

The Plow that Broke the Plains - Script

I: PROLOGUE

This is a record of land...
of soil, rather than people
a story of the Great Plains:
the 400,000,000 acres of wind-swept grass lands that spread up
from the Texas Panhandle to Canada...
A high, treeless continent,
without rivers, without streams...
A country of high winds, and sun...
and of little rain...
By 1880 we had cleared
the Indian, and with
him, the buffalo, from
the Great Plains, and
established the last frontier...
A half million square
miles of natural range...
This is a picturization of
what we did with it.

II: GRASS

The grass lands...
a treeless wind-swept continent of grass
stretching from the broad Texan Panhandle
up through mountain reaches of Montana
and to the Canadian Border.
A country of high winds and sun...
High winds and sun...
without rivers, without streams,
with little rain.

III. CATTLE

First came the cattle...
an unfenced range a thousand miles long...
an uncharted ocean of grass,
the southern range for winter grazing
and the mountain plateaus for summer.

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It was a cattleman's Paradise.
Up from the Rio Grande...
in from the rolling prairies...
down clear from the eastern highlands
the cattle rolled into the old buffalo range.
Fortunes in beef.
For a decade the world discovered the grass lands
and poured cattle into the plains.
The railroads brought markets to the edge of the plains...
land syndicates sprang up overnight
and the cattle rolled into the West.

IV: HOMESTEADERS

The railroad brought the world into the plains
...new populations, new needs crowded
the last frontier.
Once again the plowman followed the herder
and the pioneer came to the plains.
Make way for the plowman!
The first fence.
Progress came to the plain.
Two hundred miles from water,
two hundred miles from home,
but the land is new.
High winds and sun...
High winds and sun...
a country without rivers and with little rain.
Settler, plow at your peril!

V: WARNING

Many were disappointed.
The rains failed...
and the sun baked the light soil.
Many left...they fought the loneliness
and the hard years...
But the rains failed them.

VI: WAR

Many were disappointed, but the great day
was coming...the day of new causes-
new profits-new hopes.

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"Wheat will win the war!"

"Plant wheat..."

"Plant the cattle ranges..."

"Plant your vacant lots...plant wheat!"

Wheat for the boys over there!"

"Wheat for the Allies!"

"Wheat for the British!"

"Wheat for the Belgians!"

"Wheat for the French!"

"Wheat at any price..."

"Wheat will win the war!"

VII: BLUES

Then we reaped the golden harvest...

then we really plowed the plains...

we fumed under millions of new acres for war wheat.

We had the man-power...

we invented new machinery...

the world was our market.

By 1933 the old grass lands had become the new

wheat lands...a hundred million acres...

two hundred million acres...

More wheat!

VIII: DROUGHT

A country without rivers...without streams...

with little rain...

Once again the rains held off and the

sun baked the earth.

This time no grass held moisture against the

winds and the sun...this time millions of acres

of plowed land lay open to the sun.

IX: DEVASTATION

Baked out-blown out-and broke!

Year in, year out, uncomplaining they fought

the worst drought in history...

their stock choked to death on the barren land...

their homes were nightmares of swirling dust

night and day.

Many went ahead of it-but many stayed

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until stock, machinery, homes, credit, food,
and even hope were gone.
On to the West!
Once again they headed for the setting sun
Once again they headed West.
Last year in every summer month
50,000 people left
the Great Plains and hit the highways
for the Pacific Coast, the last border.
Blown out-baked out-and broke. . .
nothing to stay for. . .nothing to hope for . . .
homeless, penniless and bewildered they joined
the great army of the highways.
No place to go . . . and no place to stop.
Nothing to eat . . . nothing to do . . .
their homes on four wheels . . . their work a
desperate gamble for a day's labor in the fields
along the highways. . .
The price of a sack of beans or a tank of gas
All they ask is a chance to start over
And a chance for their children to eat.
to have medical care, to have homes again.
50,000 a month!
The sun and winds wrote the most tragic chapter
in American agriculture.