Dr. David L. Crowder Oral History Project

Dennis Green – Life during the Depression

By Dennis Green

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Box 1 Folder 44

Oral Interview conducted by Kathy Capps

Transcribed by Victor Ukorebi June 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho
KC: I am Kathy Capps. Today Friday, February 22, 1974, I am going to interview my grandfather, Dennis Green. The general topic will be the Depression in the Upper Snake River Valley. Grandpa Green, where were you born?

DG: Rexburg, Idaho.

KC: How long have you lived in Terreton, Idaho?

DG: Twenty-two years.

KC: Where were your parents born? (He couldn’t remember at that time) Okay, what was your occupation?

DG: Do you want it now or after a while?

KC: Well, what occupations have you been employed in?

DG: Oh--shearing sheep and farming, stock raising.

KC: When were you married?

DG: Fifth of June, 1924.

KC: How long did you meet Grandma?

DG: Knew her all my life. We was raised in Menan.

KC: Did you go to school together?

DG: Yeah, I was just a year ahead of her.

KC: What was the first impact the depression had on you and grandma?

DG: Well, just hard times like everybody else. I was in the sheep business then?

KC: Did it have any effect on your sheep business?

DG: Well, things wasn’t worth anything. I sold lambs one year for 2½¢ for the fat lambs and for 2¢ for the poor lambs and feeders and 9¢ for the wool.

KC: How did it affect your family?

DG: Well, they were all little children then – it didn’t affect them any.

KC: They didn’t have to go without or anything like that?
DG: Oh, no more’n anybody else.

KC: What about farm work, like how did you get the things that you needed or the equipment to do work with or whatever?

DG: We didn’t have very big places and didn’t need much equipment. Had a team or three horses that’s all. Plow and moving machine and a hay rake, an old binder—that’s all the equipment you need.

KC: Did you ride horses most of the time then? Or what kind of cars did you have?

DG: Well, we all had saddle horses but—we never had a car ‘til after we was married.

KC: When did the depression hit?


KC: So you were pretty much newly married when it hit you?

DG: Six years.

KC: Do you remember any prices like for what you could buy cattle or horses or sugar or like that?

DG: Well, I bought 18 head of rolderum heifers. It cost 10 dollars a head. I kept them ‘til spring, and I had to go shearing, and we ran out of hay; and I sold them for 10 dollars a head one time. It took that guy two years to pay for them, but he finally paid for them.

KC: Ten Dollars a head? How does that compare with the prices today that you sell cattle for?

DG: Down there today (Shoshone, Idaho) they was selling baby calves for a hundred dollars a head.

KC: What do they sell for the big ones?

DG: They sold one heifer for $765—the highest price today.

KC: How about things like sugar and flour and that? Do you remember those?

DG: Well, flour was cheap; a loaf of bread was ten-fifteen cents a loaf. Hay was about 12 dollars a ton, ten-twelve dollars a ton.

KC: What do they sell that for now?

DG: Well, 50—depends on the locality your in—50 dollars a ton here in Mud Lake now.
KC: In what ways did you get along without any money? Do you remember any experiences?

DG: There wasn’t no place to go—only to church, that’s the only entertainment we had, church furnished it all. We sang in the choir and that’s all we done. The choir will take one trip up to Pincock’s Hot Springs a year. Just go to church and Sleigh ride in the winter time and work in the summer.

KC: Didn’t you have dances and that kind of thing?

DG: Oh yeah, there was dances. I danced like I had three feet on one leg.

KC: Did you ever go to like shows or movies or those kind of things?

DG: Oh we used to go to a picture show once in a while. Father had an old Model-T Ford pick-up, had a little box on the back of it. Sometimes we would borrow that and go to a show.

KC: Do you remember how much those cost?

DG: Oh, $600 (Six hundred dollars)

KC: How about the shows?

DG: Oh 25-30 cents.

KC: Did the living comforts change all that much from the time you were first married ‘til when the depression hit.

DG: I don’t think so. Never had much comfort. Had a stove, and a bed, and a place to wash your hands; a little cupboard to put what dishes in we had, and that was about it.

KC: How did you keep warm at nights?

DG: In the winter we had a little stove; and when they’d go anywhere in the wintertime, why they’d heat rocks and get them good and warm, and then they’d wrap them in paper in a flour sack. Sometimes they’d take kerosene lanterns along, and they’d light that and hang a quilt over it to keep them warm.

KC: Did you put rocks in the beds?

DG: Yeah, we had rocks down for our feet in the winter.

KC: What things did you trade or did you trade in order to get other things that you needed?
DG: No we didn’t trade much—only horses. We used to trade horses all the time. We’d finally trade out, and we’d have to buy a new start. Could buy a pretty good horse for 50 dollars them days. That’s about the only way there was to go anywhere was on horses or in a buggy.

KC: As far as farm work went and other farmers needing help. Did you go help them and then they’d help you in turn?

DG: Yeah, then we’d go out and help pitch hay—some people would hire us. We’d get a dollar and a half to two dollars a day for ten hours work.

KC: What about thrashing crews?

