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Source: *Great Plains Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (SUMMER 2015), pp. 229-247

Published by: University of Nebraska Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24465605>

Accessed: 15-12-2020 14:25 UTC

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# One Man's Dust Bowl

Recounting 1936 with Don Hartwell of Inavale, Nebraska

STEPHEN C. BEHRENDT

Timothy Egan's *The Worst Hard Time* (2006) reminded us of one of the greatest, and entirely preventable, environmental disasters of the twentieth century. The calamitous events of that period, and the misguided decisions about land usage that precipitated them, remain indelibly inscribed upon the national consciousness, while in the Great Plains they have come to possess an element, even, of the mythological. As William Riebsame writes, "the Dust Bowl is an enduring image in the collective consciousness of Americans," an image of cultural and environmental catastrophe whose inherently sensational nature often distracts us from the growing likelihood that "the basic resources of the Great Plains may be slowly, inexorably frittered away."<sup>1</sup> But because "Nature has extraordinary powers of recuper-

ation," Donald Worster admonishes us, "it is easy and altogether human to suppress the memory of misjudgment and loss; to revert to old, familiar ways and deny responsibility." Worster worries that this is precisely what is happening today in that variety of "agricultural capitalism" that is manifested in "its recent apotheosis as agribusiness."<sup>2</sup> Like historiographers such as Paul Bonnifield and R. Douglas Hurt, Riebsame and Worster articulate a largely macrocosmic view of the Dust Bowl era, rather like the prospect of the Great Plains one gets while flying at 36,000 feet.<sup>3</sup>

But this is not the only way to look at things; one also learns by flying nearer the ground. As Pamela Riney-Kehrberg puts it, "when scholars contemplate the major historical events of the twentieth century, such as the Great Depression and dust bowl, their tendency is to read history from the outside in," moving "from the larger, seemingly all-encompassing event, in to the lives of those experiencing the event." But that macroscopic scholarly perspective risks missing the intimate view of the Dust Bowl farmer or farm-

*Key Words:* climate, diaries, drought, Great Depression, Red Cloud

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woman who struggled daily for bare subsistence amid seemingly insurmountable and interrelated natural, social, economic, and spiritual challenges. Such people recorded history “from the inside out,” in documents like letters and diaries that reveal “the perspective of the individual living in the moment, and perhaps not perceiving themselves as engulfed in historical cataclysm.”<sup>4</sup> One such personal history written from the inside out is the diary of the southwestern Kansan Mary Knackstedt Dyck that Riney-Kehrberg edited; two others are the diaries of Lucy Mabel Holmes and Elsie May Long, also from Kansas, about which C. Robert Haywood has written; another is the diary of Ann Marie Low (North Dakota); a fourth is Caroline Henderson’s more deliberately journalistic *Letters from the Dust Bowl*.<sup>5</sup>

Another example of history written from the inside out is the diary kept by the Nebraskan Donald Briggs Hartwell (RG3080.AM, Nebraska State Historical Society). A daily diary kept by a man is relatively unusual; diaries have historically been regarded as the province of women, as in the cases of Dyck, Holmes, Long, and Low, with whose diaries Hartwell’s is contemporaneous. Moreover, the deeply personal and meditative nature of Hartwell’s diary is uncharacteristic of the “male” (and masculinist) voice of most men’s narratives from the period and region, such as Lawrence Svobida’s account of farming in Dust Bowl Kansas.<sup>6</sup> Don Hartwell’s diary therefore offers an especially remarkable contemporary insight into the social, economic, and spiritual complexity of the era, when resilience and determination clashed with destruction and desperation in a struggle that first demoralized and then destroyed many of its victims. Many—but not all. There were exceptions, like Donald Hartwell, who

lived for most of his life with his wife, Verna, in the community in which he was born: in Inavale, Nebraska, about seven miles west of Red Cloud. Like so many Dust Bowl casualties, the Hartwells lost just about everything—including, finally, even the earlier stability of their marriage—and then vanished into the great dusty bowl of history, where only their names and a bit of their story remains for us to sift through today. That sifting, however, reminds us that even the most determined optimism and resilience may be ground down by an unremitting onslaught by an inscrutable and seemingly malevolent natural world. The paradoxical combination of subjective investment and objective detachment that characterizes Hartwell’s diary reveals his uncommon ability to stand at once “in the frame” of his daily experience *and* outside it, observing and commenting. In what follows, then, I examine his intimate account of 1936, generally regarded as a particularly difficult year.<sup>7</sup>

### The Hartwell Family

Donald Hartwell was born in 1887 or 1888, to Adison and Estella Hartwell, who had moved to Inavale in 1885.<sup>8</sup> Originally from Sullivan, Ohio, Adison F. Hartwell, a professional cheesemaker who had learned his trade in Michigan, settled first in Naponee, Nebraska. In 1886 or 1887 he traded some land near Naponee for the cheese factory and personal residence of J. O. Chamberlain, both of which were in Inavale, where the elder Hartwells then set up their home just east of the cheese factory. The factory, which Hartwell initially leased from Chamberlain, was a simple operation in a shabby building with neither foundation nor heating, which may be one reason why Chamberlain went broke and so was



Fig. 1. The young Don Hartwell in his feed yard, about 1915. Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society.

happy to dispose of the property to Hartwell. Hartwell turned the factory into a profitable enterprise, producing cheese in the summer and selling it in Lincoln, Hastings, and St. Joseph, and butter during the winter months. At the same time, he began raising hogs, feeding them the whey and buttermilk that were the by-products of the cheesemaking. By 1903, when he stopped operating the cheese factory, he had become sufficiently successful feeding livestock that it became his new occupation, while he was simultaneously becoming widely known (and awarded) also for breeding superior chickens.<sup>9</sup> Don Hartwell included in the

front pages of his diary a photograph of the home “where I lived ’til I was 24 years old” and “where I went through the enjoyment & tragedies of childhood,” documenting those additions and alterations that his parents had made to the house since moving into it after Chamberlain had lived there (D [5]).<sup>10</sup>

