

**THE DEPRESSION DIARY**  
**of**  
**Mrs. Clara Ackerman**

1932 - 1933



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1932

**Sunday, February 7**

These are the days of depression which has been coming on gradually for several years. Some claim it has been with us only a year or two, but how well I remember the first few months after Pres. Hoover was elected with such overwhelming victory over Al Smith (Wet) that people expected such a change of prices for the better. Hardly had he taken the oath of office when everywhere one would hear such remarks as these: "Well I can't see that Hoover has helped things much yet. Wonder when he will do something?" so evidently the depression was beginning and now here it is 1932, the next election just ahead, and the depression has settled slowly but surely more oppressively down upon us. The past year of 1931 will go into history with memories of struggles to meet taxes and loan payments, also cash rent, with prices of farm products going lower and lower toward the closing of the year. Most of us made "the grade," although it is very common to read in almost every paper of some foreclosure or transfer of property one to another. Some have borrowed on life insurance policies to meet the emergency, thinking '31 was an unusual year and looking forward to this year for a raise in prices but to our dismay we are beginning the new year with prices lower than we younger people can remember. Corn is selling off the ground (damp) at 15 cents, hogs \$3.25 to \$4.00, cream 20 cents, eggs 10 cents in trade with no reduction in taxes or indebtedness. The prospect is pretty disheartening. There is no branch of farming or stock raising which offers any promise of profit over production cost. What shall we do? Not raise anything? People are more anxious for spring to come than any year I can remember, but not because they are enthusiastic about farming, but rather to escape from their gloomy thoughts of depression out into the sunshine and newness of spring. And now that it is almost here, War clouds loom up in the horizon to take our thoughts away from one evil to a greater one. Japan is seeking territory and possessions among the Chinese. Shanghai, the international center, has been taken over by the Japs, with the U.S. soldiers

guarding our own private citizens and property at that place. Other countries are doing likewise. There is talk now of a number of countries boycotting Japan financially if she still refuses to leave China alone. The peace conference is in session at Geneva, Switzerland, at present, trying to thresh out problems pertaining to disarmament, etc. It seems like an inopportune time for a peace conference, where on every hand we hear rumors of war.

### **February 13**

This surely was an eventful day. The announcement was made over the radio by Henry Field that a bill has been passed in Congress whereby the banks and farmers are to have a large appropriation of money. The money for the farmers is to be loaned to them at 5 1/2% up to the amount of \$400 for feed and seed only. What a help this will be for some, especially for those who suffered a crop failure the past year. We have enough feed and can manage to buy what seed we lack. Already the stock market has begun to climb, as well as the price of all commodities in the line of farm products. Well people are excited, waiting breathlessly to know if it is really true. Several cars of grain have been shipped from Shenandoah to South Dakota, which is in the drouth stricken area where the stock are dying in the fields from starvation. Last year it went to Arkansas. The money being donated by the friends of K.F.N.F. who in turn buy corn from the farmers. The freight is donated by the railroad. The War is still going on with intense fighting on the part of both countries. U.S. still stands by with only enough soldiers there to protect our property. Russia surprised everyone by saying she was willing to disarm completely forever--this from a country who is teaching her children "There is no God". Surely it must be the cost of war they are considering since they are so engrossed in their 5-year government money-making scheme--well anyway it behooves such countries as ours to do as much. Yesterday was the World Day of Prayer. I am sure if every individual over the world, including those engaged in killing each other, would have stopped for a few minutes in prayerful thought concerning his fellow man and God, the Millenym would be here.

## **May 15**

About the depression - well it is still with us, only more so. For example, we sold young hogs yesterday for \$2.85 and sows at \$1.90 per hundred. Still they demand the same amount of interest and taxes as in the good years. How long can we hold out? Well, time will tell. The daily paper tells of foreclosures every day. We are still getting 9 cents for eggs, 12 and 15 for cream, which isn't spent for groceries except sugar, coffee, and an occasional head of lettuce. Are we tired of our own products? Yes, but are willing to keep on in order to buy the necessities we must have. It is reported that Hoover has put in a wet plank in his platform for this campaign. Another disappointment. The feed and seed loan was just a little boost instead of cure. Citizens of good financial standing cannot borrow much money at the banks anymore than we "lesser" ones can without giving a mortgage. I have come to depend on our Heavenly Father to bring us through from day to day and week to week and I feel if we would do that as a nation our troubles would be at an end. They are getting too great for our own strength.

