

References to Previous Miller County Droughts

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/100419.html>

We cultivated and farmed the ridge behind the barn and behind Grandma Oligschlaeger's house. We planted about three or four acres in hay or corn that we used for fodder because it was not a good stand. We never did get any grain off of it. We just used it for the cattle. We used mule drawn equipment. I started with a team of small mules when I was 12 or 13 years old. I learned to harness them and then plow corn with them. I also used a hay rake and mower to gather hay. We collected loose hay and never baled hay on the farm. Baled hay didn't come until later when we brought in hay from Nebraska and the Dakotas during the drought. It was prairie hay that had very little feed value but it kept our animals alive during the two drought years when we could raise no food for them. That was 1934-36. Those were terrible years. Later, after Dad was killed, we used the land for pasture and no longer farmed it.

The cistern was not a reliable source especially in dry summers as it would run dry. Then we had to haul water from Capps Springs to restore water to the cistern. I can remember years prior to that when we hauled water up from the well down in the holler to water the chickens and for use in the house. That was in the drought years of the 1930's. We carried water in buckets by hand. That was a lot of hauling for Leroy and me but it didn't seem too big a job at the time. Dad helped also.

Seldom did we butcher cattle. We butchered far more sheep than cattle because that is just the type of herds we maintained. Cattle were also too valuable to eat. We used them mainly for milk, butter, and cottage cheese; but hogs were only 8-10 cents a pound and produced nothing but meat for us. In the early years of the depression and the drought year of the 30's, we couldn't give them away. There were just too many of them and the price was so low. We used them for our main meat source.

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/110124.html>

A story told by Valentine's (Kallenbach) son John Edward is that a severe drought affected central Missouri during the 1870's and caused tremendous hardship on the Kallenbach family.

Accompanying the drought was an infestation of grasshoppers or locusts. As a consequence the crops failed and the family's food supply during the following winter was seriously affected. The family had been entirely dependent upon what they raised for food. By the end of the following winter their food supply was entirely exhausted such that the only food they had to live on was corn bread, parched corn and sow belly from a semi-wild hog Valentine had managed to stalk and kill in the woods.

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/090316.html>

Another historical local reference to the plague occurred regarding a farm originally owned by an early Miller County physician, George Lansdown, which was located just across the line in Cole County. At the time of the plague the farm was owned by the Kerl family. This quote is taken from the previous Progress Notes of March 16, 2009:

Simon Kerl died in 1876, leaving his wife with a seven year old son, Thomas Theodore. Maria Sommerer Kerl married Simon's half-brother Markus Kerl soon after her first husband's death. But Kerl's management skills were inadequate to offset the drought, grasshoppers and unstable crop prices that plagued area farmers in the late 1870s, and by 1879 the family's debts had become overwhelming. When the farm was auctioned at the Cole County Courthouse, the successful bidder was Mathias Sommerer, Maria's father, who bought the farm for his two sons. Mathias Jr. received the western half and John Adam received the eastern half containing the Lansdown-Higgins House.

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/071231.html>

Pauline Vaughan Stanton

The construction of Bagnell Dam and the jobs provided in the subsequent operation of that facility was an important factor in the economy hereabout. Some locals who assisted in building the project put aside a portion of their earnings and that made life easier for a brief time. The number of Missourians employed in the venture is listed by one source as 5,799. The Missouri Pacific and Rock Island Railroads still furnished some good jobs as did the Highway Department. The hamlet of Eldon was a progressive trade center prior to the reality of the dam so long spoken of as a possibility. The Lake began to fill February 2, 1931. Our immediate neighborhood in the vicinity of Mt. Carmel Church did not benefit in a large measure from Roosevelt's relief programs, but programs were in place for those who qualified. Most residents owned a bit of land, a roof to shelter them from the elements and means to provide provisions to keep one from hunger and cold. A severe drought was present, however, especially in Kansas and Oklahoma. There were times when you could see part of another Kansas farm blowing through Miller County and that served as a reminder that conditions were bleak elsewhere. The dust was, at times, enough to be an irritant to the eyes and lungs and cause laundry not to be hung on the line to dry.

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/100705.html>

Jamie Fischer Patterson

Eula's first child, a daughter named Karen Lou, was born in May of 1935, and Grandma remembers struggling to keep baby Karen cool because of a great heat and drought, likely part of the famous Dust Bowl that devastated the Midwest in the early and mid-1930s. Next born was a son, Roger Bryce, in September 1938 – my father. While she bore no more children, as years passed, she became a proud grandmother of three grandsons, Neil, Steve, and John, and one granddaughter, myself. She can now boast the status of great-grandmother as well to five great-grandsons: Michael, Charles, Logan, Landon, and Lucas. When my grandpa Bryce was alive, he was always proud that the family tended towards males to carry on the Fischer name, and he and Grandma were always quick to spoil me as their only granddaughter.

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/110905.html>

From the western border of Miller County to Tuscumbia, the Osage River flows in a general easterly direction; from Tuscumbia to where it leaves the county, it flows in a general northeasterly direction. A straight line drawn through the county from the point where it enters to where it leaves is less than 24 miles long, while the actual distance covered by the river, in all its windings through the county

is over 40 miles. In its course through Miller County the Osage River falls about 30 feet, making an average grade of three fourths of a foot per mile. The volume of water in the stream varies greatly at different seasons. In the drought of 1901 the stream could be forded on foot at a number of places without more than wetting one's shoe tops, while in the following spring and winter the water was in places 40 feet deep. In the flood of 1895 the river rose 36 feet, completely inundating the bottom land farms, washing away fences, hay stacks, and corn and flooding houses and stores in Tuscumbia and Bagnell which were built on the alluvial plain. On subsiding, the river left a deposit of alluvium averaging three fourths of an inch in thickness on level ground.

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/120213.html>

The belief that “God helps those that help themselves” is strong in all of these hill folks and while they appreciate aid when it is really needed, they do not like to accept handouts. Many of the old timers remember the depression and drought days of the ‘30’s when government “relief wagons” brought food supplies in. Anybody who could make it on his own wouldn’t take the food, they say.

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/110926.html>

The Great Depression

Sophie Hill

During the 30's and early 40's, the Great Depression came and with it a drought. There were hardly any jobs to be found anywhere, city or country. Pastures dried up for lack of rain, creeks and ponds went dry in many places, and some farmers had to feed hay to their live stock, even in summer. We were lucky to have a wonderful spring that never changed in its volume even in dry weather. The spring branch flowed into a creek. Two of our neighbors watered their animals from the water that ran from this spring.

<http://www.millercountymuseum.org/archives/090525.html>

In the opposite extreme, sometimes in summer or early fall there would not be enough water. This condition, though not as potentially dangerous as a flood, was of major concern because it caused the ferryman greater work. During a drought, rivers occasionally got so low that the ferryman had to scoop out the gravel from the landing approach to enable the ferry to get close enough to shore to unload the cars. Also, if the river became sluggish enough that the current wouldn't take the ferry across, the ferryman would have to pole the ferry to and fro across the river.