By 1912 the elder Hartwells had outgrown the simple house they had purchased from Chamberlain and had moved into a new house they had built to the northwest of the cheese factory. This more substantial house, “a two-and-a-half story square, hip roof, frame house,” had “an open porch with square

support columns and a boxed-in railing” as well as four hip-roof dormers and a sleeping porch, plus a white picket fence. This new house was less a “home” to Don than the more modest one they had left, as is evident from his remark that “My folks made a mistake when they left this place [the smaller home in the photograph] in 1912 & built the enormous house 1 block W[est]. What they should have done was to have left Inavale” (D [5]). Echoes of that ominous presentiment recur frequently throughout the diary that follows. That A. F. Hartwell was indeed prospering is further indicated by the fact that, according to the 1920 census records, a British immigrant by the name of Sarah Tilley had joined the household as a maid, assisting with both the significantly larger house and with Adison and Esther’s two children, Donald (Donnie B.), born in 1887 or 1888, and Dorothy, born about nine years later, in 1897 or 1898, and who totally disappears from the record after the 1910 census. The birth of Dorothy (“Dolly”) apparently produced a watershed change in the family life, at least for the roughly nine-year-old Donnie: “June 8, 1897. I remember the cold, gray dawn of that day. My folks got me up at 3 am & took me down to Vances ‘to spend the day.’ When I got back, Dolly had been born & my childhood was over. Nothing was ever the same again” (D 159; June 8).<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, Sarah Tilley subsequently married Adison Hartwell after his first wife’s death.<sup>12</sup> Adison died on May 28, 1934, according to Don’s diary, and was buried in Red Cloud on May 30 (D 148, 150; May 28, 30).

To the south, between their home and Blaine Street (now Nebraska Highway 136), was the remainder of Block 10, all of which Adison Hartwell had purchased in 1909 (D [20]) and where his barn and stock pens

stood.<sup>13</sup> In 1915, at the southeast corner of Block 10, Don Hartwell built a one-story bungalow house with its gable end facing east, toward Minnesota Avenue. This house, which still stands, was home to Don and Verna (who had married in 1912) for more than two decades.<sup>14</sup> After the cumulative crushing effects of the Dust Bowl years had persuaded Verna of the necessity of leaving Inavale for work in Denver, Don remained there as long as he could hold off the bank and the creditors, losing the house and land finally in 1940.<sup>15</sup> Included among the front pages of Don’s diary are photographs of their bungalow. In an entry beneath one of those pictures in 1938, Don’s nostalgic affection for the place mingles perceptibly with the sadness and resignation to which he had by that point been reduced:

Note the walk from the house.—How many times I have gone down that walk—some times in the spring when the tulips were in bloom,—& the blue grass, it was a pleasant walk. I always kept the yard mowed, & in the summer it was a pleasant place. We always managed to have some cannas & generally a caladium, some gladioli, phlox, usually a window box in spite of the terrific heat & drouth [*sic*] of nearly every summer. As I write this now—(Aug 16, ’38)—I know that we are going to lose this place & I don’t know but what will come next—But—One can always face life the best way he can, have as good a time as possible.—Oct. 20, ’38—I am sitting here alone, now. Verna is in Denver, Colo. working, of all that we used to have & do, all is gone. But the above picture will always be a memory of better times. (D [16])<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, beneath another photograph picturing their 1928 Buick parked beneath a tree

by the house, Don observed that "I liked to sit in this car in the shade & read on the long summer afternoons after the rush of work was done" (D [20]).

Don Hartwell was indeed a reader, even though his formal education had been of the rudimentary sort that one might expect of a boy raised in rural Nebraska at the turn of the century.<sup>17</sup> About school, he observes that "I never did like it very well, it was too much like imprisonment." Nevertheless, "we all either because or in spite of it [school], managed to pick up a smattering of learning (Anyone who can read this writing will probably think so in my case)" (D [12]). It is clear from the diary that Hartwell was a reader with wide-ranging tastes and experience. His entry for January 18, for example, notes the death of Rudyard Kipling and remarks that "Kipling had a descriptive style & rhythmic swing to his poems that had a general appeal. But somehow he didn't seem to come into your every day life like Gray & Coleridge" (D 18), suggesting Hartwell's easy familiarity with such classic authors. Coleridge was apparently a favorite; on June 25 he quotes that poet's famous "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in the top margin: "A noise like of a hidden brook—In the leafy month of June" (D 176).<sup>18</sup> Other quotes and references range from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to the Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebbing to the "quasi-religious romance" writer Maria Corelli, "once Britain's best-selling novelist," whom he quotes (incorrectly, so perhaps from memory) on June 11 (D 162).<sup>19</sup>

The first two decades of the twentieth century brought prosperity to Inavale, with an influx of citizens and the businesses to serve them. As early as 1904 Inavale, with its large stockyards adjacent to the Burlington and Missouri Railroad, had become a major grain

and livestock shipping center. Through the 1920s Inavale enjoyed boom times that Don Hartwell frequently and nostalgically recounts in his diary later, when the stockyards, trains, bustling businesses, and prosperous citizens were ever more distant memories. Even Addison Hartwell's old cheese factory received a new lease on life: by 1912 it had been moved to the lot next to the hotel and remodeled "so thoroughly that it looked new" in its altered role as a restaurant.<sup>20</sup>

### Don Hartwell's Diary

The diary that Don Hartwell kept from 1936 through 1940 recorded, virtually every day, details about the weather, his daily activities, and what was going on in the world around him. Like other diaries of the sort, including those of Lucy Mabel Holmes and Elsie May Long, Don's diary was of a standard design, with its roughly 5.5 × 4 inch pages ruled to accommodate brief entries for five years, each year designated only as "19\_\_"—space being left for the diarist to fill in the final two numerals. What Haywood writes about Holmes's and Long's diaries is relevant also to Hartwell's: "There was room only to be a record, a very limited record, no more than a sketchy account of each day's activities. It would be a stretch to say that the diaries carried a 'wealth of revealing or historical materials,' as many editors of diaries claim."<sup>21</sup> None of these were spacious diaries like the one kept by Ann Marie Low between 1927 and 1937 and which accommodates long narrative rambles and retrospective reminiscences. The strictly limited space for daily entries contributed to the epigrammatic quality of Hartwell's writing even as it lent poignancy to his catalogue of details of the large reversals and small victo-

ries that were the Hartwells' daily lot in 1936 and afterward.