## **June 19**

The Republican convention is over and Hoover and Curtis were nominated. The Democrat convention comes next and other surprises await us again, I suppose. Present prices are: eggs, 8 cents; cream, 14 cents; heavy hens, 8 cents. This week it goes for music lessons again, such a sacrifice to keep that going along with other things, but a good investment nevertheless. This week will be mulberry week and I expect to make a lot of "depression" sauce. Well, must see about the brooder fire and go to bed.

## **July 7**

The family is in town and everything quiet so I am inclined to write even if it is 10:30 in the forenoon. In reading the last few lines written before, the Republican convention was mentioned. Well, to be fair, I must describe the Democratic convention held also in Chicago. After much discussion and bickering they nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt, fifth cousin of "Teddy" Roosevelt. Al Smith was determined to "beat" him in any way or form but failed.

Garner is nominee for vice president. Now the contest begins between Hoover and Roosevelt unless a third party will appear, which I think and sincerely hope comes to pass. With Hoover's new resubmission and Roosevelt decidedly "wet" we need a candidate to represent us folk who are decidedly dry. Hens are worth 8 cents on the market; would like to sell enough to get some dress shoes and Frank a good shirt, as he only has had one all summer, and a pair of rayon bloomers for the girls and some little thing for Dale. Then if there should be any left, would like to make another payment on Lois' doctor bill. I made one five dollar payment once this spring when I did some custom hatching and added enough "egg money" to that to make five dollars. The Doctor was pleased, needless to say, and told me if everyone would pay in installments he would fare better. There still remains \$15.00 to be paid on Lois' bill and \$8.50 on our "flu" bill last winter. Sure hope we can clear the slate before winter. Hogs are coming right along until now they are \$5.30 in Chicago. Folks are almost holding their breath for fear it is only temporary. Henry Field says it is the turning point of the depression. Here's hoping he knows.

### **September 5**

Yes, it was temporary. Hogs are back down to between 3 and 4 dollars and so is everything else down, except fat cattle, which are around 8 cents. We have been having a farmers "strike" or holiday. Hundreds of farmers have picketed the highways emptying cream, etc., if the haulers refuse to take it back home. This went on until the law interfered and were about to send troops out. At the present, however, things are quieter and we hear they are getting ready for a new attack. Some of us farmers are at a loss to know which attitude to take, since the picketers seem to be made up partly of communists or reds. Hoover came out in his acceptance speech saying the 18th amendment was a failure and he favored state control. Well, all of the drys are "up in the air" with both parties wet and no one to vote for. Have a wonderful corn crop and if we were getting 50 cents per bushel we would be rich, but old corn is 20 cents with the new even less. Foreclosures appear every day and one wonders when his turn is next. Oh well, we are all well and together so things could be worse by far.

### **October 23**

We are picking corn. 11/2 cents is the going wage. Election is two weeks off and of all the speeches on the radio, can you believe it, I have gone back to Hoover. Frank is undecided so naturally we have plenty of arguments.

### **December 14**

Election is over by over a month and of all the surprises - it was one - there were 8 "parties": Republican, Democratic, Socialist, Labor, Communist, Prohibition, Farmers Holiday and the other I do not recall just now. Well it was a landslide for the Democrats just like it was for the Republicans in 1928 only it is all Democrat clear down to the county officers, which proved that the people were in earnest in obtaining a "new deal". Well Mr. Roosevelt has made some good sounding promises but he also advocates the legalizing of beer as a source of revenue in balancing the budget. This may be good business but to my way of thinking it isn't the proper example for a so-called Christian nation to set for the other observing countries. Congress is now in session and about every other day a beer bill is introduced but so far has been voted down, but Roosevelt proposes to call an extra session immediately after he is inaugurated to get it passed. Corn is 10 cents. The only good prices now are eggs at 25 cents and cream at 20 cents. We are getting about 20 eggs per day. There has been a terrible calamity in this county in the last week. Five banks have closed: Griswold 1 - Lewis 1 - Atlantic 1, with only 3 left in the county. People have lost thousands of dollars. We only had \$11.00 in this time. People are bewildered wondering, dreading what may come next. A good many are reading the book of Revelation trying to connect the prophesy with the present times. Those whose faith is well founded are feeling most secure.

### **December 30**

There is an agricultural "Bill" soon to be considered called the "allotment plan". A farmer signs up pledging to farm a certain number of acres, leaving the balance idle, being paid \$4 per acre for the idle ground by the government. This is supposed to take care of our surplus. This is quite a problem - so much surplus - when it really is under-consumption, millions of people out of work and hungry.

