

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Lera Packer Thomson- Depression of the 1930's

By Lera Packer Thomson

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Box 2 Folder 47

Oral Interview conducted by Reed Thomson

Transcribed by Sarah McCorristin February 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

RT: This is an oral history. I am Reed Thomson. And today is March 24, 1975. I am going to interview Mrs. Lester Thomson. The general topic will be the depression of the 1930s. Mrs. Thomson, where were you born?

LT: I was born in Franklin, Idaho.

RT: And how long have you lived here in Rexburg?

LP: Oh, let me think....a little over forty years.

RT: Where were your parents born?

LP: My father was born at Franklin, Idaho; and my mother was born in Preston, Idaho.

RT: What is your occupation at present?

LP: I'm an elementary school teacher in the Rexburg Schools.

RT: Okay, thank you. We're talking about the depression of the thirties. Where were you at the beginning of this event?

LP: I was at home on the farm at that time, but I was old enough to make myself quite useful.

RT: How were you involved at this time?

LP: There was no money for help on the farm at this time, so my sister and I worked in the fields along with our brothers. We were pretty good at thinning and topping beets. I remember at one time, my brother even put me at driving the horses hitched to the best digger. I did just fine, even though I did cut up quite a few beets.

Then I remember at haying time, I was the main derrick horse rider. That took lots of courage because if we pulled the fork up too high or not high enough, we got yelled at. We also used to raise green peas that we took to the vinery, where they were there shelled and then the peas were taken to the cannery. At that time, there was a cannery at Franklin, Idaho. The field man would come along the farms and check the peas and when he'd come to our place, he'd tell father where top cut, and to have three loads. Maybe four, whatever he thought that the peas were just ready nice and green, and we were to have them at the vinery at probably four o'clock the next morning. That meant that we had to work all night because the weather had to be cool so the peas wouldn't wilt. Oh, all of this was hard work, but as a family, we were very congenial and we had lots of fun together.

RT: I know that you went to college. When money was scarce, how ere you able to pay for your education?

LP: It wasn't easy. I remember my father had to sell a cow to pay my tuition and then I was fortunate enough to work at the college, playing for the dancing classes. With this way, I paid my way through college. After I had obtained my teaching certificate, I taught in a country school where I taught the first and second and third grades.

RT: At that time, what sort of salaries were paid to the teachers?

LP: Well, my salary was seventy dollars a months, and I paid twenty dollars a month for board and room. So many times we didn't receive checks, but we received warranties instead. If we spent the warranties before the county called them in, we had to take a discount for them. For instance, we could go in a store and buy groceries or clothes or whatever, but they would only give us a certain percent of our full amount. If we could get by and save these warranties until this certain numbered warranty was called, then we would receive full value. I remember at one time when the farm taxes came due, father was really broke, so I gave him enough warranties to pay taxes.

RT: Okay. You mentioned this word warranty. What is a warranty?

LP: Well, a warranty was just simply a piece of paper and the place of a check that promised me the money when the school district had it available.

RT: It sounds as though wages weren't very high at this time.

LP: Well, they really weren't, but neither was the cost of living. I remember paying ten cents for a loaf of bread. The depression really didn't affect my life so very much because I was raised on a small farm and we didn't have much money left over for luxuries of life. Then my husband and I were married in 1933 and he was working for the Utah Power and Light Company, and we seemed to manage by being careful in our spending. So, basically, the depression didn't adversely affect our lives too much.

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