

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Burns J. Beal-Experiences of the Depression

By Burns Beal

February 1, 1975

Box 1 Folder 7

Oral Interview conducted by Sharon Carlson

Transcribed by Heather Mattson December 2004

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is an oral history. I am Sharon Carlson. Today, February 1, 1975. I am going to interview Burns Beal. General topic will be "The Depression."

SC: Mr. Beal, where were you born?

BB: I was born in southern Utah, a little town called Richfield.

SC: Ok, how long have you lived in Boise, Idaho area?

BB: About seven years.

SC: Ok, where were your parents born?

BB: They were born in Sand Pete County, Utah.

SC: Ok, and what is your occupation?

BB: Right now I'm a State Brand Inspector. I've farmed all my life with the exception of the last seven years.

SC: Ok, on here it says what you would like to talk about is the 1932 election and the Stock market crash. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

BB: I remember this very well, even though I was a young boy. About three years before this election, of course, the economics of the country began to deteriorate very severely, and the great stock market crash occurred in 1929. of course, this was during the Hoover administration when he was President and the 1932 election, of course, the country was in a very disastrous situation. And so President Franklin Roosevelt was the candidate. He was then the governor of New York State. And, of course, during the campaign both candidates promised a lot of government help in curbing this problem. I remember as a young boy the heated debates that were occurring, and even young kids got into it. They'd wear buttons of various political parties. In 1932, the Democratic Party, headed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, swept a landslide victory because of the deterioration of the economics of the country. So this started then what was to become known as the New Deal.

SC: Ok, and the New Deal, about President Roosevelt, do you have anything more to add?

BB: Yes, this I recall very well in our own community, the various Public Works Programs that were started. The government began to pump money into the economy by having buildings built. I know in our own community there was a Lava Rock building built because this was native stone in our country, and it still stands today a monument to the Public Works Program. And I suppose almost every town and city in the country will show evidence of these great building programs that went on during this period of time. Court houses, schools, libraries, all types of buildings were constructed all over the

country through the Public Works Program. There are also other programs developed under this same policy. Civilian Conservation Corps, known as the CCC, which brought the boys from the ghettos and the cities, and everywhere also for that matter, out mainly into the west and built forest trails and forest cabins and all kinds of conservation methods that were used. These boys were paid a dollar a day and were brought out and various communities all over the western states. In our own community, I know, in Mackay we had a CCC camp, and these boys were in great competition for us local boys for the girls at the Saturday Night Dances, and we used to have a lot of trouble with them. And in our own little community they built canals and irrigation systems. A lot of construction programs went on hiring people that heretofore had been self-sustaining and, in light of the great depression, or left almost destitute, and so they were given jobs and were given commodities for pay sometimes, otherwise. So this probably will be known through history as one of the greatest depressions, and also a great construction and help went forward to people recognizing these problems.

SC: Ok, do you know anything about the Social Security Act?

BB: Yes, I recall this very well as an outlook on the depression. It was passed by Congress in 1935 because they felt immediately the great need of the people sixty-five and over who were now almost unemployable, with the exception of those on ranches and farms, and so this act was passed and still extent today; of course, and will probably go on for years. But it was brought out mainly to help people who were past the age of employment. And so this is where it began was during this administration and during this depression.

SC: Ok, great. What do you know about the Fireside Chats of the President?

BB: This was before the days of TV, but very often the President Roosevelt made himself famous by going on the radio and was talking. I can remember even as a young boy the encouragement he seemed to give out to the people of the country through the radio. He was an invalid himself, he had had polio, and in fact he was the one who initiated the March of Dimes Program; and through a great part of his effort and this contribution that was made, polio has practically been illuminated. He was totally an invalid he couldn't walk. He has to be always in a wheelchair or be moved around with someone else or had specially built automobile. OS he was very impressive because of his simple philosophy that he'd get out and would have what he called the "Fireside Chats" which sort of bolstered the people's feelings and attitudes. This I remember very well.

SC: Ok, what do you remember about the mortgage foreclosures?

BB: In our own country, living on the farm, this is particularly devastating because not only were we faced with depression, but also a severe drought. And also in the mid west, the dust bowl began about this time, when the top solid was moving in thousands of tons by the wind and erosion. In our own valley we were also faced by severe drought during this period our own called we were also faced by severe drought during this period of

time, and I remember my own dad would receive letters from mortgage company that they would be willing to credit him two dollars for every dollar that he paid on his mortgages, and so many of the farms in the Butte county area were taken over by mortgage companies that foreclosed and several dozens of ranchers had to leave their farms because of losing everything they had. In my family, I was able to survive because my dad was rather liquid and managed to hold on to his farm and didn't take advantage of this double situation, when you paid a dollar you got paid for two in mortgages.

SC: Ok, what do you know about destroying animals and products?

BB: This is something that was so pronounced in my mind. The government agent come out to our dairy farm and we actually took many of our cows up across the canal and into the sagebrush on the hillside and dug pits and shot them and destroyed them. We were paid seven dollars a piece by the government for every head of animals that we destroyed. I remember taking many cans of milk and dumping them in canals and just destroying food. This seems so strange to me that there were so many hungry people throughout the country, and year at the same time we were destroying food by the tons and by the tons, and animals by the hundreds of head throughout this part of the country. This always seemed to me to be the sad part of the depression, is that somehow we lacked to be able to have the ability to move food to hungry people that were starving in the cities, and this I remember so clearly.

