

DEPRESSION ERA DIARY
By Edith Ellen Morse
Published Posthumously by Kent Steinke

INTRODUCTION

This little diary was written during the year 1935 by Edith Ellen Morse, a Kansas and Nebraska farm wife. It details the hopes and

broken dreams of a woman's first year of marriage during that long ago world drama that we call the Great Depression.

Edith Morse was only 20 years old in 1935. Two years earlier she had been forced to quit high-school by her father, Russell Rapp, who didn't believe that it was important for a girl to be educated. That event deeply saddened Edith, for she was a bright, sensitive girl who participated actively in her class activities at Norcatur Rural High School in Kansas. Edith especially loved her English classes, and was fond of writing poetry about life, and about her relationship with God. Edith could have been a wonderful English teacher.

Perhaps an ever greater gift that God bestowed on Edith Morse was her ability to write, preserve, catalogue, and organize history. From the day she married Bud Morse in 1934 up until the time she died, Edith was a meticulous historian. Had she lived in a different time I have no doubt that she could have been eminent in the field at some college or university, or at least in a high school. She saved everything pertaining not only to the story of her own family, but of events that went on around her.

**This is a personal account of the worst year of the Depression,
from a woman who was an exceptional writer, and who was eminently
qualified to write about the subject matter that she chose.**

CHARACTERS IN THIS DIARY

Edith Ellen Morse- the author, Nebraska farm wife, gentle and patient

Bud Morse- her husband, a loving man, but a man who nevertheless had a fierce temper. Bud was moderately epileptic and was subject to fits. He also had severe migraine headaches that sometimes made it impossible for him to function

Mr. and Mrs. George Fritzer- the farmers that they worked for in 1935

Dode Morse- Bud's father, a bear of a man, weighed 300 pounds

Alice Morse- Bud's mother, meek, loving, and gentle. She weighed about 100 pounds.

June Morse- Bud's sister- a bright, curious girl- a sixth grader at Edison School

Dean Morse- a younger brother to Bud and June

Edith, Dale, Doyle, Wilma- other siblings of Bud Morse

Grandpa Morse- Bud's grandfather, an ornery, cantankerous old man

The Chick Brothers- the local vaudeville act in Edison during the Depression years.

Various other people who she knew from her life before from her life in Kansas.

January 1, 1935

Edison, Nebraska

We moved to Edison Nebraska on Saturday December 29, 1934. We moved onto the George Fritzer farm 2 miles west of Edison. Our wages are \$15 a month, house, fuel and milk. We have 8 chickens; one dog Skippy; one cat, Tom; and we butchered our pig on December 31. Bud is starting to work tomorrow morning. I cleaned my bedroom today and straightened things around. June, Dean, and Dale were here for dinner. Mother Morse got a telegram of her brother Jessie's death on December 30, 1934...¹

¹ Jesse Stallsworth, Alice Morses's brother, was asthmatic who loved the outdoor life of a farmer, but was unable to enjoy his dreams. Shortly before his death his own sons had stolen all of his money. Then, Jess, not a healthy man anyway, slipped while trying to board a streetcar in Denver, Colorado. The car dragged him down the street and severely injured him. Broken hearted, he was only in his '60s when he died.

January 2, 1935

Bud worked today. He was home at noon. I washed and finished cleaning my house. It 6:10 now. Bud will be coming any time. It was a nice day today. ²

Thursday, January 3, 1935

Bud worked today. He hauled alfalfa from Pain's today. I walked up to Mrs. Fritzer's about 4 o'clock and walked home with Bud. She sure is nice. The Dr. came to see George today. He has the flu. I whipped Skippy for killing one of my hens. But it wasn't my hen. I cleaned the henhouse and fixed the window today. Dad and Mother Morse, Dale and Grandpa Morse were here at noon today.

Friday, January 4, 1935

² Here Edith interjects that the first snow of the season was on November 7, 1934

It was sure a mean day today. I didn't do much. I worked on my apron some. Bud worked today. Men were here east of the house and sawed wood.

Saturday, January 5, 1935

It sure is a lovely day today. Bud is working. He went after a load of feed. I finished fixing his red sweater. I have to fix his shirt. I cleaned my house this morning. I am going to write to Mildred and Loyal.³ I am going to wash my hair. It sure is long. Bud fixed my picture in his watch this noon. He got his watch Dec. 31. Skippy is here asleep. We are planning on going to Edith's tomorrow.

Sunday, January 6, 1935

Sure a nice morning. I went with Bud to do chores today. We got done about 10:00 AM. We went with the folks out to Edith's for dinner. We got home at 3:30 pm. We did chores this evening- got done at 6:30 pm. I got a letter from Mother today. She said Ruby and Bose were leaving the farm and Harvey and Leona Wyatt⁴ were moving there- not much news.

³ Mildred and Loyal Morse were cousins of Bud, living in Kansas

⁴ The Bose family and the Wyatt family had been friends of Bud and Edith in Kansas

Monday, January 7, 1935

Was a nice day again today. Mrs. Fritzer came up this morning. She asked me to come down there this afternoon. I did, and I was with Bud until we came home from... 4 p.m. I sure am tired tonight.

January 8, Tuesday

Nice today- a little colder. I was sick all night. We overslept. Bud didn't have time to get any breakfast. We didn't hear the alarm. They are buzzing wood here today. Turned cold this afternoon. Mother Morse and Edith and Don⁵ were here for dinner today. I went with Bud after alfalfa today and to do chores. Don't feel very good tonight.

Wednesday, January 9

Nice today- rather foggy. I wrote to Mother and Wim⁶ this morning. Sure don't feel good today. I went with Bud this

⁵ Edith Oliver, Bud's sister and her son Donald, who was then five years old.

⁶ Wilma Kintigh, Bud's sister who had stayed in Kansas when the rest of the family moved up to Nebraska. She was affectionately known through life as "WIM."

afternoon. I baked 4 dozen buns today, sure nice⁷. Dad and the boys were here this evening.

January 10, 1935

Sure was a nice day today. Bud worked all day. I went with his this p.m. Visited with Mrs. Fritzer till 5 pm & copied off some songs. We are planning to go to Edison tomorrow night and to Mc Cook Sunday.⁸ Hope it's nice.

January 11, 1935 (Fri.)

-Cloudy all day today. Rather cold. Wind blowing tonite. I went with Bud this pm but came home about 4 pm. We are going to play dominoes.⁹ Bud beat me last night.