DG: Well, they all got together and thrashed; and they’d help one another. We used to tack our grain, and when they’d get well pretty near everybody stacked their grain – sometimes we wouldn’t get thrashed ‘til November. Only one machine in there to start with and then pretty soon they got two, and it was quite a lot better.

KC: How did you restart your sheep business—like when you sold your sheep and then how would you get the money to buy more and other things that you needed like that?

DG: Oh we—I used to shear sheep. I sheared sheep for Johnny Falck in Shoshone for years. In our later life, and I used to have a little bunch of cattle. First one I’ve got a hold of, I got from Wilford Lewis. I give him two dollars and a half and my pocket knife for an old blues calf just one day old. And I’d, you could buy those calves—good ones in those days for five dollars a head, if you had five dollars.

KC: Did you pretty much self-support yourself as far as chickens and making your own bread and fruit and those kind of things?

DG: Oh yeah—Ma, she’d done the churning; and when I came home, why we’d kill our meat and eat and put the pork in barrels and put a brine on it and cure it. Then we take and put it in, just wrap newspaper around it and put it in a flour sack and then take it out and bury it in the wheat bin. The wheat bin would stay pretty much in the same temperature all the time, and we always kept the wheat ‘til we had one year’s supply of wheat on hand all the time. When we’d thrash well, and then we’d have to sell our wheat.

MC: That’s how you made money by selling your wheat?

DG: Oh, we didn’t have much course we just had—Father had 80 acre farm—there wasn’t much money.

MC: Did you ever get discouraged and wish that you had the comforts of life?

DG: Didn’t know nothing about them.
MC: You never saw about them or read about them?

DG: Never, well there wasn’t any. Maybe Uncle Bert Smith had a little better living than we did, but he run the store there in Menan, and we just—he went broke trying to help the people—though he just let the stuff out on credit—couldn’t pay for it. I’d bet he got thousands of dollars coming into him yet, right now. Never did collect—finally went broke.

MC: What kind of credit would he or did the men in the stores ever trade in on foods from farmers or clothes or anything?

DG: Oh, they used to take their rigs to town, their butter they’d sell them, and then they’d buy groceries in return. But, the stores in those days—buy anything in there from an all-day sucker to a thrashing machine.

MC: What kind of Christmases did you ever have in the depression?

DG: Good ones!

MC: How did you manage it?

DG: We’d just all go some place, some of the families have a good meal, and then we’d have a little party, and then we’d take our gifts. Of course, they didn’t amount to much, I don’t think. Probably three now cost as much as my wife’s whole family did. But, we’d spend more now on one gift then we’d probably spend for the whole family.

MC: That’s all you needed.

DG: Didn’t know so much about all this modern stuff in those days, so we didn’t know about it, so we didn’t think you don’t know about, you don’t miss.

MC: Did you have electricity?

DG: Well, we had electricity eventually, but when we was first married and went down on the ranch we had a coal oil lamp and a coal oil lantern, and then finally we got where they come out with these Coleman gas lights. We’d have a—they had mantles on them—boy, they was sure lit up then. And an ole big blow fly would fly through there and take the mantel off.

MC: You didn’t have running water either did you?

DG: No—down on the ranch, we drank water out of the ditch and then finally we got to where we could drive a pump on it so we was pretty well fixed up for water then.

MC: What did you ever do as far as needing doctors or professional help?
DG: Oh, we had Doctor Jones. He was our doctor—family doctor who lived over to Roberts. He had an old Hudson coup that he drove around. He’d get stuck in the mud, then he’d get stuck in the snow. The wind would blow sand across the road, and he’d get stuck in the sand, but somebody always came along with a team to pull him out and away he’d go. Good doctor. Old Doc. Jones was.

MC: How about delivering babies? Did the women do that, or was he able to make it?

DG: Oh, he was the boy that done the delivering ‘till he died.

MC: How about dentist work? How did they do that without electricity?

DG: They had treadle machines that they just like a sewing machine. The doc he’d stand there and treadle that and grind away. They used to have one come into Menan every month or every two months. The eye doctor would come in Mrs. Watson’s home there to go up and have your eyes tested. His name was Scarborough, wasn’t it? Doctor Scarborough, I think.

MC: Why don’t you tell how the dentist did his tricks.

DG: They used to take me up to the dentist—he’d—don’t know as he ever pulled any teeth for me, but he sure filled a lot of them.

MC: How did he deaden it?

DG: We didn’t know much about that. Of course, we never had any occasion to have to do that.

MC: What advice would you give to like a young married couple since you were pretty much young married if another depression was to hit pretty soon. What would you advise them to do?

DG: Well, if it didn’t kill them to start with—why they’d just have to get along the best of what they could and they’d have to do what they had the money to do and that’d be it. They’d get used to it just like the people crossing the plains ‘cause there wasn’t anything to do why rather than starve to death. They’d get used to the customs. They could do it again. It might be pretty tough on them, but they could do it. Especially the Latter-day Saint people could.

MC: Do you think the welfare program would help out now?

