

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Mabel Chantrill - The Depression in the State of Idaho

By Mabel Chantrill

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Oral Interview conducted by Dennis Gibson

Transcribed by Victor Ukorebi May 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

I Dennis Gibson, today, April 1 1975, I am going to interview Mrs. Mabel Chantrill. The general topic would be “The Effects of the Depression in the 1930’s had upon her family and their farm.”

Dennis Gibson (DG): Mrs. Chantrill where were you born?

Mabel Chantrill (MC): Clarkston, Utah.

DG: How long did you leave in Newdale, Idaho?

MC: Twenty-nine years.

DG: Where were your parents born?

MC: Logan, Utah.

DG: What was your occupation during the days of Newdale?

MC: We were dry farmers.

DG: Mrs. Chantrill, would you like to give us a little bit of your background in childhood and on up until you moved into Newdale?

MC: Yes, I would. I went to Benson Ward. When I was six years old, my father returned from his mission, that year. He bought a farm that had schoolhouse already on one corner of that place, so I didn’t have far to go to school. I went through eight grades there. There was about thirty students in one school room, so you can tell it was crowded. My brothers and sisters all went to the same school. I was janitor there at the schoolhouse for a while when I grew a little older.

I had some wonderful teachers. I think the teachers they hired were mostly Latter-Day Saints men that had a testimony of the gospel, which helped a lot in our lives. If we’d get unruly and make a noise in school, the teacher would say, “Well, we’ll just put our books away now and let’s sing Do What Is Right”, or some church song and that would kind of quiet us down until we’d get it busy and learn what we were supposed to learn. When I graduated from the eighth grade, there was a thousand students. The Cashe County School all met together at what we called the Agriculture College at that time, We had our exercises there in the big assembly hall, on the stage in the big assemble hall at the A.C. John A. Witsoe, an apostle of the church, was the president of the college at that time. We loved Brother Widsoe. He was very dear person in our eyes.

I have many happy memories of being in Benson. The children there were mostly farm children or I guess all of them were. We all learned how to milk cows, pull weeds, and ride horses. We had a Shetland pony that we used to enjoy quite a lot. It was one of my brother’s. His name was Limean. After Uncle Limean Martin. Uncle Limean gave him his pony, and so we enjoyed that. We’d hitch it up on the little buggy and way we’d go

for rides. We'd have to walk about a quarter of a mile up to Mr. Mathew's for the mail and that was always a joy to do that. I remember riding a horse one time through the snow and the horse didn't know there was a ditch and I shot over his head.

We used to fish along the Bear River and we used to have our Easter outings down along the Bear River, too. Of course, it wasn't a very safe place to be but I guess we all learned now to behave ourselves so nobody ever got drowned or hurt down there.

My life in Benson was a happy life. My father was a Superintendent of the Sunday School. He had a large white top and as he went down the road to go to church, he'd gather up neighbor's children as he went, so he always had a full white top. We loved our Bishop. He was Bishop Howard Reeves. I'll always hope to see him when I get to the other side.

DG: Now, when did you get married?

MC: I was married in 1910 on the ninth of November, 1910. I lived at the Chantrill Home, Grandpa Chantrill was still alive. He was an old man, eighty-three years old when he passed on. I lived there with him three years. He was a convert from Australia, really of English birth, but he went to Australia to see the world. He came to Utah and married the sister to Bishop William B. Preston; he was the fourth Bishop of the church. So we're proud of our ancestry there. We have a large family now. We had three in Utah, then we decided to come to Idaho and farm, land was cheaper up there in Utah. The farm we had down there was mostly alkali, anyway, it was a poor situation. My folks had already come to Idaho. So we moved up here to all be together and that was a nice thing, too. I have a large family of brothers and sisters and we had their association. They were farmers too. We had a lot of happy times together. The farm wasn't a success always, though. You know at that time they had a lot of horses that would pull combines and the plows and it took a lot of feed to feed those horses. Maybe they'd be as high as twenty head on the combine to pull it around when they harvested the grain. That was expensive. That cost the farmers a lot and most of their yield of profit to feed those horses from one year to another. Then after a while they invented the tractor and things weren't quite so bad after that. Seemed like they learned how to farm better. The land was good up there in Idaho. We were up near the Clemetsville district past Canyon Creek.

The land was good but we weren't sure we were always going to have moisture to bring the crops. I remember one year we had a beautiful crop that stood up about three feet high and we went over into the Teton Basin one time to look for Huckleberries. While we were gone, that night we were gone, the hail came and knocked that crop to the ground. Well, of course, we had to pay our taxes and all of that so there wasn't so much to live on. That was the way life was up there. We could never depend that we'd sure get a crop that we could really harvest it.

