

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Claude Dalley-Experiences of the Depression

By Gen Smith

November 22, 1974

Box 1 Folder 26

Oral Interview conducted by Veda Mae Dalley

Transcribed by Sarah McCorristin February 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is an oral history. I am Veda Mea Dalley. Today is November 22, 1974. I am going to interview Claude Dailey. The general topic will be regarding the Depression in the Teton Valley.

Veda Mae Dalley: Mr. Dalley, where were you born? Were you born in this area?

Claude Dalley: I was born in Alta, Wyoming. Alta, Wyoming is on the east border of the Teton Valley.

VD: Did you live here in Alta most of your life?

CD: I only lived in Alta one year. Then we moved across the border into Idaho. Where I was born was on Teton Creek and we just crossed the line about a half-mile from where I was born, only on the Idaho side.

VD: Is this where you parents were born and raised, or were they raised somewhere else?

CD: My parents were born in southern Utah. They came into this area in 1894.

VD: They were here for quite some time before the time of the depression?

CD: Yes.

VD: At the time of the depression about how old were you Mr. Dalley?

CD: Well, it is easy to keep track of my age. I was born in 1899, so I was in my twenties. I felt like the depression started shortly after World War I, in the Twenties, because I was very familiar with foreclosures and such things as that on property, as well as livestock. It seemed like the economy of the Valley kind went bad at that time, in the early Twenties.

VD: You don't attribute of feel like the depression as we think about it was actually came because of the stock market crash.

CD: I always felt like the stock market didn't have so much effect on the Valley because we had quite a well rounded economy here in the Valley. We raised various types of crops- in other words we had seed peas, as well as green peas; practically every farm had swine, and a farm flock of sheep, as well as milk cows. They also raised their own hay, which name them quite independent in that day.

It seemed that during the World War there was kind of a need, or people thought they had the need for money, and most of them mortgaged their property, and I saw the

foreclosure starting on land as well as some of the businesses. Our banks also closed. We had four banks in the Valley and they all closed except one.

VD: When did these banks close?

CD: Well, at various times during the Twenties.

VD: They all closed during the Twenties?

CD: Yes. I might say this- I had a little experience with banks. I decided to go to school. I had been teaching in Wyoming and decided to stay out in 1925-1926 and go to Ricks College. I had gathered enough money by that year I thought to carry me through. I took my money in cash to Rexburg and put it in the Farmer's Merc. I had it there about a month when it closed making quite a problem for me. Following this, of course, we had the banks that closed here in the Valley and so on. By the time of the Thirties only one of the banks survived.

VD: How many banks had there been?

CD: There had been four banks in the Valley, two in Driggs, one in Victor, and one in Tetonia. Then we come as we say to the Thirties. The Thirties at the time of what we so call the depression started when the stock market collapsed. Of course, that was all over the United States and interfered with production; whereas, it didn't affect the economy here, I felt as much as the industrial areas.

I had been teaching school up to that time; however, in 1928 I went into the sheep business with my brother-in-law from Kemmerer, who worked in the bank in Kemmerer, Wyoming. I might state right here that I never really realized too much bad, that is it didn't affect my family too much at that time because he furnished me with \$30 a month. It would surprise people how many groceries that would buy.

I might say that the PWA started at that time and I applied to get on. I worked a week, but I was making too much money and wasn't eligible. If you made \$30 or over you couldn't work on the PWA. You weren't eligible to work for them.

Well, we go on from here- as I say we had a very well rounded economy here in the Valley. Each family was quite independent, that is they raised pretty much their own food. With very little outside things they could survive without hardships.

VD: Was money available? I mean was there any money at all available in the Valley? It seems like there was not much money anywhere else in the world. How was it here in the valley?

CD: I would say again, that money was not particularly available. As I mentioned before, I had \$30 coming in, which was a large sum of money at that time, although it doesn't mean very much now. I had thought again in comparing the so-called depression that so many are predicting now, the whole thing is backwards from what our depression was at that time. Let's take the money situation. As you know, at that time we had to have gold at Fort Knox to take care of-to balance all of the paper money that was printed; consequently it was a period of shortage of money; whereas, this depression, or so-called depression, we have too much. So you see, right there is quite a comparison of the two.

VD: During the depression, if you had money, like you say you had \$30 a month in coming I, were things available for you to buy? Supplies, anything that you needed, were they available, or was there a shortage of the things that you needed?