January 12, 1935 (Sat.)

Nice this morning- clouded up and rained this pm. I went with Bud this afternoon. We went to town tonite. Sure had bad luck. Got our groceries for two weeks. We were at the folks a little while. Burnt out the lights on the truck but got home okay.

⁷ I can just taste those buns when I read this. When Edith was an elderly lady I was fortunate enough to be able to eat some of her wonderful bread.

⁸ It is still customary for many people in that part of Nebraska to go into Mc Cook on Saturday night. Mc Cook is the major shopping town for that area- about 60 miles from Bud and Edith's Edison farm.

⁹ Even when she was an old lady, when I knew her, Edith Morse was still crazy about whatever board game she could get her hands on. She just loved board games.

January 13, Sunday

Nice day today- rather cold. We went to Mc Cook today.

Started at 9 AM and got home about 3 PM. The twins¹⁰, Bud and I went. I went with Bud again tonite to chore. We didn't get any car. A man from Holbrook is bringing one down Tuesday. Hope we can get it.

January 14, Monday

Has been a nice day today- rather cold and windy. Bud worked all day. I have been here all day. I am reading "*When a Man's a Man*-" sure is a good book. Got a letter from Mother today. I am going to send her a letter tomorrow.

January 15, Tuesday

Sure has been cold and cloudy today- misting a little tonite. I hope it doesn't storm. I have been feeling punk¹¹ all day. I have a cold in my head- sure makes me feel bad. Bud worked all day. His folks were up this noon. I went home with them. They brought me home about 4 pm. I got one egg today.

¹⁰ Dale and Doyle, Bud's brothers, born minutes apart on Aug. 5, 1918

¹¹ apparently "punk" was a word used in the slang of 1935 in place of "sick."

January 16, Wednesday

Was sure cold today. Bud worked all day. I was up to Mrs. Fritzer's this pm. The folks were up to spend the evening. Mrs. Fritzer gave me the blocks to embroider a quilt today. We made candy.

January 17, Thursday

Kinda nice today. I washed this morning. Bud worked. I made a block for my quilt and read "*The Innocent Cheat*" this pm. Sure good. Am tired tonite. I went about 5:30 pm and walked home with Bud.

January 18, Friday

Cloud today- not very cold. Bud is working. I am ironing. Sure don't feel good today. I went to Pain's with Bud after hay today. It blew up cold and I about froze. Sure is cold tonite.

January 19, Saturday

Brrr! Sure is cold today. Gosh I almost froze. Bud worked today. I went up to Mrs. Fritzer's this pm- came home about 5. I finished "*Gambler's Throw*" today. Sure is cold.

January 20, Sunday

My gosh! I thought we'd freeze to death today- 15 below and a high wind. It snowed a little last nite. COLD! Oh Boy. Bud got home at 9:AM.¹² Doyle was up today. We sure had a time trying to keep warm. Hope it gets warmer soon. We moved our bed to the kitchen tonight. Brrr!¹³

January 21, Monday

My golly! Sure is cold yet today, but not so windy & clear. Bud worked all day. Mrs. F was here this AM. I ironed and mended today. I finished "*Grainstark*" and started *The Barrier* today.

January 22, Tuesday

¹² Apparently it was too cold to work that day.

¹³ Something that the younger generations may not be aware of is the fact that in those days, on the farm, your house was usually drafty, and keeping it heated meant "not freezing to death." Comfort wasn't necessarily part of the package.

Sure is¹⁴ a nice morning- not a bit cold. But it blew up cold and we about froze this pm. Bud is working. I went with him after hay this pm and helped him chore. Mrs. "F" went to Kansas City today. She got word her mother was sick. We got the funnies tonite¹⁵. Sure is cold. Oooh-----. Dale and Doyle were here at noon.

January 23, Wednesday

Not so very warm yet today. The sun is shining. Bud is working. I got a letter from home today. Bud brought up a load of wood this P.M. And he has hauled wood from down east here all afternoon. I went with him all afternoon. We got home at 6 pm.

January 24, Thursday

Nice today- kinda cold. Bud is working. I went down this pm and washed the separator. I washed the dishes and listened to the radio. I made some candy- got home about 3:30. Bud got home at 6 tonite.

¹⁴ Apparently Edith used the wrong form of the verb here. It should be "was."

¹⁵ This brings a little smile to my mind. When Bud and Edith were in their '80s they still just loved the funnies. When he couldn't see anymore she would read the funnies to him.

January 25, Friday

My it sure is a lovely day today. Bud is working. He went to Pain's after hay today so I went with him to do chores. The folks were up this pm, but we didn't get to see them. They left a note they might bring June up tomorrow. They brought some doilies. Irene Ward Carlton has a boy and Leita Edson Newson a boy Phillip Thomas Newson¹⁶.

January 26, Saturday

Cloudy today. June came up this AM. The folks all went to Norton today to take Grandpa Morse home. Edith, Fred, and the kids were here for dinner. I and June went down to Mrs. Fritzer's to wash the separator. The folks came up & took us to Edison this eve. Got home about 10 pm.

January 27, Sunday

Cloudy this morning. We drove the truck down to the folks & went out to Aunt Nettie's¹⁷ with them. We sure had a nice time. Dad fixed Bud's shoes & Mother cut his hair.

¹⁶ More friends of Edith from Kansas

¹⁷ Mrs. Nettie Oliver, a sister of Dode Morse, and therefore an aunt to Bud and his siblings.

January 28, Monday

Sure a lovely day today. Bud is working. I went down there this pm & washed the separator. I split a little wood this eve.

January 29, Tuesday

Sure is a fine day today. Bud is working. Dad and Doyle were up at noon. We got home at 6:30. I sent my shoes back today.

January 30, Wednesday

Nice again today. Bud is working. I washed this AM- got done about 11 AM. I went with Bud after hay and walked down to the folks this pm- got home about 4 pm.

January 31, Thursday

Sure a lovely day today. I ironed this morning. I got a letter from home today. Star got killed Tuesday nite. Bud is working. I walked down home this pm. They brought me home and stayed till evening. The men played cards.

February 1, 1935

Sure a nice day today. Bud is working. I went with him after hay today. We got home about 6 pm and he split some wood for me this evening.

