

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Grant Andrus-Experiences During the Depression

By Grant Andrus

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Box 1 Folder 3

Oral Interview conducted by Mike Andrus

Transcribed by Heather Mattson December 2004

Brigham Young University- Idaho

I am Mike Andrus and today is February the thirteenth, 1974. I am going to interview Grant M. Andrus, and the general topic will be southeast Idaho during the depression.

MA: Mr. Andrus, where were you born?

GA: I was born at Ucon, Idaho. It was known then as Aco, Idaho. The post office was Aco, the ward was Willow Creek, the Precinct was Fairview, and the depot on the railroad was called Elva. Later on, all of those were changed to one name, Ucon. I've lived here practically all of my life, and I was a son of the pioneers. I was growing up in this land when they were still riling the sage and plowing up the virgin land and scraping it off making it so they could irrigate and cultivate these great acres that was, some of them still was covered with sage-brush in my childhood.

MA: Where were your parents born?

GA: My parents, my father was born at Draper, Utah, and my mother was born at Mill Creek, Utah south and south-east of Salt Lake.

MA: About how many years before you were born did they move up here?

GA: Well, they came up here about three years before I was born, they came up with team and wagon, and it took them eight days to come from Salt Lake up to Milo, which is just east of here.

MA: What was your occupation?

GA: Well, I've been a farmer all my life, and we raised sheep and hogs and we'd run- at one time we run two bands of sheep which averaged out about twelve-hundred to the band.

MA: You mentioned that you were also once a Seminary teacher, is that right?

GA: I returned from a mission, down south in Louisiana, in 1931 in the depths of the depression and I couldn't get a job because everybody that could get a teaching certificate went after the teaching jobs and yet I held a degree, a college degree. So at my own suggestion, I suggested that Ucon High School have Seminary, and I would teach three classes a day thru the school year for six-hundred dollars. My father was the Bishop of the ward and also chairman of the school board and at my suggestion he immediately got members of the Stake Presidency and other members of the board of Trustees and they went to Salt Lake and interviewed the General Authorities of the Church and got a seminary started. My salary, however, was \$700 for the school year, and I taught three classes a day thru the school year for the \$700, and that was a check that could be cashed while teachers in the school could only get registered warrants, and they even requested those warrants to be cut down to certain sizes so they could pay their debts and

buy things and those warrants were discounted at banks and in the hands of private individuals, but I was getting a cashable check so I could have cash while they were having other problems.

MA: We just might make clear here that when ever we refer to the “Church it’s the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days Saints. You mentioned earlier Mr. Andrus, that you were involved in farming about this time quite a bit..

GA: I was farming with my father and my brother and we had about well we had three farms, and the largest one was a hundred and sixty-acre-farm, that we purchase a few years before. That hundred and sixty acres today would sell for around \$800 an acre, however, when I came home from a mission prices were at the bottom. Hogs were selling for four and four and a half cents a pound live weight. I invited kids to get with me over to my fathers place and I would give them a 25-30 pound pig in a burlap sack if they would carry it home and feed it, they could have it. We thought that was easier and cheaper that to feed wheat which had been selling for 25 cents a bushel. It had come up to 40 cents a bushes and remained there for over a year. One pig that I fattened out and got it to weight about 400 pounds, my father said, “I don’t know which is the best, to sell it for what money we can get out of it at 4 ½ cents a pound or to butcher it and have the meat on hand to feed our sheep-men and hired-men that helped us with the sheep and on the farm and with the family food also.” During those years hay was selling for 4 and 5 dollars a ton. Other produce was about in the same category, very low proved, and you hardly could sell it, even at that.

People were going broke. They couldn’t meet their obligations. In 1932 when Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected, the first thing he called was a moratorium on foreclosures, which saved some of the farmers in the rule that no one could foreclose farms until there was a chance for adjustment. Some greedy people were hoping in the depths of the depression so that they could come out when things got better with a pretty good fortune. So many farmers were saved from that. At that time ‘make-work’ projects were created. The WPA project, I remember them hauling gravel out on the road, along the country roads, filling in the ruts and grating it over so that there’d be a better bottom on the roads. In those days we didn’t have any paved roads in the country. Since that time out main roads even out in the country here are paved with black top.

We got about twelve cents a pound for wool. In fact, wool had been down to eight cents- compare that with the price of wool today which is more than fifty, and a year ago wool was selling for a dollar a pound. That didn’t hold up that high but wool is selling at a good price today. The seep and cattle business was not paying their way.

