

Dr. David L. Crowder Oral History Project

Maude S. Humpherys – The Depression

By Maude S. Humpherys

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Box 1 Folder 50

Oral Interview conducted by Roberts Beck

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This is oral history, I am Robert Beck. Today, on November 20, 1975, I am going to interview Maude C. Humpherys. The general topic will be the Depression Era.

Robert Beck (RB): Mrs. Hunpherys, where were you born?

Maude S. Humpherys (MH): In Dingel.

RB: How long have you lived in Dingel?

MH: All my life until I was married. Up to 1920, I moved here and there just a little, just me alone. Little jobs here and there. Homework. Taking care of my uncle's boy once in a while. His mother died. But I haven't had any particular...and helped my mother.

RB: After you were married, where did you live?

MH: Just lived in Paris.

RB: Right there in Paris?

MH: All the time.

RB: Where were your parents born?

MH: Father was born down in Utah. I forgot now. Just a place in Ogden, Utah; and my mother in Paris.

RB: Right there in Paris?

MH: Mother was born in Paris.

RB: What was your husband's occupation again?

MH: Well, all over. Whole Bear Lake and any place they'd call him.

RB: He was a ...?

MH: He worked at fire plants, and he worked at other wiring, and other kind of work. Anything he could get.

RB: As an electrician?

MH: Electrician.

RB: In a power company? Mrs. Humpherys, why do you think the depression was started? What caused it? What happened?

MH: Well, I don't know. That's where I'm puzzled out. Whether the government had a little to do with it or not. It just kind of worked that way. Let's see, Roosevelt went in the fourth time. He liked to show off. He wanted his way, but I don't know. Things like that I wouldn't know.

RB: Did it just kind of all of a sudden just pop right up on you?

MH: Just popped up. I didn't know much about it 'til after we'd been downtown for a while—down in Paris. See, my husband worked up the power plant. He run the plant up there. He helped at Lifton a little bit. When they needed him either place, he would go, but most of the time he was up to the power plant. They ran that and the Bear Lake load. They synchronized them with the Lifton Plant, so they could work together. The power plant up there had to have enough on so they could take care of the whole Bear Lake. The juice they needed. If they didn't they didn't have enough and people had to cut down on it.

RB: Would the people have to stop using things in order to...?

MH: No. I don't know. They'd just go dim and they couldn't use some things. But they got along pretty good. People understood that they couldn't see. They had a big spring up the head of the creek furnished a lot of water. They had a big canal connected onto this spring or right close. It connected onto a ditch and this big ditch or flume run down to the power plant and down to the hill into the plant. That furnished the water.

RB: It turned the turbines?

MH: Turn so they'd have enough generation, enough to keep it going. If it was low, why then they'd have to watch it and see if they had enough load and if they didn't, I forgot what they done.

RB: What happened when the depression started? Did you go to the bank? Did the banks close up?

MH: It didn't close up right then. When we were there, we didn't know there was any depression. We moved down for the kids, to go to school, the older children. It was poor time to move, but we couldn't make a trip everyday. In winter, they'd have to go horseback riding. We'd put them on the horse and go down because the snow was too deep. They didn't make roads like they do now. So we thought it best thing to get them down where they could mix with other people and go to their church and everything. The first year we got down there, we found out that things weren't so nice. It went pretty good the first year. We got along.

RB: After you moved the first year?

MH: After we moved. Yes, we got along maybe two years. Then we noticed. We heard people saying, "Something's coming on. We heard that the government's going to take

over.” My husband, Henry, said, “I don’t know what they’re going to do” He said, “Have you heard any more?” I said, “No” He said, “Well, we’ll have to wait and see.” So we waited and things got kinda tight.

RB: It was hard to buy things then?