February 2-

Saturday- Ground Hog Day

Sure a nice day today. I wrote a letter to Mildred & Mother and card to Wim today. Got a letter from Wim today. I went with Bud this pm. We went to town tonite. We went to the Chick Boys Show- "*Other People's Business.*" Dale and Doyle went with us. It sure was a keen show. We got home about 11:pm (no tail).

February 3, 1935 (Sun.)

A pretty nice day today. We made some candy this AM. But got home at 8:30. I patched his overalls. The folks came over after about 9:30. We were down there for dinner. We went out to Edison Lakes and to Oxford this p.m. June, Dean and I got a dog. HA! Dale and Doyle went hunting. They got 4 squirrels. I tasted some

squirrel today for the first time. We got home about 4 and I went with Bud to chores. Got home at 6:20 pm.

February 4, 1935 (Monday)

Sure a nice day today. Bud is working. I sure feel punk this morning. I went with Bud this pm. I got home about 4:30 pm. I read the funnies. I have been looking for my shoes back. Don't see why they didn't come. Hope I hear from them soon.

February 5- Tuesday

Cloudy and windy today. Not very cold but disagreeable. Bud is working. I got a letter from Bernice today. I went with Bud after alfalfa this pm- kinda cool. I got an egg today. We made candy tonite.

February 6- Wednesday

Cloudy, cold and sleeting today. Heavy ice on everything. Bud is working. Mrs. Fritzer got home today. Bud hauled alfalfa this pm. I read "*The Valley of Silent Men*" today. Pretty good. I tried to read "*The Black Bag*," but it was no good. Mrs. F went to Arapahoe this pm. Cold tonite.

February 7, 1935 (Thur.)

Cold today. Rather stormy. Mrs. F was up this am. I got a letter from Mother today¹⁸. I got my shoes. They sent me a new pair. Mrs. F brought me a table cover & edging for my apron from K.C.¹⁹. I went down home this pm. Just the twins were home. I went down to Mrs. F this eve. The folks were here till 7:30 last night.

February 8 (Fri.)

Cloudy today. Not very cold. I went with Bud this pm after alfalfa and to chore. Mrs. F gave us two grapefruit tonight. I am going to plant them.

February 9, Saturday

Cloudy today. Not very cold. Bud is working. Mrs. F was up a few minutes this morning. I went to Arapahoe with them this pm. I got Bud a shirt and me some thread. Bud was down home this pm. Dean was with him to do chores this eve. The folks were up this

¹⁸ Edith's mother, Mary Rapp. Who still lived at Norcatur, Kansas

¹⁹ Kansas City, Missouri

eve. Bud has a sick headache tonite. Mrs. F gave us some rolls & doughnuts for our suppers.

February 10- Sun.

Cloudy this am, but the sun is shining before noon. Dad came up & got us this morning. June, Dad, the twins, Bud and I went to Beaver. We got us a car- Chevrolet 1927 model- gave \$35. Quite a nice car. We ate dinner down home. We got home about 4:30. I went with Bud down to Fritzers tonite. We got a letter from Mildred and Loyal & the funnies today.

February 11, Monday

Lovely day today. Bud is working. I was home all day. I wrote a letter to Mother. A car salesman from Oxford was here. I read a book- *"The Railroad Operator,"* today, too.

February 12, Tuesday

Nice today. Sent mother's letter this am, & Valentines to the girls. Today is Lincoln's birthday. I was down to Mrs. F this pm. I finished all the work on my table cloth. We went down home this

evening. Mildred Shadlow & Harvey Harmonson were married February 9²⁰.

February 13- Wednesday

Cloudy this morning. Started raining about 7:30 and has rained almost all day today (I have been home all day). Sure made me mad. I wanted to wash today. I got a letter from Edith Oliver this morning. Bud is working. He hauled a load of wood up for me today.

February 14- Thursday

"Valentine's Day!" Sure is a disagreeable day today. I washed this am and hung my clothes out and I had to bring them in. They're still wet. We went down home this noon. I went down to Mrs. F about 3:00. We got home at 6:30. Hope it's nice Sunday.

BRUNO GETS CHAIR! Tuesday, March 18.²¹

February 15- Fri.

The nastiest day today. Snowing in flurries. The sun shines once in a while. Sure windy but not very cold. Bud is working. I baked bread today and got a catch in my back this am. My back has

²⁰ More friends from back in Kansas

²¹ Edith is here referring to the execution of Bruno Hauptmann, kidnapper and murdered of the Lindbergh baby.

felt like it's just about broke all day. 6:10 now- time for Bud to come. Dad & the mechanic came & got the car today.

February 16, Sat.

Not an extra nice day today. Mrs. F was here this AM. I got a card from Mother. I went down there this pm²². Mrs. F gave me some linoleum. We went to town tonite. We were down to Bud's folks this eve.

February 17- Sunday

Nice day today. We went down home today. Got there about 8:30. Sure had a nice time- we got home about 4. Wim & Paul were up. Fred went to Lincoln Friday. I went down to Edith's with Bud this evening.

February 18- Monday

Not an extra nice day today. Windy and not very cold. Bud is working. I stayed home all day alone- sure was lonesome. Felt bad all day. I didn't do much today- slept this pm.

²² Down to Norcatur

February 19- Tues.

It is a pretty nice day today- turned kinda cold this pm. I went with Bud this pm. He plowed all afternoon. Fritzers went to Orleans. We went down home tonite. I got the things ready to wash. I drove home. The folks were here at about 9:30. I got a turkey gobbler.

February 20, Wednesday

Nice today. Windy but clear. Bud is working. I went down to Mrs. Fritzers' this afternoon. We got home about pm. Not very cold this eve. I washed this morning.

February 21- Thursday

We have been married 10 months today. Nice day until noon. Windy and awful dirty this pm. I ironed this am. Bud didn't get home till 12:30 this noon. I slept this pm. I sure feel PUNK today (I made a prune upside down cake- sure tastes good).

February 22- Fri.

George Washington's birthday. I got my permanent a year ago today. No mail today. I sent a letter to Fred and to Wim. I went

with Bud this pm. We fixed fence. I baked bread today- sure good. I used Red Cloud Flour. Sure a nice day.

February 23- Saturday

A nice day today- warm. Bud is working. I got a letter from Bernice today. The folks were up this pm. June and Mother stayed here and Doyle, Dean and & Dad went Bud till about 3. June stayed with me all nite and we went with Bud till chore time.