CD: This is another thing that is so different. To my knowledge and experience there was never any shortage of anything. I can still remember that with a dollar you could go down to the grocery store and you could hardly pack it away in groceries-oranges five cents a dozen, bananas about the same, and so on, most things in that category. So if you had money available, any kind of money available, it wasn't a tough time. That is what it felt with having \$30 a month and then some income later from the sheep which became quite productive revenue you know during the Thirties. But it is interesting to see the difference. Where as now we have this one there's shortages of everything only money; we have too much money. Of course, that is what held it down in what we called Hoover's Depression. They couldn't print money unless you had the gold at Fort Knox. After President Roosevelt, (Franklin D.) got in why then we went off the gold standard and paper money has money has become more plentiful all the time since that period.

Now we might go in further on that, but as I say the Thirties went through it seemed like our economy was such that we didn't notice it we had a very balanced economy here.

I don't know whether I mentioned it before, but we raised both seed and green peas, and during that time the County Agent and I were on the live- stock marketing deal. Practically every farm had farm flocks- we had lambs to sell and particularly every farmer had hogs to be marketed to the highest bidder.

(Note: Information obtained after tape was made. The Livestock Marketing Association was set up by the farmers. The livestock was graded by the County Agent and the directors (Mr. Dalley was the director.) After they were graded they were sold to the highest bidder. This association was set up to keep good quality on the market.)

VD: Then the actual economy didn't really put the people of Teton Valley in real dire need?

CD: It did not only there was so much of the land that was mortgaged and many foreclosures during the Twenties and early Thirties. When people had their land mortgaged most of them had no way of hanging on to it.

We were able to rent good farm land for just a few cents an acre to twenty-five cents an acre for grazing. I was renting 160 acres from a man that lived in Gering, Nebraska. He wrote me in the early Thirties and said that I could have the whole 160 acres of good farm land on which the taxes were paid for \$600. It was difficult for me to raise that much money; however, I got another letter in which he said that I could have it for \$300. I didn't have that much either, and I also had the feeling that the land was useless. This led to the time when land was foreclosed and much of it was sold for taxes or a dollar or two an acre.

VD: Most of the people then did lost their land?

CD: Not all of them. No. I would say the majority didn't lose, but there were large acreages and a lot of the farmers did lose their land.

I finally bought some land in the early Thirties for a dollar an acre, which we still own.

VD: That's not too bad for land.

CD: Well, I say it made it very difficult for many people. Many of them had the same feeling that I did, that the land was just worthless; however, there were some that could foresee the future and bought large acreages of land for just a few cents of a few dollars an acre.

VD: What do you feel like the main reason that the people had to foreclose on their land was? Why couldn't they hold on to it? Didn't they have enough money to pay the taxes, or just what was the reason they had to give it up?

CD: Well, in that depression, of course, the Thirties, it was lack of money. The banks failed and there just wasn't any place at that time to get money. One large group that took mortgages on land I know that he had several thousand acres. My partner and I though we were going to buy it from the insurance company, ad I can still remember when he told us it was a Mr. Rich, a real estate man in Rexburg told us not to buy it then because it was going back to the county for back taxes. Well, certain ones got a good many thousand acres. As I say again, those who were thrifty and did not have their property mortgaged were alright, but those who had property mortgaged were in trouble. Land didn't come up again until in the recent years when it had been a gradual increase in the value of land. Again I say those who didn't have mortgages on their land they didn't suffer too much.

VD: What kind of effect did the depression have on the schools here in the Valley?

CD: I'll have to say this- It is kind of hard for people to believe but in the Twenties there were actually more people in the Valley then than there are now. That's hard for people who have put out the population explosion to believe because it seems like more people are living here now because we have them in the towns, but you can go out and go up high where there used to be a family on ever 160 acre you can look at some of the places as far as you can see and there is not a building.

There were twenty-eight schools in the Valley at one time. There was even a high school in the Felt area. In the Felt area large companies contracted to make tie hacks (railroad ties), which were cut with axes. That was in the Twenties and Thirties. These large companies add greatly to the population of the Felt area. When they started to saw them out the companies dwindled and Felt eventually lost its high school.

It is interesting to ride out now to see the building that is going on in Felt because of the prosperity that some of the dry farmers have had.

There were twenty-eight schools in the Valley at one tie. There was a high school in Victor, one in Driggs, and the one in Felt which gradually came down I the Twenties, of course. The schools were later abandoned, ad at present- then the schools, they have been bussing students from all over the Valley to the one school in Victor (elementary) and the two schools in Driggs (Junior High and High School), and the one school in Tetonia (elementary).

