

THE DEPRESSION DIARY
of
ELMER POWERS

1932 - 1933



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Price Laboratory School
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Saturday, February 27, 1932

During the past several weeks a number of Meetings have been held in this vicinity. They were largely attended by farmers. The idea seems to be for the farmers to go on a selling strike. Whatever the results of these meetings might be, it will at least show how some of the farm folks feel and think about some of their many problems. I have not been able to attend any of these meetings.

Friday, April 22, 1932

D. L. and I both plowed all day today. He with the tractor and I with the horses. The tractor travels just a little faster than the horses and occasionally I must turn my outfit out of the way of it. The plowing speed of the tractor is about the same as that of the horses, but the horses must be stopped, some days frequently, to rest a moment or to hitch a trace that comes unhitched while turning at a corner of the field. The soil in this field is loose and mellow and turns nicely. I like the soil. I like to have it in my hands. I like the feel of it and I like to walk on it. It is soft and yielding. Many people are supposed to like and covet gold but I prefer just good clean earth.

Monday, May 2, 1932

I took the horse disk and went to the back 40 and finished disking several acres of spring plowing and the few acres of fall plowing that D. L. did not get done several days ago. Then I went to the S. W. 40 and disked there. D. L. drove to the village to get truck repairs. And to take the High School girl to school. She had helped with the laundry so the lady of the farm could get away to attend a Farm Bureau Womens Meeting. D. L. drove the disk while I took the lady of the farm to this meeting.

Saturday, May 28, 1932

We cultivated corn all afternoon and tonight we drove to the County Seat, intending to attend a circus there, but as we did not like the looks of the circus, we attended a movie instead. It seems to me that the crowds of people that throng the sidewalks of many of the smaller towns and cities these Saturday nights is a quieter, more sober crowd than they were a few months ago. I have been looking for some improvement in the business and economic situation, but

it seems now that everyone must go thru with it. No one can escape. This will be difficult for many of the younger folks to do. The older ones have become more schooled in some of these difficult experiences.

Monday, June 6, 1932

I went to my desk the first thing this morning and made a list of the names of the people I wished to vote for today. Pat came over this morning and I hired him to work for me some of the time during vacation. He and I cultivated corn this forenoon. D. L. came to the field and used my cultivator while the lady of the farm and I went to vote in the Primary Election. Folks at the schoolhouse where we voted said many more people were voting than usually did. Pat and I finished cultivating this field and started in the S. E. field just before noon.

Monday, June 13, 1932

D. L. drove to town with the truck, marketing hogs. We were paid \$2.25 per cwt. for these hogs. Much the lowest price we have received for hogs. Five years ago today they were \$6.20.

Wednesday, June 15, 1932

The Political Convention now on is the center of absorbing interest among farm people. They have a "wonder what they will give us" rather than a "we are going to have" attitude in the matter. Grain men are talking eleven cents per bushel for new oats today .

Tuesday, June 21, 1932

Today, the longest day of the year, and the day summer is supposed to begin, was a very fine day. The egg buyer is paying ten cents per dozen today. An advance of one cent. D. L. came from the corn field about the middle of the forenoon and we went to the Farm Bureau Picnic.

We did not think we could be away all day and so we missed part of the morning program. The sport events and the games were much enjoyed by the young folks and the older ones who were so inclined. The program of musical numbers, stunts and speeches was very good. Running thru it all tho was a line of worry, sadness, fear and uncertainty. The invocation, by a prominent Minister, was perhaps one of the most fitting things I ever heard. The period of history we

are passing thru showed very plainly on the farm folks, their cars, their clothes and their conduct. However, it did not show in the lunch baskets. They were wonderfully and abundantly filled. Thousands and thousands of people were in attendance at this picnic. Many of them were town and city people. For many of the farm folks this day will be their only outing and the only break in the monotony of their existence for too long a period.

Friday, July 1, 1932

With the beginning of this month we are starting on the last half of this year. It does not seem possible that harvest time is so close to us.

Pat cultivated sod corn and finished it before noon We cultivated the crop only three times this year. Very few farmers are cultivating more than three times this year. Our corn prospects have never been better. By noontime a very heavy wind was blowing and we decided that we would not work at the hay this afternoon. I took Pat home after dinner. Stopping to talk with a party along the road, offering special inducements to farmers who would pay their phone rents at once. One farmer is milking eight cows and his cream checks just keep him in chewing tobacco

Saturday, July 9, 1932

This afternoon we went to the field, early after dinner, and were thru with the cutting and shocking by five o'clock. The weather was cooler today and the horses were more comfortable. The grain was much taller than in the other fields.