There wasn’t any chance to pay off any obligation because- no market for the produce. It was not until the 1938 that things started to get better. So we had about eight or nine years of real depression. Men went out and offered their service for an eight or ten hour day if they could have their dinner and one dollar as wages, and they were glad to get that. At that time some men worked and were paid in wheat or in animals- anything that could be turned into food. In those years many people turned to gardens and then they

could can and preserve garden stuff so they would have a varied diet to help them through. I myself raised a far larger garden than I needed for my small family just because we had plenty of time and that was the easiest way to get out food supply. In those years and in the years preceding that we could preserve out meat like the port, the port quarters, and the shoulders was treated with salt and other chemicals. And then they would dig and then we would bury them in the wheat bins; and the wheat bins was a place to keep our meat through out the year. The pork after it has been treated would keep in that wheat in very good shape. New clothes, we didn't buy clothes. We didn't have any money to buy clothes with. We, many a man was wearing a patched patches on his clothes and threadbare and faded clothing and the women had to go with what they had or what they might get if they could makeup a piece of goods into some dresses. We were all in the same boat, so we accepted it with a smile and with considerable humor. In those years Pres. Hoover was president of the United States, and we talked about 'Hooverizing', that's when we made bread out of potatoes and oatmeal and other things we mixed that along with flour because that would make the bread go farther. In those days we would get by with what little we could, with pieces of lumber or salvaged old lumber that we'd get some building and those short cuts that we made, we called it 'Hooverizing' and in those years we were taking the old chassis of cars and converting the, into wagons, hay wagon, and the wagons come to be called 'Hoover wagons.' So the depression taught us many lessons and new wrinkles that we could use to learn how to get by without spending money that we didn't have.

MA: What about another question on the government- what was their stand on people who couldn't pay their taxes?

GA: Well the government didn't take a stand because everybody was in the same boat- and very few people were paying their taxes. Taxes went delinquent, three and four and five years. Because of the moratorium that Pres. Roosevelt called it included this matter pf paying up back taxes without being penalized, and so some adjustments were made and men were given more time to try and pay up their taxes on their property before property was offered for sale to someone else because of it being tax delinquent. And os adjustments were made in those years. It was slow in coming, but it did come when the government discovered that they were responsible to see that fairness and decency was manifest towards the common man and not just let the man with money get everything under his own control.

MA: was there any government system of rationing then?

GA: Yes, they were rationing gasoline, and we had to carry coupons when we went to buy gas because we could only buy so much at a time. And we had to make it last. There was considerable trouble at times. Some gas stations, a fellow traveling across the country if he offered his coupons some smart-alec would want to take his coupon book away. There were a few sore-heads and a few flights around the country because someone wanted to show his authority about these coupons that we used. We were also rationed in sugar and there was some rationing in flour and some other articles there was some rationing.

MA: You mentioned before we began that we were involved in the LDS Stake Presidency in this area at that time.

GA: In 1935 I was called to the stake presidency; I was newly created North Idaho Falls Stake. The stake at that time reached as far as the Montana line. Dubois, which was called Beaver Creek, was the farthest branch away. And there was Hamer and there was Mud Lake or Terryton as it was sometimes called. To the east the stake reached up and included Milo and Shelton. So when we visited the outlying branches we would have to economize and so we'd go as full stake presidency and hold conferences one a year on these various branches of the church. Wherever we went, people were having their struggles financially and so we had to have a sympathetic heart towards them. We were all pretty much in the same boat, however, it happened to be that the president of the stake was in the automobile business, and he did have an automobile, and so we could go in his automobile to these various places. In those years just prior to that, I've got places, I'd have to borrow an automobile or go thumb my way to Idaho falls to a stake meeting. I did that several times and finally I was able to purchase an old Chevrolet, a used Chevrolet for \$300; and on monthly payments, which I was able to make, which made it possible for me to have a car to get around it.

MA: How much was gasoline at that time?

GA: Gasoline? I've forgotten, but it seems like that we were buying gas for about eighteen cents and I think there was a time when they could buy it for fifteen cents a gallon. But eighteen and twenty cents, I remember that clearly that we were paying about that kind of money for gasoline. And oil was about twenty- five or thirty cents a quart.

MA: Was there any church canning projects going on then?