VD: You say then that there were only three schools left out of twenty-eight? (Actually there are four schools in the three towns).

CD: Yes. As I say there were little schools. In fact, I taught in some of these schools. These were the type of school that I loved to teach in, schools with either four grades or all of the grades, maybe having eight or ten students than this. The Driggs schools had a teacher for each grade most of the time in my time.

VD: You indicated earlier that you had been teaching school. Was this prior to the time of the depression?

CD: I remember when I first started teaching. I taught in 21-22, 22-23, 23-24, and 24-25 in Jackson's Hole in Zenith School, the Teton School, and the Wilson School. Then I went to Ricks for the winter quarter of 26. Then I went back and taught at Alta for two years, and then I went into the sheep business.

VD: Then you weren't really familiar with how the depression affected the school and the teachers right in the schools?

CD: The teachers had quite a difficult time to get their wages which were very low, in fact, the average wage at that time was \$100 or less. I taught for most of that time around \$95 to \$100 a month. The different areas some school districts or areas had more trouble than others, but I think that in the long run most of them did receive their wages which were very very low, but at that time a few dollars would buy so much more than we buy at the present time.

There seems to be so much confusion on the situation that we are facing right now compared with the depression which is so well advertised and remembered by so many that didn't have much to do with it that I can't see how they compared. The one in the Thirties affected the economy of the whole country because everything stopped you might say. At that time it was a scarcity of money, now it's too much money.

VD: At this time were you married?

CD: I was married in 22. I might say this. I went to the Albion State Normal after I graduated from High School in 20 and 21. I might show you then how much money a person had. I got enough money to reach Albion and I thought I had a job. I didn't have a cent left after I paid my fare. I arrived there on Sunday and I didn't know what to do so I went and sat down and ate with the rest of them. On Monday morning they handed me an apron and I waited tables on twenty-six lady school teachers. That was the first time I had ever picked up a tray. I got along very well with that. This was just an experience when I arrived there. I then went to teach at Zenith, and the next year I was married in 22.

VD: So, you probably had family during this time of the depression?

CD: Oh yes. I have seen children and most of them were born during the Thirties. (Twenties and Thirties, of course.)

VD: Back earlier, Mr. Dalley, you mentioned that you worked for the PWA for a week or so, but you were making too much money and couldn't continue. Are you aware of what types of projects they took care of or built while this project was going?

CD: Yes, I am quite familiar with them. The first that I remember was the construction of the hospital there and the gym on the High School, and the addition to the elementary school. Now it is interesting to find out that it was practically all horse drawn vehicles to go up into the East mountains to get out the stone from that area (we call it the building stone). They hauled it down and shaped it, and made some very substantial buildings from that stone.

There were other projects, of course, on roads and such things as that, and then we had the CC Camps. I believe there were at least three of them in the valley where boys in the

summer would attend the camps and work for the forest department. They I think were very helpful.

It might be interesting to not of the pea companies. In the early day of the Thirties raising of green peas was really quite a business, in fact, there were times when there were four sheds in the Valley where they hauled the peas and sorted them and iced them and so forth. I don't remember all of the companies, but I acted as foreman for two years. The Mexicans and local help would pick the peas and they would put them in crates or bushel baskets and then take them into the sheds and run them through and grade them and throw out all the flat and over ripe peas and soon this was really helpful thing because so many of the people picked peas along with the people that came in from Mexico. Our own family went out and picked peas and the made some money which was very helpful.

VD: Were there a lot of transient workers that came into Teton Valley?

CD: Yes. That was quite interesting there. We called them hoboes. They would ride in on the freight trains-catch rides. They wouldn't pay a ticket, but just ride in. At that time we had quite a few hobo's and they would work in the fields and the pea sheds.

VD: I always had the idea the hobo's didn't do much working, they just looked for handouts. These were a different type of people?

CD: Well, I guess they fit in your category pretty well- but they had to make money and we found quite a few of them that were anxious to get some work. I might tell a little experience of mine- I was teaching in Wilson at the time. It was the Twenties and I had a house and a barn rented. A fellow came and wanted to sleep in the barn. I was quite suspicious of anyone that would sleep there, afraid that they might set fire to the hay so I handed him a dollar and a half and told him to go to Mrs. McCoy who ran a motel and tell her that I had a house and a barn rented. A fellow came and wanted to sleep in the barn. I was quite suspicious of anyone that would sleep there, afraid that they might set fire to the hay so I handed him a dollar and a half and told him to go to Mrs. McCoy who ran a motel and tell here that I had sent him over there. About a month or two later at the store where I traded (Lundy's Store), they handed me a dollar and a half. I said that was it for and they said a man had handed it back. I was quite surprised that he would remember since he didn't have too. That was just one of the experiences that I had with your so-called hobo's.

