

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Carrie Miner - Life during the Depression

By Carrie Miner

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Box 2 Folder 16

Oral Interview conducted by Angela Klingler

Transcribed by Victor Ukorebi Feb. 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

AK: Today is March 23, 1975 and I'm going to interview Mrs. Carrie Miner. The general topic will be the time of depression and how it affected her. Mrs. Miner, where were you born?

CM: In Hale, Missouri.

AK: How long have you lived in Rupert, right now?

CM: Thirty years this thirtieth of January.

AK: Where were your parents born?

CM: My father was born on a farm near Pitsfield, Illinois. My mother was born on a farm near Breckenridge, Missouri.

AK: What was your occupation?

CM: School teacher.

AK: You said a few things about Kansas City, Missouri. Do you want to start there?

CM: Well, I'll start in Hale, Missouri. My husband, Stanley Miner and I and our son, Albert Lee, lived in Hale, Missouri. My husband was a mechanic but he would work at carpenter trade anything that he could do. Work became very scarce in Hale, Missouri and he decided that he would move to Kansas City. For a while he worked at Fisherbody and then there were times when the work there was slow and being the last one on, he was let out. The wages were low. Rent was not high in Kansas City and we would try to find a house, a place where there was a garden, were we raised a garden. Did I mention the groceries were not high? They were not high.

AK: Was it easy to live off the money that he made?

CM: It seemed it was because while we were living in Hale Missouri, we had a large garden and we had fruit and I did lots of canning and I was allowed five dollars a week for groceries and sometimes I could put a few dimes away in the saving jar.

AK: You sewed too. Did it save a lot of money on clothes?

CM: Oh yes. Some gifts would be off clothing, but I did sewing for a little boy and I sewed for other people. Of course, if I got twenty-five cents for a little dress that helped out.

AK: Did you use that money for yourself?

CM: No, it was to be used for, we called it an emergency fund, and sometimes we would have to use the emergency fund.

AK: What about bank account? Did you have a bank account? A big one or....?

CM: Well, we would have a very small banking account and I had saved some money from teaching and my husband didn't want to use that, only when it was necessary. Sometimes it became necessary to use it out of, he called it the teaching fund and I'm so glad that I'd been taught to can and dry fruit and dry little peas, and corn and things like that. It helped out a lot. We first lived in light housekeeping room in Kansas City.

AK: Light house what?

CM: Light housekeeping rooms. That's what they were called. There would be people who'd have an apartment fixed up and they were always light housekeeping rooms.

Then he worked for a cousin of his and then business got slow there. We were living then in Independence Missouri. He thought well, we'll go down to Hale, the rent won't be so high, and we did. And my father and an aunt and an uncle had chicken and they had a cow and they kept us with milk. We didn't have any milk bills and then we had a place where we could raise chickens. Then we raised chicken and then we had our own eggs. Then before this time my father had bought land. Land was selling just right and left and at high prices. He had a mortgage put on this and during what they called "hard times," he lost his farms and then he was a great hand to make knives. He would make knives and sharpen scissors and he traveled about in the country and that helped him. Then one time he had a serious accident and that work stopped.

Then my husband went into business of his own and we thought we were doing quite well and then there were four years of drought in Missouri and there was just simply, seemingly no money. In 1934, we had a little girl

baby and the doctor bill was paid by the doctor coming and having his car washed and buying new tires and buying new gasoline.

AK: By your husband?

CM: Yes, by my husband. It was in the garage. Then being drought, business became so slow that he sold it, the business. The people who bought it later on lost. Then he went to doing carpenter work and then he decided that we must go west. He and his brother came west. But about our entertainment in that little town, there were church parties and visiting. We always had company. We loved to have people in for dinner, and we were invited out to dinner and that was where I went to high school and I had lots of friends there. When his brother and he came west, he found work in Laramie, Wyoming and in the fall we moved to Laramie Wyoming. The wages were not high. I sewed for other people and sometimes I went out and took care of children. I would take my little girl along. Then there was still what was called the depression going on still there.

