

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Alma Greenhalgh - Life during the Depression

By Alma Greenhalgh

March 20, 1976

Box 1 Folder 45

Oral Interview conducted by Bill Briggs

Transcribed by Maren Miyasaki October 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

BB: This is an oral history. I am Bill Briggs. Today is March 20, 1976. I am going to interview Alma Greenhalgh. The general topic will be the Depression. Where were you born Mr. Alma Greenhalgh?

AG: Safford, Arizona.

BB: How long have you lived in Arizona?

AG: We lived there about six years.

BB: Where were your parents born?

AG: Willard, Utah [It's the cradle of the whole valley].

BB: What was your occupation?

AG: Farmer.

BB: Could you give me a brief history of your grandparents?

AG: Peter Greenhalgh Senior, my grandfather came from [Manchester] England. He emigrated here after he joined the church (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint), and he married Sarah Healed [of England], and I think she was also from Manchester, England. They emigrated here—I can't tell you the year—maybe you have that in the history. As usual, his parents disowned him and cast him out because he joined the church. That's how Satan had a hold of people like that. It wasn't any crime at all. I'll tell you like his father told him, "If you join that church you'll never get a penny or inheritance." He was so headstrong he just told the old man he didn't want a penny of it. "I've joined the church and I'm going to stay with it." He joined the church and came out here to Utah with the pioneers, and they settled in, I think Willard, Utah. He was good at music. He was a music teacher. He had a choir of his own [there] at one time, as well as directing the ward choir there in Utah, and he almost lost it. Later on when these old people died, they must have accumulated considerable means because they were considered wealthy, and they sent word to this old man [that] he was left some inheritance there. The old man never even answered. He said, "I made them a promise I never would want any of it, and I am going to stay with it." That fortune I guess is still there and waiting. Where it went nobody knows. It is probably in Manchester, England. We have been unable to find out just how much money there was. He used to run the silk factory there, and silk was the thing in those days. I've had a lot of people claim they were related when they were not, even though they had the last name of Greenhalgh. There was a man who came here forty years ago to St. Anthony and set up a garage, and he ran his business there for a while. When I got a chance to talk to him one day he claimed to be a cousin of mine. He couldn't make me understand how he came to be a cousin because he mentioned a lot of names that I didn't know anything about. When he got this Palmer boy, this Glen Palmer, from Ashton in with him and all at once he collected all the debts that he could collect and left the Palmer boy holding the bag. When they came to ask they would say, "Is your name Greenhalgh? Any relation to that Greenhalgh in St. Anthony?" [I would say]

“Not by a long sight.” “Any relation to those Greenhalghs around Wilford?” “Yes, you bet.” We had a good reputation and he didn’t. It was quite comical.

BB: What about your boyhood?

AG: I came into this country. I had a birthday when I was in the national park on the road here. They decided by the way, not to stay out there in Bighorn Basin, Wyoming because there wasn’t anything there, only sagebrush and Indians. There was no water for the land. It was beautiful land, but it was just prairie, no trees. And about three years (actually four years) ago we went out there to see that country and came to the conclusion that it wasn’t for father because there wasn’t anything there. He had been a pioneer all his life. That country there now is comparable to the Snake River Valley. It is one of the most beautiful pieces of country that I have ever seen. There is big wide farms there, and the funny part of it is that their season is at least thirty days longer than ours is here. They can grow corn, and they can grow these beans by the tens of thousands of acres. They still irrigate there by surface irrigation. I never saw one sprinkler while I was there. I was three years old, and I was in the Park and I remember the day of my birthday. I rode in the spring seat on the top of [the] wagon bed because that was the only way we had to travel in those days. My mother and my second cousin, Zella Welford, were leading me down from an old high house upon a hill and it was a mine. I stubbed my toe and fell down into a prickly pear bed and picked up a bright shiny dime from that prickly pear bed. Only being a three year old and not knowing the value of money, I thought I really had something there. I give it to Dad to put in his pocket purse so I wouldn’t lose it, and about every two or three miles I had to get it out and look at it.

