

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

# Barto Nelson - Life during the Depression

By Barto Nelson

March 18, 1974

## Box 2 Folder 19

Oral Interview conducted by Susan Craig

Transcribed by Maren Miyasaki      October 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

SC: This is oral history. I am Susan Craig. Today is March 18, 1974; I am going to interview Mrs. Barto Nelson. The general topic will be the Depression. Mrs. Nelson where were you born?

BN: I don't know.

SC: You don't know?

BN: Don't know, no. I don't remember. It's in my record book, but we're not over [at] home.

SC: The general area. In what state, do you know what state it was?

BN: Georgia.

SC: Georgia?

BN: Yes. Close to Atlanta and that's the capital.

SC: How long did you say that you lived there?

BN: Don't know that. I don't know how many years we lived there. Well, 'til I was five years old. That must have been five over that.

SC: Okay, when were you born?

BN: 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 1890.

SC: Okay, so in 1895, then you moved to, where, did you move from Georgia?

BN: To Fairview, Utah.

SC: How long did you live there?

BN: Two years.

SC: What brought you to Idaho?

BN: The gospel's sake. Converts of the gospel, L.D.S. [Latter Day Saints].

SC: Do you know where your parents were born?

BN: No, I don't.

SC: Were you ever married?

BN: Oh, yes. Neilly Nelson was my husband.

SC: During the depression time, did your husband have a certain occupation?

BN: Yes, he was occupied 'til they laid all the men off because they had no money to pay 'em and you couldn't buy a job. So, we had no job of any kind.

SC: Did you ever work?

BN: I made quilts at that time and sold 'em as much, of, just what I could get out of 'em.

SC: Did you ever get very much money from these? Did it profit you to make them?

BN: It did at that time because it helped out in this depression, you see, because you couldn't buy much. You didn't, there wasn't no money, and you had to just do the best you could and live the best you could. It was a sad time. All the homes and farms around here was mortgaged and [had] no money. Banks went broke. Times were hard.

SC: Did you own your own home at this time, during the depression?

BN: Yes, yes we owned our own home and a coal stoker heat. That's burning wood and coal. It would burn wood and coal.

SC: You mentioned once that you worked for a doctor?

BN: Doctor's mother, ready to wear. That was after the depression. That was in good times. She had a ready to wear shop here. I worked there. And I worked at the picture show for four years. Moving pictures, that was the thing. Movies and talkies first came out.

SC: You mentioned the movies. Did it cost a lot to go to the movies at this time?

BN: Ten cents.

SC: When your husband was working and he got laid off, did he have to, what did he do to, for a job, I mean to get money?

BN: He didn't have no job. We had to live on what we had.

SC: Did it cost you money to get firewood and stuff for your coal stove and things like that?

BN: No, he'd go down on the river and cut these willows and chop 'em up and that for kindling for heat.

SC: What was this river that he went...?

BN: I don't know what. Let's see, the Snake River. I guess that's what it'd be called. I don't know. That's the only river that's in Idaho here, the Snake River, Idaho. They didn't get very large wages even when good times was up here.

SC: That's changed. Today they get a lot more.

BN: Oh yes, now days they get a big sum of money for labor in the \$100 dollars a month. We never did make it. But, we bought Liberty Bonds for the First World War, and we helped out in the church and did things like that as much as we could.

SC: Did the Church have lots of help programs for the people in their wards?

BN: Not now, not like they do now.

SC: Did they do anything at all in this area for the members?

BN: You mean for the ward?

SC: Yes.

BN: Well, I don't, yes they used to dress the dead and make the clothes for 'em and go help widows that was left alone with families and that in the homes. And there was these midwives that would go to the home and when the baby was born and do the housework and take care of the baby and the mother.

SC: That was good. Did you ever have any children?

BN: No, not one thing. Never had a chick nor a child, haven't got nobody. All my, my folks are dead.

SC: So, it was just you and your husband in your family that you had to worry about?

