

Dr. David L. Crowder Oral History Project

L. W. Gillespie – Life during the
Depression

By L.W. Gillespie

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Box 1 Folder 42

Oral Interview conducted by Mike Vandewiele

Transcribed by Victor Ukorebi June 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

My name is Mike Vandewiele. Today is October 29, 1975. I am going to interview Mr. Gillespie and the general topic will be "The General economic conditions in Idaho during the depression and the causes of the depression."

Mike Vandewiele (MV): Mr. Gillespie, where were you born?

L.W. Gillespie (LWG): I was born here in Rexburg. Up there where the new high school now stands. We had a thirty-acre farm up there. We had a little log house. It had four rooms in it besides the pantry and a nice little cellar where we kept our vegetables. At that time all we had was coal oil lamps. That was before electricity come into Rexburg about ten years ago.

MV: How long ago was that?

LWG: Well, that was 1898 when I was born. Two years before the century. I'll never see another century.

MV: Oh, keep it up, and you'll make it. Where were your parents born?

LWG: My dad was born in Scotland. My mother was born in England. I can't think of the name in Scotland where he was born. My dad joined the church when he was about twenty-six years old, I think. Some along about then. Then he got on a boat to come to America. That is where he met my mother on the boat. He worked in Salt Lake about three years at different things and then he finally, they needed a bookkeeper here for the Rexburg Milling Co. He came up here to keep books for them.

MV: How big was the town?

LWG: Oh, I imagine it was about six hundred population about then. Rexburg was six years old then when we come here. We came here in 1889.

MV: Did you work here in Rexburg?

LWG: Yes. We had that little farm up there where the school is and we had a few cows and pigs and horses, then we had a dry farm up on the Rexburg bench. My dad, he was a bookkeeper, he kept account for different companies here in Rexburg.

MV: What were you doing when the depression hit?

LWG: We were farming, just running the farm and selling wheat for about forty cents a hundred. Milk, we sell milk for about four cents a quart delivered it to the stores. Potatoes we would be pilling up and treating them and the government was paying them for treating them so nobody could eat them and also we were only allowed to raise so much, we were working under the economy of scarcity, under monetary system you can not produce abundance. When you do produce abundance, you do away with evaluation. Just like the Eskimos. You couldn't sell ice to the Eskimos because they have plenty of it

there. But if it was out on the desert, you could sell water out on the desert. A little ice would go fine with it, out on the hot desert.

MV: That was the same way in Idaho?

LWG: Oh yes, it was the same way all over the United States- all over America. When the depression was on.

MV: When the government was making you treat the potatoes so that you couldn't eat them, what did you do with the potatoes after you treated them?

LWG: Oh, we dumped em to maintain scarcity. The main reason was to maintain a scarcity because you can not distribute abundance with money. The trouble was it is our monetary system not our science and technology of producing things. That was a time when we really should be enjoying ourselves, taking it easy because we had more than enough to go around so they could sell it at a price. That is why we call it the price system.

MV: Were they paying you for the potatoes?

LWG: Yes, they were paying us. They would make this payment for destroying the potatoes. They would make you a payment for plowing your crops under so they could maintain a scarcity. We were killing off cows, we were killing off calves, we were killing off little pigs and things because we had too much to go around. It was very stupid.

MV: It sure sounds like it. It was bad. This was when you were working on the farm? You were working for your father?

LWG: Yes. Before I was married.

MV: What happened to the other people, like people who were working down town at the stores?

LWG: Well, they (government) would create jobs, like cleaning out ditches and hauling gravel along the roads and they would fix up wagons with dump boards in them then they could haul from the gravel pit and the gravel pit would have a dozen men around each load loading it with shovels. They weren't using steam shovels to load it; they were just using hand shovels. The house guard used to say that was a foolish way to do it. He said the only thing they used the shovel for was to lean on, not to be shoveling with. You should let the machine do the work, not human being.

MV: They didn't have enough work?

LWG: Any time you have toil you use the machine. We don't believe that. They believe in letting the machine do the job and let the man run the machine.

MV: Were they making anything worthwhile when they were shoveling this all around or were....?

LWG: Just scattering gravel around and putting it on the road. It was just making jobs so they figured they earned something so they could feed their families.

MV: What were the prices like for food and that?

LWG: Well, the food was good and everything, but it was just because of the depression was caused by abundance. We could take care of scarcity but we don't know how to take care of abundance. When you have abundance you do it with evaluation. It was an opportunity so we could have had heaven here on earth but we let Satan run this country too much. It is in the hands of Satan, today it is.

MV: Was it bad?

LWG: Sure it was. Our money is Satan's biggest institution, is the dollar. We got to do away with it. It's on its way out. You can see it's on its way out. A dollar ain't worth a dime today.

MV: That's the truth.