Well, I guess the President of USA told them how much they could have with their crop because I remember hearing FDR say, "How much do you think we should give the farmers this year for their crop?" And Burner said, "Oh, I think twenty-five cents a bushel would be fine." And that's what we got. So you can see with the expenses that we

had, our hired help and things, the boys helped a lot too, but it was costly and things didn't work to our advantage. After a while, we got in debt and I am sorry to say I have a brother in-law who farmed right next to us and he thought he'd like to have our farm and he went and got some lawyer to sign it over to him. By this time my husband was sick with pernicious anemia and he was discouraged anyway because his health was so poor and his eyesight was going. He signed it over all unbeknown to me. I never did sign it over. Well, we had our ups and downs alright. We didn't have cars in those days like they do today. We'd have what they called a Hooverwagon. Did you ever hear of a Hooverwagon? A Hooverwagon was four wheels of an old car and a box of some kind was fixed on top like wagon box. We'd sit in there and we had a tongue fixed on it and the young men would drive the team to town and we'd sit in the back of that old wagon and go down the town. Wasn't happy when they started getting cars. My goodness. I believe that was hard on me because it was a long ways up there to that farm, seventeen miles. It'd take quite a while to drive up there and we went to Newdale where we spent our winters, we had to plan on staying over night if we was going to go to Newdale and buy groceries and things. Then we'd go back to the farm. We'll, we learned a lot of things. I had some good neighbors up on the dry farm too. They were a mile and a half away but they were neighbors anyway. I till love those neighbors.

DG: Mrs. Chantrill, during the depression, America was forced into a period of time where they had to give ideas and many things, you know, like food, clothes. What was the case in yours, you know? I know many people had to give totally clothes and everything in order to stay alive.

MC: Well, it never was that severe with us. I had been raised to be careful with my clothes. We took care of what we had that way and we got along pretty well. As far as food was concerned, we always had a cow or more that one cow for our cream, milk, and butter. We had chickens that laid eggs for us. So you see we were wheat farmers and we could fend to get food that kind of way. When I moved down on the other farm after we lost the dry farm, I told my husband if he would plow me a acre of ground and fence it I would plant a garden so that I wouldn't go hungry, we wouldn't go hungry. Which he did. He put a nice fence around it and we had a garden of gooseberries, raspberries, and strawberries, and corn and potatoes, beans, peas, onions, everything the heart could desire we raised right there and we bottled a lot of our corn and peas. I had my sister come and fill her bottles too. So we weren't hungry because we knew how to raise something to eat, we didn't run to the stores. We didn't buy tea or coffee, things like that. We got along with our milk.

I think we faired pretty well. Nobody really starved to death. There was no sign of that anywhere in the community. Because the other people were all on the same line as we were. They knew how to provide for theirselves. I think that's one big thing I don't agree with in the government today; feeding people that will sit down on their bottoms and not make an effort to provide for themselves. We always saw that we took care of our clothes and our food. If somebody came along that needed some help, we could give it to them. What a difference it is in the world today. It seems like they want to be kept, but we were Mormon Pioneers we didn't want to be kept. If the Lord would give us the rain to wet the

fields so the crops would grow, we was willing to do the rest. Of course, on the dry farm, the one way across the creek by Clemetsville, it didn't rain very much up there and it was harder to have a garden. But when I was down on Canyon Creek ditch, we always had enough water there so that our crops would turn out very good.

DG: Did you ever fear the Hobos and tramps that came around? Or did you just take them in?

MC: Well, I can remember going to town, time or two once anyway. My daughter said, "Momma there's gypsies came while you were gone." I said, "Goodness sake what did you do?" She said you bet we ran in that house and shut the door and they went on. Occasionally there was people who traveled through, but not too many of them.

DG: How do you feel that President Roosevelt handled everything during the depression? Do you think he handled it good or not?

MC: I saw on this T.V here the life of President Roosevelt. I didn't judge him, I didn't know what he knew about things. But this sketch of his life said that he had a mother, he was the only son and she would of given him the United States Army if he'd asked for it. He was so spoiled. He had this idea of give it away, give it away. The taxes that they collected from the poorer people, the farm population is what kept the government going. People didn't realize at that time but no I think President Roosevelt was a very poor president.

In later years, I went to Hawaii. My son took me over there and we went and Pearl harbor. That is a sad sight. A thousand boys, American boys are in that ship sunk in the ocean. It brought tears to our eyes to what a condition that was. That was all uncalled for. It never would of happen if President Hoover had of been in there a little longer because he was the one that had the brains about things. But they never mentioned President Hoover. He built the Hoover Dam. I've been there and seen that too which is a wonderful monument to him. They sold on the radio about their T.V. about that and they said this is what Roosevelt helped to build. Help build it nothing. He didn't have a thing to do with it. California, down at Stanford University, my son graduated there, and when he graduated, he took me over and showed me around the campus of Stanford University. Well, President Hoover went to California and they have a great tower built there, they call it Hoover Tower. It's a monument to him. It's a beautiful place and it shows what his ambitions were. Another thing, when my brother, Wil, came home from war, he was in the First World War. I was making a little bad remarks about President Hoover and he said, "Listen here sis., you don't know a thing your saying. President Hoover was the one that laid the foundation to start the thing out right again." But he says, "Don't ever say a thing in my hearing against President Hoover, because he was a great man." He must have been. The Dam he built and the tower that's built here in his memory.