Our grain shocks up well. The shocks are taller than last year. I think they are thicker on the ground. I think the yield will be satisfactory. But the price is all wrong. Nature has done her part well. Just men in their management are blundering. This harvest has been one of the most satisfactory we have ever had.

Saturday, July 16, 1932

While we were eating dinner the phone rang a line call and when I listened the operator said that all of the stores and the three banks in our town were having a Holiday for a week. And we always thot our banks were in such good

shape. A mass meeting was to be held this evening. All of the banks in the County Seat are closed too.

Thursday, July 21, 1932

Our daily paper has stopped and we are not renewing it promptly. As a matter of economy, I am resharpening old razor blades and when I shave I use any kind of soap instead of shaving cream. Many farmers tell me they are doing the same way. Several of the younger men have ask me about the old fashioned blade razors, so they will not have the expense of the blades. I suppose some one will start the idea of growing beards. The oats market is a cent lower today.

Saturday, August 6, 1932

While we were eating dinner this noon we heard a line ring on the phone; listening we learned the Farmers Holiday or "strike" was called for next Monday morning to begin at five o'clock .

Monday, August 8, 1932

Today is the first day of the Holiday. Many farmers are very serious about it. All agree that it cannot make things much worse, and that something must be done.

Tuesday, August 9, 1932

Today is the second day of the Holiday. Many farmers were watching for the cream and eggs trucks. Some of them did not drive over their routes. Many of them did tho. Nearly all of them found business as usual. Perhaps five percent of the farmers refused to sell. Many cream checks amount to only from twenty to sixty cents. Nearly all drivers are traveling armed. The speculative stock market is higher today. Grain is up from one to two cents. Live stock slightly higher. Some factories are resuming work in a light way.

About our farming: we went to the baler this morning and worked until the middle of the forenoon when we had finished the stack. One hundred and seventy bales in all. We received a check to the amount of \$13.50 for it.

We brot the machine home this forenoon, stopping several places along the way to see if they wished any work done. They did but didn't have any money to pay us for it.

Tuesday, August 16, 1932

About the "Holiday." A big Meeting was held in an adjoining County today. The driver of our cream truck weighed our cream today so if it should be dumped along the road he could have the weight. Driving along the road today we met loaded milk trucks carrying guards. Also we passed waiting farmer "pickets."

Friday, August 19, 1932

I drove to the village a few minutes this morning and listened to talk of the strike. I returned to the farm in time to talk with the driver who drives our cream route. He told me of some of the "bootlegging" some of the striking farmers are doing with their produce.

This afternoon we drove to the County Seat. The lady of the farm marketed eggs, successfully "running the blockade" the striking farmers had placed on the highway. We were able to do it while pickets were arguing with the driver of a truck load of ear corn.

Sunday, August 21, 1932

In conversation with a picnicker from the northern part of the State I learned that Farm Holiday organizers there had paid one dollar for each farmer they can get signed up for the movement. Some farmers have been taken in on a membership fee of fifty cents. Others without any payment of any kind. Many Holiday officers and speakers are urging the farmers to dig deeper and deeper into their pockets if the movement is to succeed.

Monday, August 22, 1932

All kinds of rumors are afloat about the Holiday Movement. It is pretty well established that the leaders can hardly be called farmers. Memberships are free some places, others on up, some donations etc. One of their speakers received fifty dollars for one talk. The Secretary receives eight dollars per day and his wife four.

Tuesday, August 23, 1932

The local news of the Holiday is that two truck loads of cream was dumped yesterday. Approximately three hundred dollars worth. A station is opened in town where striking farmers may leave their milk and cream to be

given away. One of my near neighbors left a thirty dozen case of eggs there yesterday. Clerks in the stores say much produce is brot in the back doors of the stores.

Wednesday, August 24, 1932

The Farm Holiday is proving very unsatisfactory all around. Three cars carrying only women and children and no farm produce were showered with sticks and stones. One business man driving a new car was stopped by pickets and allowed to drive on, was struck by a stone and the rear of the car dented. Cream was dumped by boys under the directions of older men. A group of anti-strike farmers called on the sheriff, who seemed to be indifferent in the matter, and stated they would take the law in their own hands and keep the roads open themselves. There are possibilities of serious trouble soon.