BN: Yes.

SC: You didn't have a family to worry about?

BN: No, didn't have any family.

SC: Did you find the food higher priced or lower priced at this time?

BN: Oh, no price at all. You couldn't hardly buy anything. You didn't have no money to pay for it if you bought it. As far as I can remember, it seems to me, like they had tokens. I don't know. They was rationed—that was the deal.

SC: I've always heard that you could buy food just really cheap?

BN: Oh yes, you could.

SC: Do you remember some of the prices?

BN: No, no I don't remember the prices of that. Like he said, ten cents.

SC: What could you buy for ten cents?

BN: Well I don't know, unless maybe a loaf of bread.

SC: That's a lot less than today.

BN: Well yeah, even today a dollar a loaf, now they say. Lately, I don't know the setup now of the store.

SC: It's quite a bit higher.

BN: Oh, a lot higher, pay siz [is] a dozen prices of what it oughta be.

SC: What did you do mainly for recreation at this time? Did you and your husband have lots of things to keep you busy, even though there wasn't any jobs?

BN: No, no I can't remember any jobs. He was laid off of his job. Reason why he had to go down there, try and keep warm the best we could, you see. I don't remember the prices of coal or if there was any coal and that. We had coal after that for fuel, you know. Yes, I guess they had coal, if you had the money to pay for it. But, I don't know how much it was. Can't think.

SC: Were your parents living anywhere near you during the depression or were they still living?

BN: I can't think. Can't remember about them. Yes, they're still living.

SC: Did they live here in Rexburg?

SC: My mother did. My father, he went back to the veteran's home in Atlanta. They have a lovely big veteran home there for all the old veterans, and he was a veteran in the First World War or was it the war before that. Must have been the war between the North and South?

SC: Was it the Spanish American War. Could it been then?

BN: I don't know what it was called. I could never tell you, I don't know. I just know that he went back there. He died at this home and she died out here at my sister's.

SC: Where was your sister's at?

BN: What?

SC: Where does your sister live at?

BN: She lived out in Rexburg.

SC: Rexburg?

BN: Yes.

SC: Was it harder to live in a town like Rexburg compared to one like Idaho Falls that was bigger?

BN: Yes, it was cheaper to live here. Idaho Falls was always an expensive town to live in. He had an operation down there.

SC: Your husband?

BN: Yes.

SC: Was it hard to get a doctor or see one at this time, like to get operations if you needed them or serious things came up?

BN: No, no there's good doctors here then.

SC: Were their prices very high?

BN: I don't remember. Never had a doctor in those days, I suppose it was pretty reasonable. And the midwife she had five dollars for delivering a baby.

SC: Five dollars? That's quite a difference than it is today!

BN: Yes, quite a difference from now isn't it? You go to the hospital now it costs up in the hundreds don't it? That's what they tell me. I don't know though. I ain't had no babies. I don't know nothing about it.

SC: You said something about the soup lines. Did they have soup lines here? I mean were they rationing meals and stuff?

BN: They was rationed. I think it was California and down in through the big cities that had soup lines.

SC: What kinds of jobs did your husband go out to look for? I mean, what were the things he could do just to make any money?

BN: His job all the time was delivering lumber to these homes that had been mortgaged and taken over by the government.

SC: Was there quite a bit of mortgaging going on?

BN: Oh, an awful lot, the banks went broke. You heard him say the banks went broke, and there wasn't no money. People couldn't pay their bills.

SC: Was your home paid for, or did you have to worry about...?

BN: Yes, he built that home before we was married and that. And that is 1916. I can remember that date because that was when I was married—16<sup>th</sup> of April.

SC: Do you think that the people during the depression, their attitudes towards work changed? I mean, did they become more willing to work?

BN: Oh, they've always been willing to work, people have, if they could get the job. It was hard to find work. Finally, times got better and more plentiful with things and they got their old job back. Not too much pay, never was very high in those days. Used to go to the picture show for ten cents, five cents and ten cents.

