

Interview with Flora Robertson about Dust Storms in Oklahoma, August 5, 1940

Flora Robertson: We looked in the north and thought it was the Blue Northern coming. Such a huge black cloud just looked like a smoke out of a train stack or something.

Interviewer: About what time of day?

Robertson: About 4 o'clock, 19 and 34. And uh, I just kind of rolled over and got near to the house we was all afraid and we run into the storm house because we thought it was a storm. And uh, we lit the lamp and it was just so dark in there that we couldn't see one another, we just had to, even with the lamp lit, and we just. So mother and my husband was out [inaudible] the cows and he stumbled up against the barbed wire fence and he followed the fence 'til they come to the house and that way he was able to get to the house. And uh, we had to tie wet rags over our mouths. And, just to keep from smothering, we dipped clothes in the buckets of water and tied over our mouths down in the cellar, um, that one lasted so fierce for about two hours and then we took trash and ... that wasn't going to blow away and we went in the house. And we wet blankets and hung over the windows. And uh, then after the first one, of course, we were scared awfully bad and the old timers said they'd never seen nothing like that. It seemed so fine. Our house was sealed but that dust come through somehow. Even those stucco houses by all around the doors and windows, the dust would be all piled so high and you just had to mop real good when it was over to get them out, you just couldn't them out any other way.

Interviewer: How long did it last?

Robertson: Well, sometimes a real bad one would last for half a day. Sometimes it would be week before we would see the sun, it was just darkened. And sometimes the cloud would look black. Sometimes it would look red. It just pardoned on which way the wind comes whether it was the red dirt was blowing over or the black dirt, or pardoned to the way the storm was coming. And we had cattle, we had cows that we gave, \$60 and some \$90 in dear old money. And it killed a lamb, its name was Dottie. And we would cut their lungs open and it looked just like a mud pack or something. It just really showed it was the mud.

Interviewer: First you have the flood, and then the grasshoppers and then the dust storms.

Robertson: Yes, and we waited, it was about five years before we just really give up. But every year we began going back. We were in debt so much we thought we never could get out.

Interviewer: Think you would want to come to California.

Robertson: Well, you've got a [inaudible] to stay in that. There's too many that has that pneumonia now, and it gives too many people TB.

Interviewer: That's when you wrote that little poem about the dust storm.

Robertson: Yes.

Interviewer: Could we hear that? Would you mind reading that to me?

Robertson: Well, I'll try, but I don't know how good it all is.

I came to Oklahoma before it was a state. Along the shiny [inaudible], I roam from [inaudible]. We were happy, healthy people, proud to live in that state. One dark lonely day, and what a sight we did see. A thick smothering dust cloud swept over the prairie. Killed many people and almost smothered me. We waited in hope almost five years through. More people and cattle died, and more dust storms came through. Then we decided on something that we'd better do. We loaded a few things into an old car. Hoping west to go very far. We landed at the government camp on a flat tar. So tired and hungry, hearts thick and dirty, too. Here we found food and shelter, too. The California people sure are good to you.

Interviewer: You wrote another one too, didn't you about [inaudible].

Robertson: And thence there camp are there from a road. Thank god for a country and a land that is free. We're so glad that our flag is the red, white and blue. [inaudible]