Another thing that stands out in my mind so clearly is the valley in which we lived was a little barrow valley just two or three miles wide. It throughout it had a rather high range of mountains were used very poorly for dump grounds, which aren't allowed anymore, and most of this debris had been covered and cleared through the years since we've become environmentally more concerned. But during those periods of time when the country was young in that particular part, I remember so clearly during the depression, going up in these foothills and seeing the mounds with literally hundreds of head of hogs and livestock there left in piles there. And each time an animal was killed, a certain value was placed on it. I think it was just a couple of dollars for pigs and I know it was seven for cattle and were paid to the farmer who did this. They'd give him a few dollars then to buy what he needed. So this is black market, it seemed to me, of the depression.

SC: Oh, why did they have you destroy these animals and products?

BB: The main reason I know of is there seemed to be an over supply of these things and if they were destroyed it then would take them out of competition for those who were producing eggs and milk and dairy products and meat; and if they were destroyed and the government paid for them, then they weren't in competition with those people that were staying in the business, or trying to remain in business.

SC: Can you tell us a little bit about the "Depression Alphabet"?

BB: During the depression, it seems like because of the various programs that were initiated by the Federal Government, there were just many dozens of programs that were

initiated to help people; and, of course when they were initiated they hooked them up with the abbreviated. Like AAA was the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Of course, this was to pay farmers to lay off land, this was to pay farms to kill stock, this was to pay farmers to try to keep them alive and still pay their bills. The NLRB was the National Labor Relations Board. This was set up to help alleviate problems between the industry and labor and try to keep peace there and keep the wage that could be lived with and also to make working conditions better, This is when most of these programs started. Now you've heard of the Public Works Program, which is called the PWA, and from this there were many dozens of off-shoots from the Public Works Programs that I don't even remember. And the NYA was called the National Youth Administration. This took care and helped to sustain young people trying to get their education in high school, that as well as secondary level. One of the great things I remember was the REA, which is the Rural Electrification Administration, which was passed by Congress in 1935 primarily for the reason of bringing power out to Rural America. Heretofore, the Public Utilities didn't think it was feasible if they had to travel some miles to furnish customers, and so through the REA many hundreds and thousands ranches receive their power during the following this period of time. Another part of the alphabet that was very important was created because so many banks went broke at this time and so many millions of Americans lost their life's earnings cause the banks went broke. And so the FDIC, the Federal Insurance Deal, that insures our money that is on deposit at the banks. It's called the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and this still exists today so that we are safe now as we deposit our money in the banks. It's called the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and this still exists today so that we are safe now as we deposit our money in the banks and we're not afraid of the run of the bank and losing our money. Of course, another is the FHA, and Farm Home Administration, which helped to alleviate some of the problems on the farm by giving long term loans at the great low rate of interest; not only to purchase and operate farms, but to build homes. And then the Federal Housing Program, which is also FHA, of course reached into all of the cost, not only agriculture. So there are many many more, but these are the ones that come to my mind more quickly as being those that effected primarily those of us that lived out in the rural part of Idaho.

SC: Ok, what about the social and economic part of it?

BB: I remember as a young boy, maybe they used to pay us what we were worth instead of what we figured we had to work for, but I remember even as a young man of fifteen and sixteen, that if we got a job for thirty dollars a month and board we thought that we were really well off; and, of course, recognizing how much young people eat at the period of time maybe that is a good wage. But that was a pretty well accepted wage, a dollar and a half a day for a man under twenty-one and not to exceed two and a half to three dollars a day for hard working people who pitched hay and run grain wagons, and this was a high wage for that time. I remember as a young boy too that we were quite self sufficient on the ranches, on the farms, because we made our own butter, we had our own milk and own eggs, and one neighbor particularly that we would trade eggs for butter, and we kids would make the deliveries a couple of miles away, and that as part of the way we made our nickels was to go to these neighbors and barter back and forth, I recall at this time that you could get a dozen eggs for ten cents, and a quart of milk for a

nickel or less, and things were just extremely cheap, which is so different then it is during this recession we're in now. So not much cash was required and so as we did get these little small payments, for the farm programs, they did turn out to be a great help because they cash needs were not excessive like they are today.

And I suppose it would be wrong to stop this interview, Sharon, without saying something about the fact that maybe there was some good that came from the Depression too. This I speak only from experience on the Rural America, not from the cities. But I think that is Rural America we learned to provide our own recreation, our own entertainment. It seemed that neighbors became closer and faster friends because of sharing was so necessary. It didn't seem to matter how well off anyone was at that time, they were all hit with the same kind of a problem, and so they relied heavily on each other. I recall many times when illness occurred in our communities, that the whole community just went to the support of the individual who was sick and did his work, put up his hay and his grain and whatever was required, There didn't seem to be any level of status. It seemed like we were all in kind of the same kind of a problem; and as a young man growing up, I count this to be one of the great experiences of my life!

SC: Ok, thank you very much. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by future researchers,