MH: It was starting to get hard up, but we got along that winter. We got along the next spring till fall came. We could see that it was getting tough and he (Henry) took every job he could get, and he’d take these other jobs, and things, and we got along until the second winter. The second winter started out hard. We could see that we weren’t going to make it. He said, “What are we gonna do?” He says, “But we’ll make it. We’ll try.” He says, “Be prayerful. Let’s pray together and work.” So we worked together and we done everything we could. The first winter was alright, it was the second winter when we could see that it was going to get pretty hard. He said, “We’d better see about fuel. I think we could make it with feed.” Cause we’d put up fruit that summer and a few things to do with, you can’t have it. You haven’t a refrigerator and you haven’t this, and you haven’t that. So the second winter we could see it was getting hard so he says we better see if we could get some fuel. But he says, “I can’t go to the canyon. We got no horses, no wagon. If I can get to go with someone. I’ll quit my jobs, I got because that’s pretty important.” So he went and got wood. He found the man and his team, and he went with this man and they got green Quakenasps. This green Quakenasps, every third load, they’d give him one. You know that was getting pretty tough too. It’d take all day or more. So we got our wood and we tried to burn it and it wouldn’t burn. This here man in town, a coal man, he came up to my husband one day and he said, “Henry,” he says, “I can see that you haven’t enough fuel for winter. You’ve been going out, getting green Quakenasps.” He says, “I can’t get money. The bank won’t let them have money.” I think it was getting hard, the money part.

RB: The money was getting tight? There was none around?

MH: Getting kinda tight. People couldn’t get the money out they wanted, and those that had money couldn’t get it then when they wanted it. So he said to Henry, “You can go and get all the coal you need, and when you get a job next summer or spring, you can pay for it. I’ll trust you.” We’d always done trade with him at any time. The power company had done a lot with him, had him do it. So we got through that pretty good that winter.

Well, towards in the coldest part of the winter, this big storm come up, you know. That had to keep this big long flume, ditch, cleaned out. A big storm would come and fill this ditch full of snow. They’d have to keep that snow off. It’d build up, or they’d have to shut the plant down or work to keep that out. Well, it filled up. But before that it had filled up and I guess they worked with it all night long. I got after the boss in Lifton, and told him he almost lost his life (Henry) He said, “Well, I won’t let him go any more.” So that turned everybody off up there except one man just to watch the machinery.

RB: That laid your husband off from his job then?

MH: He'd quit his job up there. All but just once in a while, in a pinch they'd ask him. When they didn't need him up there while the Lifton they couldn't use all their men because they had synchronized the work in the Paris Plant. So they had to turn some of their men off. By then, you could hear more about the people getting pretty hungry. You could hear them talking, you know you can't hear everybody. I could hear what everybody said; only just some of them'd come around or talk. Henry was glad that he had that much. Well, he didn't. But, he went in the gravel pit first winter. When he got up there and thought he could finish it and make a little more, to buy some food. Well, he part near froze to death because he didn't have winter clothes like that. What was I gonna say?

RB: This was your husband that worked in the gravel pit.

MH: So he said he'd just as well quit as to froze to death, I'd be worse off. So he quit that and so many people, their furnaces would go out, and their fuss would go out, and he had took all that. He'd go and maybe it wasn't a thing for nothing. They didn't consider that. he took a little job like that. We got through. Then the spring came. They just had that ditch cleaned out. They had to run the plant. They just have to have that. When the guys, they got that had worked there and the one that was working there, he couldn't get it to going. Something was the matter with the generation wheel. If you'd of ever been there, there was a great big wheel that generates right in the center of the building there. So they had to ask him because there wasn't an electrician around that understood it. Well, he went up there and he found out the coil had burned in it. Well, they couldn't get any in Utah, they had to turn back and go again back east and they couldn't do that. Well, they finally coaxed him to go. He went and helped put that coil in. He knew how to put it in before and he got that coil in, they started the plant. Well, they went ahead and got that job to Lifton. So we got through pretty good but a lot of people suffered. They didn't have jobs they could get their money. But we went pretty darn tough. We didn't have hardly enough to live, but he wouldn't (Henry) go on Government dole out. They had a big line of people stretched out. They would give commodities every week or there so often. They'd get a block long. I didn't go, my daughter, other daughter, went once or twice up there. They'd pass meat and butter, and dried milk and all that stuff out, and some clothing, sheets and towels. They got so bad, fighting for it; they knocked each other over and grab it from each other. Henry said, "Don't you go anymore. We'll survive. We can make it." And we did. It got a little better after that because things picked up just a little bit again. But, oh, a lot of people did suffer. We suffered, I know.

