

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Winford Whitney Crapo-Experiences of the Depression

By Winford Whitney Crapo

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Box 1 Folder 27

Oral Interview conducted by Larry Wilde

Transcribed by Heather Mattson December 2004

Brigham Young University- Idaho

I am Larry Wilde. Today is April 1, 1975 and I am going to interview Winford Crapo. The topic of our interview will be the Great Depression.

Larry D. Wilde: Mr. Crapo. When were you born?

Winford Whitney Crapo: In 1909, July 30.

LW: Ok, and so how old are you today?

WC: Sixty-five.

LW: Alright now, have you lived in Parker all your life?

WC: Yea, all my life, the whole time.

LW: And you never moved to any other parts of the country? So you ought to be a pretty good authority on the Upper Snake River Valley then?

WC: Well, as far as my memory will let me.

LW: What did your dad do for a living?

WC: He farmed.

LW: Ok. Now you said when we were talking earlier that your father died when you were seven years old and this left a great responsibility on you and your brothers. Would you like to tell us a little bit about what the times were like then?

WC: They were really tough and we had to all work together; this is why we went on through life with helping one another and as a group working together as brothers. And, my older brother, Lavoe, went to school and I had to work to keep him in school to get him through college. So he could get a better job because he went to teaching, and helped us and then we bought one little place after that, what was it? Seven, I don't know whether it was seven or nine acres in that piece over there. But we bought that when that was our first try at enlarging the original homestead that we had. And when dad died, my mother had to rent this farm to a Japanese because we didn't have any, we weren't old enough to run it; and my older brother worked out for the Germans helping them thin beets. They did the blocking and he would pull the extra beets out. He'd get homesick, so we'd have to go up and have dinner with him. He'd get homesick, so we'd have to go up and have dinner with him. And uh, but after he got through school, he got to making a little money and somehow or other there was a place that came up for sale and we bought the thing and we started to be doing a little better from then on.

LW: Ok, now you stayed at home until you were twenty-two and this, of course, was from 1916 to 1931. You said that during World War I, and everything like that, that the economy kind of picked up and that you were able to acquire a little bit of money and a

car and things like this before the depression came. Now when you married your wife, you said that you went to Salt Lake to the Temple. Could you tell us a little bit about what the trip was like, what the road conditions and...?

WC: Well, we went together in this first car we had, it was a Gram Page, and the roads were mostly all gravel, as I remember it. Ruts and rough and then we had to go around through Logan at that time and through Sawdine Canyon, I believe that's what they called it. And then down around and I think the roads were a little better from there on down. I don't know if you want me to tell about the..., while we were there?

LW: Yea, what was Salt Lake City like?

WC: Well, it really looked big to us. I hadn't been there for, I had been once or twice before that with my brother. We just went down there, he had a girlfriend down there. And we got down there, we didn't have a license to get married and we had to go rout the judge out in the middle of the night. To get a license. And I'll never forget what that old judge told us. He said, : now I don't want you to, I want to tell you now that marriage is a responsibility.: And we got married and stayed with some of your folks because we couldn't afford a motel or a hotel. We couldn't afford to rent rooms, so we stayed with some of our folks and ate on them; and then, got in the car and headed for home.

LW: Now when you were in Salt Lake at this time, what were the conditions like as far as the depression was concerned? Things were really tight? Hard to come by?

WC: Well, not from what we noticed, because we just stayed in there and we didn't really...

LW: Did you have any problem buying gas going down or back?

WC: No. Nope. The gas was plentiful. There was plenty of gas. We didn't have that problem.

LW: Ok, now when you got back up here to the Upper Snake River Valley, here in Parker, what conditions faced you and your wife? Did you have a place to stay?

WC: We stayed with her mother in a big front room. She give us that room to live in; and we had our bed and stove and oh everything that we had was in that one room and we had about three foot of snow facing us and no winter's wood. I had the horses and I went up the country and hauled wood down in the snow so we'd have wood enough to keep warm. And we, all that kept us warm, I suppose that's all w needed, was the cook stove. And that's...I don't remember how many loads I had to haul but I got enough down to do us all winter until warm weather come.

