

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Freda Ann Clark Bodily-Experiences of the Depression

By Freda Ann Clark

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Box 1 Folder 13

Oral Interview conducted by Paul Bodily

Transcribed by Heather Mattson December 2004

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is oral history. I am Paul Bodily. Today, March 21, 1975, I am going to interview Freda Ann Clark Bodily. The general topic will be the depression.

PB: Mrs. Bodily, where were you born?

FB: I was born in Iona on a farm, about two and one-half miles east of Iona.

PB: And how long have you lived here in Iona?

FB: Well, I was born right there and I have lived here ever since.

PB: Where were your parents born?

FB: My father was born in Lehi, Utah; and my mother was born near Logan, Hyrum, Utah near Logan.

PB: When do you feel that the depression started, or when was the time you first really felt that it started?

FB: Well, it seems like we got right into it about 1930.

PB: At this time were you married?

FB: Yes, we were married in 1925 and by 1930 we had three little boys. So there was five in the family.

PB: At this time?

FB: At this time.

PB: What was your husband's occupation at about this time, 1930?

FB: He was a laborer.

PB: What were some of his working conditions?

FB: Well, he worked on the farm at times, he worked on the railroad at times, and sometimes he worked feeding sheep or cattle. So he didn't have a regular occupation, except he was a laborer.

PB: How old were your sons at the time? Your oldest and...?

FB: Well, the oldest was born in 1926, the second one was born in 1928, and the third one was born in 1930. So they were all small.

PB: What really stands out in your mind to when the depression started, or what were some of the big steps that led to the depression?

FB: Well, some of the general conditions were the National Economy was terribly depressed, there was a lot of unemployment. We heard about bread lines and soup kitchens in the eastern cities, and some places nearer than that.

PB: But at this time you didn't really feel the bread lines and some of these general conditions here?

FB: Well, it seemed like it got increasingly worse between 1930 and 1935 or 1936. Some of the local conditions were – well maybe I should tell you a little bit about our community. We had a general store, a post office, a blacksmiths shop, the grade school, the LDS church, and in our community at that time there was about sixty-five or seventy-five families. Everybody was acquainted with everybody else and a lot of us were related. We knew just about everybody's aunts and uncles and grandmas and grandpas, and whose car was coming down the road and whose dog was wandering around. And much of the horse power on the farm was horse power. The kind a man had to feed and water and turn out to pasture or put into the barn after a hard days labor. And much of the field work was done by hand, like hoeing, and thinning the beets, and picking the potatoes and that kind of thing. Very little cash changed hands and there wasn't any credit that I knew anything about. There was a few people, a few men, had money and if they wanted some hand labor done they were slow about paying very much. I remember, there were a number of people, of course, with these small families that would- the man simply had to work. He had to work for whatever pay they would give, and some of them took advantage; and to my husband worked some months, I would say, for thirty dollars a month, a dollar a day. And that meant getting up early in the morning and take care of the horses and pitch them and go feed the sheep and then his day was long and cold. I remember one winter that was so terribly rough, the wind blew a lot and there was a lot of snow, and the roads got piled up with snow drifts. The snowplow would come out and plow a road through and maybe that night or the next night it would drift full so it was really hard; and I remember going for water to the canal to get water for the dishes and washing and so forth. And there was four feet of ice the men had to chip away with an ax or something to get to a water hole, to get the water that we needed.

PB: You mean you didn't have running water?

FB: We didn't have running water where we lived.

PB: It was just a well type?

FB: Well, it was a canal, Sand Creek. We went from where we lived – it wasn't too far but we had to chip or break the ice clear down about four feet to get to the water. Many of the rural families were large with five to seven children and when jobs became scarce some heads of families became restless and moved to the city in hopes of finding employment or some kind of help to tie them over. Fortunate was the family who either

owned or rented a few acres of land and raised most of their own food or even a garden, even a space for a garden.

PB: Did you have any kind of a garden?

FB: We had a little garden and we had milk cows, we had some pigs; and I remember we had killed pork and put it in brine, salt brine, in a barrel on the back porch and that terribly cold winter this brine froze and it very seldom does that, salt water doesn't freeze easily. We didn't have any thermometers, so I don't know how cold it got, but it was really cold and rough going where the roads were closed. Of course, the milk cow would give us milk and cream and butter and a few chickens, some people had for eggs and meat and a garden for vegetables and fruits. A thrifty family in this situation could usually manage if they were willing to work, you know, show interest, use what they had. Some of our slogans were: Waste not, want not. Made do. Patch it. Mend it. Polish it. For a family of growing children to make the clothing budget stretch, it was wearing articles of hand-me-downs. The smaller child was made; he took what somebody else grew out of. And for sickness, and by the way, that worst winter we had, people didn't gather together too often – to catch the other person's cold or disease. And when they did get sick we used the trusted old fashioned remedies: mustard plasters and sweat baths for chest colds or flu. And people had to take castor oil or liniments or garlic or herb teas, whatever was necessary to cure what they had. It was quite a...

PB: Did you have to purchase these cures, or were they government supplemented?

FB: No, we didn't have any government supplement.

PB: It was strictly from what you, you had to buy your own medical?

FB: What usually was the case, the people had been accustomed to taking care of their own illnesses. So they, as a rule, would have something of these ordinary remedies on hand. There was something we liked about the times. In summer we – our old friends remained good friends, we had a lot in common and very little superfluities, you know, just the necessary things to keep alive and keep clothed and fed. We had some good books, some fine literature, bible, and other books, we had time to study. We something took, in the summer, we'd take time out for a picnic and some nature walks thorough the open fields and pastures. We looked for a found the simple pleasures. In the cold winter months we spent some time in the evenings reading, studying the gospel and attempting to live by its precepts. There's one thing we learned was that by the time the depression was over, we decided, we we've done it once, we could do it again. We could manage to live through it again. Some of our hopes for the future was to own a home of our own; and at this time during the depression we didn't own our home, we were renting.

