



THE CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Diocese of Amarillo



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The Dust Bowl was the name given to the drought-stricken Southern Plains



Just as the anti-Catholic uproar was beginning to simmer down, the settlers were bombarded by the depression, drought and dust storms.

In the latter half of the 1930s the southern plains were devastated by drought, wind erosion, and great dust storms. Some of the storms rolled far eastward, darkening skies all the way to the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. The area's most severely affected were western Texas, eastern New Mexico, the Oklahoma Panhandle, western Kansas, and eastern Colorado. This ecological and economic disaster and the region where it happened came to be known as the Dust Bowl.

According to the federal Soil Conservation Service, the bowl covered 100 million acres in 1935. By 1940 the area had declined to twenty-two million acres. It disappeared in the forties. A prolonged drought, combined with unusually high temperatures and strong winds, caused the normally semi-arid region to become for a while a veritable desert. During some growing seasons the soil was dry to a depth of three feet. Lack of rain plagued the northern plains states too, though less severely.

Droughts occur regularly on the plains; an extreme one comes roughly every twenty years, and milder ones every three or four. But in historic times there is no record of such wind erosion as accompanied the drought in the thirties. In 1932 there were 14 dust storms of regional extent; in 1933, thirty-eight; in 1934, twenty-two; in 1935, forty; in 1936, sixty-eight; in 1937, seventy-two; in 1938, sixty-one; in 1939, thirty; in 1940, seventeen; in 1941, seventeen. In Amarillo the worst year for storms was 1935, when they lasted a total of 908 hours. Seven times, from January to March, the visibility in Amarillo declined to zero; one of these complete blackouts lasted eleven

hours. In another instance a single storm raged for 3½ days. The misery of the era was widely chronicled and eloquently captured in such books as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). People shoveled the dirt from their front yards and swept up bushel basketfuls inside their houses. Automobile and tractor engines were ruined by grit. The human costs were even harder to calculate and bear. Old people and babies were the most vulnerable to eye and lung damage, as were those with respiratory ailments like asthma. The medical remedies available to them were primitive and makeshift. The Red Cross furnished light gauze masks, and people stuffed rags around windows and door cracks. Domesticated and wild animals often suffocated or were blinded. As



Repeatedly in those years dirt and sand destroyed crops, property, and mental and physical health.



the agricultural base of the region was buried under dust, extreme hardship loomed over the southern plains. In May 1934 dust fell from a massive storm on the White House in Washington, D.C., and helped focus federal attention on the desperate situation. The Soil Erosion Service of the United States Department of Commerce established the Dalhart Wind Erosion Control Project in 1934 under the direction of Howard H. Finnell. That year \$525 million was distributed to cattlemen for emergency feed loans and as payment for some of their starving stock; farmers were provided with public jobs such as building ponds and reservoirs or planting shelter-belts of trees. Seed loans were provided for new crops, and farmers were paid to plow lines of high ridges against the wind. In 1935 the Soil Conservation Service of the USDA replaced the Soil Erosion Service and opened the Region Six office in Amarillo. There Finnell supervised the conservation work for the entire Dust Bowl. With the cooperation of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Work Projects Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Resettlement Administration, the Farm Security Administration, state extension services, and other agencies, the Soil Conservation Service made efforts to limit the worst effects of wind erosion. Also in 1935 the Texas legislature established conservation districts for wind-erosion control in nine Panhandle counties, where local authorities were given power to force farmers to institute measures to halt blowing dust. Between 1935 and 1937 over 34 percent of the farmers in the area left. The Dust Bowl was not only the result of bad weather but also of hu-



man actions that exacerbated the drought. Immediately before the thirties men had entered the plains fired with enthusiasm to make them yield abundant wealth, and, in a few short years, they had destroyed much of the native grass holding the dirt in place. Some of them had overstocked the land with cattle and reduced its ability to survive a time of severe drought. Others had come intent on transforming the area into row-crop agriculture. Both sorts of settlers ignored the hard-won experience of their predecessors on the plains as well as available scientific data and thereby put at risk a vulnerable environment.

In the boom years of the twenties, from 1925 to 1930, the time of what one writer has called "the great plow-up," farmers tore up the vegetation on millions of acres in the southern plains, an area nearly seven times the size of Rhode Island. They introduced new gasoline tractors, which allowed them to plow faster than ever before. Some "suitcase farmers" had no more responsible plan than speculating on a quick crop or two. More grandiosely, the movie mogul Hickman Price arrived in Plainview, Texas, in 1929 to establish a factory farm covering over fifty-four square miles in Swisher, Castro, and Deaf Smith counties. To every part of the region came similar pacesetters who fervently believed in the twenties' creed of unlimited, laissez-faire economic expansion and who were convinced that modern methods of industrial capitalism, so apparently successful elsewhere in the economy, were what the plains needed. Even traditional conservative agriculturists were induced to follow these entrepreneurs' lead and try to cash in on a period of good and high market demand.