LW: When did you move into the first house that you lived in, and what was it like?

WC: There was an old log cabin built here by some of the early settlers, and there was holes you could see right out through between the logs when we moved there. And I hauled wood down that winter, too, and had it all split out in front of the house. And we had one of the coldest winters that I ever remember during that winter's time. And we had one blizzard that when the snow was three foot deep, then, and that blizzard was forty miles an hour or better coming across from the north; and what I am trying to say is it's forty below zero and the wind was terrific, you couldn't hardly stand up in it. I could stand it to go outside long enough to get just a half an arm full of wood and make 9t back 9n and my breath would be gone and about froze. I'd put what I had in the stove and warm up a little and go back for another load. And this one night, it got so cold in there with just that cook stove, that he froze his fingers, he got his hands out, the boy did, our first baby. Our first baby got his hands out from under the covers and got his fingers froze on the ends. And the bread in the cupboard froze so hard that you couldn't cut it with a, you had to get an axe to just break it off in chunks. And that was the first house we moved into. And we stayed there for, what about two years. I hauled some one-inch edging boards because I couldn't afford to buy good lumber. And put up an old barn and hauled poles up for the framework of it and nailed these edging boards on to it and made a barn for my horses, and a corral around; and this blizzard blowed it so full, I couldn't even get the horses out of the barn to water them that day or for a long time. And we had the one cow that she give her. (her mother)

LW: Ok now, what were the working conditions what kind of jobs did you have to do and what were the working conditions like?

WC: Well, the only work we could get at all was sorting potatoes and I'd have to take a day or two a week and then let someone else have it and then wait until the next week and get another day or two, at twenty-five cents an hour. We had real slim pickin; that winter, along with several others. Ok now, what were some of the other jobs that you had during these years? What were they like?

LW: Well, from then on, I think, was when I started drilling beets and this is what kept us from starving was beet drilling. And we moved down to the, this other log cabin and bought this place, I was running my mother's land in the summer time with these horses and we made enough when the war started. (But I had none acres then. That was after that war, ma.) It was during the depression; but anyway, we bout that home, the fellow that owned it wanted to move away and he give us a good deal on it and a little time to pay it off and we bought that between my brother, he'd got though school and he helped me buy it. And that's where I'd drill beets in the spring to give us a little money to pay our light bills and go along on and then we'd plant the crop there too and we'd had that little bit of crop. Then in the winter I'd haul manure along on a bob sleigh from St. Anthony. The people up there, around the fringe of the town, had cows; in fact, into the edge of town a lot of them because they had to in order to live and the law allowed them to at that time. And I'd go up and haul their manure. They had to get it out of their way and so they'd either have to haul it or let somebody else haul it; and I hauled manure all winter when I wasn't sorting potatoes. I'd hook up a team and go up and get load of manure and come down and spread it out by hand so I made this land really produce.

What I did have, I made it produce good and then some years the crops would, the prices would be a little better and I'd make a little more. And we raised a garden there and we had an orchard, it had some real good apples in it. We canned and saved everything we had.

WC: Did you have bottles and stuff to can in and were they easy to come by?

LW: Bottles were at that time. We could buy bottles. We had plenty of stuff that way to can with.

WC: Ok, now you mentioned electricity and stuff like that. What was your power bill?

LW: Power bill at that time would run about a \$1.50, all we had was lights because we had a wood cook stove and no, we had no water even. We had to go outside to get our water. Our bathing was done in a little round tub and we carried it in a heated it on the stove and dumped it in there. Now our light bill was only about a \$1.50 a month.

WC: Now from the time that you lived with you mom and dad, and after your dad died, did you notice any big change from that period of time through World War I until the depression came? Was there a big difference when the depression hit? OR, in this area, had the people out here been kind of struggling?

LW: Well a lot of them had been struggling. Some of them was doing pretty good through and just happened to have a good farm and good jobs, and businesses got by pretty good. But uh, when the depression hit, why even them, all of them, were hurt by it. And people that didn't have jobs and were just trying to get along on labor, it was real rough on them.