LWG: Yeah. Ford said we have to have four trillion dollars in the next four years to take care of nine million people who are without jobs.

MV: I don't know where he is going to get it.

LWG: Neither do I.

MV: Were there a lot of bad politicians during the depression?

LWG: No they weren't bad, just stupid.

MV: Didn't know what was going on huh?

LWG: Yeah.

MV: What were they doing to try to help things out?

LWG: They were putting out these "Make Work" jobs so people could get a job. What we call a price system only operates on an economy of scarcity. If only we'd do away with money, we could solve the problem but we kept hanging on to an economy of scarcity when we were producing abundance.

MV: What were wages like?

LWG: They probably got one dollar a day maybe for running a shovel all day. Something like that. One dollar or one dollar and twenty-five cents.

MV: Was that enough to take care of a family?

LWG: Well, we got by but that was all. They got by pretty slim.

MV: It sounds like it. What kind of wages were you making?

LWG: Well, I went and helped haul gravel just like them others. I don't remember just what...we'd all work about five days and got a little check. I don't remember. Darn poor wages. Maybe about one dollar and fifty cents a day is about all that it amounted to.

MV: Were you making anything off the farm then?

LWG: No, we weren't getting much off the farm. About forty cents per one hundred for our wheat was about all we were getting. Potatoes were about two bits a hundred.

MV: How about like you said they were killing off your cows, and pigs, and that?

LWG: Oh, we sold some cows for eighteen dollars each.

MV: Full grown?

LWG: Yes.

MV: What were the pigs going for?

LWG: We didn't have any pigs at that time. I don't remember just what they were. You could buy a mutton for about two dollars you know.

MV: Was there anybody during the depression that was really well off?

LWG: Well, there was some that had more property. They took the cars and making them into wagons. They had horses and couldn't buy their gasoline. So they were calling them the Hoover Wagons. That was their name, the Hoover Wagon.

MV: After President Hoover?

LWG: Yeah, after President Hoover. They blamed him onto the depression. Hoover wasn't the blame for our depression. It was the scientists and the technologists. And producing abundance that made the depression. And we didn't have enough gumption to change from an economy of scarcity to an economy of abundance. We had the world by the trail but we didn't know.

MV: Were there many other people that knew that?

LWG: No, not very many people could see it. They just thought well, we'll just keep going along. Prosperity is around the corner. It was in 1932, got real bad in 1936, why then Roosevelt got in in '32 and he started building those CC Camps up in the hills and boys would go there for about one dollar a day and that went on until 1941. Now Allen Scott in 1937 says our economy would break down in 1942 which I think it would have done but we got in war in 1941 and that saved the economy. It was the war. That was the big reason we got into the war – to save the economy. That gave us a chance to get money into operation. Then we borrowed money to keep the war going. People went from the farms to build machinery, guns, tanks, and one thing and another so they could destroy our resources which were producing our abundance. That lasted until 1945 and then things started to go down again until 1950 when Truman got us into war again and then we kept it going ever since. It's a war economy. Now we got both bread and butter and guns.

MV: That's about it. Some people say that during the depression the rich people were buying everything up?

LWG: Yes, I think they did. They saw an opportunity to buy a piece of ground. They'd get it almost dirt cheap. A lot of ground went for... we bought a farm for eight dollars an acre up on the other side of Canyon Creek. One hundred and sixty acres. Of course there was some a little higher. About twenty dollars. That was in 1936. A lot of the farmers were losing their farms. They couldn't make anything on it and they were just going into sagebrush a lot of the ground at that time. They just abandoned them. This farm we bought for eight dollars was abandoned and wasn't growing anything. That's when things started building up along about 1935 and they were paying quite a bit for not raising stuff, you know. That's how they try to maintain scarcity by paying the farmers not raise stuff.

MV: They were doing that around here too?

LWG: Oh yeah. All over the United States they were doing the same thing.

MV: What was that CC camp you were talking about?

LWG: Ah, up here just above Ashton about twenty miles the other side of Ashton was the CC camp. They built building for them to sleep in. They had teachers to teach them different things. They were just boys, you know, boys in their early eighteen's, in their teen ages. Mostly teenage boys came from all over. They had theses CC Camps in different parts of the United States and they had them cleaning out all along the road. They'd clean out the old dead brush, pile it up burn it and in the spring before everything got dry and they kind of worked on the roads and a few things like that. Anything, the main thing is to give them a job. They had a teacher to teach them. They always had an army man to give them the works. Prepare them for another war maybe, I don't know.

MV: Was this run by the army?

LWG: No, but they always put an officer in there. The army sent their lieutenant there to lecture to them about different things mostly on the government.

MV: How good the army was? What was happening to the little towns like Rexburg?

