

Ken Burns Tells Story of Environmental Catastrophe in “The Dust Bowl” on NET Television

The environmental catastrophe that destroyed Great Plains farmland and tested families is chronicled in the two-part Ken Burns’ series, “The Dust Bowl,” airing Tuesday, April 23, at 7 p.m. CT and Thursday, April 25, at 8 p.m. CT on NET1/HD.

During the 1930s, prairies transformed into deserts and Mother Nature unleashed a pattern of massive, deadly dust storms that for many seemed to herald the end of the world. It was the worst manmade ecological disaster in American history. “The Dust Bowl” tells the story of the farming boom in the early 20th century that transformed the grassland of the southern plains into prosperous wheat fields. But, once a drought hit in 1931, winds began picking up soil from the open fields and grew into dust storms of biblical proportions.

Each year for nearly a decade, the storms grew more ferocious and more frequent, sweeping up millions of tons of earth, killing crops and livestock, threatening to turn the southern plains into a Sahara, even spreading the dust clear across the country. Children developed fatal “dust pneumonia,” business owners unable to cope with the financial ruin committed suicide and thousands of desperate Americans were torn from their homes and forced on the road in an exodus unlike anything the United States had ever seen.

“The Dust Bowl” is also a story of heroic perseverance against enormous odds: families finding ways to survive and hold on to their land, national and local government programs that kept hungry families afloat and a partnership between government agencies and farmers to develop new farming and conservation methods.

Burns’ two-part series chronicles this critical moment in American history with compelling testimony from a dwindling group of survivors. It is also filled with seldom-seen movie footage, previously unpublished photographs, the songs of Woody Guthrie and the observations of two remarkable women who left behind eloquent written accounts.

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Release written by: Kim Rogers, 402-472-9333, ext. 512, or e-mail krogers@netNebraska.org