February 24- Sunday

My gosh! I never saw such a day. The wind is blowing and dirty. Started blizzarding about 12- and sure is terrible. I never did see anything like it. We went out to Edith's for dinner- got home about 2 and went down to Fritzers'. We got home about 6- it sure is cold. George got a duck for us.

February 25, Monday

Sure cold and stormy today. Sure hated to see Bud got to work this morning. He came home at 10:30 for noon. We made candy and had roast duck for dinner. Sure cold tonite. Got a letter from home.

February 26- Tuesday

Cold today but nice. I wrote a letter to Mother and one to Mildred Morse today. I went down to Fritzers this pm. She gave me linen to make me 3 hankies. Cold tonite.

February 27- Wednesday

Nice today but cold. I sent a letter to Mother and to Mildred today. I stayed home all day- finished "*Keeper of the Bees*," and read "*The Harvester*" sure keen books. Dad was up a few minutes today.

February 28- Thursday

June's birthday. Bud is working. I was down to Fritzers this pm. The men sawed wood. Sure a nice day. We got home about 7 tonite- got a card from Wim.

March 1, Fr.

A new month. I started to work for Mrs. F this am. I worked from 9 to 10:30. I got home about 11. I wrote a card to Wim today. I went with Bud after alfalfa this pm. I helped him do chores- lovely day.

March 2- Saturday

Sure a nice day today. I went down to Mrs. F this am. We went to the sale and did our trading this pm.²³ Bud, Dale and I went to the Chick Boys play tonite- "*Beyond the Law*"- sure was good. The folks went to Norton today. I got June some beads for her birthday.

March 3, Sunday

Not very nice today- raining this eve. We ate dinner at 10:30 and went down home about 4 pm. Hail at 10 A.M. I am going with Bud tonite. We have had our supper- ate at 5:00. I got a letter from home today.

March 4, Monday

Nice spring day this morn. I went down to Fritzers this am. I sent for some hose and panties today. Wim and Paul were here for dinner. I cleaned up my house this pm and went down and helped Bud do chores. I came home with him.

March 5- Tuesday

²³ Trading- In those days a farm wife could buy her groceries by trading milk and eggs. Most people in the country did their weekly shopping without cash..

Not a bad day today- Spitting snow. I went down home this pm. Bud came up after me this evening. I sent a letter home today- went down to Fritzers this am.

March 6- Wed.

Sure a bad day. Snowed almost all nite & still snowing. I washed this am. I went down to Fritzers this pm- came home with Bud last night.

March 7- Thur.

Kinda nice today. I went dow to Fritzers this am. Mrs. F & I went to Arapahoe this pm. I got me a permanent. I broke the lamp chimney this am.²⁴ We went down home tonite.

March 8- Friday

Windy and dirty as------. Sure a terrible day. I was down to Fritzers this am. I stayed at home and read & slept all afternoon. Bud is working. Sure a terrible day to be out.

March 9- Saturday

Not a bad day today. I went to Fritzers this am. Rode home with Bud. He brought up a load of wood. I went with Bud this pm.

²⁴ Most people on the farm in the mid-30s still didn't have electricity, and were living as their grandparents had in the 19th century. This included things like kerosene lamps.

He plowed with the tractor. We went to Edison tonite. Got some spuds at Hill's.²⁵ We were at the folks for a few minutes.

March 10- Sunday

Nice day today. Kinda chilly. We went and took the folks down to Wim's. Got there about 9:30 am- got home about 5. We had a pretty good time- got awful tired. I went with Bud tonite. Mrs. Fritzer's son came Saturday nite. We saw him tonite.

March 11- Monday

Nice day today. I went down to Fritzers this am. The tractor ran over George this am- sure scared me. I went and phoned for the Dr. It didn't hurt him very bad- fractured one muscle. Bob Burns went home this am. We got us 4 pigeons this am.

March 12- Tuesday

My golly! I feel like the d_____ this morn. I am baking bread. It is a lovely day so far. Turned off kinda cold this pm. Had pigeon for dinner. I don't like it. I baked bread. I sure was sick²⁶ this pm and all nite.

²⁵ Hill's Store- the local market in Edison, Nebraska during that period of time

²⁶ I wonder why, after they had pigeon for supper.

March 13- Wednesday

Sure a nice day today. I sure have been sick all day. My stomach just hurts so bad. Bud went after corn this pm. I went down home. I didn't go up to Fritzers today. I got Bud's billfold today- sure pretty. Bud don't feel very good. The Dr. was to see George twice yesterday.

March 14- Thursday

Nice day today. I went down to Fs today. Don't feel very good yet. Got a letter from Mother & Wim today. Rose²⁷ is out to Fritzers. George isn't any better. Bud is working.

March 15- Fr.

Sure a nice day this am. But we had the awfulest dirt storm I ever saw this eve. We were just coming home as it struck. My it sure was terrible. Dirt-----! Damn dirt anyway. I went with Bud to chore.

March 16- Sat.

Blizzarding- not very cold. I cleaned 15 bushels of dirt out of the house this morning. We were just buried in dirt last night. I

²⁷ Mrs. Rose Stout, landlord to Bud's parents. She was described by one of Bud's brothers as a "stingy old lady." In most sharecropping situations the house came rent free along with the ground, but Rose made Dode and Alice made cash rent.

went down to Fritzers this pm & then helped Bud chore. We went to Edison tonite. We stopped home. They have a little lamb. Mother is sick with a gathering in her head. Doyle, Bud & I went to the Chick Boys- "*the Vulture*-" sure a good show- a mystery show.

March 17- St. Patrick Day

Sure an awful day today- dirt blowing from the south. We got dinner for Edith & Fred but they didn't come. Sure made me sore. We went down home awhile this pm and then I went with Bud to chore. We sure had a good time today.

March 18- Monday

Sure a nice day today- kinda windy. I went down to Fritzers this am- sent a card to Wim and one to Mother today. I went with Bud this pm.

March 19- Tuesday

I washed today. Nice day today- sure had a big wash. I went down to Fritzers this pm. I helped Bud chore. We went down home this eve. I sure am tired tonite. (Sent Mom a letter today)

March 20- Wednesday

Another DIRT storm today- sure the berries. I went down to Fritzers this am. We got dinner but Bud came on home. I went back this pm- helped Bud chore this eve. Sure feel punk tonite.

March 21- Thur.

Spring begins. We have been married 11 months today. Didn't do much today. Another windy day. I rested this pm. I went & helped Bud do the chores tonite.