When we got here Mother had a brother here. They lived right here in these trees in a little log hut. I didn’t do much of anything until I was eight years old. There was a law then that wouldn’t allow a person to go to school until he was eight. I was past eight when I went to school. My birthday is the second day in August, and school started in the latter part of September and that’s when I started. I can remember the teacher I had and some of the things that happened. And I grew up here, later on in my life when I was about twenty-one, I attended the Ray Donovan Tractor School in Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri. All you to do was cross the river and you were in Missouri. I stayed there three months in that school and I graduated from mechanical school. I was drafted while I was attending school during the First World War. They wanted to send me directly to Camp Princeton a hundred miles from Kansas City. But I didn’t want to go there because I didn’t like the crowd. I asked permission, my brother was with me. I passed the A-1 examination for that army. My brother had inflammatory rheumatism and they would not accept him in the army. We came home around the first of March. I remember getting off the train in this little berg of St. Anthony, and I said to him look at the good population here. Did he leave anything for me and then he went to Kansas City. There were skyscrapers and many people were occupying at that time. Do you know what? If I had money to ride home from the fair, [I’d turn right around and go back]. Did you join the army back there?” “No sir on second thought I wouldn’t push you into it.”

They drafted me into the army and every draft that came up during the summer, it was once a month, they put my name in it. They [would] send me back. They wouldn’t take me. I don’t know why, I couldn’t figure it out. I had passed the A-1 examination, I was physically fit for the army, and I was just as reckless as the rest of the boys. I was rearin’ to go, and I would have been with that regiment, the ninety-first division. They charged through the forest, the Blue

forest in France (Actually Belgium), and they lost a lot of boys. It was Fandon from Teton that was killed. A friend of Anthony Gardner was one and a lot from around here that had lost their lives. I guessed it wasn't to be or I wouldn't be in that regiment. But every month they would call a bunch of soldiers up from here. I would be one of them. They would say, "We have got a few more than our quota so we're not sending more than we have to, and those I don't read their name off stay home." And I would listen for mine and it didn't come. Well, a long in November, my name came up and I got ready. And there were seventeen of us that got on the train that went down. We got down as far as Pocatello and start out for the camp at American Lake. They stop the train at the edge of the city and said the war is over, we're not sending anymore trouble over. Well I said, I got back around three o'clock in the morning.

There're seventeen of us [in] that bunch, and every one of them except one had the flu. That was in 1911, and I'm telling you there five out of that seventeen that died with the flu, and I thought I was the next one that would die. They thought I was sicker than I thought I was. I remember lying in bed in there, and the people talking out in here, and they said Ralph Naton died last night. I was just sick and didn't know what I was doing. I remember I thought I was next. I just turned over. It wouldn't have hurt me at all to have died. I could have died there in peace. The fellows were on relief, but I didn't—I got it through and I had it about three times since. I know what the flu is. I happen to get it that often I have been inoculated every winter as far as it goes.

BB: When were you married?

AG: We were married in 1921 on January the 19th in Salt Lake Temple in Salt Lake City, Utah.

BB: Who did you marry?

AG: I married Ethel Martinreth-Hiot of St. Anthony.

BB: Where did you come live?

AG: Right here in Wilford.

BB: How many children did you have?

AG: Mother and dad of seventeen children. One set of twins. We have them yet, all but one. One of the boys was killed in Vietnam in 1969. He is sleeping up in the graveyard now, in Wilford Cemetery.

BB: What about the Depression?

AG: I can't forget all about it although I've tried and would like to. I tell you that because it brings back memories of things that happened there during that Depression. We were having an extra hard time of making a living. We were married six to eight years. Like all young people, we had an ambition and a lot of desires to fulfill, and we let this Depression catch us unprepared because there wasn't any money. I didn't have a job, only in the summer. I worked for wages most of the time, and we had a little farm up on the hill. It only consisted of eighty acres when I

first leased it, but later on I leased another eighty acres during it that made a hundred and sixty acres on that farm. I had to break the ground because there were a lot of quaking aspen trees on it. I had to pull this quaking aspen with a team and cut it in barley. And it worked a hardship on us, [when] this here depression hit. We didn't have any money. We didn't have very many provisions layed up because we were just starting in, and I bought me a house and moved onto this piece of land down here by this old school house. It hit pretty hard. All the banks in the valley went broke, and [I] was lucky in a way and unlucky in another because I had rented some ground down here one year to put in sugar beets. I liked to raise sugar beets. I worked in them all the time in the summer. I had contracted with the Rigby Sugar Company. It was the factory down there at Rigby at the time. I don't think they ever processed beets. So when the beets came up, I couldn't thin them alone so I had to hire some kids. So I went to the First National Bank, I had some good friends in there. They ask me what I wanted the money for so I told them. They were glad to loan it to me, something around 200 dollars.