RB: Where there people who were worse off than you?

MH: I don't know whether there was any worse or not. But we didn't want to go on charity. What we had, we tried to make. Flour, that's what I didn't know whether it was rationed out or just what. I forgot about that. I know when we used flour; we had to mix yellow cornmeal with the flour to make our bread. We had to do two or three things. It's funny, but it's just slipped my mind. I guess I just wanted to forget it.

RB: Did you have to mix a lot of things together in order to make it last longer?

MH: I think so, I don't know. It was awful. If we could mix one loaf...I don't know if they'd just let us have so much one and have to use them together or just how it was.

RB: In your community where you lived, do you think the depression years; did it make people come together? Did it bring families together?

MH: No, it separated them. It really did. It caused feelings. The worse of it, people that had voted for Roosevelt another year. He'd of went in five or six years or more. Some of them said he was a Savior to them.

RB: Some of them really liked Roosevelt?

MH: Yes, he furnished them with food and things. They didn't have to work for it. See when they passed it out like that, they didn't have to do anything, just get along there and grab it.

RB: Getting back to the family. What was family like?

MH: Oh, I think it was good. Family life was good there. Good families, good Latter-Day Saints families. May once in a while they weren't doing just right, but as a rule it was fairly good. I don't know of any trouble. There's more now than there was then.

RB: What was the name of your LDS Ward?

MH: It was right down our street. They had that string of people.

RB: What was the name of the church or ward?

MH: Paris First Ward.

RB: Paris First.

MH: But it's not called that any more. There's no first or second ward. There's two wards. They separated them years after but there is just one ward again. They don't have one like that anymore. They're either one ward or another.

RB: What activities did the ward perform during the depression? Was there a lot of ward gatherings?

MH: Oh, they had their meetings and things, as far as I know. I don't remember. Seems to me they had their organizations. I know their Relief Society did because I kept books. We kept every bishop, every Stake President's picture and their name and the bishop's picture. Right from the very beginning when it was organized, when they first settled Paris.

RB: I know but, did the church do anything to help people that were having hard times?

MH: That's what I don't know. They never told if they did. You know that's one thing the church didn't used to do but now they planted all over. If you get something, why it's told it's not the church, it's the people.

RB: In our class, we were talking about that some of the commodities were destroyed during the depression. Some people were dumping pigs into pits and burying them, while other people were starving to death.

MH: Oh, the cattle. Now I didn't see that, and I couldn't prove it, but I saw trucks go up there. People said they did. They took little pigs and sheep and took the hind quarters of the sheep and piled them and burned them up. That's what they told. I never went up there. My husband didn't go up there. He said he couldn't prove it but he talked to people that said that that's what they'd been doing to get rid of it.

RB: Why did they do that?

MH: I don't know. He says they couldn't understand it and there they was dishing meat out in this row. Now we had a milk cow. But she was dry then. Everything got so scarce you couldn't buy it. Of course, they could have trusted us because we never owed a single man but he wouldn't break any stack and this poor old cow, we couldn't feed her any longer, so we had to sell her. She's a nice jersey cow. They'd only give you thirty dollars for her. They were expensive then too. Every time they had meat on the string, why someone would say, "We're serving meat today", why we'd say, "There's old Boss."

RB: Your cow. What did you think about Roosevelt's New Deal?

MH: I don't think it was good. I think it was rotten.

RB: What exactly was the new deal? I'm not familiar with that.

MH: I don't think the government should go that far. They'd tried to fix the government out in their places. Don't you?

RB: I don't understand what the new deal was exactly.

MH: I don't know what it was. Looks like where the welfare keeps you.

RB: Was this the lines you were talking about?

MH: Oh no, I think not only the line but they have a welfare person go around and dish things out too. It was just in the summer that they've had these strange long rows. In the winter, why I know a welfare guy come to our place and I says hope my husband says no welfare. No welfare things, we're gonna make it.

RB: So the new deal was more or less a handout?

