

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Lester Belnap-Experiences of the Depression

By Lester Belnap

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Box 1 Folder 9

Oral Interview conducted by Renette Perschon

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Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is an oral history. I am Renette Perschon. Today, February 14, 1976, I am going to interview Lester Belnap, B-E-L-N-A-P. The general topic will be the Great Depression in 1929.

RP: Mr. Belnap, where were you born?

LB: In Hooper, Utah.

RP: How long have you lived in Moreland, Idaho?

LB: Since 1898, July the tenth.

RP: Where were your parents born?

LB: My mother was born in Hooper, Utah; my father, Springfield, Utah.

RP: What is your occupation?

LB: Ranching and livestock.

RP: Thank you. Tell us how you arrived in Moreland?

LB: I arrived at Moreland with my father, grandmother, and one brother and one sister, with two wagons, four horses.

RP: Tell us a little bit about the Depression.

LB: The Depression, that's the subject. Sometimes referred to as "crash of 1929". World War I was responsible factor during the years of 1914 through 1918 as of V-Day November 11, 1918. From my own records and from memory, I will try to recall some of the trials we were forced to live with beginning with 1914 until about 1936.

RP: What brought on the Depression?

LB: Under Kaiser Wilhelm and his aids and supporters built up a war programs which was superior to any other army in the world. So they got the idea they could conquer the world. So they got the idea they could conquer the world. It took four years to convince them differently. At that time, horses were being used to move their equipment. It is unconceivable and beyond our imagination to estimate the loss of life and destruction and damage of property.

Following the war, we had accumulated a good supply of produce and livestock and for a while there was a moderate demand. About the middle of 1920's, prices began to decline in a small amounts until near the end of the 1928 and then the market dropped rapidly. Cattle prices went to the low 2.25 per hundred weight, hogs the same. From a price of 28-29 cents per pound on cattle to 2.25 per hundred. Eggs to ten cents a dozen, butterfat

eleven cents per pound in cream, we were still separating milk. Wheat from 3.20 per hundred to fifty center per hundred. Potatoes were hauled out on the land for fertilizer. The government did subsidize on potatoes some. I personally bought potatoes for five cents per hundred weight and fed them to cattle and hogs.

RP: Tell us what brought you out of the Depression?

LB: I would like to mention a few things that brought us back to normal. In the 1930's, the government passed a law referred to as the WPA, Works Program Act. Their program provided employment for many of the people with horses and wagons hauling gravel on roads and other activities. The wages were not very much but it was a cash income, about three to five dollars per day.

Industry began to function. The model T Ford car came in 1915. Telephone service and electric power began to expand. Then the trucks came. A little later, the Ford tractor in the early twenties.

The price of cattle, hogs were up to 4.15 per hundred by 1934, and continued to rise the later part of the thirties.

RP: Did you buy a tractor?

LB: Yes, I bought my first Ford tractor in 1950. I used it primarily for cleaning ditches and used it very little for farming because most of my ground was in grass, in pasture. For that reason, I didn't use a tractor only just for cleaning ditches.

About that time, I hired out to Packer, Carstein Packer Company, in Tacoma, Washington in connection with the Tom Bond Feed Lots here in Blackfoot area. My special services were to buy fields in the fall of the year to graze the cattle on prior to going into the feed lots; and to take care of the shipping from Blackfoot over to Tacoma to the packing company.

In addition to the WPA program, the government provided for the disposal of aged cattle by selling the carcass to be manufactured into pets foods, cats and dogs, and ect. It brought to the farmer about seven dollars for the carcass and about seven dollars for the hide because of the shortage of leather. In addition to that, the government paid the farmers a dollar a piece for wiener pigs that were destroyed to cut down on the supply of pork.

RP: Tell us how many pigs were killed in your area?

LB: Oh there were literally hundreds of them. There were several people here that called me up and wanted to know how many pigs they sold that year to me. I have a record of it and it ruined into several hundred of them, probably in the thousands, that were destroyed to relieve the possible supply of pork.

RP: Were there any certain illnesses or sicknesses in your community?

LB: There many good lessons learned from the depression. After the war was over and the soldiers began coming home, there was an epidemic of Asian flu. It seemed to spread very rapidly. We were unprepared to cope with it, these diseases. Hospitals were over loaded, professional help was scarce, and we had no medicine to supply or cope with it. Neither did we have the knowledge to administer it and as a result the death rate was very unusually high.

RP: What kind of medical people did you have and hospitals and things?

LB: Well, our hospitals were loaded and our doctors and nurses were overworked. There was not enough of professional help to give the necessary attention to go many who were down with the disease. Those that did have the disease and was void of the professional help, didn't have the medicine neither did they have the knowledge to apply what they did have.

There were a group of Kentucky people that was settled in here and was not familiar with cold weather, Those people suffered more severely than the native people because they were not accustomed to our hard winters. So they were hit the hardest, not having the knowledge and information to take car of themselves having come from another climate that was altogether different than what we had here.

Another lesson we should learn was to supply a store of food, clothing and medicines. That we need such things as flour and basic foods. It is well to be thrifty and not to spend money on unneeded things. We need to save a little money in case of an emergency.

One man said to another: He who lives farthest from the market is he who had nothing to sell, and those who are in need if they have nothing in savings have nothing to buy those who have something to sell.

RP: Thank you very much. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for future use by researchers.