

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

# Kate Thomas Sorensen - The Depression

By Kate Thomas Sorensen

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## Box 2 Folder 39

Oral Interview conducted by Dawn Lyon

Transcribed by Victor Ukorebi March 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

DL: I am Dawn Lyon. Today, March 23, 1974, I am going to interview Kate Thomas Sorensen, and the general topic will be the depression. Mrs. Sorensen, where were you born?

KTS: St. Anthony (Idaho) or Wilford, I guess really. It was just a little place outside of St. Anthony. It's just a ward.

DL: Okay, and how long have you lived in Firth?

KTS: Oh, fifty-four years or a little over.

DL: Where were your parents born?

KTS: My father was born in Wales, and my mother was born in Hooper, Utah.

DL: What was your occupation?

KTS: We always just farmed.

DL: Just farmed? Okay.

DL: Will you spell your name now for us, so that we have it correct for the tape?

KTS: Kate, K-A-T-E T-H-O-M-A-S S-O-R-E-N-S-E-N.

DL: Okay, thank you.

DL: Where did you live during the Depression?

KTS: Up there at Basalt (Idaho) just on the hill above the Government canal.

DL: How many children did you have during the Depression?

KTS: Three.

DL: Three? Were they—how many boys and girls?

KTS: Two boys and one girl.

DL: And during the Depression, for a living you had a farm?

KTS: Well, we was up on the farm up in the hills, but we couldn't make it up there so we just stayed down here and milked, oh, ten or twelve cows and done the best we could for feed.

DL: So you just raised cows?

KTS: Yes, and then bought most of our feed.

DL: I heard that you had to sell your farm because of the Depression?

KTS: No, we didn't. We didn't have any farm to sell. It was rented ground that we's running up there in the hills, his father's homestead and his sister's homestead and some ground his brother had up there. We rented that and ran sheep.

DL: You had sheep, then?

KTS: Just, we'd pick up sheep in the small bands around the valley and take them up there and herd them fer...

DL: Oh, just for men in the valley?

KTS: Yeah, and then they'd pay us fer so much fer herding them.

DL: Did you always get paid in cash or like would they pay you with crops and stuff too?

KTS: No, we got paid in cash.

DL: What type of wages did you get for this?

KTS: Oh, I don't remember what they paid us for herding the sheep up there. Do You?

Husband: What say?

KTS: How much did you get a piece for the sheep you herded up there in the hills?

Husband: Different prices.

KTS: There's one, the biggest ones were supposed to give us \$50 a month.

DL: Oh, but it just varied with the different herders?

KTS: Yeah well, so much a head for sheep, but he had his, it was his ground and he was the biggest one. He was supposed to get \$50 a month and then the crops were raised, why he'd get a share of them back.

DL: Oh, I see. How much land did you have up there that you tended the sheep on?

KTS: About a thousand acres I'd say, just roughly.

DL: Oh, okay. Could you tell us a little bit now about the prices, the prices of the food and such at this time?

KTS: Well, you could buy a sack of flour for round about fifty cents.

DL: How much flour was this?

KTS: Fifty pounds.

DL: Oh, fifty pounds! How about sugar or bread or butter, things like this?

KTS: Well, we never bought bread. We made it, always made our own bread, but to buy a loaf of bread was something unusual. I don't even remember what they sold bread for. We always made our own, and I can't remember what sugar was either.

DL: How about butter?

KTS: Well, I'm, if I remember right I don't think we got over from between ten and twenty cents a pound for butter fat.

DL: Now, did you buy coal for your heater or did you use wood or what kind did you?

KTS: Well, mostly wood, a little coal in the coldest part of the winter.

DL: How much did you have to pay for this coal?

KTS: We got our coal, what was it, about five dollars a ton for coal then?

Husband: Yeah, about that, five to seven dollars.

DL: What did you remember reading or hearing now about the bread lines or soup lines?

KTS: Oh, just reading in the paper the—I guess the people in the city, from all you read about, they really suffered a lot more than the people out here in the rural areas. Course, that was all just what we'd read and hear. We didn't know—didn't see any of that.

DL: You consider yourself quite fortunate then?

KTS: Oh yes. Yes, we always had plenty to eat of what of good nourishing grub. We'd probably would like a few luxuries you didn't get.

DL: Yes. Okay, I understand now that you had a personal experience with the WPA. Could you tell us about that?

KTS: Well, not exactly a personal experience, just hearing things. Now they'd, there wasn't enough work for everybody. They had to just pick the ones that, that'd work on it,

and I remember hearing that a veteran would go there and want a job. If he had a small family, oh well, we've got to give it to the man with the big family and a man with a big family would go and want a job, they'd try and give him the run-around and well, the veterans just got to come first.

DL: Okay, was it about this same way then with the CCC? Is that about...

KTS: Well, the CC camps is just like enlisting in the army. They'd take ya out wherever the CC camps was. A lot of married men enlisted in them. I think they got thirty dollars a month for their, for to get along with, course they had all their keep in the camp, and they sent most of their \$30 home to their families.

DL: What did they just do in these CC camps?