AK: When your father lost his farms, did all the people around him lose theirs too?

CM: Oh, many, many, many lost them. It went into the hands of the loan companies.

AK: So all the loan companies had all the farms?

CM: Yes, I presume now, I know that one man has bought back several of those loans.

AK: So he's got the land?

CM: Yes, he has the land. There was, the last I heard, more land going back into the real farmers. They're owning their farms. Some, they predict, will lose some of their farms because they've gone in too heavily.

AK: Your father, like you said, could travel around and sell knives and stuff like that. What did the other people do for money?

CM: Well, what they did...

AK: What happened to them? Did they go to the city and try to find work?

CM: Well, I just don't know what they did. Just little piece work and it seemed to me like that some of them getting some kind of aid. I don't know what it was.

AK: Was it from the government?

CM: I believe it was. They got some of the aid; I don't know what it was. The thing of it was that they were not so scarce for food because everybody was raising so much, and they shared their products with the people who were poor.

AK: Now you said something about the atmosphere that your relatives and family had?

CM: Yes, I had an aunt and uncle, they were very wealthy. Uncle Charlie would walk down the railroad with a quart of milk every day for us. I substituted and I did sewing for other people, and that brought a little money in to go into the emergency jar.

AK: Was the atmosphere like this all over where you lived? Friends were calling in all the time to help?

CM: Oh yes. They seemed very, very willing to help and at one time I can see my mother walking down the walk in the winter time and the hens weren't laying and maybe she'd have an egg for Albert. But it was very happy times.

AK: For you it was. Now you lived out in the country, right?

CM: No, I lived in town then.

AK: Was it a big city?

CM: No, it wasn't over five hundred people there.

AK: Oh, I see. Did you ever hear anything about New York or any of the big cities? Did it ever come back to you how bad times were?

CM: Yes, Stanley had a brother that didn't live far from New York, New Jersey. He was a Navy man but he was still in the Navy, but he could live in that town. They talked about how hard it was back in New Jersey, about the times back there. The brother never wanted to go back there because they could live much cheaper in Hale. He was getting some kind of a pension, a disability pension.

AK: When you moved to Laramie, Wyoming, was it a hard adjustment or did you find it easy.

CM: No it wasn't, because I had made up my mind that wherever Stanley had work that was the place for me.

AK: When Stanley was working, did you still have enough money coming in? Was the money change any different? Were prices higher in Laramie, than they were in other places?

CM: Yes, the prices were somewhat higher in Laramie, Wyoming than they were in Hale, Missouri.

AK: But that didn't bother you?

CM: No, when we left, we had a little old trailer and I had fruit and vegetables canned up that we brought, that our grocery bill just didn't amount to anything. My husband liked to hunt and during the hunting season he would hunt. I would either can the meat or we would put it in the town locker.

AK: The town locker?

CM: Yes. There would be a locker, well they called it the town locker, someone owned it but it was named the town locker, where they kept frozen articles for other people.

AK: What did you have to buy?

CM: Flour, sugar, and coffee.

AK: Do you see now a rise in prices just like back then? Like compare sugar now to back then.

CM: Oh my, it never never reached the point that it has now.

AK: But it was expensive back then, too?

CM: In Laramie it was higher than it was back in Missouri, but we were told that groceries would be higher in the west, after you got past Denver.

AK: How come?

CM: Well, I don't know unless they had to work harder to get them over that big hump.

AK: Do you know if the drought that happened back in Missouri had any effect out there?

CM: Only that people were leaving the farms there and going to irrigated lands. Some of them were leaving and they went to Oregon and they did quite well there in farming. There were people just leaving there.

AK: Where did they go? Did they go to cities?

CM: Well, there were quite a number of them [that] went to farming counties.

AK: They left their one farm and went to another?

CM: Yes.

AK: Well now, where did they get the money, from the loan that they had?

