit card" is a siphon hose and a gas can, and in the cattle market an "Okie" is the poorest calf in the lot or the ring. The traditional popular usage of a word is its meaning; it is difficult to change tradition. Steinbeck merely used the best term to express himself—"Okie."

Steinbeck's novel was not intended to be a history of Oklahoma, the Dust Bowl, or the migrant; instead it was a social criticism about the plight of the agricultural worker in California. The theme consisted of economic and social injustices suffered by displaced persons. Oklahoma and Highway 66 were merely devices to introduce and transport the migrants, and historical accuracy was unimportant since Steinbeck's craft was fiction, not historical documentary. The placement of the Joads in Oklahoma was justified, and most of the mistakes attributed to the Joads were justified because the migrant of the 1930's did not understand or recognize the source of his problems. Steinbeck told the story as it was told to him.

The Dust Bowl was a problem separate from, but related to, the great westward migration that occurred in the 1930's. It has been a widely held belief that the Dust Bowl caused the migration. *The Grapes of Wrath* helped perpetuate this misconception, which was a contributing factor to the Oklahoma-Dust Bowl image. The Dust Bowl did not cause the migration.

In Oklahoma the Dust Bowl was limited to the Panhandle, the four northwestern counties, and possibly a small strip of acreage along the extreme western boundary. The population of the Panhandle counties in 1930 was 30,960; in 1940 it was 22,198. The other four counties had 50,151 in 1930 and 46,105 in 1940. The total loss was 12,808. It was a serious percentage to the Dust Bowl communities, schools, and churches, but it was hardly a major portion of the westward migration. Also, it must be re-emphasized that the wheat farmer was accustomed to dry spells and drought and that he usually owned his farm,

which averaged close to 1,000 acres in size. Approximately 40 percent of the farm families in the Panhandle moved, but not out of the state. Many farmers took residence in the nearest town for the safety and health of their families.

Even though the Oklahoma Dust Bowl contributed a minor percentage of the migrants, the state was well represented. Of the 312,278 persons seeking manual employment in California and who entered by automobile between July 1, 1935, and June 30, 1939, 22.7 percent were from Oklahoma. This figure was twice that of Texas, the second ranking state, and most of the Oklahoma migrants were from agricultural occupations, which does not apply as much to those from other states. The "Okies" were Oklahomans and less than 20 percent of approximately 72,000 from Oklahoma could have been from the Dust Bowl.

The reasons behind Oklahoma's migrants were many and complex. One reason was that Oklahoma's economy was a boom economy. With the exception of the Indian population, the citizens of Oklahoma had been attracted to the state by the promise of quick prosperity. The land runs and low-cost farm property brought the largest body of migrating, prosperity-seeking people to the twin territories between 1889 and statehood that the United States had yet seen. The discovery that the southern Great Plains was not only rich pasture land but also that it could be plowed and would produce the best high-protein wheat in the United States created a desire to exploit the Plains for quick profit. The oil industry which had grown up after 1905 was a boom-town oriented industry, and even the basic and old established ranching industry had grown from a sudden national need for cattle from the Southwest after the Civil War.

Cotton, however, was the product that had had longest tenure in Oklahoma as a staple crop, for the Choctaws and Chickasaws had been successful cotton farmers for generations. When the status of the Indian was changed during the latter part of the nineteenth century and his so-called surplus lands were thrown open to white acquisition, cotton farming became a cash-crop, quick-profit endeavor, conducted predominantly by white tenant farmers.

The economy had experienced boom surges through the rapid expansion and development of communities during settlement and early statehood days and the discovery of oil shortly after the turn of the century. The first World War had provided the necessary booms to the state when

recession or drought threatened segments of the economy between 1912 and 1915. But the boom economy was dying by 1930.

The dying boom economy coincided with the Great Depression and the emergence of the Dust Bowl; for the next ten years Oklahoma suffered as its abnormally migratory inhabitants pulled out and left the state, allowing its land to be reconstructed into a more stable agricultural economy by those who had the money as well as the tenacity.

The greatest economic blow to the state came from the cotton industry. Oklahoma was a major cotton producing state; cotton, in fact, was Oklahoma's largest income crop. In 1924 cotton farmers produced 1,511,000 bales that sold for \$22.33 per bale. The dollar production was \$168,655,000. Then the cotton industry started to decline. By 1930 the yield fell to 854,000 bales at \$8.71 per bale of a gross value of \$37,174,000. In 1931 the price fell to \$5.06 per bale and on a yield of 1,261,000 bales brought \$31,906,000; this trend was followed until it hit its low in 1935.