March 22 Fri.

Windy & dirty today. Bud is working. We went to Edison this am after a man to start the truck- stopped down home. Mother has had four teeth pulled & is pretty sick. Edith was there washing. I went with Bud this pm.

March 23- Saturday

Not a bad day today. I went with Bud to plow this pm and I helped him chore. We went to Edison this eve- stopped down home a few minutes.

March 24- Sunday

I drove the car down and helped Bud chore. Got a letter from Mother today. Sure is nice. We went down home and went fishing. Uncle Ralph's were there²⁸. I helped Bud chore tonite.

March 25- Monday

Windy and dirty this am. I went down to Fritzers. I went with Bud this pm and helped him chore. Mrs. Fritzer came up about 1:30 AM and got Bud. They had a sick horse. He didn't get home till 3:20 pm.

March 26- Tues.

Bud didn't go to work till 7: AM. I baked bread today. Dirt blew this pm. I went down to Fritzers and helped Bud chore. The horse isn't much better.

March 27- Wed.

I was sick about all nite - sure feel punk this a.m. Sent Mom a letter today. I went down to Fritzers this am. They went to Arapahoe this am. She sent her teeth away. I slept this pm. Bud brought up a load of cobs²⁹ and I went back with & helped do chores. Cold this evening- rather windy all day.

²⁸ Ralph Oliver, who was married to Bud's aunt Nettie

²⁹ It was common in that part of Nebraska, many years ago, to heat your house with corn cobs,

March 28- Thursday

Not a bad day today. Chilly and a little windy. I went down to Fritzers this am. Went with Bud this pm. We cultivated the garden. I got me some violets and a little fir tree- sure cute. Both tired tonite.

March 29- Friday

Kinda windy today. Went with Bud this pm. We fixed fence. We started "*The Lone Ranger*" today.³⁰ The black horse was down tonite. We didn't get home until about 7:30 - a dirt storm struck about 7- sure awful. Wind sure blowing hard.

March 30- Sat.

My gosh! Dirt everywhere. The wind blowed a gale all nite and is it a mess! I went with Bud this pm. George was going so I came home. I went and helped him chore. Tonite we went to Edison- got our fishhooks and line. Went to "*Maggie & Jiggs in Society*"- sure punk.

March 31- Sunday.

³⁰ This brings back so many memories. When I knew Bud and Edith, years later, it was still one of their great pastimes to sit and read Western dime novels to each other.

Kinda nice today. Sure cold. We went to Edith's this am. For dinner. Stopped at the folks & got home about 5 pm. Lee's dad was buried today.³¹ Leland is awful bad sick too.³²

April 1- Monday

All Fool's Day. I washed. Cloudy & and little windy- kinda chilly. Went down to Fritzers' this pm. Was with Bud to chore this eve. We went down home this eve.- got home about 8:30.

April 2- Tues.

I got a letter from Mom today.

Ironed and baked bread today. Sure cold & windy. Sure had good bread. I used MMJ Flour. Sure good. I went down to Fritzers this pm. Came home about 4 pm. Bud got home at 7.

April 3- Wednesday

Nice day today- cold. I went down to Fritzers this morning. Stayed home this pm. Kate and Dan ran away.³³ Sent a letter to Grandpa Morse & a card to Wim today.

April 4- Thursday

³¹ Lee's dad- This was John Gregory, whose son Lee was married to Bertha Morse, Bud's sister.

³² Leland Krause- a nephew of Bud Morse

³³ Kate and Dan- Edith's cats

Cold today but nice. I stayed home this pm. Went down where Bud was about 3:30 pm. Helped him chore.

April 5- Friday

Nice today- kinda cold. I went with Bud this pm. We went down home this eve. I got some popcorn.

(Went to B.C. today) April 6- Sat.

Raining today- not very cold. I went down to Fritzers. Bud and George went to Arapahoe this am. Bud came home about 3 pm & stayed till 5:30. He finished chores about 6:30. We went to Oxford tonite- got home about 9:30. It snowed & rained till about noon.

(Not working this week) April 7- Sunday

Nice this morning- kinda cold. I sure feel punk this am. We went down home. I'm exposed to red measles from Bess'

letter.³⁴ We came home about 4. I went with Bud to chore. We read some in "*Lone Star Ranger*" tonite.

April 8- Monday

Windy and cold today. I stayed at home all day. Sure feel punk. I slept this pm. Bud got home about 7. I sent for my curtains today.

April 9- Tuesday

Cold and windy- rained a little this morning. Windy this pm. Dirt in the air. I went with Bud this pm. We picked over seed corn. We got home early tonite because it looked so stormy. George went to Edison after corn today.

April 10- Wednesday

Got card from Edith today. Cold and rainy today. My speckled hen is gone. Haven't been able to find her. I went with Bud this eve to chore. We went after spuds- got 10 lbs. down to Hill's. & my little green table- were down home a few minutes.

³⁴ Apparently John Gregory had died from red measles, and Leland Krausre, Bess' son, was sick with the same disease.

April 11- Thursday

Not very nice- cold, & the d_____ wind is blowing as usual. Got a letter from Grandpa Morse & from home. Got my curtains, too. I sure like them. Went down to Fritzers this pm. Sure feel bad tonight- sick headache.

April 12- Friday

Sure a swell day today. I cleaned my bedroom this am. I went with Bud this pm. I wrote to Mama & Grandpa. George has a new colt. We didn't get home till 8.

April 13- Saturday

Not extra nice today. Sure feel punk. The folks came up for dinner. Dad & Dale plowed our garden and planted us a few spuds. Dean stayed this pm. He got sick. I went & helped Bud chore. He has been cutting spuds. We went to the show tonite- "*Up Pop the Devil-*" sure good. I got my dishes tonite.

April 14- Sunday

Nice day today but awful dirty this pm. Edith's, Mother & us went to Bernice's.³⁵ We sure had a good time. Bernice gave me a towel & cloth. I helped Bud chore this eve.

April 15- Monday

Sure a lovely day today. I went down home this pm & got things to wash- went down with Bud in the evening.

April 16- Tuesday

Dirt storm-----DAMN! I washed but couldn't hang out my clothes. I slept all pm. Went Fritzer's this eve.

April 17- Wed.

Another DS (dirt storm). Edith & I cleaned my kitchen today. I took her back down home this eve. Went down to Fritzers this eve.

April 18- Thur.