DG: Do you feel that America has to go to war in order for prosperity to come to our country?

MC: I wish that America could mind their own business and stay home and take care of themselves. They've been throwing money to every nation that's ever got to quarreling with anybody else and Russia is sitting back enjoying it. Saying well let's let em throw their money away. Let's let them just get rid of everything and then we can easy take them, sit down on them. That's what their ambition is, to take America. But this is the Lord's land; this is the land of Joseph. The Lamanites which the world don't know anything about, they came here from back from the holy land. The Lord promised them that this would be their land if they would keep his commandments. There's a great day coming for the Indian people. My son that's on mission now, called his brother, who is a big potatoe farmer here, irrigates his farm with pipes of water. He said come and show these Indians how to handle their land. They've got to raise their own food and they don't know how to use pipes and spray water on the land. A friend of mine told me a day or two ago, she was there visiting me and she said I got a letter from my mother and she said that Aberdin, South Dakota is the driest spot she knows of. She said there is cracks down in the ground seventeen inches deep. They haven't had moisture there, rain or snow or anything to wet that. They can't possibly raise a crop unless they pipe water out on the land. So my son is going out there and give them a few lessons and show them how to handle this situation. I'm proud of them. They'll both be doing missionary work out there.

DG: Getting back to the war that happened during the depression. Right, the war happened right during? Well, wasn't it the war that helped America get out of their depression?

MC: Lands sake no. Do you know that the first time they'd given a decent price to the farmers in the last two years? The last year really. They got a pretty good price this year they got a real good price for their potatoes and that's why they overplanted. They planted too much and now the world says bring them, give them to us for nothing. We want them for nothing. If you've got more potatoes than you can handle, don't burn them just give them to us. They did take a lot down to Salt Lake and give them to them. Boise was the other place, wasn't it?

No we don't need to have the world fight. The more we help the world fight, the more they're going to destroy each other. They have no sense of honor or anything. They just want to be, we've made so many men wealthy by throwing our money at them. What has it done? Their just sitting back and laughing at us think how crazy we are.

DG: Now during the depression, you said that your sons wanted to go on missions, but what was it that stopped that? Just no money?

MC: Well, I told you about my one son that come home smiling and said the Bishop had just asked him to go on mission. So I told my husband. I said, "Clayton's just said that the Bishop had asked him to go on a mission." I said you'd better go out and tell the Bishop our circumstances so he'll know what to expect. My husband, I didn't go with him, but my husband drove up to the farm where the Bishop lived. He said I know you've had it rough. He said I know you've lost your home, the first home you got in Newdale

you lost, you've lost your farm. He says go up there and rent that farm with the intention of buying it. He says send your boy on a mission and the Lord will bless you. I saw more money after that boy went on mission than I'd seen because we had a few cows and we'd separate our cream and sold it. I had a brother that was pretty well fixed. He didn't have any family and he came to us one day and he says I'd like to send your boy some money once a month. Five dollars I believe. They can go a lot cheaper than they can today. That was one hundred and twenty dollars loaned us to help that boy on that mission. Well, after his mission was over he came home and he said, "Mother, I had more money than a lot of missionaries had." The Lord did open up the way, so listen to that declaration because the Bishop was right there, and we were blessed. We had a little old model T without any top on it and by that time we was up there on this other farm on Canyon Creek ditch where I had the big garden.

DG: But right during the depression when he wanted to go he couldn't because he had to work on the farm?

MC: Well, they wanted what food he could produce. He bought a farm up there. It was a farm that people had walked off of it said they didn't want that kind of a farm, that's too hard of work. I know there was one Clark fellow went up there. I was just amused with him. He was in town half the time. You can't be farming and be in town half the time, you got to be there to take care of your property. He finally bought that farm. The lord blesses anybody that will keep his commandments.

DG: Now you said that the government was only giving you twenty-five cents a bushel? Did you sell your crops for that price?

MC: We had to. We had to pay our bank, you know, we borrowed money from the bank to rent. We had to sell it.

DG: How much did you sell, would you say out of your total harvest?

MC: Well, I'll tell you, I don't do any keeping books of that so I can't tell you exactly. Anyway it finally added up we was in debt three thousand dollars.

DG: So it was pretty tough for the price you had to sell at?