The drought of 1930 cut the crop yield by 36 percent, but this and the Depression were not the causes for the near death of the cotton industry. The problem was complex, for American cotton was experiencing competition in the 1920's from countries that had not hitherto been large cotton producers. Moreover, some of these countries, notably Egypt, were producing a better quality of cotton than that of the United States.

Cotton quality was then, and is now, based on the length of the lint and a number of other factors, including color. Short-staple cotton is 13/16 to 14/16 inches in length while long-staple cotton is from 1 1/8 to 1 5/8 inches in length, and the longer lint produces the higher quality yarn. The higher count for yarn indicates the fine quality of yarn. Short-staple cotton has a yarn count of 40 to 60, and long-staple cotton has a count of 100 to 150. This means that yarn from long-staple cotton can be more tightly woven and is used for better quality cloth such as that required for shirting. Oklahoma and most of the cotton states produced short-staple cotton, while Egypt, along with the northern Brazilian states and some areas of India, produced the long-staple variety. Russia at this time dropped out of the market as a buyer and became a major producer. By 1930 there was a limited market for Oklahoma cotton, which, because of its long-haul freight characteristics, had always suffered a price penalty.

The structure of the cotton farms varied from



14
THE CRUCIFIED LAND, Oil, by Alexandre Hogue. This painting is not part of Alexandre Hogue's "Dust Bowl series" but part of his "Water Erosion" series, and is now in the Gilcrease collections.

that of the wheat farms, for the wheat farmer, with the exception of the suitcase farmer, usually owned his land and was not migratory in habit. Over 60 percent of the cotton farmers in Oklahoma were tenants or sharecroppers who farmed small tracts of land, and since cotton was extremely depleting to soil fertility, it was not unusual for a farmer to wear out a farm and then move to another tract and start all over again. They were migratory by habit. Also, when they abandoned the depleted soil, water erosion followed.

The average income of the cotton family in the Cotton Belt fell to \$216 by 1933, and the Depression and reduced world consumption created a cotton surplus. In 1933 the Domestic Allotment plan for voluntary crop reduction was adopted. Those producers who participated plowed up 25 to 50 percent of the crop for a payment of approximately \$11 per acre. The policy created some stability for the land owner and large producer. Very little money went to the small farmer; the tenant, the sharecropper, and the cotton laborer were completely ignored.

The cotton industry required a large field labor force that was used sporadically each year because of the seasonal character of cultivation and harvesting. Many migratory laborers winter-camped in Oklahoma, and when the cotton market dropped, they, along with the tenant farmers, became displaced persons. These people, not the Dust Bowl wheat farmers, became the migratory "Okies" who traveled to California in the mid-thirties. The cotton fields of Arizona and California were the only hope for them, but mechanization in the California fields was already cutting into that labor force. The only thing left for many of the laborers was "relief" in California, from which enmity and derogatory attitudes developed among long resident Californians.

Steinbeck through observation became aware of the problems and suffering of the migrants in California. He wrote *In Dubious Battle* (1936) about organizing tactics in the fields, and in the fall of 1936 he wrote a series of newspaper articles about squatters' camps. Then in the fall of 1937, he traveled to Oklahoma and started westward with migrants. He traveled and lived with them and remained in the California camps until he had achieved their life story. These experiences were published with illustrations in 1938 under the title *Their Blood Is Strong* as an inexpensive pamphlet by the Simon J. Lubin Society of California. It is a scarce and difficult publication to find, and it shows that Steinbeck

was not a propagandist, as was often stated. *The Grapes of Wrath* was an artistic expansion of this pamphlet. The novel was not a short-term attempt at sensationalism. The author put at least three years of emotional concern, research, and writing into the migrants' plight before creating what many consider his master work. His weakness in Oklahoma was that he knew only what he had been told; the migrants did not know or could not see the source of their problems.

He was correct in placing the Joads as tenant cotton farmers in eastern Oklahoma, for here and in southwestern Oklahoma was the well-spring of migration. He was wrong in saying that they were from the Dust Bowl, for wheat, not cotton, was the crop there. The Cotton Belt was affected by the drought of 1936, and it did have some dust settle on the land from the Dust Bowl throughout the 1930's. The migrants believed that it was the dust which they could see that forced them out, for they could not see or understand the dying cotton economy or the changing times.

Steinbeck was right in having the Joads' land plowed under, but it was not by the "banks" and "companys." The Constitution of Oklahoma, Article 22, clearly stated that no corporation could own land. However, land could be mortgaged to corporations and to banks, but if they foreclosed, they could not retain ownership beyond seven years. The tenant farmer was not a bank-land tenant; he farmed the land owned by individuals. When he was plowed under, it was by mechanization and crop reduction policies; again, these were factors that he could not see and understand.