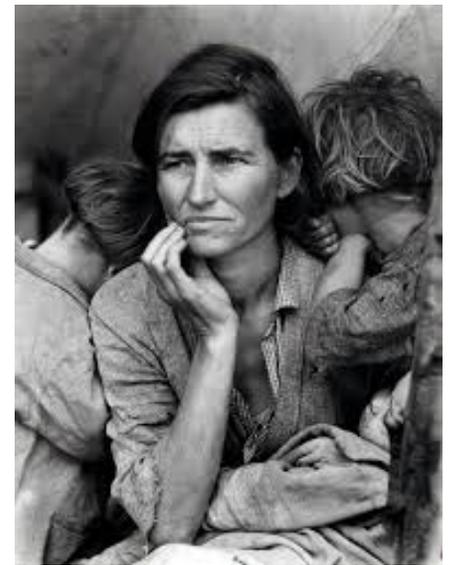
Dust Bowls, Black Blizzards and Migration

When the black blizzards began to roll, one-third of the Dust Bowl region—thirty-three million acres—lay ungrassed and open to the winds. The origin of the Dust Bowl was therefore related to the near-simultaneous collapse of the American economy. Both catastrophes revealed the darker side of entrepreneurialism, its tendency to risk long-term social and ecological damage in the pursuit of short-term, private gain. The New Deal was elaborated partly to prevent such disasters in the future. Some argue that plains agriculture was chastened by the Dust Bowl years and has, with government help, reformed itself adequately so that the thirties nightmare will not recur. Others, less sanguine, point to the dust storms of the mid-1950s and 1970s as evidence that the old Dust Bowl can be reborn, if and when weather and market forces collide again.



The 1930s were times of tremendous hardship on the Great Plains. Settlers dealt not only with the Great Depression, but also with years of drought that plunged an already-suffering society into an onslaught of relentless dust storms for days and months on end. They were known as dirt storms, sand storms, black blizzards, and “dusters.” It seemed as if it could get no worse, but on Sunday, the 14th of April 1935, it got worse. The day is known in history as “Black Sunday,” when a mountain of blackness swept across the High Plains and instantly turned a warm, sunny afternoon into a horrible blackness that was darker than the darkest night. Famous songs were written about it, and on the following day, the world would hear the region referred to for the first time as “The Dust Bowl.”

The wall of blowing sand and dust first blasted into the eastern Oklahoma panhandle and far northwestern Oklahoma around 4 PM. It raced to the south and southeast across the main body of Oklahoma that evening, accompanied by heavy blowing dust, winds of 40 MPH or more, and rapidly falling temperatures. But the worst conditions were in the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles, where the rolling mass raced more toward the south-southwest - accompanied by a massive wall of blowing dust that resembled a land-based tsunami. Winds in the panhandle reached upwards of 60 MPH, and for at least a brief time, the blackness was so complete that one could not see their own hand in front of their face. It struck Beaver around 4 PM, Boise City around 5:15 PM, and Amarillo at 7:20 PM.



‘People caught in their own yards grope for the doorstep. Cars come to a standstill, for no light in the world can penetrate that swirling murk...We live with the dust, eat it, sleep with it, watch it strip us of possessions and the hope of possessions. It is becoming Real,’ Avis D. Carlson wrote in a *New Republic* article

Dusty Old Dust

Singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie, who was born and grew up in Okemah, Oklahoma, moved to Pampa, Texas in 1931. Many of his early songs were inspired by his personal experiences on the Texas High Plains during the dust storms of the 1930s. Among them is the song “Dusty Old Dust,” which also became known as “So Long, It’s Been Good to Know Yuh.” In the original lyrics, he sings, “Of the place that I lived on the wild windy plains, in the month called April, county called Gray...” (Pampa was, and is, in Gray County .) Also among the lyrics:

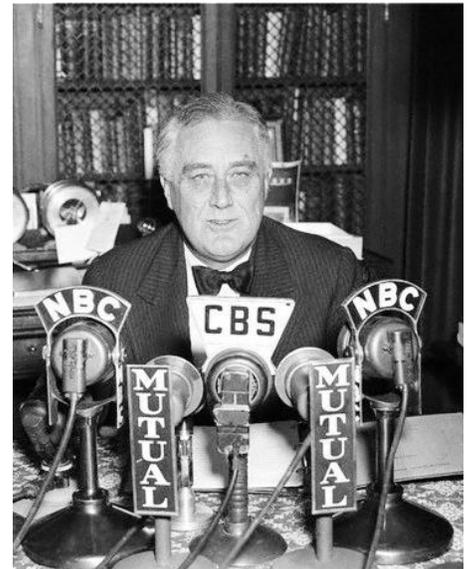
“A dust storm hit, an’ it hit like thunder;
It dusted us over, an’ it covered us under;
Blocked out the traffic and blocked out the sun,
Straight for home all the people did run,
Singin’:
So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh.
This dusty old dust is a-gettin’ my home,
And I got to be driftin’ along.”



"The lyrics are highly representative of the events of Black Sunday in the Texas panhandle, and suggest that Black Sunday may well have been the specific event that inspired those words more than any other.