Don Hartwell's diary traces through these five years the winding down of the drought years, a denouement that coincided with the deterioration of the Hartwells' marriage as one consequence of the sheer oppression of their losing daily battle against the unforgiving elements, the relentless mortgage bankers, and the irreversible loss of health, property, friends, and neighbors. As Hartwell wrote in August 1938, accompanying a photograph of a burned-out cornfield,

I couldn't help feeling as I mowed this burned out field of corn, that it was a fair sample of what our own circumstances are known to be, turning out to be blighted in various ways.—Bad luck seems to follow some persons all their lives, some times temporarily in the background, but always there, always following, to [the] grave itself. I wonder, some times, if death itself can or does break the curse of bad luck, destiny, call it what you will. (D [17])

The only diary that remains of the many that Don Hartwell kept over the years is this single volume that runs from 1936 through 1940. After Hartwell's death, a neighbor found Verna burning the diary and rescued it.<sup>22</sup> The original seems to have vanished after it was microfilmed by the Nebraska Historical Society in Lincoln. It is a shame that previous diaries were lost; on January 1, 1936, Hartwell writes, "I have kept several during my life & 5 year ones at that" (D 1). Hartwell refers on the first page to "these diaries" as documentary resources for a possible "short sketch of my experience with that vague, incomprehensible thing called life" (D [10]). He often refers, too, by date, to personal events that happened "on

this day" *x* years ago and that he must surely have looked up in his earlier diaries. Finally, in the front matter are several pages listing "some things the passing years left impressed upon my mind," as well as a double-column page that constitutes "a summary of drouth & weather conditions since 1894" (D [31]).<sup>23</sup> Yet we are left today with only the image of Verna about to consign what must have been the last diary to the flames, almost as if she was destroying the last vestiges of those terrible times—perhaps even including her husband. Indeed, the loss of the other diaries is emblematic of the life experiences that Hartwell's single surviving diary records. At every turn, the stalwart determination of at least this one individual confronted the inexorable forces of natural and social change, and the consequences are recorded with a rare philosophical perspective that is all the more remarkable for its ostensibly humble author.

### Climatological Apocalypse

Not surprisingly, Hartwell kept a close eye on the weather; in 1936 he recorded almost every day the barometric readings and high and low temperatures at his farm, observing as well the relentless Nebraska wind that he frequently refers to as "raw," "hard," "mean," and—again and again—"dusty."<sup>24</sup> The dust was everywhere, and it went everywhere. On March 23, for instance, he notes that "the afternoon was very peculiar, the air filled with dust, the sun hardly visible & the wind whirling & puffing from nearly every direction" (D 82; March 23). Most Sundays, he notes that he and Verna "dusted and swept," contending with that fine, suffocating clay dust against which other citizens throughout the region hung damp sheets and towels over their windows or stuffed them



into door and window sills in mostly unsuccessful attempts to reduce the infiltration. Nor were the Hartwells alone in their endless battle with the dust: in southeastern North Dakota Ann Marie Low also complained about enduring the 110-degree heat while “watching the dirt drift in the windows and across the floor” (July 11, 1936). Low details what Hartwell only hinted at with characteristic understatement when he wrote “dusted and swept” in his diary’s small space:

What a mess! The same old business of scrubbing floors in all nine rooms, washing all the woodwork and windows, washing the bedding, curtains, and towels, taking all the rugs and sofa pillows out to beat the dust out of them, cleaning closets and cupboards, dusting all the books and furniture, washing the mirrors and every dish and cooking utensil. (August 1, 1936)<sup>25</sup>

The consequences of the wind and dust outside the home were, if anything, more immediately dramatic: on April 8 Hartwell describes a scene that would become iconic in photographic records of the Dust Bowl years: “fences in some places are almost entirely covered, some of our woven wire has been covered for a year.”<sup>26</sup> By July 8, he bewails “that everlasting S[outh] wind, dust, discouragement, desolation, destruction” (D 189). As he put it two days later, “It is too discouraging to try to do much of anything. To watch things destroyed before your eyes every day DOES get discouraging in time” (D 191; July 10).

Despite the endless setbacks, Hartwell nevertheless often couches his overwhelming sense of the futility of trying to go on with in a wry humor. On April 27, for instance, he records that he had sown Sudan grass around the feed yard. His next day’s entry reports “a

hard shower of rain & hail,” after which he observes: “Most of the Sudan seed I sowed on the W[est] place yesterday washed away. So much for that” (D 117–18). Next day, “I dug out the ditch on the W[est] bottom (which yesterday’s rain filled with mud)” (D 119); he had dug that ditch less than a week earlier—and would dig it again. This sort of wry resignation appears in other diaries of the period like Ann Marie Low’s, where she concludes her description of housecleaning, quoted above, with these words: “Cleaning up after dust storms has gone on year after year now. I’m getting awfully tired of it. The dust will probably blow again tomorrow” (August 1, 1936). A year earlier, in Kansas, Elsie Long had written: “have cleaned house[.] I worked hard all day, what good does it do[?]” (April 5, 1935).<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, resignation could do only so much to stave off the effects of what became known widely as the “Dust Blues.” As Haywood explains, women—and farm women in particular—were particularly susceptible to this variety of depression because they were more housebound than the male members of their families, who had at least the qualified satisfaction of fighting directly with the enemy by listing their fields and physically undoing by day what antagonistic Nature had done by night. The woman who fought a losing battle against the dust, however, “felt that she was not fulfilling her obligations as a wife to maintain acceptable standards of neatness, cleanliness, and household order.”<sup>28</sup> In reality, though, women and men both expressed abiding fears of inadequacy in the face of the brutal weather conditions and the personal, social, economic, and political crises they precipitated. These psychological dilemmas were in fact not nearly so neatly delimited by gender as is usually suggested by Haywood

and others who have studied them. Moreover, respiratory problems plagued young and old throughout the region, so much so that a condition called "dust pneumonia" entered the Great Plains medical lexicon.<sup>29</sup>

Like so many summers before, the summer of 1936 perpetuated the drought conditions that continued to crush the hopes of Hartwell and the multitudes for whom he was a wry spokesman. On May 21 he commented on the apparent futility of trying to raise alfalfa under the circumstances: he writes that the wind "has already killed out part of the alfalfa I sowed west of the feed yard.—I think the days of big, heavy alfalfa in this country seem to be over anyway. It is almost impossible to get alfalfa started any more & it doesn't live or grow well when you do" (D 141). He continued in the page's top margin: "15 years ago the whole Republican R[iver] bottom was a vast expanse of alfalfa & corn fields. Now it is practically a desert of washed, shifting sand, washed out ditches, cockle burrs & devastation. I doubt if very much of it can be reclaimed" (D 141). And so the summer went, as it had for the preceding years. After recording the increasingly catastrophic effects of unceasing wind, extreme temperatures, and lack of rain, he wrote on July 17, "Well[,] the campaign of destruction is still continuing. Between the course of drouth [*sic*] & plague of grasshoppers there is, indeed, 'no place like Nebraska'" (D 198). In late September, when it finally rained a bit after the summer's scorching drought had devastated crops, land, and citizens alike, Hartwell observed sardonically that "[o]ne happy facility of this country is that rain falls when it will do the least possible good. This rain is too late to do any good this year—& very much too early to help next year" (D 269; September 26).

