

A LOOK BACK IN HUTCHINSON COUNTY HISTORY



The Dirty Thirties

In the latter half of the 1930's the southern plains were devastated by drought, wind erosion and dust storms. Some storms rolled far eastward, darkening skies to the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. 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 occurred are known as the Dust Bowl. From 1932 to 1937, dust storms ravaged this area. The Dust Bowl resulted from bad weather and human actions that exacerbated the drought. Before the 30's men had come to plains intent on making them yield abundant wealth. In a few short years, they had destroyed much of the native grass that held the soil in place. The Dust Bowl was therefore related to the near-simultaneous collapse of the American economy in 1929. These events revealed the dark side of entrepreneurialism and its tendency to risk long-term social and ecological damage in the pursuit of short-term gain. The Federal government's New Deal was implemented to prevent such disasters in the future, but the dust storms of the mid-1950's and 1970's demonstrate that the Dust Bowl can be reborn, if and when weather and market forces collide again. ■

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9am-5pm
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