If there was a way to bring up prices of farm products, I believe the other problems would solve themselves.

**1933**

**January 8**

The Griswold Bank reopened yesterday. The Whitney Bank has about given up hopes of opening. The sheriff's sales are now being stopped by mob rule.

**Sunday, January 29**

Have had a wonderful month of springlike weather, a great saving in fuel. Haven't bought any coal yet. Have had some wood and did burn a lot of corn the first part of the winter. This seems like a crime to some people, but a good many have done it. Well we didn't have the money to buy fuel and I believe that is why we were blessed with such a good crop, so we would have some extra for fuel. Times indeed are hard. Farmers in great numbers are revolting and joining the "Holiday" organization, which assists people who are threatened with foreclosure. Many a farmer's stock and machinery has been saved this way. It seems hard to think that mob rule should prevail in America, and yet I do not know where it would have stopped otherwise. The county farms and bread lines are taxed to capacity now. We are back on our last payment on our loan company. Am wondering how long they will "have a heart".

**Sunday, February 19**

This last week we killed 2 hogs and it took so long to take care of it. Frank had to help shell corn and haul almost every day - they are getting 12 cents. We still have a large pile on the ground. We rendered 12 1/2 gallons of lard. We still have the sausage to take care of. Have it in casings and think we will try to smoke them. We want to kill a beef this week if we can sell part of it. It is almost impossible as people do not have the money. Some offer to trade their wares for it, but in most cases it is something we can do without. For instance, the movie man wanted to give us "show tickets". Imagine that when we never do go. We may get to apply some on the last of the doctor bill which has persisted in

dragging along into the new year. Here's hoping there won't be any broken bones this year.

### **Easter Sunday, April 16**

The last I added to your pages was the fact that the banks were all closed. Well after a time the most of them opened on the 111 plan, which means they are not allowed to loan money, but can take money on deposit. They have a certain time to arrange and work their way out of this plan to where they can operate as before, but they must be able to guarantee their deposits. This is supposed to clear up all of the uncertainty of banking and restore confidence. This was Roosevelt's first accomplishment. The next was giving the people 3.2 per cent beer. A few states remain dry, but soon will have an election to determine their future. Just now the farm bill is up before the Senate, who are trying to tear it to pieces. They feel if it does go through, it will be too late to put into use for this year's crop - that is, reducing the acreage.

### **Sunday, May 7**

Next Saturday the Holiday members expect to begin their national strike, all roads will be patrolled so farmers can't sell their products. At LeMars the militia was called out this week. Prices have been advancing so cannot understand why they don't have a little patience. Cream is now 20 and 22 cents, eggs are 11 and 12 cents, corn is around 25 cents. The wet and dry battle will be fought June 20. There is so much agitation everywhere.

### **Sunday, May 14**

Well, the national farm strike sponsored by the Holidays set for May 13 has been postponed, for which we are all thankful. They came to that decision after Roosevelt signed the farm bill which makes it possible for the loan companies to refinance mortgages. Ours will cut interest to 4 1/2% and postpone payments on the principal for 5 years. Well, it gives us more courage to go on. We had about given up ever trying to keep up anymore. Prices are going up since they have inflated the money. They claim the U.S. going off the gold standard has helped start things also. Some are afraid it isn't a good sign where prices jump too rapidly. Corn is 33 cents, hogs between \$4 and \$5, wheat 65



cents, cream 22 cents, and eggs 12 cents. That sounds fine but there is another side of the story. Flour and sugar and other things are going up, too, and I wonder if we can keep up.

### **July 14**

The reason I neglected you, old book, is because I got into a rut. You see we were going through a drouth. Everything seemed almost gone and when you see plant life dying before your eyes for lack of water, it takes the heart out of you. However, it rained about 2 weeks ago and I revived with everything else. Corn looks wonderful but small grain is very poor. Late garden is looking good. We didn't get hardly any peas and no beans yet. Beets and carrots are growing now. I should tell by all means how the price of grain has gone up. Sold the last half of our corn for 48 cents, the first half for 38 cents. Wheat almost reached \$1.00. We think it is a speculative market though and wouldn't be surprised to see the bottom drop out again. So many are buying on the board of trade. I sold my hens for 7 cents per lb. Eggs were down to 6 cents but are back up to 10 cents again. Am trying to do a little sewing again. There is practically no canning now, potatoes almost zero.