MC: Oh tough, I'll say it was. I can remember when I said we took care of our clothes. But they wore out after a while. I didn't go to church for two or three months. Why didn't I go? I wasn't presentable. I had taught Sunday School Classes, you know, and I didn't want to be seen out there. I saw that my children went, but I had to wait until I.... and I went down there and sorted potatoes in the potatoes warehouse and I got me an outfit. It was in the winter, along in the winter. I put some coveralls on and went down there and worked just like a man. I made enough money to buy me a coat, a winter coat and winter hat. I went to church the next Sunday after I bought those, the coat was brown and the hat was dark green. My brother sat over across the isle from me and he says, "Who's that? Who's that?" He didn't know. The hat I had was a kind of one that kind of covered my

face. Oh, you bet there were hard times. But our Bishop had an orchard up there on his farm and he was thoughtful of us. Occasionally he would bring us down and may be a bucket full of apples, you know. They were bruised. They weren't sellable but they helped a lot. Then I had a neighbor across the way. My sister married their son. We were quarantined in one winter with scarlet fever and we had one sickness right after the other. This Suanmen, you've heard the name Suamen haven't you? Well, Brother Suamne came over and he had a box about so big. I can't remember exactly now it's been so many years ago. We stuck to the church, we depended on the Lord and I am sure he did bring us out of it, a lot of it. We had a good bishop. Two bishops while I lived up there.

DG: Do you feel now that you'll ever recover from what happened back then?

MC: Yes. Because I learned a lesson. I made up my mind that if I ever saw any money, I was going to know how to take care of it and use it wisely. Now that's something that the generation today doesn't know anything about. As long as Dad can write them out a check, fine, they just go throw it.

When I came to Newdale, we left the farm my son Lee, my oldest son, took the farm over and run it. Well Pa couldn't see to do it. You know, he couldn't see to do the work. Lee would run the farm for so much. Well he is an honest man and he would bring us our share of what the money was, you know. We paid for our home here and got it all paid for. Got this home for four thousand two hundred dollars and it's a cozy warm house. We sold this lot here next to us on the west. We had a garden in there. We sold that to this man that's put a house just next to us. That money went into the bank. Well, now I have a little nest egg in the bank so that when I die they can bury me. Then won't have to be put out cause I've died.

I tell that to the young people today. If you make money, save a little of it. If it's only ten percentage of it, save it. Cause you don't know what thing will face you.

DG: Did you have much money during the depression? I mean, like you say you had to borrow money from the bank to buy your farm?

MC: Yes. We didn't see money only just what little we get from our crops.

DG: I bet that wasn't much.

MC: No. No. One Christmas I remember, well this was in Utah, Father's crops, I guess, I didn't pay too much attention to the crops. I always had plenty to eat, you know, a place to sleep. I never worried too much. But I told I was janitor at the school and that meant sweep the floor, board floor, and build the fire in the morning so it would warm the school house. I'd get kindlings in for night for the next morning. My check was five dollars a month

On month in Benson, I bought for Christmas with that five dollars. I had a little brother, he's seventy something now but I bought him a little rag doll. Doll made out of yarn, you

know. About so big. He was big enough for a doll. So I've learned, if I haven't learned anything else, I've learned how to handle money.

DG: Were your children. You had children at this time? Nine of them. Now did you buy them things like dolls and toys? Were you able to do that?

MC: Just very few.

DG: Was this mostly like at Christmas times?

MC: Christmas was the only time. That was the only time. If we got one new dress a year for summer, a new dress for winter we was real, that was wonderful. See now every they go to town they buy something new.

If I could just put that over to the young people, I think they'll see the day when they'll want to have a little money on hand to take care of somebody that is sick and never mind the fancy things of life. Just so you have security check now and that's a little check from the government. You don't need everything you see, just get what you need and enjoy it. We farmed. My daughter-in-law came and to me one day not too long ago and she says, "Grandma I think we're paying your social security." I said, "No you're not, Irna." I said I raised wheat for years up there. Twenty-five cents a bushel. Maybe thirty cents or forty cents. I said I've paid all the social security the government pays.

DG: Do you feel that America will ever go into another depression?

MC: I was just listening to this talk by this man. He said the time is so much faster now than it's ever been. I'm not predicting what's going to happen, but I have heard that it'll be a bloody scene here in America. Have you heard that?

DG: Yes, I have.

MC: We Latter-Day Saints are going to be protected. I sat in that chair the other night and felt the earthquake they had down the country. I felt three other earthquakes so I knew that was an earthquake and then pretty soon they started telling about it, you know. We just don't have to have it. We need to have what we need to have and pay our honest debts, pay our tithing and the Lord will bless us.

DG: Mrs. Chantrill, I'd like to thank you for letting me do this tape on you and everything. I've really enjoyed it.

MC: Well, I've enjoyed telling you