DG: Would ‘til they ran out of material and stuff to give away. We didn’t have any money to send into church—pay tithing, pay our welfare assessment—why wouldn’t have any money to buy it unless they got busy and went out, found some gold someplace or some oil, or something like this.
MC: Did the church help out during the depression on with the welfare?

DG: No, the church didn’t have that those days.

MC: You didn’t?

DG: No, we didn’t have to have any help. We milked a few cows. We got along all right. If we couldn’t pay for when we had a baby, why we’d go work it out for Doctor Jones.

MC: Did you rely on the Priesthood a lot during this time?

DG: Well, I guess so in a way. There wasn’t as much emphasis on it as there is now, but we went to church, and we done what we was suppose to.

MC: Was family unity stronger then than it seems now that things are going real well?

DG: Well, I just imagine they was. No way to get away from one another I suppose. Got a horse apiece but it’s… there wasn’t so much temptation them days because we didn’t know what drugs was, and some of them guys they’d make a little moonshine. They’d get a little too much to drink. But, they didn’t have time to mess around with that. Why it just kept you pretty busy trying to make a living. We’d turn our cattle out on the desert. We didn’t have any Taylor grazing or B.L.M. or anything. We’d ride out during the summer and see if we could find them. In the fall of the year, we’d go out and round them up and bring them in. Get eight cents a pound for them for good steers. That’s pretty good price those days. Top hogs would bring in seven cents. Father sold a bunch one time for 7½¢ and he said he’d like to contract him for five years. At that price he could sure make some money. Forty-three cents now by weight.

MC: It took a lot of courage I think to go through that now that you see what people have now.

DG: I don’t know. I think it’d be probably just as good as it is now. Make a living then, and that’s all you do now. You just make a living. Got a colored television to watch, got a good car, but that little old ford got us where we was going. We didn’t have to go so far.

MC: What type of things now do you have that you—since you were in this depression does it really make you appreciate. Like what do you appreciate now?

DG: All the good things of life. Don’t appreciate getting old. I can tell you that. That’s something that comes to everybody.

MC: How about taking baths? Did you have to do them in a tub of cold water?

DG: No, we heated our water, had just a little ole tub, get in it and splash around.
MC: How did you wash clothes then?

DG: In that same tub with a washboard. Made our own soap.

MC: How did you make your own soap?

DG: My mother she made the soap. They made their soap they made their home remedies.

MC: Do you know anything about that Grandma’s salve? Could you tell anything about it?

DG: I don’t know how it’s made. Some of it now that’s pretty near impossible to get—some of the ingredients. I know that’s the best salve I ever used.

MC: Well, did you ever have any serious accidents or things like that as a result of not having modern conveniences or safety measures?

DG: Oh no more than we did now. Times we’d get bucked off a horse. We’d fall down but that’s just everyday life them days. On the twenty-fourth of July we used to have a celebration in Menan. They’d have baseball games and foot-races, and they got to where they started to have horse races. That was the big day—the twenty-fourth of July. Always had a good program in the church. Had a bandstand out on the lawn and then had a brass band. I guess all those fellows are dead now that played in it. The last one I think died just the other day. Chip Guyder, I think he was the last one that I knowed that played in that band.

MC: Well, considering the condition of some of the other people, would you consider your family well off?

DG: Then?

MC: Uh huh.

DG: Well, there just wasn’t much difference. Nobody had any money, so I don’t know how anybody could be more well off than the others. Might have a little more property or might have a few more stock, but there just wasn’t any money. Buy a diamond ring for thirty-five dollars do just as much good as one that cost eighteen hundred now. But, it was just about as hard to pay for it.

MC: Can you think of any other experiences of things that happened that you’d like to share?

DG: Oh not right off the bat. But, the only trips we ever took we went up Teton basin where we used to—where we was raised—where I was raised. Folks was—grandparents were polygamists. Father’s side and on mother’s side, but they stayed in Utah—mother’s
people did. Down Beaver, Utah that’s where she come from. But, my grandmother—she had to go into Wyoming because they didn’t prosecute the polygamists up there and Idaho did—so she went up there and then the boys, they got old enough they all homesteaded up there. That’s where we was raised. All our kids—father’s kids. We come out of there when I was eleven years old I guess. We stayed in Rexburg three years; and then when I was 14, we moved to Menan. Stayed there till 1951, and we come to Mud lake.

MC: Do you remember how much land was an acre?

DG: Some of those better places were fifty dollars an acre. ‘Cause they got it all cleared up.

MC: Did they homestead here in Idaho?

DG: Oh yes, grandfather’s little homestead was north Menan. All that land over in there was settled by homestead.

MC: In Menan and Rexburg.

DG: All over this whole country. Those early days that’s when the Saints first come up here.

MC: Now what was your parents’ name?

DG: My father’s name was Robbie Green and mother’s name was Martha Farnsworth before she was married.

MC: I can’t think of anymore questions. Do you have anything else you’d like to add?

DG: Yeah, I think you’d better have Ma over here—she’s the talker. She writes the letters…

MC: Thank you very much this tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by future researchers.