PB: Do you remember, how much the rent was, was it extremely high, or did you work for it?

FB: Well, we worked for it. Once summer thinned some beets and that was turned towards rent. And seems like we sold a calf or something for one. And there was a time when we lived in half of a house and my brother and his wife lived in the other half; and I don't remember paying a lot of rent then. There was no electricity in that home, by the way, either. It was a farm home and we cooked without electricity. We had hoped to bring up our children properly, live our religion as best we could, serve the community, and see that our sons and daughters got an adequate education.

PB: Most of this area was Mormons then, wasn't it?

FB: Most of it. The area was Mormons, in fact I don't remember any families living in this community that wasn't LDS; and they helped each other. If there was any serious problem, something the family could not handle, the neighbors have always been very kind and considerate and helpful in the community, in fact this community is known for it's, what would you say, it's hospitality and it's – we sympathize, we try to help each other; and there's a lot of love amongst the people here.

PB: I guess the conditions being the way they were pretty well united them?

FB: Yes, I can remember our wedding reception was, now that would be in 1925, was held in the hall above the Merc Store; and it was a local orchestra and they played instead of giving us a present. There were about four or five in that orchestra. We had a good time.

PB: I've heard a lot about the food stamps and the as rationing. What do you remember about this?

FB: I remember going to the store and handing over food, that is ration cards, we didn't have any food stamps but the food was rationed.

PB: Was this later?

FB: This was later, this food rationing was during World War II.

PB: Then you didn't have any rationing?

FB: We didn't have any rationing during this depression period.

PB: Was there great commodities of gasoline and produce like this, like tires? Or did they even have cars?

FB: Oh, they had cars. They had cars. I don't think anything was rationed. Money was scarce, to buy what there was, but there was not rationing. Food was kinda high.

PB: I've kinda got the impression or I've kinda have the knowledge that maybe you owned a farm. Did you husband own a farm at one time?

FB: No, he didn't own a farm. It was some years later that he did a little farming, rented some farm land. But at this time he didn't run a farm.

PB: You were saying about credit. Was there ever credit before the depression? That you remember?

FB: Well, the banks would loan credit if you had lots of property to back it up. But the only time I remember that we asked for credit, five dollars credit, in groceries and we were refused. Not because we weren't honest people, but because the store owner figured if he loaned to us, he would have to loan to somebody else and this just wouldn't do. So we managed without that five dollars credit.

PB: Who were the major people that you felt were in the best condition through the depression? What type of people?

FB: Well, the man with cattle or sheep or wheat, some thing to sell for food. I remember going to one of the stores in Idaho Falls to buy some yardage and what they shoed me was – well I finally bought a little piece of it and made me a dress, but it was about the shoddiest looking cloth I ever saw in my life. And well, we just...

PB: The products at the time weren't that good then?

FB: Well, I don't know. It seemed like everything was just slowed right down to almost nothing. You just kinda waited for times to get better and they eventually did.

PB: Now when did you say that you felt like that the nation started coming out of the depression?

FB: Well, about 1936 our church leaders gave us this welfare program. Where I suppose they could see that the LDS people really should have and deserved a plan where we could help each other, and that was quite an encouragement. And it seemed like from then into 1936, 1937 it began climbing. Things began to loosen up a bit and there was better wages, better exchange of goods. We saw more produce or products to buy. Wages raised somewhat and well, things just got a little brighter. I remember we borrowed from our insurance to put a little two room home on that three acres over there. During this depression time we knew we had to do something to make a home for ourselves, and we had moved about ten times between 1925 and 1932 or 33 and so with a little help from our insurance company we borrowed enough to start that little – to buy that little house that used to stand up there on the foothill. With two rooms, and a leanto, and a granary; and with help of the village people here, some of the men, we moved it down and started helping other people with their problems and they would help us in return – now that's how we got it plastered. And that's just the way things went, from one man helped another man, and we exchanged labor and finally we had a little home.

PB: That's how you feel they ended the depression?

FB: That's how we made it through is helping each other. I remember a carpenter-we, that's before my husband learned the carpentry trade – and we had a good carpenter in the village here and we needed something done with that little house, I can't remember just what it was. And this man helped us and if I remember correctly we had a quarter of a beef or something – a good sized piece of meat and he got part of it. That's exactly how we managed. If somebody needed something and we tried to fill that need and he's help us back.

PB: Was the depression still going on during or when the beginning of World War II?

FB: Well, when he began building airplanes and such for our friends across the sea then wages soared, the wages came up and it seemed like things came alive again. But there may have been a lot of other factors, too.

PB: Who was the President at these times? Do you remember any specific things they'd done that, around the depression that you had feelings about?

FB: Well, Roosevelt started what he called the New Deal. Now, I can't remember exactly what all that was but it was something that helped wake the economy up, wake up the economy, and things started moving. But I think we're finding that that back fired a little now. It was carried through too long. The government starts these big ventures and they never run out, that is we don't stop them even after we've made – after they've done their job we still carry them over and we've over done the thing, I think, now.

PB: Do you remember any of the policies in this deal?

FB: New Deal? Oh what was it? Oh I don't think I can tell you. It was a New Deal.

Well, thank you very much, and this tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by future researchers.