Windy & dirty today. I painted the dining room & wash room today. Dale was here this pm. I went down to Fritzers this eve.

³⁵ Mrs. Bernice Laughry, Bud's sister, who lived at Almena, Kansas

April 19- Fri.

Lovely day today. I ironed all forenoon. Rested this pm. Bud got me a bunny. I went to help him chore. Got a letter from Mom & Grandpa Morse today.

April 20- Sat.

Kinda windy today. I went with Bud this p.m. We disked with the tractor- sure DIRTY. We went to Edison this eve and got our groceries. We were down home a while. June came home with us- stayed all nite.

April 21- Sunday

Our first anniversary. Lovely day. Dirty this pm. Bud's folks, my folks, Edith's, Wim & Paul were all here for dinner. We were down home awhile. I stayed & Doyle helped Bud chore. The folks and us all went to the Free Methodist Church this evening.³⁶

AMEN. Sure a noisy bunch. We got home about 10 pm.

³⁶ This was Easter Sunday.

April 22- Monday

Well we had the awfulest Dirt Storm last nite. It blew in here awful- worse than it ever did. Bud is sick today. He didn't work today. We went down home about noon. Bud has big knots on his neck & is all broke out. I think he has German measles. He sure is sick.

April 23- Tues.

We stayed down home all nite. Bud wasn't any better this morning. We came home about 9:30 am. Doyle came with us. He went with Bud this pm. They disked. Bud is still broke out some tonite.

April 24- Wed.

Not very nice. Kinda rainy. Doyle is still here. The folks were up a while this am. I helped them chore this eve- took Doyle home.

April 25- Thursday

Raining this am. Bud doesn't feel very good yet. I went down and helped him chore.³⁷ I got some me some violets. He set out onion sets this eve.

April 26- Friday

Cloudy & cold today. I finished my garden- onion plants & lettuce & radishes this am. Got a card from dad & an announcement of Hubert's graduation.³⁸ Mother has the measles. I went with Bud all pm. Dad, Dean, & Dale were up awhile this eve.

April 27- Saturday

Nice day today. I went with Bud this pm. We went to Edison this eve- didn't go to the show. Mother is sick. I did most of the chores tonite while George and Bud got the tractor.

April 28- Sunday

Kinda nice today- cold. We slept this am & went down home this pm. The boys went hunting. I went with Bud tonite to chore.

³⁷ This is an interesting insight into the times they were living in. He had German measles, which had killed John Gregory only weeks before, and was still working anyway.

³⁸ A relative of Edith's still living in Kansas

April 29- Monday

Such a lovely day today. I washed this pm. About 10:30 Mrs. Fritzer & I went over to the South Pasteur where the men are fixing fence. We took our dinner & ate with them. We found a lot of daisies. We stopped over at Earl W's,³⁹ Bud's folks, & Mr. Pearson's as we came home. I helped do chores. I had to turn my Easter bunny loose. He was about dead.

April 30- Tuesday

Last day [of April] & a DAMNED dirt storm. It's terrible. I was here alone all day. Sure got lonesome. Bud came home at noon. I didn't get to help chore this pm.

May 1- Wednesday

May Day! Another dirt storm. Sure the berries- Bud came home about 10:30. He went over South this pm. I was here alone. Washed this pm. I did the chores. (Queenie had 8 pups)

May 2- Thursday

³⁹ A neighbor there on the old river road west of Edison

Another dirt storm. Skippy killed my speckled hen last nite. I milled my bread and went down home all day. Bud took his dinner over south- sure cold this pm. Bud sure feels bad tonite. I had the chores all done.⁴⁰

May 3, Fri.

Cloudy & cold today. Bud didn't go over south. I was here all day- got a card from home. I went down & helped Bud do chores tonite. Bud killed Trixie.⁴¹

May 4- Saturday

Wim's birthday. Nice today. Kinda cold. The folks were up at noon. Dale stayed. I went with the boys this pm. Bud harrowed. Mother's two brothers Dow & Sherm⁴² came about 6 this eve. Cad, Dave, & Jim came too.⁴³ Us kids were down there till about 10.

⁴⁰ i.e. She did the chores for Bud, as he was sick.

⁴¹ Apparently Trixie was one of their dogs.

⁴² Dow and Sherman Stallsworth, uncles of Bud from Eckley, Colorado- former Old West outlaw types

⁴³ Sons of Dow and Sherm.

May 5- Saturday

Lovely day. We went to do chores at 15 to 5 this am. George's father died last nite. We went down home at 6- the folks left about 7. We went down to Bess' today. All went in our car- had a good time & stopped at Wim's & my folks. Vena⁴⁴ was taking the measles. We had a little car trouble- got home about 5:30.

May 6- Monday

Nice today. I went with Bud some this pm & to chore. Kate⁴⁵ has a colt. We went down home this eve. The folks went to Norton after Grandpa Morse. He was 80 years old today.

May 7- Tuesday

Nice day today- cloudy & chilly. Mr Fritzer's funeral today. I was with Bud part of the afternoon. I sent a letter to Mama & to Opal today.

⁴⁴ Edith's sister, later Mrs. Vena Morse (different family) of Gooding, Idaho

⁴⁵ George Fritzer's horse

May 8- Wed.

Raining this morning. Sure nice. I went down home. Bud went over south to list. He came home about 9 so I came home and went back with George & him this pm. We didn't get the chores done till 8:30 pm.

May 9- Thursday

Lovely today. Warm this pm. Bud went over south. They broke a wheel on the tractor so came home about 11:45 am. He plowed this pm. I was with him about all afternoon. I helped chore. We went down home and ate ice cream tonite.

Got a chain letter from Loyal.⁴⁶

May 10- Friday

Windy today. Another DIRT storm. Bud & George went over & listed this am. Came home at noon. Bud plowed this pm. I was with him this eve & to chore. We got home early because it looked so stormy.

May 11- Saturday

⁴⁶ Another cousin of Bud, brother and brother-in-law to Leroy & Mildred

Not very nice today. I was alone all day- about died. Washed this pm. Went down to Fritzers about 4:30. We went over to the river & it was out of its banks- sure awful. Edith & Fred & boys were up & stayed all nite. I had all the chores done. Bud sure was sick tonite. We went to Edison. Doyle has the measles.

May 12- Sunday

Mother's Day- Sure wanted to go home today but the girls have the red measles. Edith & Fred left this am. We went down home this pm. I helped Bud chore & we got the funnies.