Indeed, on June 21 he had begun quoting

ominous passages from Deuteronomy in his diary entries, beginning, that day, with "And the Lord shall make the sky above to be as brass & the earth below as iron & the rain of the land shall be powder & dust" (Deut. 28:23–24), to which he added: "here is Nebr[aska] described in detail" (D 172). Others were quoting Deuteronomy as well; Brad Lookingbill has suggested that "apocalyptic dread became a common belief among the grassroots population" of the Great Plains. Indeed, according to Lookingbill, the *Hutchinson* (*ks*) *Herald* had a year earlier cited the same verses that Hartwell quotes here.<sup>30</sup> Lookingbill opines that "fundamentalistic religious beliefs functioned as both an escape and a creative force by pointing to the economic and environmental calamity as evidence of Heaven's mysterious ways."<sup>31</sup> It's not clear whether the Hartwells were religious people, though, or indeed whether they were regular churchgoers at all. Certainly they were not like their contemporary Kansas diarists Lucy Mabel Holmes and Elsie May Long, for both of whom "attending Sunday church service and Sunday school was an unquestioned responsibility" and who "shared an interest in other church-related activities" like missionary society work.<sup>32</sup> The Hartwells seem to have done their household dusting and sweeping on Sunday mornings, for example, and the few mentions in Hartwell's diary of "going to church" all come in conjunction with social activities. At the same time, though, in autumn 1936 he notes that "we listened to Pearson preach from Shenandoah Ia. (over the radio)" (D 256; September 13). Although hardly a substitute for attending church, this listening seems to have been a regular habit rather like tuning in modern broadcasts and telecasts of Sunday

We have been watering our flowers around the house trying to keep them alive. Our window box & a few plants on the E. side look quite nice.  
 81 JULY 17 105

71-1936 Well the campaign of destruction is still continuing. B. & the curse of drouth & plague of grasshoppers there is indeed "No Place like Nebraska!" Norma went out with Marie pitying to Wagoner to a meeting in the afternoon. Norma has been writing "news notes" for the R. Cloud paper since R. Colburn left.

5<sup>th</sup> 1937 I finished cultivating 3/4 of field N.W. of the fudyard, it is replanted corn & is about waist high. Earlier corn has been damaged by drouth & heat. Norma helped at the hotel in the evening. Another few pictures show in the evening. Another flood in the N.W. in the evening, but it passed around.

73-  
 5<sup>th</sup> 1938 A sort of cool, dry N.E. breeze & dry drifting clouds. Grasshoppers are very bad this year. Our ~~corn~~ has been badly damaged (killed) by the last 10 days drouth. Our window box is rather well & there is a great deal of philoxera & a few gimmas. But we haven't many flowers this year we simply didn't have the money to get them. (Norma & Marie) to bring at the M.E. Church in the evening; I persuaded myself. 66-783

74-1939 Slightly cooler today I did some washing & ironing. Annacks write the news for the R. Cloud paper now. We do not get any papers now - for the first time since I have lived here. - All the news I get is over the radio & by rumor.

70-94/67 3/8 in rain. Par. 29.7  
 W. 1940 Well, it looks today as though the mopping up drive has started. A few dry, scattered clouds, a dead S. wind which will soon clear up what little is left. Corn is carrying out 1 ft. high but most of it will never get to seed. The S. wind will see to that.

71-101

Fig. 3. The diary page for July 17, with Hartwell's remark about "no place like Nebraska." Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society.

church services, for a month later he writes, "[w]e listen to Pearson from K.F.N.F. nearly every Sunday morning. He is earnest if nothing else, but I don't think life would be very glamorous according to his precepts" (D 297; October 24). This was Reuben Pearson, a fundamentalist preacher with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which organization had established radio station CHMA in Edmonton, Alberta, and whose religious programming was picked up in the United States by radio stations like KFNF in Shenandoah, Iowa.<sup>33</sup> Pearson was one of a number of preachers who had emerged following the birth of radio, which brought a varied but predictably polemical variety of evangelical fundamentalism to the rural airwaves.

Another better-known and more controversial radio evangelist was the Canadian-born priest Charles Edward Coughlin, who by 1926 had ended up in Royal Oak, Michigan, and whose powerful preaching soon found a home on WJR in Detroit. Father Coughlin's radio addresses were by 1930 being broadcast nationally by the CBS radio network, although the network dropped him after a short time when his politics became too extreme for its executives' tastes, leaving as his most regular radio pulpit going forward the one provided by WJR and its affiliates. By 1936 Father Coughlin had amassed literally tens of millions of radio listeners, with whom his increasingly antisemitic, antisocialist, and anticommunist diatribes resonated in the desperate socioeconomic and political circumstances of the national Depression and the regional Dust Bowl catastrophe alike.<sup>34</sup> Hartwell notes more than once that he and Verna were among his listeners, as they were also to Reuben Pearson; his unusually extensive entry on February 9 hints at the nature and tone of Father Coughlin's ad-

resses as well as at Hartwell's own understated skepticism about the direction of this sort of broadcast pulpit oratory:

We listened to "Father" Coughlin give a political speech in the afternoon on "inflation." "Inflation" & "sound money" were political issues in 1896 only in those days one didn't get them thousands of miles away over the "radio." We went out to chilly out door meetings or sat in dim lighted, chilly halls or "opera houses" to political speeches in those days (D 40).<sup>35</sup>

Seven weeks later, Coughlin's exhortations evoke Hartwell's deepening sense of the futility of individual initiative in the face of what we now think of as "big government" as particularly represented by Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal": "We listened to 'Father Coughlin' from Detroit, over the radio in the afternoon. He emphasizes the graft in the political parties. I have heard that ever since '96 but nothing has been done about it so far as I know. I don't really know what the 'average Citizen' could do" (D; March 29). While much of this brand of political discourse appears largely to have rolled off Hartwell, we can nevertheless see evidence of the diet of fundamentalism in his frequent allusions to, and quotations from, the Bible, like the passages from Deuteronomy cited earlier. At the end of his entries for September, for instance, he wrote these words in the top margin: "For whoso hath, to him shall be given & whoso hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he SEEMED to have"—LUKE 8:18. There is our life described in one simple phrase" (D 273A). The comment strikes us today as a revealing rejoinder to the alarmist national political discourse with which the radio—and undoubtedly the press—furnished citizens on a regular basis.