LWG: They were in bad shape you know. They was having a hard time collecting their bills, and getting enough to keep the stores going, some went broke, you know and things like that.

MV: How about the city Government? Was it going broke?

LWG: I don't know. I guess they were having a rough time, I'd say.

MV: Sounds like a pretty bad time all together.

LWG: Yeah, it was pretty rough.

MV: Can you think of anything else as to how rough it was?

LWG: No. Now and then there are a lot of things I think of, you know. Let's see. There was something they told about Hoover. Hoover would go along and wanted to borrow a nickel for something and the guard gave him a dime and said, I'll give you a dime and we'll have a nickel each. Oh no, I forget how that went. Anyway they blamed the depression on Hoover. Well, it really wasn't. He was just in the presidency at that time when our economy was breaking down.

MV: How about the State Government. Were they doing anything?

LWG: I don't know much about the State Government. They were all in together. They had organizations in each country you know and they appointed people to do different things. There was a fellow named Wilford Jensen who had charge of certain things and then there was.... I don't remember the names or what they did have. They had the offices in the court room where they went and signed up all the farmers for holding out their jobs. Anyway, they created jobs to keep them from starving to death in this land of abundance. We didn't know how to distribute abundance. We only know how to distribute scarcity. Money will only distribute scarcity, it will not distribute abundance. Money is no good. It's going down the drain.

MV: Inflation and everything?

LWG: Yeah.

MV: Well, if it distributed scarcity, who had all the money? Did anyone had all the money?

LWG: No, there wasn't anybody who had all of it. But there was so many who had a lot more than others. Yeah.

MV: What were they doing with it?

LWG: What do you mean the ones that had it?

MV: Yes.

LWG: Well those who had the money, after things went on, they saw things way down cheap and they, I think they bought up land and one thing and another, figuring on when the things got good; they would be the ones on top.

MV: Was there anybody in this area who was like that?

LWG: Oh yes. I think there was quite a few that took advantage because they could buy the ground pretty cheap and they could get in on down payment and they could pay about ten percent down and so much a year and some of them got pretty well along there when the things started going the other way.

MV: I bet they did. Was anybody trying trying to help anybody else, like did any of the townspeople get together and try to help somebody who was in really bad shape financially or anything?

LWG: Oh, I think there was but don't remember exactly. They had WPS who helped them get on these jobs so they could get on their feet.

MV: Was your father around during the depression?

LWG: Oh yeah, he was here. He had a little money in the bank, you know, and he wasn't hurt too bad but he wasn't rich.

MV: How was he during the depression?

LWG: Well, he was doing OK. He felt it was all uncalled for. Why we should be going without when we had too much, when we had plenty. I heard him tell a veterinarian, our veterinarian came to help us take care of our cows, you know, when we had to get a veterinarian and the veterinarian was talking about things being tough and I remember dad telling them all we had to do was get rid of this money and everything would be alright.

That was a long time before I heard of the technology and technology came out in 1933 when I first heard about it. Dad said they had the answer. Just get rid of the money and that's all there'd be to it.

MV: If you do away with money and start distributing or quit distributing scarcity and distribute abundance, won't that do away with incentive?

LWG: Yes, you bet. That would be the finest thing we could do is to do away with incentive. We wouldn't be sending kids off to war to fight if we did away with incentive. When they get war going, that's incentive for some of these big munition makers to make millions of dollars while these kids go off and give their lives for nothing. Incentive has got to be done away with but not initiative. We don't want to get rid of initiative. There is difference between initiative and incentive. Money is an incentive to steal and one thing and another. That is what money is for. Money is not non-transferable, non-negotiable. It would be issued to you and it would give you the privilege of buying abundance, of getting abundance, of getting abundance without having to energy certificates. Ninety-eight percent of what we produced today is done by extraneous energy, non-human energy. We don't have much to do with the production of goods in service. It is the biggest part done by machinery. Like when you get into a car. You are not pushing the car down the road. You are just steering it down. The power from that engine is pushing it down the road. That is what all of our production is done by, machines and extraneous energy and that produces abundance so when you produce abundance you do away evaluation so we have to have a system of distributing abundance which would be no money but would be energy certificates and everybody would be entitled to a high standard of living, not just privileged few and we don't have to send boys off to another country to fight to maintain a scarcity. That's what we want to work for. The Pearl Harbor was a deal to get us into war and our politicians knew about it before it happened.

MV: Do you think so?

LWG: Yes, I'm sure so.

MV: That's a thought to think about.

LWG: That's what made the people, that's the only way they could get us into it and that made the people mad. They pulled a trick on us but they had an invitation to come over and bomb us from Washington.

MV: Mr. Gillespie, we'd like to thank you very much for your cooperation on this. We are going to take this tape down to the Ricks College library for further reference for anybody else who would like to listen to it. Like to thank you again.