VD: You mentioned a little while back about the Mexicans that came to work I the pea fields. What kind of places did they live in? Did the town set up laces for them to live in or did you places for them to live? How were they set up while they were here to work in these fields?

CD: It was a very much different situation than that of recent years. At that time there were no regulations on housing so they made shacks out of everything that they could find to make some kind of shelter. There were several of those camps. It is interesting and I remember them and try to visualize them as they were. In fact, one of the first was up in Alta, Wyoming. There were two up there, and just the last few years have all the imprints been plowed or cleaned a way from those old camps. There were several of them in the Valley and they were made out of whatever they could find. Some had tents; some had anything that they could make a camp out of.

VD: Then they would actually be classified along with history in what they call "Hooverville"?

CD: Yes, that's right.

VD: They were of this type?

CD: Yes. There were some very nice people of all types. They tried to stay by themselves. In working in the pea fields they tried to separate them so they didn't have to mix too much.

Is there any more ideas on the pea deal or the PWA that you have?

VD: Well, I can't think of anything other than these the only two projects that you had in the Valley. Did you have any others that came into provide for people in the area?

CD: Right off hand I can't think of anything only the building projects and later the road projects, mostly construction where they handled quite a bit of work. They were very helpful; of course, they helped supply people that didn't have any income.

Another interesting thing that we had during that period was script. We call it script, I don't know whether that would be proper name, but each store made their money out of some type of bronze with their name and this value of the coin on it.

VD: You mean they made their own money?

CD: They made their own money. As some of the housewives and farmers also printed their names on their pound of butter that they would sell to the merchant. Whatever the merchant wanted to buy from you in trade he would pay for it in script. Of course, that was the only place you could trade it out. You didn't have to trade it all at once; he would give you the money. In fact, I have a piece in my possession now, I believe it was

a dollar. It was marked Robertsons. We had three stores I the Valley-Robertson, Price and Hatch Stores.

Blodgett, the one banker that stayed he was quite a character he did a lot of good while he lived in Victor. He picked out six of seven you men that he more or less set up in business. It is quite interesting that he was that type of man.

VD: You say he set them up in business? What type of business?

CD: Well, one worked in the bank and another one a cattleman. Others were merchants, two of them in the mercantile business. He financed them so that they could make a living.

VD: Are there any of these businesses still in the Valley today?

CD: Well, there are some of them still alive. One of them, I'll mention his name, Fred Derickson, because he just recently passed away. But set him up as cattleman. There are several others, one in banking. Several of them are dead but their business will stand.

VD: Which businesses in the Valley would those be?

CD: The mercantile business mostly. There were two stores that I know of. I don't know, but have in mind that there were several of them that he helped out and set them up in business.

Another situation that I have been interested in was the water situation when the State Militia was sent in and they camped up at Fox Creek. What brought forth this on was the distribution of water and the water decrees and so forth. When the Drigg's and the Wallaces; a Salt Lake Company set up the Grand Teton Canal, they thought they were building it in Idaho; however, the line was moved so that the canal was about a mile on the Wyoming side of the line. One of the pea companies had peas in Wyoming. The man that was in charge of the pea company, Hubble, was enough of a lawyer to find out that we didn't have the right to take water from the Wyoming side so they just started to use the water from the canal which we always had figured we were entitled to. Also, there was the fight of other canals with Fox Creek and Victor, where the lower valley felt they had prior rights. Because of the disagreements the Militia was sent in to straighten it out. I always felt this was unnecessary.

VD: Where did the State Militia come from?

CD: I don't know exactly, other than they were sent up by the governor.

VD: This isn't the same thing as the National Guard? It was actually army?

CD: I always called it the State Militia, but it was pretty much the same as the National Guard. That was always kind of an interesting thing that was finally settled by agreements between the lower valley and the people up here. That was something else that was excitable an interesting when the Militia was in here.

VD: Thank you Mr. Dalley. I appreciate this very much. This tape will be placed it eh library at Ricks College to be used by future researchers.