This is an Oral History. I am Mike Harper. Today, April 3, 1974, I am going to interview Bro. Pieper. The general topic of discussion will be the Depression in Idaho.

Albert A. Pieper: Hamburger 10 cents, sometimes 21 pounds for 15 cents, and milk something like 5 cents a quart, and potatoes, a whole ton of potatoes for 2 cents.

Michael Harper: You were born in Idaho at this time, 1929-30?

AP: I was born in Idaho, and I was here in 1929-31. I was on my mission to Germany till ’34. But to give you an idea on how things were: I worked for a man while I was going to high school during the summer months. He was supposed to pay me $100 a month. He ran a dairy farm, a great food supply. I was still working when I was called on a mission the fall of ’31, and he still owed me $250 which he wouldn’t or couldn’t pay me because he didn’t have the money. So when I was called back from my mission, I went to see if I could get back some of the money cause I wanted to go to school in ’34, but he still didn’t have any money. But he did have some cows down pasture and said he’d give me some cattle if I’d settle for that. So I went down and picked out five head of cattle between six months and one year old. So, I took them, and they weren’t too fat, so I borrowed $30 from my Dad and fed them for about six weeks… grain and hay. Then sold them for $100-125 for five head. And today a good day-old calf costs you that much.

Course in town there was quite a few unemployed people. We had what we called the WPA, The Public Works Administration. They paid you $40 a month to work for them. On a number of occasions they started projects that were built here. There’s a suburban school out there in Burton or wherever the need existed or that the community would want done. I can’t think of many buildings they built here. It was sort of a laugh cause the people who worked for it were “shovel workers;” they didn’t work too hard.

That gives you an idea of what wages were like because this was all these families would have to live on- $50 a month.

MH: Did you live on a farm at the time or work on one?

AP: No, I didn’t live on a farm. I worked outside the edge of town. My folks had a place two acres from across the creek. Never did work on a farm.

MH: Did you ever hungry or do without certain things?

AP: Well, I suppose we went without many things, but I didn’t think we were bad off, that deprived. Almost everybody was in the same boat. Like I say, we probably didn’t suffer like your big cities, where they have to ship food in. Everybody was in the same boat even those with jobs. We weren’t making much more than the WPA workers.

When I came home from my mission in ’34, I got a summer job uptown for $54 a month. My dad worked in construction, and there was no construction work, so he took a job as
janitor at the tabernacle for $50 a month. So that gives you an idea what the wages were like. There was a few people who had good jobs. Those who worked for the government, like postal workers and people like that had considerably higher wages.

MH: Any areas of Idaho hit harder than others?

AP: Well, I couldn’t tell you that. There was poverty everywhere. Could have been in the north of Idaho where there’s a lot of mining. I imagine the mining was hit hardest and had [the] highest unemployment. Southern Idaho was mainly agricultural.

MH: Did you hear any stories concerning the plight of the poor in the big cities resulting from the depression?

AP: Well, Roosevelt got into office by blaming Hoover for it. The Republican Party didn’t get on top of things as fast as they should have done, although some of the programs Roosevelt gets credit for were already in the making by the Republican Administration. Pigs were killed and buried and the government would pay so much. There was little else to do with them.

MH: After you got back from your mission, did you ever work on something like the WPA?

AP: I went to Ricks College here. During the summer of ’35, I went hitch-hiking to Washington, DC and worked as a typist in the WPA office on projects gaining approval. Typed up copies on each project… on several compartments. A town could make a project out of anything. A project that had a lot of towns did was what we called “Roosevelt Summer Homes” - outhouses. That’s the closest I got to working in the WPA, but it was quite interesting. You got a first-hand look at the magnitude of paperwork that goes on back there. A crew of workers of which I was one, once spent three weeks just mailing envelopes.

MH: Did you notice any difference before you went on your mission and after?

AP: After, it was getting better, but I was on my mission during the worst part. It had quite an effect on the church missionary program. At first the German Mission had 167 missionaries, but later because of the expense of the mission, it was reduced to 36.

MH: What did you personally feel about Roosevelt?

AP: Well, he did what he had to do. He certainly helped the situation with all his programs and such. Well, I don’t know whether that helped you.

MH: It did.