The Dust Bowl Gets Its Name

Robert E. Geiger was a reporter for the Associated Press. He and photographer Harry G. Eisenhard were overtaken by the storm six miles from Boise City, Oklahoma, and were forced to wait two hours before returning to town. Mr. Geiger then wrote an article that appeared in the Lubbock Evening Journal the next day, which began: “Residents of the southwestern dust bowl marked up another black duster today...” Another article, also attributed to “an Associated Press reporter” and published the next day, included the following: “Three little words... rule life in the dust bowl of the continent – ‘if it rains’.” These cases generally are acknowledged to be the first-ever usages of the phrase by which the events of the 1930s have been known to history ever since: The Dust Bowl.



Dust Goes to Washington

The blowing dust that blasted the High Plains in the 1930s was attributed not only to dry weather, but to poor soil conservation techniques that were in use at the time. In March 1935 (several weeks before Black Sunday), one of President Roosevelt’s advisors, Hugh Hammond Bennett, testified before congress about the need for better soil conservation techniques. Ironically, dust from the Great Plains was transported all the way to the East Coast, blotting out the sun even in the Nation’s capital. Mr. Bennett only needed to point out the window to the evidence supporting his position, and say, “This, gentlemen, is what I’ve been talking about.” Congress passed the Soil Conservation Act before the end of the year.

More

The Dust Bowl was the name given to the drought-stricken Southern Plains region of the United States, which suffered severe dust storms during a dry period in the 1930s. As high winds and choking dust swept the region from Texas to Nebraska, people and livestock were killed and crops failed across the entire region. The Dust Bowl intensified the crushing economic impacts of the Great



Depression and drove many farming families on a desperate migration in search of work and better living

Fear and suspicion was witnessed in California. Most of the immigrants from the affected plains found their way to California. The vast numbers of these immigrants led to fear and suspicion among the residents of California who found it hard to accommodate them. Police blocked roads entering the state and cases of organized fire outbreaks in the camps of the immigrants were reported



The dust led to the deaths of people. About 6,500 people died in the first one year of the Dust Bowl. The dusty wind carried with it coarse and fine particles of soil and other materials. The inhalation of the dusty air also led to lung illnesses and pneumonia that killed numerous children and adults, some of who died decades after the event.

75% of the population affected stayed put. It is common knowledge that a great number of people were displaced and ended up in California and a few neighboring states. Nevertheless, studies have shown that only a quarter of the population displaced migrated. The majority stayed and survived the Dust Bowl.

Blue flames were witnessed. There was a lot of static electricity that was created due to the friction between the ground and the dust that was being blown. As a result, blue flames were seen when this friction passed by any metallic objects such as fence wires. Due to the magnitude of the dusty wind, the static electricity that built up was so great that cars had to tether chains towards the ground to earth any static current to ease movement and reduce chances of electrocution. A single dust storm was able to generate enough static electricity to short-circuit radios and other electronic devices, damage car engines, and even cause barbed wire fences to be engulfed in strange-looking blue flames. All this static electricity built up between the ground and the dust that was flying around, and was practically impossible to avoid. People who were driving installed chains to the back of their cars so that they dragged along the way, grounding the car, and people avoided contact with each other since the static electricity was so strong it could throw grown men off their feet. And how strong exactly was the built-up static electricity?

Dust Bowl facts reveal that the worst of the many dust storms in the US during the 1930s occurred on April 14, 1935, a day which is now known as Black Sunday. Why black? Because it blackened several cities in the area from the Atlantic coast to 200 miles further inland. Massive amounts of dust were accompanied by millions of insects and thousands of animals fleeing the area, causing a spectacular sight that convinced many that the Armageddon was coming. There is even a story of one woman wanting to spare her child the horror of experiencing the Armageddon, so she killed the child herself...

Well, the infamous Black Sunday storm produced enough static electricity to power New York City...

Physicists know that sand storms can provoke lightning, but no one knew how static charge could build up during a "duster." Troy Shinbrot at Rutgers University recently came up with a model that showed how particles of dust could build up large static charges. He didn't believe in his idea, until he calculated that it would only work when the particles reached a certain density in the air. When testing the theory out with glass beads, he saw that once they reached a certain density the level of charge shot up.

Here's how it works. Think of dust particles as little globes, each with two hemispheres. When the particles become polarized, one hemisphere becomes positive and the other hemisphere becomes negative. Since positive charges attract negative charges, a negatively charged hemisphere on one dust particle can attract a positively charged hemisphere on another dust particle. When they meet, they neutralize by transferring the electron from the negatively charged hemisphere to the positively charged hemisphere. Remember, the hemispheres are part of larger particles. The larger particles already were neutral, with a positive and a negative charge. So when its positively charged hemisphere acquired an electron, the entire particle acquired an overall negative charge. This process could be repeated until the particle built up a major charge.

People could build up major charges as well. As could cars and buildings. As dust storms came through, they could short out the electrical systems on people's cars. They'd blank out radio stations. And, yes, they would occasionally directly strike people with lightning.