WC: Yea, there was a lot of banks went broke and a lot of people lost money that they had. And, I know, there was a lot of winters that the bishop had to haul produce out to people in order to keep them from starving.

LW: Ok, now what talking about that, was this mainly a Mormon community or were there quite a few other outsiders in here besides Mormons?

WC: Mostly Mormons. As far as I know most of them were Mormons.

LW: Now did you have to pitch in and help each other out during this time? Was there a lot of community effort?

WC: Yea, there was. We'd work together thrashing, change work. Some of us would instead of just being paid. Why we would go out and help our neighbor thrash them he'd come back and help us. This is the way that on our sugar beets and stuff like that if we needed help why they'd come in and help us and then we'd go help them. And some of them that could afford to hire, I did a lot of beet topping during that time for them. Topped them till my arm went lame, had to tape it up.

LW: Now what were the main crops that were grown out here during this time? Any different than today?

WC: Well, today they use a lot of commercial fertilizers and raise a lot of grain, and still raising potatoes. In them days, though, the main crops was potatoes here. This happened to be an area where some big potato men came in and the land was fertile then and the people were keeping it that way, planting a lot of green crops and had a lot of cattle and manure. And they were keeping it that way and that was real fertile. They raised good sugar beets and good potatoes and quite a bit of grain. Yeh, we raised more sugar beets then than we do now. And it had to be all hand worked done, it wasn't mechanized like it is today.

LW: Basically through this period, could you tell us how the wages ran either by the hour or by the day?

WC: We used to, in topping the beets, I remember that they paid by the ton. I think it was a dollar a ton. If I remember right. We got on that and the wages when you could get a job was really low. It was about twenty-five cents and hour is all I can remember.

LW: Now is the community here in Parker, was this particular area that you lived in, the community here, rather poor as a whole?

WC: Yea. I would say so.

LW: Was there a lot of close companionship with each other?

WC: Yes.

LW: You said that they mainly be Mormons and stuff like that. What were some of the things that you did back then for fun or...?

WC: Well, mainly just vistin' wit one another and popping corn. Yea, we'd have ward parties and one of the big things that I remember at that time that furnished a big amusement was a carnival they held in the winter. They'd get all their big fancy pulling horses out. We had fancy harnesses and sleigh bells and housing over the horses out. We had fancy harnesses and sleigh bells and housing over the horses hanes and they'd have ht pulling horses out to see who could out pull. They'd have boxing and skiing. With horses, they'd pull people on skis and pull them over jumps, they'd build them over here in town and it was this type of thing and dog races; they'd have dog races up to Ashton we'd go up there. And mainly it was just that and visiting around in the evening with people and popping corn and visiting. We didn't have to go out to entertain.

LW: Could you tell us a little bit about when you went and had community projects wit helping each other, how these things were conducted?

WC: I don't remember too much about it. Only that we just helped one another.

LW: Now, you mentioned that the men would get together and work and...?

WC: Yeah, the men would come with their teams and wagons to thrash for one individual with maybe a steam engine, and separator would pull in and get set and we'd load up our wagons and then at non the women and neighbors, friends would come in and move right in with them and help them prepare the lunch for the whole crew see and the...well, it was a big feed. We always looked forward to them, and out of some of those feeds that I had at that time, that I'll never forget cause I was living in a place where we had real skimpy eating on account of dad died and when we were kids. And when big crops of wheat, like Ed Cox, down here, had one hundred and sixty acres on one place. He must have had close to three hundred acres and I'd get a job from him and work and I ate there and they'd cook for us, for everybody that'd came. We'd just undo the horses and water them and tie them to the wagons and feed them a little few bundles, if it wasn't hay available, we'd feed um a bundle of oats or something while we had our dinner and then we'd go back out and go to work. And uh, those who could afford it would pay us for our days work and I don't remember just what we got in wages. But there was some of them at times, they couldn't afford it and we'd change work with on another. Some of the farmers would say well we'll come and help you and then you come and help us and that's the way a lot of it was done.

LW: Now you mentioned back there that there was a big treat that everybody'd looked forward to once a year. The donuts?