KTS: Oh, out working in the timber like they do now, ya know, you do most, that's where they were most of the time, up in the timbers and working that, whatever timber work, you know.

DL: I see. Okay, I heard too now that a lot of people blamed President Hoover for the depression. How do you feel about that?

KTS: Well I, I certainly didn't blame him. It was world-wide and I know that a lot of people just thought Hoover was entirely to blame, but I could never could see it that way. Something that'd come on people that they just didn't know what to do about it, and he was in.

DL: He just happened to be in the wrong place?

KTS: No more fault than the rest of them. No, I think he done a wonderful job, considering what he had to, the conditions.

DL: Okay. Did the government now do anything during this time to help the World War One veterans besides giving them the jobs in the WPA?

KTS: Well, now when they elected Roosevelt in for President, then he, he was the one that put out the WPA and that kind of work for people and then they got to building these little outhouses. You probably see what they called "Roosevelt's." They built a lot of them, and then that, the men'd build them they got paid to live on.

DL: Do you know about when the Depression ended then?

KTS: Well, it was about the time we got into World War II, it's when it started to end and they, we always had a, it was a very bad time for labor, you know, then we took a lot of men into the army, and that had a lot of work to build up a war machine, then that's when it ended. That's that was in Roosevelt's time, I believe it was his second term of office that we got into the war. That would be, what was it, about '38 I guess.

DL: So you think it took the war for the depression to end?

KTS: Oh yes, definitely. I think so.

DL: I'd just kind of like your opinion now. Do you think that we're headed for another depression?

KTS: Well, it looks to me like if it; it might be shortage of necessary things not a money depression. I don't think so. I'd say people just won't be able to buy what they need. That's my opinion now maybe I'm wrong.

DL: Okay. Is there anything else now that you'd like to tell us that you remember about the depression?

KTS: Well, the kind of wages that men used to have to work for, that might be interesting. A man around here, they were awful glad to get a job to go out and pitch hay for 12 hours a day for a dollar and that wasn't like that with the machinery like we have now. They had little piles of hay in the fields and pitch them up on wagons pulled by horses. You will fill one the wagons and work 12 hours a day for a dollar.

DL: So it was pretty hard work for little pay?

KTS: Yes, but then that dollar bought a lot of things too. Things were cheap, and it's, it gives the family what they needed, a lot of them couldn't get that.

Husband: They're trying to make Democrats out of these kids.

DL: What other kinds of working conditions were there now, life factory working conditions? Did you.....

KTS: Well, round here there wasn't no, much factory work. It was just mostly farm labor, and then they established this WPA. I remember we's living up there, it had, it's a real bad winter when it was during one of the years of depression, and the crews'd come out and shovel roads out. The snow drifts was come clear above the top of the car. They just shoveled a tunnel through that Goshen highway, and that's some of the work the WPA done—road work and mill work and things like that was what the put them to working at.

DL: Okay, so the working conditions weren't really good?

KTS: Oh, they'd, person just begged for jobs.

DL: Oh, okay.

KTS: The one that could get a job then, they could manage because everything you bought was so cheap.

DL: But the people would just take what work they could get?

KTS: Yeah, they was glad to figure themselves fortunate if they got a job for a dollar a day.

DL: Okay. How were the wages then of the regular worker compared to that of the WPA worker?

KTS: Well, before the WPA started, glad to get a job for a dollar a day, but afterwards I think about \$3.50 a day.

Husband: Wages gone up. On a farm or ranch work, it was \$35 a month.

DL: Are there any other experiences, personal experiences, or anything that you can remember then that...

KTS: Well, I can remember a sick family, it wasn't ours, their sheets was all worn out, and the woman had had several months of a real serious sickness, and she never had any sheets for the bed and couldn't afford to buy them and that. I know there is a lot worse than we did.

DL: Okay. Another thing that I just thought of, what about clothing? Did you have a lot of clothes, all the clothing you needed and stuff too?

KTS: Well, we done pretty well on clothing on our own family. Now I don't know about others, but this might be interesting too. During that time you could have a beautiful funeral and all coffin and all burial expenses for about a hundred and fifty to sixty-five dollars.

DL: You mentioned that funerals were a lot cheaper then. Now what about weddings? Did weddings run the same or ...

KTS: Never had any experience with any of them. I don't think they done much but just go get married.

DL: Oh, okay. They didn't have receptions or anything?

KTS: I don't think so. There might have some been some but ...

DL: Okay then. You just considered yourself as one of the more fortunate families?

KTS: Well, I heard a lot of families, a lot of families that had it a lot harder than we did.

DL: But with your garden and stuff ...

KTS: Yeah, and we always had cows to milk and cream and that we sold we'd buy the necessary things that we couldn't raise in the garden and on the farm.

DL: I'm sure that this Depression has really made you appreciate what you have had then.

KTS: Oh yes, I figure that there's a lot of people a lot worse off than we was.

DL: Okay, well thanks so much for your time and experiences and stuff.

KTS: Well, I hope it works out all right for you.

DL: Oh, I'm sure it will, and this tape then will be placed in the library at Ricks College and will be for use by further researchers, and thanks a lot.