

RABBIT DRIVES: Taken from the Kinsley Library Oral Histories

Kenny Dupree: Born 1926

Kenny: Then we had jackrabbits. We had jackrabbits by the millions. I went to one jackrabbit...

Joan: Was that because they had eradicated the coyotes?

Kenny: Yes, but they paid a dollar apiece for coyote ears at the courthouse. But the jackrabbits got so thick they had jackrabbit drives. About every ten foot a person went around for three or four sections and drove them into a fence. They sold them to get rid of them.

Joan: Did you eat jackrabbit too at that time?

Kenny: We ate cottontail. We ate lots of them, and we ate young jacks. Sure, everyone did.

Joan: Now were you involved in those, or were you too young?

Kenny: I went on a jackrabbit drive. I went up to Sts. Peter and Paul (*Catholic Church*) one morning.

Joan: Did they kill them by hitting them?

Kenny: Sure. Knock them in the head, any way to kill them. It was quite a sight.

Joan: I've never asked this question, but was it treated like a festival at all? With a dinner? Or as it...

Kenny: It was a big get-together. No, we didn't have no dinner at the end, but everyone from town came out, and the farmers all came out, and they would get rid of the rabbits. No, I never will forget that.

Joan: Well, we have some pictures of that here at the library that show all the rabbits.

Keith King: 1928-1914

Keith: I remember Rabbit Drives. I went on a few of them. It turned my stomach. I didn't mind driving them, but when they got them in them pens and started clubbing them, it was too much for me. But they had to do it. They started down at the Parallel and ended up at my Uncle Warren Duggar's pasture there.

Joan: And they were just eating the crops and everything?

Keith: Yes, when I remember they were eating what little there was green.

Joan: There just got to be too many of them?

Keith: Well, I guess the government thought so.

Joan: What did they do with the rabbits after they killed them?

Keith: Shipped them all back to around New York and Boston and back in there.

Marcile King: Born 1928

King: I can remember them hanging wet sheets up to the window because we were the house clear on the far end of Belpre. We lived next to a field. They would hang wet sheets up over the windows to help keep the dirt out. That's about the only thing I remember. I don't know whether this was Depression years or not, but they would put up snow fences and they would have rabbit hunts or whatever. They would get them in this big fence and club them. That took place just next to us.

Interviewer: And you would watch that?

King: Yes.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel? Watching all those bunnies?

King: I can't remember any feelings; I just remember that they did it.

Interviewer: Did you eat rabbit then?

King: Yes. We ate everything because my four brothers, they all hunted. So we had rabbit; we had squirrel; we had frogs; we had turtles...

Welton Parker: 1923-2011

Welton: Well, I was young, but I can remember the clouds coming up, and the dust would be so thick you couldn't hardly see. Couldn't hardly breathe, but it was nothing like it was out west; I'm sure, at Syracuse and Ulysses and Johnson. It would get so bad that sometimes I think they just dismissed school because it was so bad they couldn't see to drive. I can remember back in the '30s too, we had so many jackrabbits we had jackrabbit drives and stuff. You'd take about six square sections and then scatter out and beat on pans or something to kind of scare them out until they got up closer. Then they had clubs and they'd try to get by you. The clubs got a little dangerous sometimes. You had to watch that somebody didn't get a little careless with a club.

Joan: Were there so many jackrabbits because the natural predators had been eliminated? The coyote and wolf or whatever? Or had there always been jackrabbits?

Welton: Well, I don't know. Back then there were just jackrabbits. I think in that one book, the Wichita Northwestern book (*railroad*), that tells about a fellow riding from Zook to Belpre, counted in the 90's some, just on one side of the track he was riding on. So there was...they destroyed an awful lot of stuff. Then it was dry back then, it wasn't growing too good, of course, they didn't have fertilizer or anything.

Robert Stach: 1925-2011

I do remember having the rabbit drives, when the rabbits got to be so terribly horrible. I never could stand to even think about going on one of those, but they used to shoot rabbit; we ate a lot of rabbit because it was a handy thing.