Hobos During the Dust Bowl

One of the more interesting aspects about the history of the Dust Bowl was the emergence of "hobos." Farmers who left the Dust Bowl states had no money to buy bus or train tickets and few had vehicles that could make the trip. Therefore, many men took to illegally hopping on trains to travel to cities hundreds or thousands of miles away where they hoped to find jobs. An estimated 2 million people became hobos during the Dust Bowl. The life of a hobo was not an easy one though. In one year during the Great Depression, it's estimated that 6,500 people were killed trying to hop on moving freight trains. Many died as the result of accidents, though some were killed by guards hired by railways to keep hobos off the trains.



Perryton



Spearman



BIG RABBIT DRIVE THIS WEEKEND -BRING CLUBS”
1932- announcement in the Texan newspaper.

Rabbit drives became popular in the Plains states because the rodents were considered a major nuisance, gobbling up all the remaining agriculture - ripping alfalfa out by the roots and not to mention - during the hard times rabbits became a source of food - for poverty-stricken families of the Dust Bowl.

Newspapers and county agricultural groups began sponsoring "rabbit roundups and drives " that grew to be quite popular. On any given Sunday - moms and dads, ranchers and church goers would meet in a field to round up and club the rabbits.

The warm weather of the early 1930s coupled with the lack of rainfall eliminated many of the natural conditions that killed young rabbits. By 1935 the Wichita Beacon estimated there were 8,000,000 rabbits in 30 western Kansas counties. The worst years were 1934 and 1935. Desperate farmers called them "Hoover hogs" after the U. S. President Herbert Hoover who was generally blamed for the Great Depression. The rabbits were eating what few crops had survived, depriving cattle of badly needed feed. Several counties tried offering bounties of one to four cents per rabbit, but Hodgeman County stopped paying bounties at 44,000 rabbits when the cost became more than the county could bear. Strapped farmers couldn't afford to waste precious ammunition shooting them.

Cattlemen estimated that feed for 200,000 cattle was saved by these attempts to control the jackrabbit. The remains of the rabbits were used as feed for other animals. Relatively few were eaten by humans because of the fear of a disease known as "rabbit fever," introduced into the rabbit population earlier in the 1930s. Some rabbit pelts were sold for about three cents each.

Rabbit drives were a means by which farmers could directly improve their economic condition, which was being attacked by a variety of destructive forces in the mid-1930s. Though gruesome by today's standards, the drives fostered a sense of community as farm families struggled to survive during the worst years of the Dust Bowl and the Depression.

Today these rabbit drives would seem quite barbaric, but when faced with starvation became quite the necessity to those living in the Dust Bowl.





“We came off the highway and gathered with other people at the Panhandle Inn. That thing rolled in and it wasn’t like a dust cloud coming from out of the sky. It was like something creeping along on the ground, just turning over and over and over. We watched it until it hit the school building there and it just simply rolled over it and just covered it. One minute you could see the school building and the next minute you couldn’t even tell the school building was there. It just simply covered the thing over. It was just an amazing thing to watch.”



“Our recent transition from rain-soaked land with its green pastures, luxuriant foliage, abundance of flowers, and promise of a generous harvest, to the dust-covered desolation of No Man’s Land was a difficult change to crowd into one short day’s travel time. Wearing our shade hats, with handkerchiefs tied over our faces and Vaseline in our nostrils, we have been trying to rescue our home from the accumulations of wind-blown dust which penetrates wherever air can go. It is an almost hopeless task, for there is rarely a day when at some time the dust clouds do not roll over. ‘Visibility’ approaches zero and everything is covered again with a silt-like deposit which may vary in depth from a film to actual ripples on the kitchen floor. I keep oiled cloths on the window sills and between the upper and lower sashes. They help just a little to retard or collect the dust. Some seal the windows with the gummed-paper strips used in wrapping parcels, but no method is fully effective. We buy what appears to be red cedar sawdust with oil added to use in sweeping our floors, and do our best to avoid inhaling the irritating dust.”



There was very little living vegetation in the area affected by the Dust Bowl so the industrious crows built their nest with bobwire.



Making Bread. Farm women would knead the bread in the drawer of a dresser or kitchen cabinet which was opened just enough for two hands to get in.



Not only did people have to cover their faces when they went outside they also had to do that in their sleep, too! Wet rags or washcloths were placed over their faces as they slept so that they wouldn’t inhale the dust.





The morning of Sunday, April 14, 1935, dawned clear and dry across the southern Great Plains. Families went to church, planning to enjoy picnics and visits to friends during the pleasant afternoon hours ahead.

Then, in mid-afternoon the air turned suddenly cooler. Birds began fluttering nervously. All at once, a rolling black cloud of dust darkened the northern horizon. Everyone hurried home, trying desperately to beat the overwhelming “black blizzard” before it struck. Within minutes, the sky overhead was dark, streetlights flickered in the gloom, and drivers switched on headlights as the swirling dust storm blotted out the sun.

“Black blizzards” were nothing new to the residents of the southwestern Plains. They had experienced these destructive dust storms for several years. Yet the wall of flying soil that struck on April 14 was particularly awesome in its size and intensity.