### Trapped between Eden and the Wilderness

Despite his diary's recounting of Hartwell's often Jobean reversals, it is genuinely moving to read there the sort of details that speak volumes about how he and Verna—and others in comparable circumstances—tried to sustain some sense of life, beauty, and hope amid the awful conditions they faced on a daily basis. In mid-May, "[w]e set out some tomato plants in the evening. Verna got a boquet [*sic*] of wild roses, the first I have seen this year" (D 138; May 18). He writes on July 17 that "We have been watering our flowers around the house trying to keep them alive. Our window box & a few plants on the E[ast] side look quite nice" (D 199). By early August they were still doing their best to preserve the few phlox and cannas that they had "tried to keep alive," but the fate of their gladioli was painfully symptomatic: they "grew up a foot high; burned over & never even budded" (D 223; August 11).

Far more typical, though, are the recurring reports of failed crops, like this one from July 29, about what had been "a fine stand" of "cane" (sorghum) a month ago: "Now it is mostly burned up & destroyed. This year is the 3rd total failure in succession ('34, '35, '36)" (D 210; July 29), a point he made several times during 1936. Ironically, Ann Marie Low's report from North Dakota only three days later paints a remarkably similar picture: "The hills are burned to nothing but rocks and dry ground. The meadows have no grass except in former slough holes, and that has to be raked and stacked as soon as cut, as it blows away in these hot winds" (August 1).<sup>36</sup> Although Hartwell's entries for 1936 constitute a painful tally of failed and burned-up crops, some things *did* grow. Unfortunately, these were weeds, which

invaded the fields where the corn, sorghum (cane), and alfalfa continued to struggle. By September Hartwell is complaining specifically about the invasive Russian thistles, or tumbleweeds, which he calls "the hand-maid of the S[outh]W[est] wind, drouth & desolation" (D 300; October 27).<sup>37</sup> They flourish in the dry conditions that waste the cash crops: "I would like to be some place or see the time when something would grow besides Russian thistles[;] they are a useless pest, and these little dry sprinkles of rain favor their growth" (D 262; September 19).

Hartwell's reports about his dwindling livestock are particularly poignant, partly because he is himself so profoundly reflected in what he says about the stock. In February, for instance, he writes that "I had to have old Harry, the old horse I have used so long, killed today. He got down, up in the pasture, & couldn't get up. We worked together for a good many years, & I can't help but feel his passing. Not just that in itself. It seems like a distinct era in our (my) existence is passing" (D 48; February 17). He wrote ruefully, in late November, that "Inavale reminds me a good deal of a piece of cut over timber land from which the 'live' 'green' timber has been cut down or died & about all that is left are brush piles for porcupines to hide in & stumps for crows to roost on" (D 333; November 29). Indeed, a recurring theme in Hartwell's diary is a profound sense of the irreversible passing of an era, and along with it a whole way of life. His entry for December 13 says it all: "I remember how the call of the stock train used to sound out on the sharp, clear of Sunday morning in years past. But no stock trains run now.—Some how it seems as though something were missing. Most of the stock feeders & buyers who used to go on the stock trains in those days are now dead" (D 347). Indeed,



Fig. 4. Verna Hartwell outside the Hartwells' bungalow, about 1921. Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society.

his entries for 1936 are punctuated with nostalgic memories of the sights—and especially the sounds—of the trains that had been so numerous during the good times that were now seemingly gone forever.

The feeling of being trapped in a no-win situation was at times almost overwhelming. Those who could, apparently, did leave, so that in September he wrote that “Inavale is quiet, quieter even than it has always been. More than a dozen families have left there in the last six months” (D 270; September 27). Noting in late October that another of his neighbors (Vic Colburne) had moved (presumably to join his parents in California), he epitomizes

the dilemma that he and others faced: “We should have left this country last July. Now I don’t know how we can leave, or still less how we can stay” (D 299; October 26).<sup>38</sup>

We recognize Hartwell’s dilemma clearly in what he says much earlier in the year, in February, about the need to sell his north pasture to secure some working cash. Predictably, he links his animals with the land: “I took some cane up to the horses in the N. Pasture in the forenoon. They wont be up there much longer as R. F. Hunter will take that place over Mar 1st. So much for that” (D 42; February 11).<sup>39</sup> A few days later he and Verna are shivering in their house and facing collateral damage from

the impending sale: "We have the bed in the dining room & the front room closed up. We haven't much wood left except what I can cut from day to day up on the creek N. of town & after Mar. 1st we won't have that" (D 46; February 15). Then on February 17 came the dispiriting moment noted earlier, when he had to have his old horse put down after it collapsed in the pasture. On February 29, a leap-year day, Hartwell interweaves his growing despair with the lyricism that so often accompanies it in this diary and that gives his entries such power and poignancy:

Well, ordinarily today would be Mar. 1, but this year gives us one more day to hold the place "up North" which has meant so much to me in life & tradition in the last 35 years, from the scent of the wild plum bushes & the violets & the blue grass in April, to the little dry thunder showers of June which break away late in the afternoons, with the meadow larks singing & the wild roses which seem brighter & smell sweet when wet with rain than any other time. (D 60)

This pattern of association, in which painful experience mingles with pleasant memories, is typical of Hartwell's writing. When he noted later, on May 28, for instance, that it had been two years since his father died, he immediately followed that bald statement with "I often think of it [his father's death] when I hear the birds sing before day light, early in the morning" (D 148).

They had to sell off their land, bit by bit, to try to keep up with the bills. Having decided early in 1936 to sell that north pasture parcel along the creek, Hartwell tried at least to harvest the usable wood: "but we will lose the place in another week any way, so it is rather discouraging trying & there is so much to do

and so little to do with" (D 52; February 21). And in May he says of their feed yard: "I don't know why I speak of the 'feed yard' anymore. No cattle have been fed there for 2 years now—and—so far as I am concerned probably never will be" (D 144; May 24). With the cattle gone and the number of working horses dwindling, they were left with their pigs, whose diminishing numbers Hartwell likewise recorded throughout the year. In February, for instance, he reports, "Verna & I went to R. Cloud in the afternoon. I took a pig to the sale, the pig weighed 120 lbs & sold for \$8.60 per cwt. That is our last hog to sell unless we sell the brood sows. I am not sure but what we will have to" (D 44; February 13). Even when the brood sows produced young, it was a mixed blessing: "Well, 2 sows had 20 pigs today. I don't know exactly what I will do with them. Feed is very scarce & high, even if one had money to buy it, which I haven't" (D 276; October 3). In the event, he did sell many of his hogs at the sales held in Red Cloud (primarily on Thursdays) that he and Verna attended regularly. And as 1936 drew to its sad conclusion, he reports that he had sold "4 little pigs" to Herb Lambrecht (also from Inavale): "so 8 2 [year] old sows & 6 fall pigs are all that we have left. It always depresses me to have to sell off stock. But when one has no feed & less money what can you do?" (D 362; December 28).