CM: I don't know. Maybe it was with some of them as it was with us. I had saved money when Stanley was out here and had sent money home. I had saved seventy-five dollars out of that and he thought that would get us to Laramie, Wyoming and it did.

AK: Well now, when you had your kids, you made most of their clothes, right?

CM: Yes, and our son, after he was grown up he said, “Will make me shirts like you used to?” When he’d go to school, they’d say, “Where did you get such a pretty shirt?”, and he’d say, “My mom made it.” “Would your mom make me one?”

AK: Did your kids go to college?

CM: Albert didn’t. When we lived in Laramie, the last time, he joined the Navy. Joy graduated from Rupert High School and she entered the Nurse’s Training in Pocatello at the Hospital there. We thought she was doing just wonderfully. She’d come home and talk about how grand the work was and so at Christmas time one of her old boyfriends came to see her, and they fell madly in love and they were married January fourteenth. He was in the Air Force and they moved to Texas for his training and later she came home and went to Louisiana. Then she came home again and he went overseas. They had been married a little over two years and he was killed in an airplane crash. Then she went back to Pocatello to Business College.

AK: Did she pay her way?

CM: Yes, she did paid her own way. The Air Force, the military, and the government were very kind and good to the widow. Then she graduated from Business College and was working, and then they gave her a job on the Air Force Base at Mountain Home.

AK: What year did you move from Laramie to here?

CM: 1945

AK: Now in 1945, what condition were we in? Were we just recovering from the depression or were we still pretty much in it?

CM: Well, I couldn’t say that. Just about that. We bought a home here. It didn’t seem to be any depression. We went on socially and we’d take our trips and I couldn’t say that we were still into it.

AK: What about food stamps and rationing. Did they have that?

CM: There was that on sugar. I've got part of a book now. I believe when we moved here that, well I don't know if there was any here or not but I've got part of a sugar stamp.

AK: How did that work? Did you have to have certain stamps of sugar?

CM: Yes.

AK: Now what about gas? Did you have to have those stamps for that too?

CM: You know, I don't remember. I had quit driving on account of gasoline rationing. When we lived in Laramie, I wouldn't drive and then I didn't drive any more until after gasoline rationing was over. Then I thought that was the best way. I did most of my traveling when I moved here by walking. Neighbors were good to take me places and when my husband wasn't working, we would go places. We were economical with gasoline. We had to go to hospital in Missouri, both of us had surgery, and we got a special allotment of gasoline stamps then.

AK: You could get special allotment in emergencies?

CM: Now that happened in Laramie, Wyoming. When we lived in Laramie, that's when we got permission. He was sort of an inventor and he invented something on the car that wouldn't use so much gasoline. We had a big Buick second-hand car; we got it at a bargain. It was just almost a give away, and he always kept it running well. We took a trip when we went to that hospital. He got twenty-four miles to the gallon in that big heavy car, averaged twenty-four miles.

I look back, that was a part of life. I don't think he worried, and I don't think I worried. The greatest was about anything, as I say, I'm quite sure that all fruit and vegetables I canned in Missouri helped a long ways to keep down. We trusted that the boy would come back. He went through some of the toughest naval battles and came through alright. We couldn't help but be anxious about that.

AK: What year did the war start?

CM: I don't know now, I don't remember.

AK: Is that the war that...?

CM: The Second World War.

AK: That he fought in?

CM: That Albert fought in.

AK: Did your husband fight in anything?

CM: He was stationed in France and he was a mechanic for the airplanes.

AK: Was this before you got married?

CM: Yes, it was before I got married. I had met him at the end of World War I, and then I kept on teaching. I waited for him.

AK: When you were younger did you ever hear anything about the West?

CM: Oh yes, from my dad. That's where I heard about the west. After we moved into town, he took a trip to see his brother in northern Idaho and that's all he talked about was Idaho. He wanted to move there. Mama just didn't care about it. He talked so much about Idaho that they nicknamed him Idaho.

AK: Your father?

CM: My father, yes. He was known as Mr. Idaho

AK: Was it a wild country?