One reporter wrote that an “uncorked jug placed on (the) sidewalk two hours (was) found to be half filled with dust.

... Lady Godiva could ride through the streets without even the horse seeing her.” A long-suffering home owner said, “All we could do about it was just sit in our dusty chairs, gaze at each other through the fog that filled the room and watch that fog settle slowly and silently, covering everything including ourselves in a thick, brownish gray blanket.”

The stories were the same throughout the area of the Great Plains known as the dust bowl—stories of attics collapsing under the weight of tons of dust, tractors buried beneath six-foot drifts of dirt, and travelers stranded in their cars.

From 1932 through 1940, powerful storms of dust ravaged the farming and grazing lands of the dust bowl. At times the winds were so powerful that they cut to levels as deep as a steel plow could reach. With the soil stripped away, people found long-buried Indian campgrounds, arrowheads, pioneer wagon wheels, and even Spanish stirrups. In many locales, a day rarely passed without dust clouds rolling over. A boy in Texas said, “These storms were like rolling black smoke. We had to keep the lights on all day. We went to school with headlights on and with dust masks on.”

Before the “dirty thirties,” as people called that time, the dust bowl region had experienced years of bumper crops.

The years 1926, 1929, and 1931 produced particularly fine crops of wheat. The farmers, encouraged by the bountiful crops, began to use more efficient machinery, to carve out even greater fields. In so doing, the farmers uprooted the grasses that had held together the rich prairie soil for ages.

Then the weather changed. Less rain fell throughout the Plains. The ground dried up, crumbling into small pieces.

Crops withered and died. At the same time, the ever-present prairie winds increased in strength and duration. The winds first shifted the topsoil, then lifted it and transported it for miles. Drought and wind storms were not new to the Great Plains, but the lack of prairie grass to hold down and protect the soil was. To make matters worse, a grasshopper plague struck the Plains, wiping out the remaining vegetation and completely exposing the soil.

During the height of the storms, a farmer in Texas commented that, “If the wind blew one way, here came the dark dust from Oklahoma. Another way and it was the gray dust from Kansas. Still another way, the brown dust from Colorado and New Mexico. Little farms were buried. And towns were blackened.”

Despite the hardships, many farm families chose to stay in the dust bowl, hoping for rain and trying to combat the shifting earth with improved conservation measures. An Oklahoma farmer said, “All that dust made some of the farmers leave. We stuck it out here. We scratched, literally scratched to live. Despite all the dust and the wind, we were putting in crops, but making no crops and barely living out of barnyard products only. We made five crop failures in five years.”

Life during the Dust Bowl years was a challenge for those who remained on the Plains. They battled constantly to keep the dust out of their homes. Windows were taped and wet sheets hung to catch the dust. At the dinner table, cups, glasses, and plates were kept overturned until the meal was served. Dentists and surgeons struggled to keep their instruments sterile. Roads and railroads were often blocked, causing delays until hard-pressed crews cleared them. People lost their way in the “black blizzards” and perished. The cutting dust caused “dust pneumonia” which sometimes killed the very young and the very old.

Yet most people kept a sense of humor. Farmers told the tale that, when the drought was especially bad, a man hit on the head by a single raindrop had to be revived by throwing two buckets of sand in his face. A store advertised, “Great bargains in real estate. Bring your own container.” Hunters were said to have shot prairie dogs overhead as they tunneled through the dusty air. One farmer mused, “I hope it’ll rain before the kids grow up. They ain’t never seen none.”

Those who stayed tried to live as normal a life as possible in spite of the failing crops, ever-present dust, and dying landscape. Schools remained open except in the worst of the storms. Basketball tournaments continued. Farmers planted seed, praying the rains would return. Farm wives took whatever they could spare to Saturday markets. People had faith that times would change and their beloved land would regain its former prosperity. As Caroline Henderson, an Oklahoma farm wife, wrote in 1936, “We instinctively feel that the longer we travel on a straight road, the nearer we must be coming to a turn.”

And finally the turn came. By 1938, the worst of the drought was over. The new soil conservation measures had taken hold and crops were returning. The ravaging winds had slackened and dust storms came less frequently. The Dust Bowl of the 1930s was over.

Drought struck the Great Plains again in the 1950s, but thanks to improved conservation measures, the soil suffered much less damage. With each drought, soil conservationists learn more about protecting the land. Anyone who lived through the 1930s Dust Bowl will agree that is a good thing. No one wishes to live through the conditions of that earlier tragedy again.

Bishop Robert E. Lucey, second bishop of the Diocese of Amarillo, gave this account in his annual report to Rome:

We are now enjoying sixth year of drought. Once more our wheat crop has been ruined by long continued dry weather. This year, however, is different from the five previous seasons. Usually the wheat comes up and then dies. This year it didn’t even come up. One wonders how these people out here can continue to live. Many of them are in debt and it may be a long time before they get out of it. At the present they will never recover. As a banker would say: their income chart shows a steady downward trend. A farmer can stand a bad crop once in a while but six consecutive years is a long time to wait for rain.