May 13- Monday

Was alone all day today. Bud took his dinner over south. It rained about all day. Bud was sure wet tonite. They got home about 5:30. I helped Bud chore.

May 14- Tuesday

Cloudy & cold today. Hope it rains some more. Bud listed over by the river today. I did the chores and we went to the Operaetta⁴⁷ tonite. The car wouldn't go, so we had to walk home from the folks. Misting rain tonite.

⁴⁷ At the Edison schoolhouse.

May 15- Wednesday

Still misting rain this am. Don't seem to be very cold. Went with Bud this pm to list. Kinda cold. Helped him chore. We got home about 8 pm this eve. Sprinkling this eve.

May 16- Thursday

Cloudy this am. Chilly. Sent a letter to Mom today. Got my new shoes. Went down to Fritzlers this pm & helped Bud chore.

May 17- Friday

Was here alone till eve. Cloudy today & rainy. Helped Bud chore tonite- got a letter from Mama today.

May 18- Saturday

RAIN-----!! At last. Rained all day & all nite.⁴⁸ We went to town this am- was down home for dinner. I went with Bud this pm.

May 19- Sunday

Rained all nite and all day today. Sure nice. I expect it has rained about 3 inches. Us kids sure had a good time today- just

⁴⁸ Here it seems necessary to explain some of the weather patterns in that part of Nebraska. It is not uncommon to have Springs in which it will cloud up & mist & seem like it's raining, without really doing anything. Here Edith is talking about a real-live gusher after a Spring of false alarms. 1935 was one of the driest years on record.

being alone. Bud went to Edison with George this am. He got me a new True Story. We read some in it. I couldn't help Bud chore. It was raining.

May 20- Monday

Well, another lonesome old rainy day. Rained about all day. I was here alone all day. Bud brought me up a load of wood about 6 pm. I read and embroidered today. I sent the girls⁴⁹ a bracelet apiece today- Vena a red one and Miljie a blue one.

May 21- Tuesday

Was here again today. Bud & George took 60 head of cattle over south to pasture. Bud didn't come for dinner⁵⁰ till 4:30. I went with him down there. He was sick and had to come home about 6. Sick headache & stomach. I baked bread [today].

May 22- Wed.

Nice today- chilly. Rained a shower this pm. Bud & George went to pull the pump- didn't get home till 1:30. I went with Bud and stayed at Fritzers all pm. I helped him chore.

⁴⁹ I.e. Edith's sisters in Kansas

⁵⁰ If 4:30 seems early, rather than late for dinner, allow me to explain. In traditional Nebraska thinking, dinner is the noon meal and supper is the evening meal. He was late for lunch.

May 23- Thursday

Mildred's birthday. Cold but nice today. I planted some beans and radishes. Bud plowed this am. I went down to Fritzer's this pm. Bud set out some tomatoe plants. I helped chore.

May 24- Friday

Not very nice today- cloudy & kinda rainy. Got a big letter from the folks today. Bud harrowed and plowed today. I helped chore this eve. Doyle was up at noon.

May 25- Saturday

Not very cold but cloudy. Bud harrowed this am. Listed this pm. I rode on the tractor with him all pm. Helped chore. We went to Edison & got our groceries- stopped a while at the folks.

May 26- Sunday

Kinda nice today. We went down home this am. Went out to Nettie's this pm. Grandpa Morse came home with us. Dad (Dode) went to Eckley, Colorado tonite on the train after Aunt Gertie.⁵¹

⁵¹ An older sister of Dode's, and therefore an aunt to Bud

May 27- Monday

Cloudy today, but kinda nice. I sure did a big washing.

Rested this pm & went down to help Bud chore.

May 28- Tuesday

Kinda cloudy today. Rained this am. I set out some tomato plants and planted some cucumbers this pm. George told Bud he wouldn't need him any more after this week. We came down home. Decided to move tomorrow. The river is all out of its banks.

May 29- Wednesday

Raining this am. We moved to one of Mrs. Stout's houses in Edison this am. Straightened up a little this pm. Bud is about sick with a headache. Dean was up here this pm. The river is still way out.

Thursday, May 30

Today is Beverly's⁵² birthday. I straightened up my house. Bud rested and we walked down home. River has gone down some.

⁵² Beverly Gregory, a niece of Bud, the granddaughter of John Gregory who died with measles

Friday, May 31

Bud went up town. Nice today- cloudy around. We went down home this pm. We walked down to see the river tonite- still coming up. We rode around with Bill Fritzer's hired hand and his wife- Got home about 10 pm.

Sat., June 1, 1935- Memorial Day Flood

Flood- they came and woke us up at 1 AM. The whole town is under water- running in houses & basements. People drowned & missing between Oxford & Arapahoe. We went up on the hill to Jack Bouler's & stayed all nite. Streets running full. We came back to Edison about 6 AM- went out to Ed White's north of Edison and stayed till about 1 pm. The water ruined Mother's rug & run in the house. We stayed down home all nite. We stayed down home all nite. We went back up there about 7pm but came home about 10 pm. River sure high- more people drowned & missing. We were the last to get out of town last nite. Water never came in our house.

Sunday, June 2, 1935

Well, quite a sight- water running awful yet. We went out on the hill again tonite. The folks stayed all nite. Us kids come back home.

Monday, June 3, 1935

Was down home today. Helped take care of some meat. Nice day today. Quite calm after the storm. June & I went down to the river this eve.

Thursday, June 4

Kinda cold today. I was down home all day. Bud and Stub Evans went to Cambridge today to look for work⁵³- didn't get home till late- about 8:30.

Wednesday, June 5.

Got a letter from Opal today We slept about all forenoon- went to Oxford this pm with the folks. June & mother went to a double funeral- was down home for supper.

⁵³ During that period of time many out of work farm laborers went over to Cambridge and other towns offering their services in the cleanup effort.

Wednesday, June 26

Mother's birthday- went to Oxford this afternoon with the folks- vaccinated at noon- last shot for typhoid. Bud & Dad worked from 4 to 8 pm up to Fritzers. We had ice cream & cake tonite down home. Got mother a comb.

Thursday, June 27

Bud worked again this eve from 4 to 6. A storm came up this evening, so they had to quit.⁵⁴ I was down home

Friday

Bud worked from 3 to 8:30 moving Fritzer's house⁵⁵- didn't get home until 9. I was down home & helped Mother with her rug.

