

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

# Mary E. Widdison-The Depression

By Mary E. Widdison

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## Box 2 Folder 51

Oral Interview conducted by Barbara Moore

Transcribed by Sarah McCorristin      March 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

BM: My name is Barbara Moore and I am here interviewing Mary E. Widdison and her daughter Lillis Widdison Muir about the Depression. First of all Sister Widdison is going to tell us about how the banks foreclosed and how she got the money to send her son on a mission.

MW: It was the late summer or early fall of 1930; he was called to go to England on a mission. We, at that time, had money in the First National Bank in Rexburg and just shortly before he was to leave, perhaps a month or six weeks, the bank went closed and we had so little extra money and we put it in the Farmers and Merchants Bank across the road and it was only a little while until the Farmers and Merchants Bank went closed. So that took all the money that we had on hand, which I'm sorry to admit wasn't very much. But we were saving it for his mission and so we went to Sugar City to the Sugar City Bank to borrow money for him to go on. We thought we could earn money that it would come from somewhere if we could just get him into the mission field. But when we got up there, they said, "Oh no. You can't borrow money to send him on a mission. We'll loan you money to live off of while the Depression is on but we can't support any missionaries. You'll have to call his mission off." But we said, no, that some way we'd get the money. So my husband had two life insurance policies, the New York Life and the Beneficiary Life. We went to Salt Lake and he borrowed money enough on those two policies to send him to England. In those days, you had to pay your own way, which his ticket cost two hundred and twenty five dollars. In fact, he was sent to Germany first. Then we had to send one hundred dollars ahead of him and he had one hundred dollars in his pocket. So you see by the time he got there, the five hundred dollars was spent. That was the last money we had until he was ready to return home from his work. He went and filled a mission and the Lord provided.

It was just before that, that we were living in Ashton and my neighbor had a little boy the same age as my oldest daughter and we were called to Boise on a business trip but I had no clothes ready, none prepared for the daughter; and Mrs. Hulsse came over and she said, "Oh, don't stay home on account of clothes. I'll go home and get Henry's clothes all ready and you can take them for her." Course in those days, the little boys wore dresses the same as the little girls did. So while we were in Boise (s)he wore the little boy's clothes as much as (s)he did his (her) own. And we got by that way.

Then when a little bit later (Mrs. Hulse's) brother, (Alma Larsen) was going blind and they phoned up and said, "Although he can see you, you'll have to come tonight because by morning he'll be totally blind." So, I took my dress and let the hem out. She was just my size only taller and I took the hem out of my dress and faced it so she would wear my dress down to see her brother while he could yet see. Because in those days we didn't have extra dresses neither for ourselves nor our children. We had plenty for our needs while we were home but to go on a trip we were running short. At the same time, our other neighbor down there had been on a mission and, of course, it took every bit of money they had for his way but when he came back he went up to the dry farm to put in his crop and he told me afterwards that there was for ninety days that they stayed on the dry farm and they never saw a dollar. Yet they lived and have raised a family and are very fine people.

One of our neighbors, at that time, had a lot of horses and mules. He used to take horses and animals from his neighbors in summer then and if possible feed them in the

winter. This year there was no feed for winter but he kept the horses together and brought them down here and there were about seventy-five head in number. He turned them loose along the river and they ate willows and brush and that. They survived as long as they could but they finally most of them died, starved to death. We, at that time, lived down in Hibbard in the wintertime so the children could go to school. We had planted a large orchard and it being a sub-irrigated ground, now what I mean with sub-irrigation is we don't run the water over the top, we fill up the ground with water in the spring and the water will come to the surface and then we don't have to water it during the summer. Just hold the sub up, although we did have a little water in the spring. But it was so dry and we couldn't get any more water and all the apple trees and all the strawberries and everything that was growing around the home died for the want of water. This was about the year 1933, I think.

Another neighbor who lived at Clementsville had been on a mission the same time my son was. When he came home, of course, he went up to the dry farm to put in his crops. Put in his crop and worked all summer. He told me it was for ninety days they never saw a dollar. There was no money to be had and people had to do without. That same summer we had put in wheat and lows where the moisture lasted a little bit longer and there was moisture enough to bring up a little grain in the hollows. So while we were out trying to find hay down here for our horses in the winter, we figured that we would go up there and cut this green stuff, whatever it might be, for winter feed for them. But our neighbor up there thought the same thing. He thought, "Well, Widdisons won't get that little bit of green so we'll just turn our cows in." They had a bunch of milk cows and they herded their cows and took what green grass we had.

There were very few cars in those days. It was just the beginning of our car "season," you might say. We for one, put our car in the garage when the boy went on his mission (1930) and we never took it out until he returned because we had no money to buy gas to run it with. All the way we had of traveling was either horse back or by team. By that time nearly everybody's wagons had got worn out so they made what was called the Hoover Wagon. They took the trusses of the old cars, took the lid off, took the car part off and put a tongue in it and built a box or a frame of some kind and that was the wagons that we used. Put a tongue in it and we could drive the horses. Later on I'm not sure just what year it was, the government substituted, helped the farmers out a little bit by having them kill so many horses and so many cattle and so many sheep in order to keep them from starving to death. Now I remember we had a little flock of sheep and they ran them in the corral and then they picked out all the old ones and the poor ones and those we thought wouldn't make it though the winter and they killed them and took their pelts. I remember their nasty, old carcasses on that ground.

This was about the time of the CC Boys came to help us and they (the government) found work for them. Some crews were put up to the rock quarry and they quarried rock. Cut the stone for buildings and houses and others were stationed along the road where they cut the willows off the ditch bank and off of the borrow pits. They gave them work wherever they could find work to do. They worked on the roads, mostly in public places. But they got some money and that helped them out a great deal. They worked on dams. I don't know just which dams at the time. The Teton dam, and the dam up at Mack's (Inn), the Grassy Lakes Dam. They worked in the timber up at the Park

(Yellowstone). Anything that they could get for them to do, they paid them for it. This was the first lift the government gave us.