Well, I took care of the beets all that summer myself. The second hoeing and the third [hoeing] and kept them clean and irrigated, and I had a fairly good crop. But just about the time we would harvest them, I had to have some more help to do that and I had to have a little more money in the bank. I went to this bank and for some reason they didn't have it, but they had some idea that the Depression was going to hit pretty hard and probably close the banks. I didn't get that money, I owed 200 dollars, but when they came to pay for the beets, after I got the beets and turn them over to the company it went broke. I never got a penny out of them. I also had a patch of peas down here, some ground I had rented from Johnsons, and my brother was working for this CP Company. He came in and said don't you turn a pea over to that company. He said they don't have the money to pay for it. You will never get it. Johnson had a share of the crop. I told him about it and he just laughed on it.

Now [as] good financiers as them boys were, Ed Cary and Ed Johnson laughed at me because I told them that. Then I told them where I got information from and Ed on second thought, "Well, I think [it wouldn't hurt to hold them] for a little while." And we plowed them up and the company threatened a lawsuit [because we got the seeds from the company], and they done with. They just had to share them that's all and they had some cement trucks. They threatened a lawsuit and scared the Johnson boys into it and they turned scared. They never got a penny out of them pigs, so that left things pretty hard for us there. And I was in debt to this bank around 200 dollars, and they went broke, and the very first thing they done was start to gun me for that money. How in the world could I pay that? We couldn't get a hold of a nickel. You couldn't get a hold of a job to ever make anything when you did work for a dollar a day. And that winter or summer and fall I had moved the house down here across—I was trying to fix that up. It was just nothing but a shell, two rooms with an upstairs in it, and I didn't even have my foundation to it when the winter got me.

I am a telling you that was a cold winter. It was very cold. We had an old home comfort range and the lids was an inch thick, and all the wood we had put in that range was barngilered wood from these old barngilered trees that was around the playground. And I cut them and chopped them up all winter long, exposing my health, and the next spring I am telling you about a new farm ahead. And I got it from dry farming at that time. I went up there and went to work, and I stayed there two or three days. Got caught in a storm, came home here, layed in bed six weeks. Some of the neighbors came in to see me and they said, "How is he?" They thought I would die, and they said, "Why don't we pack him up in cotton balls." I was tougher than they thought. I came through. That time I remember for me, we didn't have clothes to keep us warm.

We had two or three children at that time, and we didn't have too much to eat. We had enough to keep us alive and we had a stove to keep us from going hungry, but the thing got older and older. You know like this one over here.

BB: What can you tell me about the Farming?

AG: It was the dry farming, a state land lease, and I got that lease for farming for forty cents an acre. All the agriculture I had on it, the tri-send, we would get a dollar a hundred for barley. We would produce and we got around a dollar twenty-five to a dollar fifty a hundred for wheat. When they sold it was at a hundred pounds. So that was what price we got out of it and I was trying to increase the agriculture ground on that all the time and of breaking it up.

BB: What about the livestock?

AG: Well I told you about the story about the pigs. I kept on raising those pigs until five or six years ago. I took a bunch of them down there and all I got for them was 13 cents a pound. I lost a lot of money on it and I thought well, we will quit raising pigs because I had that ground up there. And I sold the last pig I had raised for three and a half cents a pound. I would have went broke on that if I hadn't been raising the feed. Bill, I want to tell you that your grandfather was an honest man. Ever since my grandfather died my father took the mill. I want you to know and I want my father to know, I told him this myself. But I fully appreciate the way he dealt with me. He has been absolutely honest with him. Bill, I used to grow my own wheat and I would take the wheat over to your grandfather's gristmill and have him grind it into flour. I got for a hundred pounds of wheat about forty pounds of flour, about ten pounds of bran, and about five pounds of shorts. I feed this byproduct, this bran and the shorts to the animals that I had, which was pigs and cattle. And that way I got away from the inflation if there ever was any. And all I have to do is raise all I have consumed.

BB: Where was your next move?

AG: To their new home and they had been living in it for forty-nine years.

BB: What was it like coming out of the Depression?

AG: It was a slow process, but I [will] tell you we were mighty glad it was over and things went back to somewhere near normal. So much different to what they are now because like I said before we got around a dollar twenty-five for a hundred pounds of wheat and that was before they changed the way of selling wheat, they sell it by the bushel these days. And barley I never did get to have for years and years, over a dollar a hundred for barley. And time began to get better here. When one of the kids went on a mission in 1963, I held my crop and it [did] help to support them boys on that mission. I don't know it would happen that my neighbor harvested that grain for me, and I started in that elevator in Newdale. And later on he sold his grain for a dollar and eighty cents a hundred. I held mine for about thirty days and I got two dollars and fourteen cents a bushel for it. And that's the way I started to buy it.