### Taking What Ease They Could

One of the few pleasures that Hartwell had was playing the piano at local dances. He records many such occasions, playing primarily at Red Cloud and Riverton (six miles west of Inavale). At Red Cloud he was often joined by Fountain ("Fount") F. Fincher, twelve years his junior and in 1940 the janitor at the

high school in Red Cloud; numerous entries in early 1936 report that it was "Fincher & I" playing, usually at Red Cloud and occasionally also in Riverton. Not even these musical gigs were immune to the seemingly inevitable disappointments, though; he writes on August 1, after two or three of these engagements, "I got word from Riverton that they hired someone else to play tonight, so that, apparently, is that" (D 213). Even that little source of income seemed, like the crops and the land, to have burned up. Nevertheless, all was not lost, apparently, for on October 23 he begins playing, as part of a group, for dances at the Bohemian Hall, which he says is "11 mi. N. of R. Cloud" (D 310; November 6). On that date the group includes "Fount F (from R. C.) I & Bill Havel" (D 310).<sup>40</sup> On November 6 it is "F. Fincher, I, (& 2 others)" (D 310). On November 21 "I (& 4 others) from R. Cloud played for a dance in Riverton in the evening" (D 325).

Hartwell recalls having taken piano lessons as a teenager, and in addition to popular dance tunes his repertoire included such classically based pieces as the "Poet and Peasant" (based on Franz von Suppé's *Poet and Peasant Overture*) and the "Sextette from Lucia" (from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*).<sup>41</sup> Access to a piano on which to practice was a sore spot with him; on January 8 he reports, "I haven't had a piano to keep in practice since last June 1 [when it had been lost to the Republican River flood] so I suppose it won't be long before I forget what little I ever knew" (D 8). But in late April came an unexpected break: "I got the piano Dunn used to have in the pool hall in the afternoon. Don't know how long we will keep it—how long we can. Henry Lehman got the piano for the pool hall in his romantic days" (D 118; April 28).<sup>42</sup> The fate of the pool hall itself, incidentally, reflects the dwindling life of

Inavale itself. In the front pages of his diary Hartwell inserted a photograph of the north side of Blaine Street in about 1913, on which he has identified the pool hall with the numeral 6: "No. '6' the pool hall was a lively place in the 1909–12 period but it gradually petered out & now they are holding Revival Meetings there! Even they don't amount to much" (D [23]). At the top of the page for January 11 Hartwell wrote flatly, "There is no pool hall in Inavale now, it simply died a natural death" (D 11).

Another diversion that the Hartwells and others enjoyed was a series of free "picture shows" sponsored by local merchants in an attempt at once to cheer up the families of the villagers and the surrounding farmers and to drum up at least some little extra trade for their own floundering businesses. These were generally shown on Saturdays (and a few Fridays)—after dusk, of course—in the open area just east of Don and Verna's house (across Minnesota Avenue), "on the spot where the old cheese factory used to stand so many years ago" (D 171; June 20). "Big crowds attend those shows. (They are Free.)" (D 157; June 6). Other such free shows sprang up also in Riverton, to the west, and in Red Cloud, to the east. Hartwell drolly observes, more than once, that, being free, these events drew large crowds. But even free entertainment could only do so much among the increasingly desperate and shrinking citizenry.

### Epilogue

Hope withered along with those few struggling flowers that Don and Verna tried to keep alive in their window boxes. The Hartwells eventually lost everything, including their marriage.<sup>43</sup> By 1940 Verna had moved to Denver, where she made enough money as

a housemaid to a doctor and his family that she sent five dollars to Don every two weeks. Physically separated from her for the first time, Don was miserable. After driving her to Denver in late September 1938 to take up her new job, he records his cold return trip "to Inavale! where I left the car & went to our house—where we have lived so many years—alone!" (D 274; October 1, 1938). The next day was no better: "Well, today is my first day at home since Verna has gone! It wouldn't seem quite so bad if she was in calling distance, or could come in once in a while. But I found a dress turned half inside out—a half used can of fruit; Oh what's the use! I'll have to get used to it" (D 275). They had never been apart before during their twenty-six years of marriage, and Don *couldn't* get used to it. At the same time, he couldn't tear himself away from the pitiful, failing farm in which he had invested his entire adult life. Even though he was forced gradually to sell off the stock, the farm implements, and just about everything else, it was not enough to prevent the bank foreclosing on the house and the remaining land, resulting in a sheriff's sale in July 1940.<sup>44</sup> Even after they had earlier lost most of their savings when the Bank of Inavale failed in October 1932 as a consequence of the drought and the hardship it imposed on the village and the citizens, they had tried nevertheless to make their payments, but it was no good.<sup>45</sup> Don was finally put out and wound up working on a government road crew. He subsequently ended up in Denver, where he joined Verna in domestic service.<sup>46</sup> Donald Hartwell died in Denver in 1955; Verna Hartwell died two years later. They are buried in the Red Cloud cemetery.

Timothy Egan wrote in 2006 that Webster County lost more than 60 percent of its population of the 1930s, and that Inavale is now

"a ghost town."<sup>47</sup> That is overstating the case, although the main thoroughfare, Blaine Street (Highway 136), is a sad affair today, lined by a few old, tumble-down structures and a couple of white clapboard houses with "For Sale" signs in scruffy lawns. As the few remaining residents leave—or die—less and less remains of the once thriving village where Don Hartwell's father, Adison, once operated a cheese factory and where Don and Verna tried—and ultimately failed—to survive the drought and the Dust Bowl. Just about all that remains is the microfilm of that single surviving diary, that history written from the inside, and what we may yet be able to reconstruct from its pages.