SC: Did you and your husband have an automobile or something?

BN: Yes, we had a Model T Ford at first.

SC: Was it expensive to have an automobile?

BN: Well you could, I can remember the first automobile in Rexburg and that. I remember Comstock, he's the banker, he had the first one; and Orson Waldrum, he's the druggist, he had the second one. No it wasn't the first, in that. Fords. You know those Model T Fords came out first. They was the first car, I think that was made, but I don't know when they was made. I don't know their record and that. But, then our last little car here, it was a Plymouth one seat, you know and that. All glassed in, and it was very comfortable. He sold it when he quit playing the coronet. He couldn't play it, you see, when he lost his lower teeth. You can't play that instrument, that, the...oh, what is it, the, oh, that you blow?

SC: Coronet?

BN: Coronet, yes that's it. He played that.

SC: Did they have, I've always heard that on, like Sunday afternoon or something, that people would go out in the park and play their instruments. Did they do this in the time during the depression?

BN: I don't think so.

SC: Did your husband just play the coronet?

BN: Yes, that's all.

SC: Just around your home or...?

BN: Oh no. He played in the orchestra. He took under the first man, Brother Inger. He ran the music part of the college here, and he was one of the first ones here, and he worked for him—Inger.

SC: Was it cheaper to go to school at this college, here at Ricks, during the depression?

BN: Oh, my yes! Than it is now? Oh, my yes. I should say so.

SC: Did you go to school at Ricks?

BN: No. I never went to college. I just graduated from the eighth grade, here. That was the highest you could go then. There wasn't no college and that, you know, so plentiful, like they are now.

SC: But, your husband went to college?

BN: No.

SC: He just played with the orchestra?

BN: He just played with the orchestra and that. We was married then, so, but up to the time I was married in 1916, I worked at the picture show. During the depression I made quilts, and I made all kinds of work—different kinds of needle work and that.

SC: Did there seem to be more of a crime rate when you were living during the depression?

BN: No, there didn't seem like anything like that.

SC: What kinds of things did the people do mainly that were wrong? Was it just stealing or robberies, and stuff like that?

BN: Well, they had the WPA here. You know what the WPA was? It was the men that they had working on the roads and streets and they, I don't know, I guess it was the city that hired them. I don't know, or the government, maybe the government. I wouldn't know. I can't remember that, back that far. But I know it was during the depression and they, after, you know, it kinda got back on their feet again, and they had to find work of some sort. But, my husband didn't work on the WPA. But, there's a lot of men that did. I guess to keep their families, I don't know.

SC: When the depression was finally starting to get over, did the Federal Government do a lot to help?

BN: Yes, yes it did. That's when Franklin Delanore Roosevelt took over. He made the, he declared the banks a holiday. And they was all closed 'til they could open you know and that, and get these farmers, you know, taken care of that there were mortgaged. Their homes were and everything were mortgaged, and they couldn't meet it you see. They couldn't meet the payments. So, these crooked people you know these crooked what you call it, would step in and take their homes, and that made it very bad, so it was Franklin Delanore Roosevelt.

SC: At the time of the depression, there were political elections. What kind of person would you have voted for during the time of the depression?

BN: Well, I would have voted for President Roosevelt. He was the finest president that ever lived. He has infantile paralysis, and he was a cripple, and they called him everything, the "ole cripple," and everything, and that you know, "the Republican." They were really nasty.

SC: During the depression, this is kind of a summary, were you, as a person kind of depressed yourself?

BN: Oh yes, we was awful. It was awful heartbreaking. It was a sad time. It was a time you just, well, you didn't know what to do to make ends meet, and it was very hard. Everybody was having trouble and bad luck, you know, hit the nation.

SC: Those were really sad times.

BN: Yes, it was sad times, bad times and that, I'd say.

SC: Okay, thank you Mrs. Nelson, for this interview.

BN: Oh, you're awful welcome.