Southwest dust storms produce much electrical energy

According to this article, the dust storms that swept through Kansas during the "dirty thirties" generated high levels of electricity. Fred Ellis, a Western Union telegraph operator who was interviewed for this article, contributes this rise in electricity to the friction caused by dust particles swirling together into dust storms.

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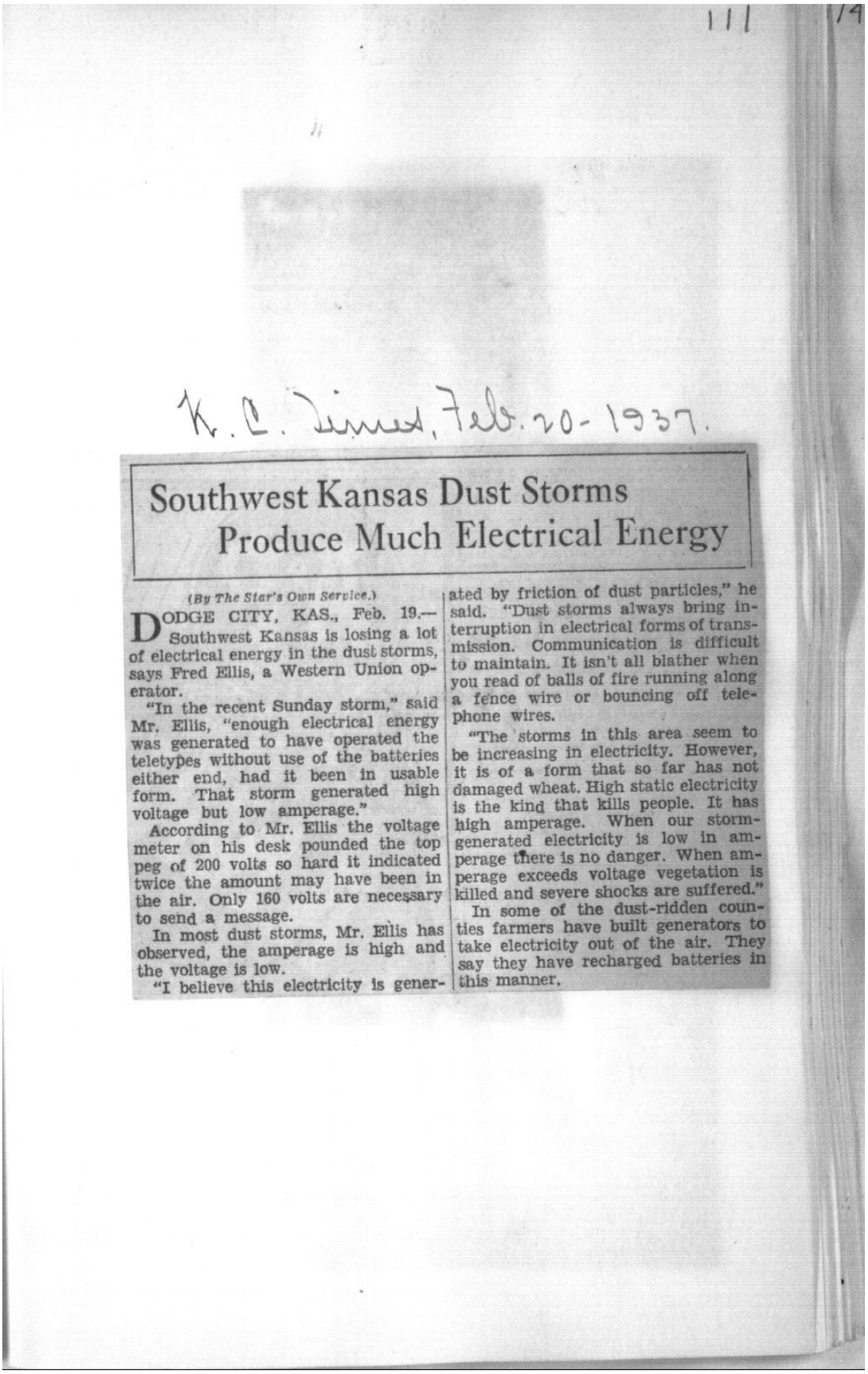

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K. C. Times, Feb. 20-1937.

Southwest Kansas Dust Storms Produce Much Electrical Energy

(By The Star's Own Service.)

DODGE CITY, KAS., Feb. 19.—Southwest Kansas is losing a lot of electrical energy in the dust storms, says Fred Ellis, a Western Union operator.

"In the recent Sunday storm," said Mr. Ellis, "enough electrical energy was generated to have operated the teletypes without use of the batteries either end, had it been in usable form. That storm generated high voltage but low amperage."

According to Mr. Ellis the voltage meter on his desk pounded the top peg of 200 volts so hard it indicated twice the amount may have been in the air. Only 160 volts are necessary to send a message.

In most dust storms, Mr. Ellis has observed, the amperage is high and the voltage is low.

"I believe this electricity is generated by friction of dust particles," he said. "Dust storms always bring interruption in electrical forms of transmission. Communication is difficult to maintain. It isn't all blather when you read of balls of fire running along a fence wire or bouncing off telephone wires.

"The storms in this area seem to be increasing in electricity. However, it is of a form that so far has not damaged wheat. High static electricity is the kind that kills people. It has high amperage. When our storm-generated electricity is low in amperage there is no danger. When amperage exceeds voltage vegetation is killed and severe shocks are suffered."

In some of the dust-ridden counties farmers have built generators to take electricity out of the air. They say they have recharged batteries in this manner.