## Notes

1. William Riebsame, "The Dust Bowl: Historical Image, Psychological Anchor, and Ecological Taboo," *Great Plains Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 127–36; 127, 134.
2. Donald Worster, "The Dirty Thirties: A Study in Agricultural Capitalism," *Great Plains Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 107–16; 114, 110. Indeed, Worster has warned that the whole Great Plains region, currently threatened by the characteristically unchecked American rapacity for resource consumption, "may be in the most serious ecological trouble it has ever seen," while the international export of American agribusiness principles threatens "a new chain of environmental disasters." *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 239–40.
3. Paul Bonnifield, *The Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt, and Depression* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979); R. Douglas Hurt, *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1981).
4. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, ed., *Waiting on the Bounty: The Dust Bowl Diary of Mary Knackstedt Dyck* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 24.
5. C. Robert Haywood, "The Great Depression: Two Kansas Diaries," *Great Plains Quarterly* 18 (Winter 1998): 23–37; Ann Marie Low, *Dust Bowl*

*Diary* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Caroline Henderson, *Letters from the Dust Bowl*, ed. Alvin O. Turner (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

6. Lawrence Svobida, *Farming the Dust Bowl: A First-Hand Account from Kansas*, foreword by R. Douglas Hurt (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

7. I confine my discussion to 1936 in order to examine that year's account relatively closely while framing that view as appropriate with various contextual materials. Marsha Davis has published an edited transcription of the diary, which seems to have vanished at some point after it was microfilmed by the Nebraska State Historical Society. Marsha Davis, ed., *One Man's Voice: The Donald Hartwell Diary, 1936–1940: A Five Year Chronicle of the Nebraska Dust Bowl* (Denver: Tattered Cover Press, 2014). The transcriptions in the present essay are my own, taken from the microfilm of the diary, catalogued as RG3080.AM, Nebraska State Historical Society.

8. See the entry "Donald B. Hartwell, 1888–," Nebraska State Historical Society website, <http://nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/manuscripts/family/donald-hartwell.htm>. Davis gives Hartwell's date of birth as 1887 (*One Man's Voice*, 1). The United States census for 1900 estimates that Adison and Estella Hartwell were married in 1885.

9. For these and other details about the Hartwell family in the years before the Dust Bowl, I have drawn on Mabel R. Cooper-Skjelver's privately printed *Webster County: Visions of the Past* (ca. 1980), sponsored by the Webster County Historical Museum; Inavale is discussed on pp. 176–92. See pp. 180–82, 186, for Adison Hartwell.

10. Quotations from Don Hartwell's diary are noted parenthetically with D, followed by the page number and date, where appropriate. Interpolated materials within the diary are identified with capital letters to indicate their sequence after the preceding numbered page. Because the front matter that precedes the daily diary entries is unpaginated, I indicate with bracketed numerals the page numbers I have supplied. This front matter comprises notes, observations, photographs, and newspaper clippings, as well as a brief account of the progress of drought beginning in 1894 and continuing on through 1939. The diary proper is paginated beginning with January 1.

11. The name of Don's sister Dorothy, whom he

calls "Dolly," is recorded as "Dorothea Hartwell" in the 1910 census but as "Dorothy A. Hartwell" in those of 1900 and 1920; perhaps the variation is simply one of faulty transcription. Recalling 1896 (the year preceding his sister's birth forty years earlier) in his diary on August 15, Hartwell writes: "that was a year to conjure with! . . . My enjoyment of childhood reached its height that year. The next year was—oh, so different" (D 227).

12. The 1910 census lists Adison (whose name is sometimes spelled with two *d*'s) and Estella as spouses. The 1920 record indicates that Adison is now "widowed" and that Sarah Tilley is employed as a "maid." In 1930 the record shows Sarah J. Hartwell as Adison's spouse. Estella Hartwell died in November 1913, according to Davis, *One Man's Voice*, 195.

13. Cooper-Skjelver, *Webster County*, 188.

14. Davis reports Don Hartwell married Verna Wintjen on August 27, 1912 (*One Man's Voice*, 1); probably they lived in his parents' "enormous" new house until their own bungalow was built, a practice that was relatively common at the time.

15. The 1940 census reveals that Verna was working as a "servant" (apparently a maid or housekeeper) in the Denver household of Duval G. Prey and his wife and three children. Prey was a founding member of the Denver Academy of Surgery, which was formed in 1948.

16. Hartwell occasionally went back at a later date and commented on earlier entries, often to confirm them after the fact; generally he dated those later additions, as he did here.

17. Hartwell includes among his diary's front pages photographs of "the school house where I went to school from 1899 to Oct. 1904" and of another that he attended from 1894 to 1899. Clearly it was a memorable time, for he observes that "[i]t would take a volume to chronicle some of these school experiences, alone" (D [24]).

18. Among the entries in his two-page list of memorable moments and events, in fact, is "The Ancient Mariner," which he apparently associates with the devastating flood of the Republican River in 1905 (D [29]). The Hartwells' home and furnishings were badly damaged in the flood.

19. Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (New York: St. Martin's, 2001), 30. The passage from Corelli that Hartwell misquotes is "No wise man stops to consider his by-gone possibilities. The land of Might-

Have-Been is, after all, nothing but a blurred prospect, a sort of dim and distant landscape, where the dull clouds rain perpetual tears"; the passage, from *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris* (1890), is painfully apropos of Hartwell's outlook in 1936.

20. Cooper-Skjelver, *Webster County*, 181–83. By the late 1920s it had metamorphosed again, this time into a drug store.

21. Haywood, "Two Kansas Diaries," 24.

22. This may have been Charlotte Lambrecht, daughter of Henry and Edith Lambrecht of Inavale and friend of Verna (Davis, *One Man's Voice*, 195).

23. One feature of Hartwell's diary is his idiosyncratic spelling of "drought" as "drouth," which spelling recurs throughout the diary. "Drouth," a widely recognized variant of "drought," is especially common in the South and among older people with less formal education, according to the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. The spelling appears also in the diaries of Low and Henderson.

24. For example: "Very dusty, windy, mean" (D 80; March 21); "nothing but wind dust & dust & wind from the S. one day & the N. the next" (D 112; April 22); "a driving, killing S.W. wind which has set out evidently to destroy all living vegetation" (D 172; June 21); "a miserable day, a gale of wind & dirt from the S.W. all day" (D 268; September 25); "a terrific wind & dust storm from the N. in the evening" (D 329; November 25).

25. Low, *Dust Bowl Diary*, 152, 156.

26. With characteristic understatement, Hartwell describes the situation as "getting serious" (D 98; April 8).

27. Low, *Dust Bowl Diary*, 156; Haywood, "Two Kansas Diaries," 34.

28. Haywood, "Two Kansas Diaries," 34.

29. See Turner's introduction to Henderson, *Letters*, 19.

30. Brad Lookingbill, "A God-Forsaken Place': Folk Eschatology and the Dust Bowl," *Great Plains Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1994), 273–86; 278–89; "Southwest Breezes," *Hutchinson (KS) Herald*, March 24, 1935.