On the other hand, every cloud has a silver lining. This year a horde of grasshoppers moved in on us and if they had found any wheat around here

they would surely have devoured it. So we were really lucky not have crops that they could destroy. The government is spending thousands of dollars to spread arsenic mash all over the Panhandle to combat the plague of grasshoppers. The hoppers, however, have had special training in dietetics and they won’t touch the poison. Many horses and cattle, not being so meticulous, have tried the mash and died on spot.

Since we have no wheat to offer the grasshoppers have invaded our trees, lawns, shrubs, hedges and flower gardens. They are really not particular; they will eat anything but arsenic. Around the bishop’s residence on the campus of Price College the hoppers are having a truly wonderful time.



A plague of grasshoppers also came about during the dust bowl. Herds of them - up to 23,000 insects per acre - swept over the land and consumed everything.



"Anybody who lived that summer and could not get over being squeamish about walking on wall-to-wall grasshoppers stayed indoors ... Clouds of the insects obscured the sun."

The Faith and Courage of Father WolkoShines

The Dallas Morning News
General News
Thursday, Dec 19, 1974

The courage and faith of Father Ladislau Wolko shines bright as the Star of Bethlehem in the darkness of our spiritual night.

He is the Little Rascal priest from Poland, who endured five years Nazi torture in concentration camps during World War II and outwitted communist takeover of his country after the war. He took vows of the priesthood in Rome and finally was ordained in the Texas Panhandle. Today he is serving in a missionary parish in Memphis, Texas, where most of his parishioners are Latin-Americans.

This Christmas he will again be trying to bring cheer to the children, telling their parents the Good News of the birth of Christ and saying Mass in the little Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

But he is more a man of action than words, of works as well as faith.

Throughout his lifetime those works have been considerable. He is 57 now. No one expected him to live so long, especially not the Gestapo nor the Soviet Secret Police.

THE LITTLE priest, sometimes in shirtsleeves; always with his black briefcase of projects, is a familiar sight now about the small town of 3,300. He is barely over five feet, weighs only 106, in the concentration camp only 76. But he is a spiritual giant. He is not the most popular man in town. Men of strong principle rarely are. The friends he has are strong. He has a quick smile, almost impish, and an irrepressible sense of humor.

For five years now, since he came to this parish, in the hospitals, school offices, at the police station, employment offices, in the courthouse and at the homes of the Latin-Americans, he is busy. He is trying to help his people help themselves.

Father Wolko was born to a family of nobility in Kepno, Byelorussia, one of three boys. His mother called them her "little rascals." Him, her "super rascal." He had a cleft palate and was unable to speak for five years until he taught himself to do so after an operation. Now he writes and speaks five languages and wrote his master's thesis in Italian. But verbal communication is still his biggest barrier, as it is with many who speak only one language. The Latin-American migrants, whose grammar he often corrects, laughingly protest their English is better than his.

HE KNOWS by now where he can get help in his efforts from the community. He takes the ailing to the hospital, tries to help the men and women find jobs during farming slack, urges industry and businesses to hire minority group workers when they can, counsels with families in superintendent's and counselor's offices to discipline the troublemakers and keeps children in school. He credits others and not himself.

In the early days of the Head Start program, when few small towns had a program to help underprivileged, disadvantage, handicapped and retarded children, Father Wolko called a meeting in his church. No one else had time or concern. With help of then superintendent Charles Chambless, they got a Head Start Program going.



Father Ladislau Wolko

Efforts to establish a bilingual program for Latin American children, frustrated at first, were finally initiated.

The needy he has helped are countless: the young farm laborer, stricken suddenly with incurable neurological disease. He arranged financial help through social security, and then helped him get training with watch repair so he could support his family.

Later he ran for county school superintendent. He promised to abolish the office and use the funds for bilingual education. He lost this one, too, and picked up a few detractors on his way. From Austin came a letter urging him to stay in ministry and out of politics.

Probably Father Wolko's passion for social justice springs from his country's history. That middle European nation was molded in 963 from the unity of tribal states with equal rights for each. Throughout its history the ethnic groups have been used one against the other to divide and conquer the vulnerable country. Its people are fiercely independent and know unity is their



The banquet following Fr. Wolko's ordination. Clergy seated left to right; Msgr. John Steinlage, Bishop J. L. Morkovsky, Bishop L. J. FitzSimon and Fr. Ladislau Wolko.

unity is their only hope against Russia on the east, Germany on the west and Austria to the south.

"In Berlin after World War II, I talked with two catholic priests who tried to convince me they could protest Hitler because they believed in separation of church and state." Not so with the Catholics of Poland, 89 percent of its population. The Catholic action Committee, promoters of social justice, was the framework for the Polish underground, strongest and most effective during the war against Nazis and later communism.

Wolko, a bright, young student ready to graduate, was an active member to the group. When Hitler goose-stepped into the Sudetenland in June 1940, he was arrested with 400 other activists. They were in the first transport from Karnow, Little Poland. He was prisoner number 40. The young prisoners were taken in boxcars to Auschwitz, where they were forced to help build the infamous murder camp. Seventy-six were beaten to death on that first trip. In time, more than 3 million Jews and Poles would be exterminated. No one was expected to live more than six weeks. It was cold, 45 degrees below zero, that first winter. Prisoners had no coats, no socks, and no heat in their blocks. To demoralize the prisoners, dehumanize them, they put them in bunkers, only three bricks wide, with electric currents.