MH: I think it was.

RB: That's more what it was. You don't think that they should have done that?

MH: No, I don't. I think in some cases it might be alright, but I don't think the Government ought to do it.

RB: What did you think of Roosevelt himself as a president?

MH: He was a stinker. He wasn't even a descent man.

RB: He wasn't even a good president.

MH: No, he tried many times but.....

RB: You didn't like his policies or what?

MH: Well, I didn't like him. Truman was the only one there who ...he was good. He had his way and he went through it.

RB: My dad has told me a lot about Truman. He really liked Truman.

MH: I like him and he'll stick out his own guts.

RB: He didn't back off at all?

MH: No.

RB: He was a good president. Was Truman the president during the depression years?

MH: No, I don't remember Truman in there then. I think that the next year it was getting better. Like I said, a little work here and a little work there. I don't know how everybody was getting along a little better. We got a little work that made us feel better. We got a little tiny bit of garden in. People that owed us, sometimes we'd get a few dollars. One man come and we was both down in the garden on our knees pulling weeds and he come and down and said, "Oh Brother Humpherys, you can use a little money to buy you some bisques."

RB: So it was pretty hard. I've heard some talk about CCC workers. What is that?

MH: CCC Workers. I don't understand this Government business now. I've had him try to explain it to me but my head don't take it. What I understand is that they done jobs like putting up the fences and paving roads and the Government would [give] them a small

amount. There was a lot of people that didn't have any other jobs, that worked for the government doing this. I think it was all part of the New Deal or something like that. Pugmeyers, they use to live in St. Charles. They had a little store on Main Street and he had money out and he couldn't get it. He had to almost give his things away but he loaded what he had and went. Moved out of town.

RB: Was there a lot of store owners that went out of business?

MH: I don't know how many, but I knew him well because he borrowed money from us and he couldn't pay us back. About five years after they had moved and he died and his wife, she wrote a letter and she told us she said, "We owe you money and we don't know what it is but if you'll just let us pay the interest and we'll pay it right up for you because he had got his insurance." Wrote right back and said no, you pay the principle, that's all you need to do. She was so happy about it. So the people were really nice. We couldn't get ours what we had either. One we've never had yet, never expected.

RB: You loaned money to a person and he has never paid you back yet?

MH: Never paid back. Never expect it. Cause he wouldn't ask for it anymore. He was close, almost a relative too.

RB: A really close friend?

MH: Yes.

RB: What was it like near the end of the depression? What happened to stop it? What was it like when it was all over with?

MH: It just kind of worked up gradual as far as I know. Little job after star. I think one or two mines started, and they put men on.

RB: Everything just kind of slowly came back together?

MH: It came back again. I don't know. Of course, I didn't have anyone working. I have a son that quite a few years after couldn't get anything decent. So he moved to California and he's done real good down there. He's government.

RB: Were people quite happy when it all come...?

MH: Oh, people were happy to just see things waking up! All people was glad. Some of them to this day say that they wish Roosevelt was there to give them something.

RB: Oh really?

MH: Yes.

RB: Well, Mrs. Humpherys, I'd like to thank you for letting me talk to you. I'll turn this in.

MH: I guess I could of told you, I told too much about my side of it.

RB: Well, go ahead and tell some more of it if you have something else.

MH: Well, I've really forgot and I've lost my memory to some of it, too. I forget when I was born half of the time.

RB: Well, just think of all the students that can listen....

MH: Well, that won't help them a bit.

RB: This will. Want to listen to this tape?

MH: Well, I guess maybe some of their folks will tell them about it.

RB: Well, like me, in my family. My dad, he was a small boy during the depression. He can remember but I never have really learned much about it until tonight, until just talking to you about it.

MH: Well, you was at go through it, it was just a little different. It was hard for the kids too. They didn't get what they needed.

RB: Well, when it's not there, I guess they just can't get it. I guess.

MH: They took it in good part, I guess.

RB: Well, I'll turn this into the library then.

MH: No, that's awful. That won't do anyone any good. But anyone knows if they've got kids they won't care anything about it because their kids can tell them more than I could ever tell them.