31. Lookingbill, "Folk Eschatology," 284.

32. Haywood, "Two Kansas Diaries," 31.

33. For both the Alliance and Pearson, who began as a hobbyist in radio's early days, see James W. Opp, "The New Age of Evangelism: Fundamentalism and Radio on the Canadian Prairies, 1925–1945," *Historical*

*Papers* 1994: *Canadian Society of Church History*, ed. Bruce L. Guenther (Canada, 1994): 99–119. KFNF was, along with KMA, one of the "Friendly Farmer Stations" based in Shenandoah, Iowa, and operated by Henry Field, owner and operator of the Henry Field Seed Company and chief rival of Earl May of the May Seed Company, also based in Shenandoah. In 1936 KFNF (whose call letters were treated as acronyms for both "Known For Neighborly Folks" and "Keep Friendly, Never Frown") was still a low-power broadcaster, approved only for a one-thousand-watt operation and consequently limited in its coverage range.

34. Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 119.

35. Indeed, Hartwell makes a similar point after hearing Franklin Delano Roosevelt speak on the radio: "What would the old time Democrats & Republicans of the Bryan days of '96 think of that! One went (and they did go!) to chilly, dark distant halls (with horse & buggy) to hear the political orators 'point with pride' or 'view with alarm' in those days." (D 294; October 21). The Hartwells seem to have been regular radio listeners; in 1936 Don mentions listening to the Major Bowles amateur program, "Barn Dance," the World Series, and various political broadcasts in addition to news programs.

36. Low, *Dust Bowl Diary*, 156.

37. The now nearly omnipresent and much-loathed pest weed, *Salsola tragus*, is said to have arrived in the United States in shipments of flax seeds to South Dakota in the 1870s. Simon Winchester, *The Men Who United the States: America's Explorers, Inventors, Eccentrics, and Mavericks, and the Creation of One Nation, Indivisible* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), 38.

38. Like the Dyck family in southwestern Kansas—and dozens if not hundreds of other families—they understood that "if they left, they would lose everything for which they had worked," so that "staying was the only viable option." Riney-Kehrberg, *Waiting on the Bounty*, 23.

39. Ann Marie Low felt much the same; looking back at mid-August 1936, she wrote: "I hate to remember the human and animal suffering. . . . Many cattle and horses, searching for feed and water, drifted until their strength was gone and died where they fell" (*Dust Bowl Diary*, 158–59).

40. This is likely William R. Havel, born about

1911, head cook at the Hastings State Hospital and living in Red Cloud in 1936.

41. "34 years ago today, in 1902, I went to R. Cloud on the train & took a music lesson[:] the Poet & Peasant. . . . It was my first trip on a train alone. I guess one always remembers those things. Miss Igow, my folks & very many others living then are now dead" (D 303, October 30). In the front pages of the diary is a picture of a four-wheeled buggy, beneath which Hartwell wrote "I took 'music lessons' when I was young & we used to drive back & forth from Inavale to R. Cloud in one of these buggies. . . . to take lessons of Miss Josie Igow" (D [21]). Recalling these trips, he wrote, "It doesn't seem that anything could be as cold intentionally, as those old time 'buggy rides,' usually, to take a 'music lesson' (D 350; December 16). His piano teacher, Josie Igow, would have been about forty-eight in 1902; she lived in Red Cloud with her widowed mother, Mary L. Igow (US Census records, 1900). On November 23 he recalled another such train ride to a lesson, remarking that he "enjoyed those trips in those days." He continued poignantly: "Very many who took active part in those days are now dead. It doesn't seem 31 years ago" (D 327).

Lest "Sextette from Lucia" seem curiously highbrow, it's worth recalling that Enrico Caruso and five colleagues had in 1908 recorded the famous sextet as a record that sold for the extraordinary price of \$7.00—equivalent to more than \$170 today. It had appeared again in Howard Hanks's 1932 mob movie *Scarface* and yet again—perhaps most conspicuously—when Shirley Temple made it a sensation when she sang it (with other cast members) in the 1936 movie *Captain January*. Haywood observes that in the later 1930s Elsie May Long, who enjoyed movies, "mentioned Shirley Temple shows five times and the child actress apparently was a favorite of hers, as she was for most Depression-era people" (Haywood, "Two Kansas Diaries," 32).

So widely and well known throughout the thirties and forties was the sextet's melody that the Three Stooges subsequently parodied it in two of their short features from the 1940s after it had showed up in 1941 in a Warner Brothers cartoon. The Three Stooges films are *Micro-Phonies* (1945), with Moe, Larry, and Curly, and *Squareheads of the Round Table* (1948), with Moe, Larry, and Shemp. In the Warner Brothers

cartoon *Notes to You*, a chorus of cats' nine lives sings the song to a startled Porky Pig. During the period, it was also a popular song among regional and national dance bands including those of Russ Morgan, Kay Kyser, and Glenn Miller, to name only three well-known ensembles.

42. Charles A. Waldo's "double" general store, which featured concrete block construction, was built in 1906 following a fire that destroyed the original and several neighboring buildings; it stood on the north side of Blaine Street and had a pool hall on its east end. By the late 1930s the building was occupied by Hiram Dunn. Cooper-Skjelver, *Webster County*, 180–83. My identification of "Dunn" is speculative: given Hartwell's occasionally difficult handwriting, the surname *may* be Davis. There was in fact a family by that name in Inavale at the time. Ransom D. Davis had by 1910 bought out the farm equipment business of his son (A. R. Davis), which sat on the south side of Blaine Street; I have found no connection between this Davis and the pool hall, however.

43. Some of the details in this paragraph are summarized from Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 299–301.

44. See "Donald B. Hartwell, 1888–," Nebraska State Historical Society website.

45. On October 7, Hartwell wrote at the top of the page (these top-margin notes date consistently from 1936): "The Bank of Inavale which closed Nov. 11, 1932 paid its final dividend today.—8 3/4 per cent—38 3/4 per cent altogether" (D 280). Willa Cather was aware of this failure and others throughout the region. On about December 11, 1932 (the day the bank closed), she asked Carrie Miner Sherwood, "Isn't the Bladen bank going to pay off its depositors? Or the Inavale bank?" Janis P. Stout, ed., *A Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 169.

46. The Denver directory for 1948 lists Donald and Verna Hartwell as residing at 835 Penn[sylvania] Street; he is listed there as "hsemn," denoting "houseman," "a man employed to do domestic work in a house, hotel, etc.; a male servant" (*OED*).

47. Egan, *Worst Hard Time*, 312.