⁵⁴ They were probably out coming the riverbank for bodies. Some people were never found.

⁵⁵ After the flood George Fritzer's house was left hangin halfway out in midair- ten feet above the river, and thus had to be moved to a safe location

POSTSCRIPT

Dode and Alice Morse had been living on the Sam Sweley farm north of Norton, Kansas for seven years when their son Bud married Edith Rapp. They were good friends of Edith's parents- enjoyed playing cards together.

Bud and Edith started dating one day when her wagon got stuck in the mud at the bottom of the Sweley Hill. Bud rushed in like a knight in shining armor to help a fair maiden get out of a jam. Everyone said that they were wrong for each other- that it would never last. They proved everyone wrong, however.

By the summer of 1934 Dode Morse had lost his entire crop seven years in a row. They were feeding the kids dry bread and fat meat.

He decided to try his luck someplace else.

Someone told him about good bottomland near Edison, Nebraska, and so in December of 1934 he moved his whole family up there- hoping for a better life.

One of the things that really strikes me in reading Edith Morse's diary is all of her hopes, as she painted her little house, planted a garden, and tried to make, and then the way that her hopes were dashed when George Fritzer was forced to let Bud go. That little house wasn't really hers, but she had allowed herself to think it was.

Dode's hopes were dashed, as well. When that flood came in it washed millions of tons of silt down the river, washed away the topsoil, and moved the river a quarter of a mile south. When Dode returned to his rented farm on the Stout place he found the water in the barn up to the horses' bellies. They didn't grow anything that summer, except a few watermelons on the second bottom. Dode moved his wife and children ten miles away, to a farm at Hollinger, Nebraska. They moved in 23 degree below zero weather in February of 1936. All of their hopes of greater prosperity at Edison had been washed away (literally) very quickly.

Bud found work with the railroad in July of 1935, and was gone for a good part of the summer. That, in the end, didn't work out either.

One of the last entries in Edith Morse's diary was written April 21, 1936: Well, another year has rolled around. We are both OK. We are at Bud's folks.

Bud and Edith Morse moved to Colorado to find work in April, 1937- on a dairy farm at Hudson, Colorado. Eventually they did come back to Nebraska and tried farming on their own for a few years.

In the Summer of 1952 Bud Morse grew the best wheat crop that he had ever had. They were really banking on that. Then, right before harvest, at the beginning of July, an early morning hailstorm came. Bud's son Joe couldn't remember anything about the storm except running for the cellar. When they came out that golden wheat was smashed into the ground- nothing left except stubble. So Bud and Edith sold their farm, loaded everything in a trailer, pulled behind an old '46 Ford, and moved to Washington State, where they lived out the rest of their lives. For a while in the 1950s they ran a café in Yakima, Washington, as her folks had done in Norcatur, Kansas. For the rest of his working life Bud was in construction- gone for long periods of time on the job.

Bud and Edith Morse are representative of thousands of poor Midwesterners who weren't able to make it, and had to leave home during the 1930s, '40s, and early '1950s. As an old man Bud would cry when he thought of his friends back in Nebraska.

Edith often wrote to me, "We sure loved it back there- wish we hadn't ever left."

APPENDIX
THE FLOOD OF 1935

The big flood was the decisive, determining moment in the history of the town of Edison. An old man I used to know out in Central Nebraska told me that Edison was a prosperous town before the flood, but that it never recovered afterwards. The top soil which made it such a fertile valley was all washed away. Then the cottonwoods grew up on the banks of the new river, and now many of them aren't even there anymore. Edison just kind of drifted away after the events of Memorial Day weekend, 1935. Except for the bank, and a café that is sometimes open, sometimes not, all of the businesses in Edison are closed. The school-house, where the Chick Boys played, is still there, but it's not used for anything.

The Indians always told the settlers about the rampage that the river went on, about once every hundred years, but no one listened to them. That river is normally about 400 yards across, and maybe six feet deep at most. I've been wading in there at times when it is so shallow that the fish become trapped in the holes. The night of the flood there were 112 people killed up and down the valley, from further east in Nebraska, all the way out to Eastern

Colorado. Part of the reason that so many people were killed, was that nobody believed the warnings.

On Memorial Day weekend of 1935 there was a massive cloud burst in Eastern Colorado. Something like 22 inches of rain fell in one day. A series of Earthen damns on the tributaries of the Republican River burst, sending an eight foot high wall of water raging down the valley (some people said 12 feet).

Stories were told of people who got on the roofs of their houses, thought they were safe, and then were drowned when their houses hit debris in the river and broke up. One man stood on a hill and watched as the water slowly rose around a friend's house, and then BAM! That eight foot wall came crashing into the house, and it was gone.

Bud's brother Dale was still a boy at home the night of May 31-June 1 1935, and he remembered when his folks got out, more than an hour before Bud and Edith did.

That night the authorities sent out search parties, knocking on people's doors down along that old river road, telling them to get out. The headlights were out on Dode's car, and so he set Dale

and Doyle on the hood with flashlights as they drove up the hill. He and Alice and June and Dean rode inside the car.

They got up on the cemetery hill, where just about everyone in town went for refuge, and then Dode realized that Bud and Edith weren't there. So he sent a search party after them. As she wrote, they were the last people in town. She and Bud had heard the town bells ringing, but as it was Memorial Day weekend they thought it was some patriotic thing, so they went back to sleep. The water was almost under the door of the house when the knock came. Bud tried to start the car, but it was too deep in water. So they ambled up the hill through peoples yards, pigsties, etc.

That night everybody stayed at the Bouler Farm. All of the Morses except Dale slept in the front yard. Dale crashed in the haymow of the barn.

The noise of that wall of water was so loud that it could be heard ten miles away, down by Beaver City. Donald Oliver, whose parents' farm was back in the hills, said that it sounded like there was a tornado down there. By the time it was over the 400 yard

wife stream had become a four mile wide river running from one bluff to the other.

All of the rental houses on that old river road are gone now.

Edith wrote on the
back: "Buy 1 cup at the looks of this.
Better load up + come on back"



Bud + Edith Morse +
daughter, just before
(April, 1937)
leaving Nebraska
shortly after this diary
was written



George Fritz's home,
~~the morning~~ after the
flood waters had
receded



Bud + Edith Morse
at the time the
diary was written.



Bud Morse



The house on Bud Morse's
place, where they lived just
before leaving for Washington State