CM: Oh, that was in the year 1913. His brother lived in northern Idaho and that was a most flourishing country, he thought.

AK: When you came to this area in 1945, were you much active in politics? I mean, did you hear anything from the capitol that really affected this town?

CM: I don't think so.

AK: Were there ever any scandals in the government?

CM: No, I can't think of any scandals. I know that after we came here, we completely changed our party and we were from the South. We talked it over. My brother stayed with the old party of the South and he accused me of changing because of what my husband said, but we talked it over and so we changed politics.

One of the head politicians there seemed to have owned a lot of filling stations and they'd go around and say, "Are you going to buy your gasoline from this company?" They'd say, "No." In a few days that filling station would be blown up.

AK: That really happened?

CM: That really happened and it was really in the hands of the City Manager, a lot of it was. Then they got a new governor. He raised apple trees and sold them. I can't think of his name. Anyway, they put the city managers and these...oh, Stark, Governor Stark....cleaned up the politics in Missouri and they would have in the paper, a bushel of apples. These were Stark's delicious apples. He propagated the Delicious apple. They would have a basket of apples and they would say, "Stark's Delicious apples grown by the city manager."

AK: During the depression times, did it seem like the apple that had a lot of money, like the politicians, and stuff, did they seem like they got more or were they in the same situation as most of the people?

CM: Well, we were the most of the people and we thought that a lot went into their hands. That's what we felt like; it did went into the hands of the politicians.

AK: They were pretty well off then?

CM: Oh yes, especially the man that was backing the city manager.

AK: Now back to Idaho. When you came out to Idaho, was it pretty well developed? I mean, were people pretty well situated or were there a lot of new...?

CM: When we came here from the edge of Rupert on the Minidoka Highway going to Minidoka, there were few houses. From Acequia on, why it was just like a desert but now there are farm houses.

AK: Is it true now that at one time Minidoka was quite a big, flourishing town?

CM: I've heard that Minidoka at one time had a population of three thousand. The railroad was what made it grow, but now when they began to sell this farm land out here that it changed.

AK: The main railroad was switched to Rupert then?

CM: No, it never had the main railroad switched to Rupert. There's a road from Minidoka on down to Twin Falls and on to another place, and the trains, of course, were running good at that time when we came here.

AK: Were the trains an expensive way to travel?

CM: Oh yes, and a very pleasant way to travel.

AK: Did you meet a lot of people on the trains?

CM: Oh yes. I love to travel on AM-track or the bus. I have been traveling most of the time, Doctor's orders, by plain, get me there quicker. But I prefer to go by train or by bus by meeting people. You meet the loveliest people and I love to visit. I didn't like to take the plane so well because it got me there so quick. I'd just rather visit.

AK: Now the main railroad ran through Rupert. Is that why Rupert sprang up?

CM: I wouldn't know about that. I think that now that Rupert is increasing is that the business is increasing, on account of what we always called the north side where they put the land out for homesteaders. Well maybe they sold that, but there were drawings that they had to draw on the land. In the years that we've been here, we came in 1945, why it just doesn't look like the same place or the country around is just so much more settled, built up, houses. It seems to me like the farm lands and the homes there are just beautiful.

AK: During the war, were you in Idaho or were you in Laramie, during the war?

CM: No, we were here during the World War II

AK: Did it have a lot of influence on this town in particular?

CM: Well, it must have had. You know there was a Japanese camp a few miles out and that is all been in farms and built up in farm houses now. They had what we called a concentration camp out here, the Japanese. I don't know how. They had a lot of them out there.

AK: Were they used for labor or were they just kept there?

CM: Well, I believe some of them went out and got work, I believe they did. I don't know of the Japanese people. I meet with them and they're friendly, kind, but there has been for a long time Japanese farmers here. They're good farmers.

AK: Is there anything that you'd like to add in conclusion?

CM: I'm not promoting the depression, but I can look back and say that they were very happy days.

AK: Thank you very much. This tape would be submitted to the Ricks College Library for other people and further research.