THE GESTAPO beat them and tried to get them to confess what they knew and did not know about their fellow prisoners. They pulverized their teeth, and those who did not die were black and blue for months.

"How is it you are not dead?" Himmler demanded of Wolko when he saw his number the next year. The Pole replied simply, "Because you did not kill me." The young Catholic, like others who lived, lost concern for his physical life. "If we begged them to kill us to give us peace, they would not. If we begged to live, they killed," he remembered. In concentration camp there were only "Devils and Saints." Wolko was in seven prisons and camps before the war ended. "That first Christmas at Auschwitz we said the Christmas Mass in secret, with crowds around the priest to protect and shield him from the guards. We sang Christ

mas carols silently in our minds and gave communion to each other." Father Wolko was one of twenty young men in the concentration camps who took the vows of priesthood because of the martyrdom of father Maximillian Kolbe, now elevated to sainthood.

FATHER KOLBE comforted, cheered, and encouraged the prisoners in their nightmare of hell and torture. He kept them from becoming beasts. Then he gave himself to be shot in the place of a sergeant who had children. The sergeant was one of twenty prisoners picked to die in payment for twenty escaped prisoners.

Another known as "The Holy Gardener" had taught Wolko the Catechism in Kepno. He stayed in camp rather than be removed with other Catholic priests so he could comfort the men.

"I cannot give away my secrets. I may need them again," smiled Father Wolko. "We are neither in peace or war. We are on a volcano," but a few things he told.

"Like the prisoners I had talked to in Europe, he had made himself useful but not helpful. He was an electrical engineering student, and he had studied some pre-med courses. He understood German, but did not let the Germans know. Like Hogan's Heroes, he listened for information that would be useful to the underground and sent it out on "tapes" on radio with engraved wires. By war's end, he was a surgeon's assistant and was: "scrubbing up" for operations on the Nazis when American soldiers liberated his camp on the eve of an ordered mass extermination of all remaining prisoners.

AFTER that the young man, 24 but centuries old, helped the Americans set up a hospital to care for 2,000 sick prisoners until the Red Cross came.



“God has ways of convincing you of your purpose to serve Him and mankind. I intended to be an engineer, never a priest. Our assistant pastor in Silesia talked too long. He was a pain. I did not want to preach. Once in the priesthood, doors kept closing in my face. My sponsoring Bishop Poznan was interred by the Stalinists. But the bishop through the underground never let me quit.”

Ill health kept him from going to Rhodesia where he wanted to serve as a missionary priest. Finally after studying in Rome and Paris, and teaching at a seminary in Indiana, he was sent to Texas to the Diocese of Amarillo.

“Don’t go to Texas,” pleaded a Polish priest with whom he had been interned. “There are cowboys there. You will be shot.”

“They are good cowboys,” I wrote him “and we ride horses made of iron and powered by gasoline. They gallop 65 m.p.h.”

FATHER WOLKO would not have us think he is the only one. Two other Polish priests and one Latvian, who were in concentration camps, Dachau and others, are serving in Texas now, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Dallas said. They are all who remain in this area of about fifteen sent to Texas in the 1950s.

One of these, Father Casimir Glogowski, formerly of Decatur and now in Kaufman, lived in Kepno, Wolko’s home town. He was a close friend of the Panhandle priest’s older brother.

Memphis, which has a sign calling itself the Cotton Capital of the Panhandle on the old compress building alongside Highway 287, has even more to brag about. It has three M.D.s and a new hospital.

Lately Father Wolko has been in and out of this hospital, this time for his own care. Dr. H. R. Stevenson, director of the recently formed Academy of Family Practice, is treating his various ailments, the ravages of his dedicated life. They might have slowed a lesser man years ago.

THE GOVERNMENT of West Germany at war’s end awarded him “indemnity” for 30 per cent disability from frostbite, missing teeth, duodenal ulcers, impaired hearing and vision. It was a pittance then in bankrupt Germany. Today it’s worth more than \$150 a month.

The recent urgent ailment of father Wolko is a heart condition. He must at least slow down. The Christmas party he has given the children of his parish and surrounding counties will be smaller this year unless he gets more help than he can reasonably count on from his communicants, busy now with cotton harvest.

In fact, what worries Father Wolko most this Christmas is not his health, but, if something should at last happen to him, who would take care of his children, his flock?

Dust Bowl Meals



Almost nothing would grow in the Dust Bowl, but weeds like lamb’s quarters and tumbleweeds continued to thrive. Families resorted to brining the weeds and storing them to eat during the winter. The Ball Canning Corporation spearheaded an effort to spread canning skills to families affected by the Dust Bowl.

Nearly 4,000 community canning kitchens provided food to struggling families.