Monday, September 5, 1932

The truck that takes our cream usually drives in here at the place around eight o'clock in the morning. Today when I came from the field at eleven o'clock, it had not been here yet. The ladies here at the house said many of the folks were uneasy about what had happened to it, suspecting pickets were at work. However, just at noon the truck came. Engine trouble had delayed it. Many farm folks had begun to worry about it tho. The driver said several farmers had offered to help him if anyone tried to stop him.

This driver, a farm owner, a former Farm Union man, said a number of farmers came to his produce house a week after the beginning of the strike to talk with him about closing during the strike, and he told them he had to keep open to buy their produce when they had their hired man or a relative bring in the cream or eggs. Every farmer present admitted having sent produce to him. The driver said he told them they were not getting on with the strike because of their own Association members and not because people did not believe in it. He said he also discussed with them the unaccounted thousands of dollars that had gone into the hands of men now prominent in the Holiday movement. These farmers finally retired from his place and no one had called on him Wednesday.

September 14, 1932

Sometimes I think these Depression Days are growing darker and longer. Unquestionably there are signs of an early winter this season and this would be a very great hardship to many people, both in the city and out in the country.

Monday, September 19, 1932

Today is my birthday. By way of celebrating it I did not work very hard. I shocked some fodder this forenoon and this afternoon I did a few things around the farm. Every day I am certain to do some farming. Even when not in the best of health I disregard the lesser aches and pains and the minor ills and have some close contact with the live stock and the fields. Broken bones are probably the only thing that would keep me away from the barns.

Everyone is trading now. I did a little of it today myself, trading sorghum for grapes.

As a matter of economy I shaved to day with a dime store blade. One of the smoothest shaves I have had for a long time. But it is the farm women who can think out and do the economical things.

Sunday, September 25, 1932

I believe city folks, and I know country folks are doing much more canning and preserving than they did in former years. Also they are storing more vegetables and gathering more nuts than ever before. Many folks, tho, seemed to have abandoned Sunday as Sunday and a religious observance of it. I think this is only temporary. I look for a strong reaction on Sunday observance to come soon.

Wednesday, October 5, 1932

Everyone that I talked to today was much pleased with the President and his speech last night. Even several Democrats said they were going to vote for him and many Republicans said they had been rather on the fence, but knew now how they were going to vote.

Wednesday, October 26, 1932

In politics many are saying that they do not have anything against Roosevelt, in fact they have much respect for him, but they are going to vote for Hoover because they are afraid to try a change just at this time.

Tuesday, November 8, 1932

Today is Presidential Election Day. Last night during the night I awakened and found I was sitting up in bed. Something seemed to be wrong and when I turned my head toward the window I could see the ground was covered with snow. I thought perhaps it would just be a light fall because it was raining last night and the weather may have turned colder. I went back to sleep, but this morning a blizzard was raging. We did the morning work and talked about taking L. L. to school and then going to the polls to vote. The bus came on time and we delayed the trip to vote thinking that the weather would get better. At noon we thought it would surely clear in a short time and when we began to inquire about the main roads later in the afternoon we found it would be useless to try to get to our voting place.

This is the first Presidential Election I have ever missed.

Wednesday, November 9, 1932

I was up until quite late last night listening to the Election returns as they came in on the radio. Everything seemed to point to a Democratic landslide and this morning those reports were confirmed. Either the Republicans have failed to care for the affairs of the people and the Government or else they have saved a country from disaster and the people did not know it.

Sunday, December 25, 1932

The young folks attended Christmas Services in town and reported that the attendance was very small. Our family enjoyed a Christmas Dinner with the old folks at their home in the village. The entire family was there with the exception of my oldest brother and his family. No gifts were exchanged by the grown folks. However, the smaller children were well remembered. Father's health is very poor and while we hope to have him with us for many more Christmases everyone is a little uneasy.

Late this afternoon before chore time I did a few odd jobs around the place. A habit I cannot seem to get over. I just must do a little fixing or changing everyday. This Christmas is perhaps the most different one I ever experienced and can remember of.

Saturday, February 25, 1933

In the mail today I received a bank check and because of the many bank closings I had D. L. go to town and cash this check at once. While D. L. was away I did more work with the seed corn and when he returned he said he had bot a truck load of cobs for a dollar and half and we drove to get them. They will make fine kindlings for the kitchen stove this spring. At this price cobs are worth one fourth as much as ear corn.