WC: Oh, this was in our family when we always had butchering time, you know, and we'd fatten hogs up, butcher them in the fall because we could keep them cool in the winter. And we did our own cuttin'. Nowadays it costs so much. Thirty-five to forty dollars just to have on butchered and cut up for you, and in them days we couldn't even of afforded that, we'd of had to go without. But we'd have this time when we'd butcher our hogs and then render the lard out, and put it in crock jars or whatever we had to save it and when we'd get the lard rendered out. This is one time we had enough lard to have donuts so mother would make donuts for us. We'd help her with the cuttin' of them and then we'd have a big feed on donuts for a while until the lard was all put away and set up and then we'd use that for our shortening all through the season. They didn't have that kind in the stores then, did they? That's the only kind I ever remember was the lard from the pigs.

LW: Now was a lot of the items that you obtained for food and clothes and such like this, did you do a lot of trading or things with the merchants in town?

WC: Well, not too much that way. We'd sometimes trade grain to get our flour made to bring home. Take grain up and those that had it and them that didn't sometimes they'd work for someone that did have the grain and they'd give them a grist to take it up to the mill and they'd make the flour and everybody had some flour stashed away for the winter. And my dad, he always made sauerkraut. We had an ole pantry there and he'd make all the cabbages he didn't waste anything. We had root cellars. Put our, all our

apples and carrots and vegetables, cabbage, everything was saved and put down in these root cellars and that's what we did all through the depression. We didn't have refrigerators then like we got now to keep things and that's the only way we had to keep them. You'd dig a hole in the ground and put the stuff in to start with and put straw over it and then cover it over with dirt. Sometimes we'd build a board frame so that we could get into it see, to fill that with sacks and stuff and cover it over with snow. And then when we had to get in there to get apples or something, we'd, and if it was deep enough we'd make a little ladder. Then we'd crawl down in there and pull the stuff out and so we could get into it in the winter. Crawl down in there and get our apples and cabbage and whatever we had stored.

LW: Now, what was the hunting like back then?

WC: Well, the hunting was fabulous if you had the money to buy ammunition. We had to be real careful that way. I didn't have money to spend as much as some of them and I had friends that made their living one winter or two shooting rabbits. They didn't have any other work and it was so tight that they couldn't get it and they were, it was a good shot. I couldn't mention names but maybe I hadn't ought to. He was a good shot and he made his living off of rabbit hides this one winter. I think they bought the carcass for to feed mink or something and he sold the rabbit hides. And he got a rabbit with just about every bullet he fired. And he lived on the hides I know for the one winter.

LW: And what was the fishing like back then?

WC: Fishing was good. There was lots more, I think it was better then than it is now³ and the hunting too. There were more deer. We had all kinds of deer and game of all kinds around here. But in the winter we couldn't get out to get any of it.

LW: Now did you use any of this to supplement you mu8ch?

WC: As soon as I got enough money so I could go to buy the license and stuff, I'd go out and get deer, elk. We had quite a few elk. I got elk and deer and that helped us out quite a bit.

LW: Now let's see, you mentioned before, there were times when you made the choice between your tithing and Christmas presents. Do you want to tell us about that?

WC: Well, yeah we had a time. This was right during the depression when it started. About two years after or was it three? What was it? Well it was during the depression, anyway. About right in the heart of it. I'd say, but we had raised some sugar beets and some other crops and we run in debt. We had to go in debt for our gasoline, we couldn't afford to pay it as we went. And uh, when the first check came due out of the sugar beets, the gas man was there to take it for the gas and we didn't have any money left, not a thing, to pay light bills or to buy Christmas or anything. We had kept our light bills and things up to date, what little we had to pay. That way, and uh, but we didn't know what we was going to do for Christmas for the kids. We had a choice. There was an old

Government program and I forget the name of it, that they were paying us for doing something and I don't know what, I don't know what it was I can't remember the program, but there was a little money coming to us on this program but it had been due for so long that we'd forgot it was coming. And we didn't know if it would ever come and we had this problem come up that we either pay our tithing and not let the children have any Christmas or else we could have Christmas and not pay our tithing. We decided we better pay our tithing and trust in the Lord whether we got Christmas or not. And we hadn't anymore than got our tithing paid and about the week before Christmas, I think, this Government check come so we had money to have Christmas for our kids.