Dust Bowl meals focused on nutrition over taste. They often included milk, potatoes, and canned goods. Some families resorted to eating dandelions or even tumbleweeds. While not as difficult as finding food as a pioneer, these Dust Bowl meals demonstrate the scarcity with which US citizens had to contend during the '30s.

Popcorn was once considered a breakfast food, and in the Dust Bowl, people ate it like cereal - in a bowl with milk. Popcorn was cheap - it often went for 5 to 10 cents a bag - so it was affordable even for families hit hard by the Depression.

Because it was necessary to prioritize frugality over taste, food was cheap, filling, and questionably flavored. If they weren’t entirely tasteless, recipes combined ingredients we likely wouldn’t consider pairing today.

One such recipe included canned corned beef, canned peas, gelatin, lemon juice, and vinegar.

Catholic Historical Happenings



Fr. Haider Quintero and Fr. Francisco Perez stop in the museum to wish Msgr. Norbert Kuehler Happy 91st Birthand and Happy 65th ordination day. Msgr. Kuehler is Vice President of the CHS board and our mentor.



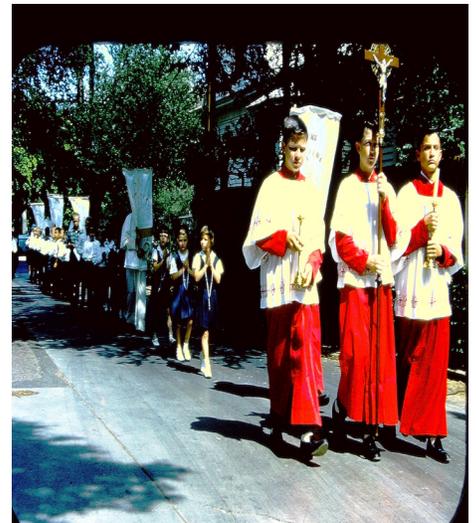
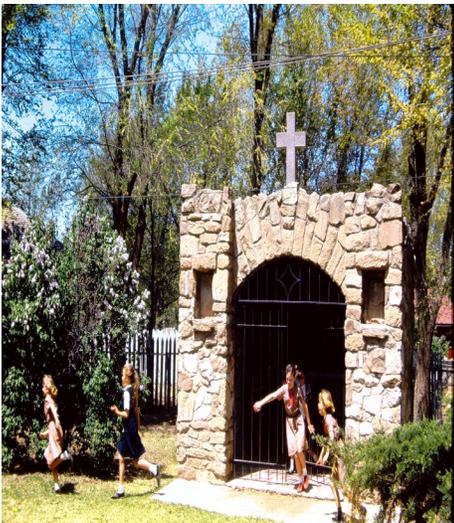
What do you do with a plethora of trophies that are mostly broken and a few for consolation prize? You call a front loader to help you dispose of them... The trophies were found under the stage of old Price College Gym stage where the workers were cleaning out getting ready for the building to be use as the food pantry of Texas Catholic Charities. The majority of the trophies were for Alamo and the ones that were salvageable were displayed in the museum or stored.

We are still wondering were the majority of the early Price College trophies diassapeared to. The last sighting of them was in a display case in the basement of Gerken Hall. Do you know?



I have been viewing slides kept in the archives and found these taken by Msgr. Monroe Matthiesen. St. Mary's Parish started as a girl's academy and continually expanded to meet the needs of the people. This parish church was once an Air Force chapel moved to the grounds and remodeled in 1948. Come on... who remembers the blue pews?

The Grotto, Processions and May Crownings



May 13, 202 -August 4, 2020

CONTRIBUTIONS

M/M Thomas Albracht	50
Donald & Judith Allen, Sr.	100
Beverly Armstrong	10
Mike Armstrong	50
Joe & Theresa Artho	75
Steven & Lorraine Beckham	25
Alfred Bednorz	25
M/M Roy Bertrand	25
Florence Brofft	50
Msgr. Norbert Kuehler	700
Gracie Lineman	25
Linda McCurdy	25
Mike & Diane McLain	30
Lori Monceballez	25
M/M Jery Poirot	25
Dee Ramirez	30
Mrs. John Roach	100
Jane Roberts	50
Richard Rouillard	25
Carmen Salamy	50
Lawrence Schmucker	30
Blaine Westlake, Sr.	75
Bishop John Yanta	75
Total	1675

MEMBERSHIP

Joe & Theresa Artho	25
Blaine Westlake Sr.	25
Total	50

HONORARIUM

IN MEMORY OF:

In memmory of Mary F. Beard by Orville R. Blum	100
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Total	1775
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Your Dollars in Action



This is the original altar cross that was used at St. Patrick's Church, Shamrock donated by Mrs. John Roach.



This beautiful drum table was donated by Katie Mckillip - Harstrom which was originally owned by her mother.

Catholic History Society Board Members

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You may stop by daily (Monday through Friday) to view the museum, for a guided tour it is recommended that you make an appointment.. The museum is open by appointment for church and school groups. This includes evenings and weekends.

Susan: 383-2243 Ext. 120 or even better: sgarner@dioama.org

Thank you for
your continued
generosity!