The Joads did not have to fight the Indians for possession of their land. Land in eastern Indian Territory was leased to farmers prior to statehood by Indians who, in many cases, were better educated and more civilized than the farmers. The unassigned lands in Oklahoma Territory and other Indian lands in western Indian Territory were acquired by the U.S. Government and thrown open to free settlement for homesteaders. No farmer had to fight Indians for his land; he had to fight other farmers and claim-jumpers. The Indian stories were those told by the story-teller to people who did not know better.

Again, Steinbeck was justified in placing the Joads in Oklahoma, and the essence of what he wrote was true. The very few minor inaccuracies were incidental to the theme and purpose of the novel, yet the image of Oklahoma that spread from the book and the movie has plagued the

state for nearly three decades. The negative reaction from the citizens of the state who were not willing to admit, recognize, and investigate the truths and inaccuracies did nothing to help rectify the image. Also, they failed to realize that other factors, such as photographs and news articles, had created part of the image; many continue to heap their wrath on Steinbeck.

A final element in creating the Oklahoma Dust Bowl image was Woody Guthrie, the Dust Bowl balladeer. In August, 1937, he was a featured singer over KFVD in Los Angeles, and his Dust Bowl songs became well known among the migrants, the Southwest, and southern Cali-

fornia. By 1940 the songs were being broadcast nation wide, and the same year, the RCA Victor Company released an album of Dust Bowl Ballads by Guthrie. Publicity releases stated that he was from Okemah, Oklahoma, "the heart of the Dust Bowl," when, in fact, Guthrie was a resident of Pampa, Texas, from 1929 to 1937, and Okemah was three hundred miles from the Dust Bowl. His songs were not inspired by any experiences in Oklahoma.

The Dust Bowl and the migration of the 1930's were separate but related problems. To consider one exclusive of the other is as wrong as considering them to be synonymous. □

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GUY W. LOGSDON, GUEST author of this issue of the American Scene magazine, has spent several years researching the life of ballad singer, Woody Guthrie, the various aspects of the Dust Bowl, and the circumstances of the migrations of the 1930's. In 1968, Logsdon began gathering information on Woody Guthrie, probing into the singer's background for facts and incidents which influenced his songs and philosophy. The Dust Bowl era and problems of the migrants were major factors which appeared and reappeared in the unfolding of Guthrie's history.

Logsdon, who is now considered a regional authority on Woody Guthrie, the Dust Bowl era, and migrations from Oklahoma during the 1930's, has given numerous talks and has written several articles on the various phases of these subjects. He has frequently presented papers on these topics at meetings of several of the library associations and historical societies to which he belongs. He is presently participating in the preparation of sixteen half-hour television programs dealing with the "Folklore of the Southwest" which are being filmed for the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority.

A native Oklahoman, Logsdon was born in Ada, May 31, 1934. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree from East Central State College in Ada, he studied at the University of Oklahoma where he attained a Master of Library Science degree. He has done graduate work at the Arizona State University, Indiana University, and the University of Oklahoma toward a degree as Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education.

A member of the faculty of the University of Tulsa since 1967, Logsdon is Director of Libraries there. He resides in Tulsa with his wife, Phyllis, and their four daughters.

ALEXANDRE HOGUE, WHOSE paintings are used to illustrate this issue, is a well-known artist and teacher whose works have gained regional and national acclaim. He received international recognition during the 1930's for his bold landscapes of the Dust Bowl section of the country. A writer for the American Artist magazine said of Hogue: "His paintings have been a major factor in the soil conservation movement... In terse, graphic language the dry water tanks and dead windmills under a merciless, brilliant blue sky give proof of the drouth; the land has been given back to the rattlesnake and the prairie dog."

Known for lithographs and paintings other than his Dust Bowl series, Hogue has exhibited widely and is the recipient of numerous awards. Many collections in this country and abroad include his works. A painting from his Dust Bowl series, "Drouth Survivors," which was originally in the Jeu de Paume Museum of Paris was burned, along with many other American paintings, soon after its return from loan to the Tate Gallery in London. Its replacement, "Oil in the Sandhills" is now in the permanent collection of the Musee National d'Art Moderne.

Born at Memphis, Missouri, on February 22, 1898, Hogue moved with his family to Denton, Texas when he was only six weeks old. As a young man Hogue spent a period of four years as a commercial artist in New York City, after which he spent several years teaching art at various Texas colleges. During the Second World War, he worked as technical illustrator for North American Aviation in Dallas. In 1945 Hogue began his twenty four year association with the University of Tulsa, serving as head of its art department for nineteen of those years.

Currently as Professor Emeritus he is in retirement from the faculty of T.U. where he taught oil painting, life drawing, and lithography. Hogue has continued with his art work and, as a writer and poet, has published in several Southwestern journals.



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