LW: Now do you have any other stories or anything that you'd like to tell to kind give us an idea what things were like during the depression?

WC: Well, we had, like I say we had to burn wood, we had to, we couldn't afford to have doctors and things. When we got sick we had neighbors down there. I never will forget this one. What was her name? Do you remember? Evelyn McNeal at that time she come an helped us and many a time down there when the kids were sick and when Melvina was sick and she'd come in and do the housework and it didn't matter whether she got paid or not I don't know whether she ever took anything I don't remember but if it was it wasn't much and in those days, the children if we got a chance to go out at night, her and I, the girl that come an tended our children, twenty-five cents was a big wage. We paid twenty-five cents for a babysitter and of course we fed cattle during the depression we bought cattle and fed them and I took yeah during the latter years of it. And my brother Fred and I went to the timbers in the night we happened to get enough money to buy an ole truck and old used truck it was about wore out but it would still go and him and I would go to the timbers in the night, take a flashlight or lantern, I think we had a gas lantern to light up the trees so we could see 'um and we'd take this truck and go up there and haul our winter's wood. He helped and we'd stack that up and when we got home towards morning, we'd get home just in time to eat our breakfast and milk the cows and go out an pitch bundles for thrashing machine again. We did this many a time without ever going to bed. When we hauled our potatoes in, in the fields we'd haul them in in sacks. The big potato guys come in here and started raising potatoes and I'd buck sacks all day on their trucks and then I'd go up and help my neighbors put theirs in, because there wasn't enough help to do it all. Everybody was hauling in and I'd go up and help them throw theirs back in. Take two of us to a sack and throw 'um back in these bins we'd carry then and then throw them till we'd get the bins out towards the front filled to the, then we'd up and go home so tired that we wouldn't even go to bed, just lay out on the bed with my clothes on and get up and go down and either pick potatoes or buck 'um on these trucks again the next day. We did a lot of that. We'd get home around midnight from this work in the pits and then just lay there four or five hours on top of the bed and get up and go again. It got light pretty early and we'd just, that's the way we went at it.

LW: Ok, when you came home tonight you mentioned that you were over at MIA and that Fred Jackson had told you a story about what happened during the depression. Would you like to relate that to us?

WC: Yes, he told me that at that time his other people here in Parker got so destitute, some of them, for something for money to buy things for their family, that they needed and they didn't know what to do. His dad run a sawmill out near Kilgore so they, his dad went over to the sugar factory here in Sugar City and borrowed some money to pay these men for logging and they went up into the hills in the winter and logged. Cut timber for this sawmill until spring and he go, paid them with this money that he borrowed from the Sugar Factory; and then when spring come, they hauled the logs into the sawmill and he sawed them out and sold the lumber. This was how he got the money to pay the Sugar Factory back, and that did furnish them a job and kept them from starving.

LW: Now what was the, how did you obtain clothes and haircuts and stuff like that during the depression?

WC: My wife cut all our hair and made the clothes for the children and made the first shoes for our oldest boy had was made out of an old felt hat, and some of his little panties was made out of flour sacks. And she, well, all of his clothes she made everything and she cut all of our hair and made her furniture out of orange crates. Put curtains around them and this was her dressing table. This was the dressing table. She made most of our furniture and most of the children's clothes we couldn't afford to buy.

LW: Now do you have anything else that you'd like to say about the depression?

WC: No, I don't know of anything more that I can remember about it. But I'm sure I've skipped some things. I can say that I don't want to see anymore of it. It was very difficult times.

LW: You know I have one final question because I heard you talk about it before when we've been on some of the hunting trips and stuff. Back in the depression days when you went through things, when you went through these things with all these people and everything, how do you compare the people back then as with modern days and stuff like that?

WC: I think they were more humble than they are now. More willing to help one another and cooperate and work for the good of everybody than they are now.

LW: Ok. Thank you very much for letting me come into your home and conduct this interview with you. This tape and this transcript will now be placed into the Ricks College Library for use by future researchers.