Saturday, March 4, 1933

Coming in from the barns 3 this morning I tuned in the radio and was surprised to learn about the bank situation. Spent some time contemplating the past events that had led up to this and then the probable outcome of it. Going back to the barns I worked a part of the forenoon with the live stock and went to the village. In the village I could not learn anything that would give me much satisfaction. I knew that all of our local banks were in good shape and the trouble must be farther on up the bankiny line some place. While I was in town I listened to the radio and learned all about the Inaugural Program.

Tonight we drove to the County Seat. I wanted to see how people were reacting to the financial situation and found them seemingly attempting to make the best of it, tho for some it will be a pretty hard job. Not nearly so many people were on the streets and in the stores this evening. A very raw chilly wind was blowing from the southeast this evening, making it very disagreeable to be outside.

Monday, March 6, 1933

People today were listening to every radio and reading every newspaper in an effort to learn something more about the muddled conditions of our banking and money affairs. I have not found a farm family but what is getting along in good shape yet, but many in town are not so fortunate.

Wednesday, March 22, 1933

The two most interesting new events today, to me, were the change in the German Government and the progress in our Congress on the farm relief bill. When a plan is finally worked out it may be a long discouraging task to get it

functioning as it is intended to. There will very probably be some opposition and the longer time goes on the greater the opposition will become.

Thursday, April 6, 1933

Today is our wedding anniversary and tonight, by way of a celebration, we drove to the city and attended a movie. Many farm folks are disgusted because Congress has passed the beer bill before farm relief. Just at planting time the farm bill should have had attention and beer should have waited for it. At any other season of the year it would not have mattered so much which was first.

Friday, April 28, 1933

Radio news this morning gave us information about the farmers' actions in the northwest part of the state. This is a very serious mistake. Evidently the leaders of these particular farmers have led them too far or lost control of them.

We plowed again today, stopping long enough at noontime to grind more feed for the live stock and poultry. Also we marketed the last litter of pure bred pigs. If the weather is favorable tomorrow we should finish our plowing.

Late this afternoon a fleet of strange looking trucks passed our place. While they were some distance away and I could not see them very plainly. Yet I am certain they were loaded with troops and supplies and what has been a lark for some farmers is very likely to turn into serious trouble. Having contact with nature as the farmers do they should know that there are times when one must "bow to the powers that be" whatever they are.

Saturday, April 29, 1933

Radio news tells of more trouble among the farmers and law enforcement officials and soldiers taking charge of the affairs of several counties. We did some plowing today, but because of showers we were not able to finish the field as we had hoped to do. Between showers we did odd jobs around the place and in the farm shop and I caught up some neglected writing and bookkeeping.

Tonight we drove to town and I made numerous apologies to business friends that not all farmers were alike in their methods of expression and that while the farmers in our county are protesting they are business men and gentlemen.

Tuesday, June 6, 1933

It was very dry and very hot in the fields today. I think the heat on the back fields of young corn plants was the most severe heat I ever experienced. The soil is very dry and the heat is extreme. A fair wind was blowing and the horses appreciated this very much as well as our taking them from the field to the water tank very frequently. Every day we think surely we will have a rain soon. It will be three weeks next Friday night since we had a rain of any benefit.

Tuesday, June 13, 1933

Today has been another very dry day. Yesterday I mowed thru the growing oats and today when I tried to take up the oats they were too light and thin. The cows are holding up well in-their milk production. The driver of the cream truck says that many herds are showing the effects of the drouth by a sharp drop in their output of milk. Among other things for tomorrow we must grind feed and take in hay.

Thursday, June 22, 1933

Still hot and dry this morning. Not a cloud in sight in the sky. Last night was a hot night all night. Very hard to get any sleep. We made fly nets out of burlap sacks and put them on the horses this morning. The Red Ball salesman came. We did not buy anything. Dan's family came to pick mulberries. The telephone line man came collecting. We are laying by corn in the field west of the grove. So far as I can see we are not accomplishing anything other than to say we are going over the corn. As I type this page this noon, perspiration is streaming from my face, work clothes are plastered with dust and sweat. One fine thing about it tho is that L. L. made a big freezer of ice cream and that cools one for the moment.

Wednesday, July 19, 1933

For us another threshing time has come and gone. One of the poorest crops ever. We have followed good farming practices, better than the average neighbor has, and our yield has been discouraging. Two other machines in our neighborhood threshed all day today on oats that yielded fifteen bushels per acre. Market reports this evening carry the news that wheat prices are down

twelve cents, corn six- cents and oats fifteen cents today. Immense quantities of grain have been moving recently too.