GA: In 1935 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints established a welfare plan, and I attended the first meeting in this area that was held at Pocatello. And one of the Apostles was sent there to organize it into this area, this upper Snake River Valley. Shortly after that, however, it was divided into several regions in this valley because of distance. And in Idaho falls area we proceeded to build with the little amount of cash and much donated labor, the building which is now genealogical building in Idaho Falls but which was called the Bishop's storehouse, there we were canning. By that time, the latter part of the thirties, the World War was on and we were involved in it. I remember that women from all over the state would go in there and can foods; beans, peas, corn, and meat, particularly meat that could be canned and sent to Europe, because at that time many of the members of the church were starving, and their diet was so depleted of fats. We were instructed to put plenty of chunks of fat in these cans of meat. The packages were made up into eleven-pound packages. Food and clothing, some soap and other things, but they were made up in packages that could be distributed so that something of those articles would be in each, and it happened to be in some of those packages, my wife and my name and address were placed in them. We received three

letters from Germany in answer to those addresses thanking us for a contribution to the welfare of those people that were in distress.

As soon as the war was over, the church secured priority favors to ship over a hundred railroad car loads of stuff to Europe. When George Albert Smith, president of the church, went to Pres. Harry Truman and asked for this priority privilege, Harry Truman said, "Where will ya get the food and the stuff to send?" and Pres. George Albert Smith said, "We have it already. It's already in cans and in packages and all we ask is a change t ship it to Europe to distribute to our people there!" Ezra Taft Benson was sent with food stuffs over to Europe to see that it was properly distributed. And many of the members of the church came back into health quite readily after they got this diet which contained considerable fat in it. And they were grateful for the clothing and especially the soap because they hadn't had soap for cleansing their bodies and their clothes for years.

MA: How about independent peoples, individuals and families canine, was there a lot of that?

GA: There was a lot of family canning, everyone, if they could afford it, they brought quart jars and two- quart jars, glass jars. And they would can lots of vegetables and lots of fruit. And in those years the fruit areas had plenty of fruit, and it was offered, what we would call quite cheap. We could buy a bushel of peaches for a dollar or a dollar and a half, and the sisters would can them. Sometimes if they didn't have sugar they would use honey as a sweetening or syrup or whatever they could get. That didn't work quite so well but it was edible, and people were willing to accept it and felt quite lucky that they had plenty to eat. We didn't go hungry, because we didn't have an outlet for a lot of out produce, so we'd eat it. Especially the chickens, and the pigs, and the milk and the beef and anything else. In this area, in the great farming area here, people could get things, and people who didn't have these things would be glad to go and work for produce from the farmers and they would be paid in produce, and the laborer would be glad to get that.

MA: Was there much crime or anything like that going on in this area?

GA: Scarcely any crime. Occasionally there was some, but nothing like there is today. People had to work hard, so they didn't have the energy or time to get in mischief. And it was mostly pioneer stock in this valley at that time, and everybody knew everybody else, and so there was very little crime or anything like that because everybody had to work.

MA: Is there anything else you would like to say? Now we've covered about everything we went over first?

GA: Well, I might say that I had my struggles, and I was in debt over a period of years, trying to raise my family and get them educated. The picture is quite different today, and never thought I'd live to see when I'd have several thousand dollars in the bank at a time. At that time I did plan a sort of insurance program which I tried to carry on some insurance. Some of it I had to drop I had took more than I could. But, I'm grateful now that I did get some insurance; and as a result, it is now paying back to me, or I have in reserve insurance that will come at my passing, so my family will be able to take care of

things if I should be taken away from them. Through the years, in recent years, in the last twelve years, my wife and I have been on two long- term missions. We spent twenty six months down in Oklahoma conducting a tourist attraction and bureau of information for the Church. We spent much time among the Indians, and we had a wonderful experience down there among those people. We returned and after a year at home we went back out on another mission and were stationed at the Hill Cumorah. And I had charge of the church properties such as the Smith Farm, the Hill Cumorah, and the Whitmer Farm, the Harris Farm; and while I was there I was able to get them, some of the, especially the Harris Farm seeded down into hay, and the others had been sadly neglected and rent had failed to be paid, but we got it under cultivation by some good people that lived close by that had some machinery; and as result, we left it in much better shape, those farms when we found them. I would like to say this, that the greatest thing in this world is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and a knowledge of it is of more value to me and would be to anybody else than anything else that I can think of in this world, and I leave this as a witness to you. And I bear testimony that tithing is the best thing a person can pay, tithing. He increases his power and his wisdom and his know how if he will pay the Lord his tenth. I know this to be true from my own personal experiences! Today I am completely free from debt, and my wife and I are enjoying good health. Our children have been properly educated, and now we are enjoying the company of our grandchildren and seeing them go on and get prepared for their role in life. Thank you.

MA: Thank you.