

THE PALIMPSEST

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The Weather

Weather cost Iowa millions of dollars in 1935. The farmer who had looked ruefully at his sunburnt fields of the previous summer was encouraged by the excess rainfall in the autumn of drought-stricken 1934. Although in the following spring copious showers fell over much of the parched central and southern section of the State, precipitation was below normal in most of the western and northern counties. The heavy rains delayed corn planting nearly a month. Instead of being "knee-high by the Fourth", much of the corn was scarcely six inches above the ground. According to estimates at that time the crop was thirty-one per cent below normal — the worst condition reported at that time of the season during the forty-six years that records have been kept. To make matters worse the growing season was four days shorter than usual and about a fourth of the corn crop was damaged by frost. Despite these adverse conditions, the corn yield was over

a bushel per acre above the ten-year average. The crop was very poor in quality, however, containing the greatest amount of moisture ever recorded.

The excess rainfall also resulted in destructive floods. Farmers viewed with apprehension the high stages on the Iowa and Cedar rivers early in March. In May floods occurred on the Grand, Little, and Middle rivers. But it was the Des Moines Valley which experienced the most damaging floods. Beginning on June 3rd with a stage of 15.2 feet at Tracy, four consecutive crests bankful or higher collected below Des Moines and moved down past Ottumwa. The third and highest crest passed Tracy with a stage of 20.1 feet on June 27-28th. The river did not fall below the fourteen-foot flood stage until after the fourth crest of 18.5 feet on July 5th. At Eddyville a hundred men worked frantically building a levee of 14,000 sand bags to protect the town. Relief workers came from Oskaloosa to aid in the fight, while scores of volunteers trooped in from surrounding communities. So serious was the flood threat that every one in Eddyville was prepared to move on a moment's notice. If the water had risen four inches higher it would have broken over the sandbag barrier and flooded all but twenty-three residences.

At Ottumwa cots and tents were provided for

eighty families driven from their homes. A train of cars loaded with coal held down the Milwaukee railroad bridge across the waterworks channel. At Eldon, where all roads south were overflowed, a doctor and nurse reached the home of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Cole by rowboat just in time to usher a baby boy into a home marooned. Forty thousand acres of land were inundated between Des Moines and Eldon and the damage to crops, livestock, and property was conservatively placed at almost a half million dollars.

Billions of chinch bugs that survived the winter of 1934-1935 became a serious menace to Iowa crops. This was particularly true in southern and east-central counties where the ground was "alive with them". Fortunately, adverse weather conditions greatly reduced the hosts of chinch bugs which had threatened to take practically all the small grain and seriously damage many cornfields in half the counties of the State.

The grasshopper scourge in some of the western counties was reminiscent of the locust plagues of the seventies. Fremont County and the region round Ida Grove, Denison, Harlan, and Logan suffered most. Fields of alfalfa and sweet clover were the favorite feeding grounds. Entomologist A. D. Worthington urged farmers to use the 600 tons of poison bran available to eradicate the pest.

At best he feared that another dry fall and spring might result in the "worst infestation" in Iowa history. The prospect for 1936 was gloomy, indeed, when the grasshoppers survived September rains.

Dust from the southwest filled the sky and discolored the snow on February 23rd. A month later, on March 20th, a dense cloud of dust covered the whole State. Visibility as low as a hundred feet was reported in southwestern Iowa. A brisk wind carried the dust high into the air. During April, dust-laden atmosphere dimmed the sun's rays and diminished visibility. But dust storms in 1935 did not match those of 1934 either in number or severity.

Violent local storms were uncommon. Loss from wind and hail was consequently less than half that of 1934 and far less than usual. A small tornado near Alton on March 20th did some damage. Much more serious was the tornado four days later in Mahaska County which unroofed buildings, leveled barns, and caused damage estimated at \$60,000.

Two earthquakes were felt in Iowa in 1935. At five o'clock in the morning on March 1st a tremor of short duration was felt in southwestern Iowa. The quake in the extreme southwest was of sufficient intensity to move furniture. Window panes rattled, dishes jingled, and light sleepers

were disturbed. Farmers reported that their stock became restless and excited when the tremor occurred. Des Moines, Kansas City, Wichita, and Council Bluffs bordered the area affected.

At Dubuque sometime between midnight and 1:10 A. M. on November 1st at least seven people in two different buildings reported a "sudden quivering shock" that caused mirrors to swing and chairs to rock. The Dubuque tremor was apparently a phase of the severe shock that originated in North Bay, Ontario, and rocked eastern Canada and the United States at 1:03:45 A. M. The time definitely associates it with the North Bay rather than the Helena tremors. Measured by the distance it was felt, the quake was of greater severity than that at San Francisco in 1906 and twice as great as the Long Beach earthquake of 1933, though not nearly so destructive. Dubuque is at least one hundred miles farther from the center of the disturbance than any other point mentioned in the preliminary government survey.

The average temperature in Iowa for 1935 was 48.6° compared with the sixty-three year average of 47.9°. For the sixth consecutive winter the temperature during December, January, and February was above the long-time norm, while precipitation was below average for the tenth winter in the last twelve. The lowest temperature was re-

corded at Northwood and Osage where the thermometer fell to 30° below zero on January 23rd.

The worst snow storm occurred on February 25th, when a blanket of snow averaging four inches in depth covered the State. Drifts of snow fifteen feet deep were reported. The Iowa Highway Commission had the primary road system cleared in forty-eight hours but many country roads were blockaded for days. Busses and trains ran far behind schedule, airplanes were grounded, and many automobiles were abandoned in the drifts. Hundreds of men worked overtime with shovels, teams and scrapers, trucks, and all available clearing equipment. The Iowa Weather Bureau estimated 2,024,727,912 tons of snow fell.

The highest temperature recorded was 107° at Sac City on July 28th and at Corning and Lenox on August 9th. This was eleven degrees below the all-time high established at Keokuk on June 20, 1934. Although few records were broken, the year was marked by many unique phenomena. May of 1934 was the warmest on record with an average temperature of 69.6° whereas in 1935 May approached an all-time low with an average of 55.0°. But Iowans have learned to accept such variations of nature with calm solicitude. Providence is, after all, beyond human management.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN