

Voices From the Past

# IMPACT OF DEPRESSION ON SUGAR CITY 1930-43

By Norma Browning  
Cleo Browning

August 7, 1982

## Tape #30

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Louis Clements      December 2002

Brigham Young University- Idaho

## INTRODUCTION

The library of the Upper Snake River Historical Society in the Teton Flood Museum contains over 600 video, cassette, and reel to reel tapes. These oral interviews have been gathered over the past years from individuals throughout the Snake River Valley. I had the opportunity to catalogue this collection over the past couple of years and was amazed at the information contained therein.

I decided that it was unfair to the public to have all of this historical information on a tape and only available to a few who had the time to come to the library and listen to them. The library does provide a service in which copies of the tapes can be made, and during the past few years many have come in and obtained a copy of a particular tape. The collection has a lot of family stories, some pioneer experiences, a few individual reminiscences of particular parts of history, and some recorded individuals have a personal knowledge of a historical event.

I spent a lot of time trying to come up with a name for this series of stories that would describe the overall text of the message contained herein. Since they are transcribed from the actual voices of those who experienced the history the name Voices From The Past seemed appropriate. The oral history in this volume of Voices From The Past has been taken from the latter group of those individuals who knew of a particular historical event and told it to an interviewer with it being recorded on tape. Since Idaho's history is so young in years, the oral history becomes greater in importance. Eyewitness accounts rank high in reliability of the truth of events, although the reliability suffers as the interviewee ages or the time between the event and interview grows. As the age of some of the cassettes is progressing into the time period of deterioration of tapes, all are currently (2002) being copied onto audio discs (CD's) for preservation.

I have selected this event as one that occurred in Eastern Idaho which was experienced by the person or persons being interviewed. There was such a vast amount of information available in the library, I had to reserve many of the tapes for inclusion in future volumes. The tapes are being transcribed in order of importance according to my thinking.

Transcribing from a tape to written word is a new experience for me. I have done this on a very small scale before but to attempt to put the content of a conversation down on paper requires a great amount of concentration. I have taken the liberty of editing out the many "ah's" that occur in an interview as well as other conversation comments. Then comes the problem of developing a style of listing the question and the appropriate answer. It made the composition of the book a challenge from the point of view of making a correct transcription and yet an interesting story. I have made a few editorial changes in view of this problem.

I would like to thank the many people who have taken the time to arrange for the oral recording of an individual's story. The information obtained in this manner is, in many cases, not available from any other source. One of the pioneers of oral history in Eastern Idaho is Harold Forbush. Despite the handicap of being blind, he travels around the whole Snake River Valley visiting with people and taping their responses. He began his career of taping while living in Teton Valley and serving as the prosecuting attorney there. His lifetime interest in history got him started and since then he has been a major contributor to the collection of stories in the library. He continued his oral history

recording after moving to Rexburg. After retiring from being Madison Counties magistrate, he move to Idaho Falls for a time and now has returned to Rexburg to continue an occasional taping session. He is to be congratulated for his lifetime commitment to the preservation of Idaho's history.

There are many others who have done some taping including several Madison High School students. Most of the student tapes are not of the same sound quality as the professional oral history collector, but the stories they have gathered over the years have provided a special look at the Depression, war experiences, farming experience, and many other subjects which can't be found anywhere else. Many thanks to them.

There are some tapes in which the interviewer did not identify themselves. These unknown recorders have provided several stories which have helped make up the overall history of the Snake River Valley and I thank them even if I cannot acknowledge them personally.

I hope that as you read the following stories you will be inspired to keep a record of your own either in written or tape form so that your opinion of what has happened in the world or in your life can be preserved. Many think their life has been insignificant and others would not want to know of their happenings. This is just not true. I have read hundreds of personal stories over the years and find each one to have its own contribution to my knowledge of what has happened. Idaho is an exciting place to live and is full of stories which are unique to our area. Share them with others.

Louis J. Clements

(Since the interview is with two Browning's, a husband and wife, I will designate who is speaking by identifying them as Cleo or Norma.)

Forbush: The impact of the Great Depression of the 1920's and during the 1930's upon a small community of Sugar City in which Cleo Browning and his wife, Norma Browning offer operated a store. It's my opportunity this Saturday, the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, 1982, to invite the Browning's here that we might treat the announced primary subject. First, though, Mrs. Browning will you state your full name, where you were born, and a little about your background?

Norma: I was born in Fayette, Sandy County, Utah, on June 7, 1911. My father was Lathel Addison Bean and my mother was Etta Agnes Palmer Bean. They met at Provo where my dad's people resided. They were pioneers in the Provo area. They were married on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1908. My father left in three weeks for a mission in England. My mother went back to Fayette to stay with her mother, who was a widow. Dad got home in 1910 and I was born 13 months later 1911. I stayed there, our folks stayed there until August of 1911, when dad brought my mother and me to Sugar City where his father and his two uncles had settled in the general area. My grandfather was George Addison Bean, who lived just north of Sugar. I had two uncles, they were great uncles, who settled in Teton. William Bean and Marcellus Bean, who lived in Teton. They had come up earlier. My dad brought my mother and me and followed on August of 1911. I was blessed Sugar City.

Forbush: Thank you very much. Now Cleo would you give me your date of birth, where, and a little bit of your ancestral background?

Cleo: I was born February 22, 1911, in a log cabin back in the field in Thornton, Idaho. My father was Charles Henry and my mother was Viola R. McFate (?). I am the 2<sup>nd</sup> of four of their children. My father, with his father, came to Idaho from Ogden. But my great, great, grandfather was Jonathan Browning, the first member of the family to join the Church as far as I know. He came across the Plains in 1848, settled in Ogden, and started the Browning Arms business in connection with his son, John. They carried it on there for many years and it is still there. My father came to and worked in Thornton out of a store that my grandfather owned. He, my dad, and this brother used to run a delivery outfit out into the country, the country of Lyman, Archer, Sunnyside, Independence, and so on. That's the way he made his living. As I said, I was born in Thornton, Idaho.

Forbush: Well now, I know that you opened a store together as husband and wife in Sugar City. As a prelude to that experience each of you enjoyed some experiences growing up in Sugar City and doing some things before you were married. Norma, just rather briefly, tell me what experiences you had had growing up and going to school, what things were like there at Sugar City? Include maybe the time you went on your mission and what things were like before you were married?

Norma: The first year we were in Sugar City after we moved from Utah, we lived with my grandfather and Grandmother Bean north of Sugar City. My dad worked for Fred

Schwendiman in the hardware business. It was located just a block and a half east of the depot. Dad had had considerable experience in a lot of ways. He worked there and they got along fine. Later on my dad built a house. By the time we had been in Sugar a year we had a house that dad built before and after work. He was a very energetic man. Then in 1920 dad started a business of his own. Brother Schwendiman had sold his business to another firm. I can't exactly remember the name of it. I know the manager who came in. At any rate, dad decided he wanted to go into business himself. He established this business in exactly the same place where later we had our grocery store. It had been built as a hotel during the time the sugar factory was flourishing. It was on the south side of Main Street. I don't know what block you call it. It was two blocks west of the chapel about a half a block south.

Cleo: It was on the corner of Austin Avenue and Center Street or Main Street.

Forbush: Main Street.

Norma: But it had been a hotel operated by a lady whose name was Mrs. Nef. It prospered for many years and then things slowed down and dad was able to get that building. He remodeled it and put his hardware and furniture store in there in about 1920.

Then we had some personal experiences which affected our lives. My mother died in 1922 as did my father's mother, grandmother Bean, my mother in the spring and his mother in the fall. We had kind of a bad time there for a while. Dad rallied and together with Jim Stone and the Bishop Ricks, Alfred Ricks and his brother, Eph Ricks, the Hamilton Brothers, several men who owned sheep and had financing were persuaded by my dad, who was always a good salesman, to put together some stock to build a building where the old theater stood. The school owns that auditorium now. It's where my younger brother, Melvin Bean, now operates the hardware and furniture store. Dad got that building built. It was at that time between the bank and Rowel Gaddy's garage. It took in that area. Then dad later bought the garage and incorporated it with his building. He made a success of that building. During the years that I went to high school, between the years 1924 and 1928, things went really well financially. I guess for most people in Sugar City and at least for my dad.

Cleo and I began dating in high school. We had known each other in elementary school. We had been neighbors living only a couple of blocks apart. My folks bought milk from his folks once when our cow was dry. I used to go get the milk and on dark nights, this was in the winter, Cleo's mother insisted he walk me part way down to Bishop Ricks' so I wouldn't have to walk alone. Our friendship started when we were very young. During high school we commenced dating and the year that Cleo was student body president, which was my senior year, we did what was called going steady. I didn't go with any other boys and he didn't go with any other girls.

Sugar City had a good school. It rated very well, both elementary and secondary. I had started out at the Park School building, which is now demolished. I continued my education at the rock school building, which is on the west end of town, which was destroyed by fire. I guess it was in the early forties or sometime along in there. Then we went, both of us, to the high school in the Sugar -Salem High School. And then, in 1929,

after one year at Ricks College, Cleo was called on a mission. I finished two years at Ricks and then I was called on a Mission after he had been out about eight months. After I had been home six weeks and he had been home seven months we were married.

Forbush: That's really super. Now in that same way, Cleo, will you share with us the experiences you have had at Sugar City prior to the time you opened your store?

Cleo: When I moved to Sugar, I think it was 1919; the war was over, the First World War, and one of the things I remember after we moved there. We came over in order for my father to operate the InterOcean Elevator. He was manager of that elevator for a few years. We bought an old home fairly close to the elevator, a block or so away, northeast. My father had it remodeled and made into a nice livable home for the four children of us in the family. But the thing I remember, that stands out in my memory, I should say, is the welcome home for Tom Niebaur, who was a World War I war hero. The town band, the businesses were all closed, and everybody came out to welcome him off the train in company with the governor and I don't know who else of the dignitaries that were there. But I remember walking up to the center of town behind this group and everybody celebrated the rest of the day. That was a good day in my life. I tough it was outstanding.

As Norma has said, I knew her in grade school. I recall the fifth and sixth grades knowing her along with others in the class. Id didn't get serious about dating or going with her until, as she said, when we were in our senior year. I didn't think she was interested in me and I wasn't interested in going steady with anyone. I didn't go with anyone, in fact, previous to going with her.

But anyway, the year or so around when we were married were real rough. When I got home from my mission I tried several things to make a living, or to make some spending money. None of them turned out very successful. I tried selling real silk hosiery, that was door to door in Salt Lake and various communities between there and Sugar City. I tried other occupations, just didn't work out. I worked on various farm jobs and so on. It was real discouraging at the time we got married. We had been engaged for so long that we decided to talk it over with our Bishop to wee what he would suggest about our getting married, whether we should get married or I should go away and try to get work or just what. He said, in view of the fact we had been going together for some time and so on and before our missions, and we had been on missions, and so on, he would recommend that we would get married. So we talked to my wife to see if she thought we could get along on the financial conditions as they likely would be with us. IT would be somewhat different from what she was used to in her home. She did debate about that very long. She said she thought she could furnish on whatever I could provide.

So I worked on various things trying to make a living. I worked on my fathers dry farm for board and room when he started operating a dry farm after he quit working at the elevator. He had to quit because of the dust situation was so hard on his lungs, even with a mask that he's wear over his nose. He still was bothered with the dust and so he decided to quit and go out on the dry farm. He leased a farm on Canyon Creek. So we would go up there in the summer time and work and then we would come back to Sugar in the winter.

In 1932 before we were married, just before, one thing that might be interesting is that my father told me to load u a wagon load of wheat and bring it down to Newdale to sell and get a little spending money to make it possible for us to get married. I loaded a load of wheat, whatever two horses could haul, which amounted to 38 sacks. I took it down to Newdale, sold it for fifty cents a hundred to get enough to buy a marriage license and to have a little spending money so we could be married. That was on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 1932.

Norma: We were married the 27<sup>th</sup> of July.

Cleo: Oh, all right, the 27<sup>th</sup> of July. It was July alright. We went down with the seventies quorum who made an annual excursion to the Logan Temple. This was the time of their going, and this was the time Bishop Hamilton suggested we do. So Norma's father took us down with two or three other passengers and we were married at that time.

Forbush: Course you went by car or bus or...

Norma: Automobile. It was a caravan. They used to call it a caravan. The seventies quorum for many years did that. They were very active. This was before the temple in Idaho Falls.

Cleo: They would go down and stay overnight in Logan. Then go to two sessions the next day and then go home.

Norma: Oh, they would go to more than two. They always would go to three at least in those days. Then they would go to two the next day and then they would drive home. Even when we were married, you see, we went through two sessions the day we were married and then we went back and went to two sessions before we went home.

Cleo: The people in the temple said that was most unusual. They couldn't recall that had ever been done before. There were thirteen couples married on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July when we were but the people there at the temple, the temple workers that day and the day after said they had no recollection of nay other couples coming back for another session right after they were married. They usually took right off on their honeymoon. We couldn't do that because we didn't have a car and we didn't have the and so on. So we went to the temple with the seventies and then we came back. Then we went to work on the dry farm and worked there until the next year.

Norma: Till October of that fall, when your mother died.

Forbush: Now as a background to our subject her, I think it would be appropriate, Norma, if you would recall and describe the Sugar City Community in the way of population, something about where it was located, the farming area around it and just what seemed to be special about the Sugar City community?

Norma: I don't know if I can do exactly what you want me to or not. So far as the population was concerned, there was only one ward. In 1935 Cleo was the ward clerk. So he knows the population of the ward better than I do. It runs in my mind that it was about 800. That included people in the town, in the community, plus the larger community of the farming area. That extended part way east to Teton, part way on the north to St. Anthony, part way west to Salem, and part way south to Rexburg. There was really not too much distinct a dividing line in those days about where people went to church. Later on they made them more firm.

Even though the primary occupation of most people had to do with agriculture and mainly in those days with the sugar factory, there were lots of family farms. Most people had their own cows and chickens and pigs to provide for their needs. We could have them, even in town. Cleo and I did shortly after we were married. I insisted, saddling him with that kind of a job.

Now the community itself was not a bedroom community for Rexburg, like it is now. People lived there and worked there. The sugar factory was the biggest employer. There were a lot of sugar company houses that were occupied in those days. The sugar company had built them and provided them for their year round employees. They had quite a lot of those. I don't know how many there were. Then during the factory run when the beets were processed, of course, the number of employees multiplied considerably.

The town is located just south of the sugar factory. The chapel was on the east end of the community and was built of rock. I have fond recollections of that old church. It was very adequate in those days. People didn't attend church as often as they do now. There was not the same enthusiasm and urgency about it. My dad was in the Bishopric during the 1920's and on into the 30's a bit. He was in the Bishopric when we got married in 1932. I can remember when he and Bishop Hamilton, who replaced Alfred Ricks as Bishop in the twenties, set a goal of 25% at sacrament meeting for the ward. They had been getting around 18% and they became very bold and set this goal of 25%. Now anybody who has 25% would be far out as even inactive wards are better than that.

There was south of the chapel, the Park School building. It was made of brick and was three stories high. It was an elementary school. It was surrounded by residential buildings. West of the chapel and the Park School building and between them both as far as north and south in concerned along Main Street, were the local businesses. One of the most important was the Sugar City Mercantile, which is a block west of the chapel. It was operated by the Ricks' and it was a general merchandise store. I can remember when next to it on the east was a millinery shop that was operated by Emma Dalling, who got training in millinery work and made her own hats. She sewed them in the shop next to the mercantile. That building stayed there for years. Then as you moved west along that side of the street, which was the north side, there was the Gaddy Garage and then, in the middle 20's there was the building that housed my dad's hardware and furniture store and the theater. Then the bank was on the corner of that block opposite and west of the mercantile.

Then across the street west was the high school building. At various times in my life time I can remember business being in the lower part of it in what later became the auditorium and the library. I can remember when there was a drug store on the corner across from the bank. I can remember when there was a carpenter shop just west of that.

The drug store was operated by Harry Bean at the time that I recall. The carpenter shop was operated by a man by the name of Phillips. Across the street from the high school there were two or three more businesses. The most important one at that time was the hotel, that I mentioned, that was operated by Mrs. Nef. Just east of the hotel entrance and under part of the rooms upstairs that were provided by the hotel, there was another merchandise store that was operated when I can remember by a man named Fred J. Hughes. It wasn't as large as the mercantile but it served a good purpose.

Then west of the hotel was the post office. There was a blacksmith shop operated by a man by the name of Nielsen. There used to be an old theater, which was abandoned after the new building was built on the north side of the street. This is where I saw my first movie during World War I. Then there was a meat market operated by Harris's and West. Mr. West, whose first name I don't recall, was their father-in-law of this Mr. Harris. They were in business together there. That took about half of the block. From there on there were no businesses except for a little shoe shop somewhere along the south side of the road until you got down to that Midland Elevator or the InterOcean and the depot. Then there was a mill that was across the street east of the Depot.

The Depot was sort of the west boundary of the town. Beyond it in a field was the rock school building which was an elementary school building, built later than the Park School building. We both went to school in that building. Now I don't know if that said what you want or not but that described Main Street, there were no other businesses.

Forbush: That's very good. Actually I intended to have Cleo more or less supplement that. Would you like to supplement any items by way of business houses that come to your mind that Norma didn't describe or mention?

Cleo: No, course it was a little different when we opened up. There was drug store next to the building we operated. B.L. Waldrom operated a general merchandise store in the building which was the original hotel. There was at the time we purchased the store from him a drug store on that corner, then our store, and then the post office. That's the south side of Main Street. Across the street to the north was the high school building, two story building.

Forbush: Had it recently been built or was it part of the old...

Cleo: No, a few years before.

Forbush: It was part of the old building, I can't remember it, and they had a big dance hall up the stairs. What did they call that building?

Norma: Part of it was called the opera house in the first years that it was built. Underneath the opera house were these stores that I mentioned. Later on, they kept remodeling that building, the stores were moved out as they needed more room for the high school.

Forbush: Now one time in that building downstairs they had the Sugar City Times, the newspaper...

Norma: That was before my day.

Forbush: At the time you were there, there was no paper published in Sugar City?

Cleo: No.

Forbush: Were the streets oiled at that time?

Cleo: No they were not. Not even the main street. It was graveled.

Forbush: Was there a service station?

Cleo: There were three or four service stations when we opened our business. Two on the east end and then Ray Dalling had one across the street from the drug store. That one is still there but it is closed now. Then there was another one down west, it was operated by J.C. Stone in connection with a motel. The first motel I can recall.

Norma: They were cabins really. He called it a Cabin Camp.

Forbush: Now down towards on Main Street on the south side in the west part of town, Charlie England and his wife had a barber shop.

Cleo: And a beauty parlor.

Norma: I got my first permanent there but it was not in that location that I got it. When we built this building in which my dad had his hardware store, which was between the bank and the Gaddy Garage, they made two little rooms on each side of the entrance to the theater. These housed different businesses at different times during the 1920's. I can remember when one of those on the west side of the theater entrance had a candy shop in it operated by Georgia Ricks Osteler. She made home made candy and sold it in there. Then there were other businesses. But the one on the east, Charlie England used as his barbershop. And Sister England had her beauty shop in there and that is where I got my first permanent while I was in high school. Now I don't remember them being in the other place that was mentioned. There was a barber shop across the street from that building which was in the block east of our store that was operated by several people. One was somebody Dyne, who used to cut your (Cleo) hair. And Weaver, they had a place there, a barbershop. I don't know if that was the place you were thinking of that England's were in when they first came to town. But I knew them in that little, small room.

Forbush: Now that was the theater that showed the silent movies for years, I guess didn't they?

Norma: When we were married they had sound.

Cleo: The original theater was the silent movies. But when this new theater was built it went over sound tracts.

Norma: Yes, Weaver and Davis, they had sound there about as soon as they began to operate.

Cleo: That was called the Weada Theater after Weaver and Davis.

Forbush: Now then subsequently it was at that theater that became the auditorium of the high school where they held their assemblies?

Cleo: After we had sold our store.

Norma: There was a period in there, before the school bought that building, when the only part they used was the upstairs rooms over the bank, which used to be called the Chamber of Commerce rooms, the club rooms. They used it for seminary. That's where we went to seminary. After two or three people had operated that theater and couldn't make it go, Weaver and Davis had to quit, it went through various hands. Finally the Church operated it for a while. You (Cleo) and Floss took care of the projectors. Cleo and his sister took care of that as a sort of a side job.

Cleo: The two wards took it over and operated it on a Friday and Saturday nights as a fund raising project. That was when Sugar Ward was divided. The two Bishoprics got together...

Forbush: Now that would have been after the war?

Norma: Well, the wards were put back together in 1945. They were separated and divided into two in 1935. In 1945 they were combined. It was during that period between 1935 and 1945, some part of that period. It wasn't all of it but it was some part of it, the latter part of it that the Church operated it. Then, of course, it went through a lot of hands after that. Mr. Knutson was very successful. Harry Field in Ashton had it. Cleo operated it for him in the 1940's. Bill Roberts had it for a while. Then it was after that, that the school bought it. So it was in the late 1940's and the early 50's, something like that.

Forbush: We are going to be talking and focusing the balance of the tape on the impact of the Depression years, when you had your store. Now, from a historical point of view, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected in November and he assumed the office of President in March of 1933. The first hundred days of his administration has been marked by some events of traumatic importance, I suppose, and impact on the people. He closed the banks down. He did a lot of things in those first hundred days that had to be done, I presume, because of the very serious conditions. Unemployment was very high. I don't know what the percentage was but it was very high. It was a tough time for Americans to survive and make a livelihood and so forth. Now, under those trying circumstances, Cleo, you and Norma determined to buy a little store on the south side of

Main Street. When was that, what were the circumstances under which you decided, what motivated you to get that store?

Cleo: Well, in October of 1932 my mother passed away at the age of 46. My father was left to look after the children?

Norma: There was just Rich and Floss at home. Janine was married.

Cleo: All right. Arrangements were made for us to live in the home, in my father's home, to look after him and the children. It provided us a place to live until we could get something better. In November of that year I was able to work a few hours a week at the Jacobs and Hendricks potato ware house for twenty cents an hour. Spuds were selling for twenty-five cents a hundred at that time loaded on the track. Then I received some work as a substitute Seminary teacher. In fact, for five days I worked at that after I had been on my mission and returned. It was in December that I worked for five days and received twenty-five dollars for that. Substituting I suppose for Will Armstrong (?), I suppose it was. He was likely ill. Later on Norma substituted too. That was before we took over the store.

I was put in as Ward Clerk a year after I returned from my mission in the Sugar Ward and served for two years. Then the ward was divided and I served for ten years as clerk of the Sugar 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward under Bishop John W. Stoker. In February of 1933 I worked with W.P.A. relief crew hauling gravel on the Sugar City streets for twenty-five cents and hour for five days per month. We received orders for groceries and clothing that we could exchange for groceries and clothing at the local stores. We didn't receive any cash there. Now that was even before Franklin Roosevelt took over. He took over the next month, March 3<sup>rd</sup>. That's when the nation's banks were closed, at least.

Norma: Well, I don't understand that March business. The inauguration is in January.

Forbush: Not then. It's been changed.

Cleo: It was March 3, 1933, that the nation's banks were closed. It would be until the new President, Franklin Roosevelt, was to give the orders to lift the holiday ban, they called it. On March 7<sup>th</sup> I talked with Reo Waldrom about purchasing his store, general merchandise store. We decided we had to have work of some kind. We were desperate. Reo Waldrom had been trying to close out for some time. I don't know how long he had been having closing out sales. For quite a long time he couldn't seem to get out from under it. For us to think that, without any experience, either one of us in managing or clerking in a store. That we could take over and make a go of that business was something quite fantastic.

Anyway the next day, after I had talked to him, he and I went down to Pocatello to talk to his wholesalers about the possibility of my taking kit over. I guess they felt they couldn't do any worse that they were doing then. So they went along with us. So two days after that my father agreed to sign notes with us for two thousand eight hundred dollars to cover the cost of the twenty dollars a month. So that is what we did.

On April 3, 1933, we opened Cleo's Cash Store, a name we had decided on. We opened fro business. Before very long we changed it to Browning's Cash Store. We had a lot of experiences. I don't know how many we have time for that indicated conditions in those days. How different people...

Forbush: What was the size of the store? Do you recall the dimensions?

Cleo: It was a pretty good sized store. It was deep and wide. Let's see, it would have been twenty-five by one hundred and twenty-five, maybe.

Forbush: North and South?

Cleo: Running north and south.

Forbush: And twenty-five east/west?

Cleo: Twenty-five feet wide, twenty-five or thirty.

Forbush: What merchandise did you stock?

Cleo: Well, when we took it over he had some dry goods. He sold shoes and things of that nature in connection with the groceries. There was so little, so small a stock of dry goods that we decided that we couldn't make a go of it. We didn't have money enough to replenish the stock and give us anything to work with. So we just discontinued the dry goods and went into groceries entirely. We rebuilt the shelves to accommodate the grocery products, cans and so forth instead of dry goods.

Forbush: Now you had a major competitor just...

Cleo: The Sugar City Mercantile.

Forbush: And that was just up and around the corner?

Norma: Straight east and across the road.

Cleo: Less that a block. About a block from our business. They had been there since Sugar City started. So we had a major competitor, as you say, there plus the businesses in Rexburg to compete with. So we had a real struggle during the time that we had the store.

Forbush: What did you do that was special to meet that competition, so that you could get a little corner of it?

Cleo: I don't know what accounted for it. We were fortunate to be in a good location as far as the schools were concerned. As you would know, since you went to high school in those years. We got a lot of cash from the children, elementary school children, during

the noon hour. And high school between classes and at noon hours. Mostly candy and gum and items like that.

Forbush: School supplies?

Cleo: Yes, school supplies. We put in a good stock of tablets and pencils and things of that nature for the elementary and high school students. So altogether that helped to make our business go.

Norma: We had some real loyal friends too. We were really good friends with our competitor. They happened to be in the Bishopric and Cleo was the Clerk.

Cleo: Henry Thomas was the 1<sup>st</sup> Counselor and I was the Clerk.

Norma: But the Bishop, Bishop Stoker was very good to divide his business. There were people in Sugar, although they had cars, and although there was an O.P. Skaggs store in Rexburg, and this kind of thing. They were loyal to Sugar and believed in doing their business there.

Norma: As I was saying, there were people in Sugar who were very loyal to the town. Although there were temptations to come to Rexburg to shop, they didn't. One of those was our Bishop, who was very conscientious in dividing his business between his 1<sup>st</sup> Counselor and his Ward Clerk. Then there was my dad. My dad was very loyal in supporting us and buying the things they needed for their household from us. There were others, who because of their loyalty helped us to stay in business this many years.

Forbush: Sugar City had a lot of pride, didn't it? As a town and as a school? Talk about loyalty, the blue and the white, a lot of loyalty there.

Norma: Oh, yes.

Forbush: Well now how did you stock your building? Would people bring things in from the community? Talk a little bit about that.

Cleo: We bought a good share of our grocery merchandise from the Idaho Wholesale Company in Pocatello. Pacific Fruit and Produce Company and Farr Candy Company and various firms like that sent their own trucks up once or twice a week through Sugar City.

Forbush: Any from Scowcroft? Or is that a new one?

Cleo: Scowcroft was more a dry goods, and we didn't buy much from them. But these companies came through often enough that we could buy in small enough quantities. In some ways that was an asset and in some ways it wasn't. You couldn't buy in large enough quantities to get a good enough price to compete with these other stores in Rexburg. At least we were able to get fresh produce on a small scale to buy quantities

whatever we could afford. We paid cash for it whenever it was delivered. Bread was delivered every day. Wonder Bread mostly but we did put in competition later. We paid cash for it whenever it was delivered. Bread was delivered every day. Wonder Bread mostly but we did put in competition later. We paid cash for everything. I few didn't have the money we didn't buy anything. For a few days that was the case. But it didn't last for long until we could pay once a week or once a month however we wanted to.

We got a local carpenter to build a, to do some remodeling at the back of the store for us. In August of '33 we moved into an apartment in the back of the store. The rent was raised from twenty dollars to fifty-seven, twenty. That made the store rent and our rent combined. The labor for the remodeling and fixing it made it so we could live there in a two room apartment at first. Just a kitchen and a bedroom/living room combined was what it was. But we were handy and we could accommodate people who couldn't get to the store during regular hours, which we did quite often. That helped our business some. They'd come to the backdoor and we'd go out and wait on them there.

Forbush: You divided the store attendance, keeping it and maintaining it, between yourselves? Or did you have, maybe, and employee or two?

Cleo: We had an employee or two although my wife was the main help when she could.

Norma: Tell the about the bell that you rigged up.

Cleo: Oh, yes. One of the boys in town who was handy with electricity and so on. I got him to fix up a bell on the front door; actually it was on the screen door. So that when anyone opened the screen door it would make contact and ring a bell back in our apartment. Then if someone was there and wanted to come in, so we would go out and unlock the door for them.

Norma: That was after hours or before.

Cleo: Then during hours if I were eating lunch in the back, as soon as anyone opened the screen door we knew someone was there and we could dash out and wait on them. If I was waiting on someone else and it sounded like there were quite a lot of customers, why my wife could run out and help.

Norma: He had a bell also by the cash register.

Cleo: I had a button so I could ring for help, if I need additional help from her.

Norma: So I did that in connection with keeping that little house. We lost our first baby. It was in December of '34 when our oldest surviving son was born. And we had been in the store then for over a year.

Forbush: Now what utilities, you mentioned electricity, so you did have electricity?

Cleo: We had a telephone handy to my desk and the back part of the store. We could run from the candy counter back to the phone to answer if I needed to. If I was working at the desk I could answer the phone there handy. From our apartment we could go out and answer it too.

Norma: We had a refrigerator to keep the butter and the cheese and different things like that in.

Cleo: We bought a seven cubic foot refrigerator in May of '33 for \$175. We used it for yeast cakes, butter, and so on for the store. And we could use it for ourselves for minor items. It may be interesting to note, the refrigerator double the capacity now would cost \$775. Just six hundred more than that one in 1933 cost. We just ordered one to be shipped down to our house in St. George next month.

Norma: Let's see, we heated with coal. You mentioned utilities. We had a great big stove in the store. It was one of those big round bellied things, the big black stove. Cleo used to have to keep the fire going in the wintertime. In our apartment we had a coal range which heated our water for the apartment and also heated the two room apartment. That was all the heat we had there. We used quite a lot of coal every winter. But I don't know how much it cost.

Forbush: Were there quite a few of your stock, your groceries sold by barter, eggs and so on?

Cleo: Yes, we sold groceries and took eggs and butter from people. Those are about the only two items. A little later my father opened from the meat counter in there. He'd take livestock and sell it and trade that out. The customers would be able to trade what they had coming for the meat in groceries. At the first the only bartering was in eggs and butter. Now occasionally the kids would raid their chicken house and bring it in two or three eggs and trade it for candy. In many cases the parents might not have known about it. But anyway they traded for candy. But most of it was brought in a dozen or two at a time and they took groceries in exchange for it.

Forbush: What were eggs a dozen at that time?

Cleo: I have here in 1936, according to my journal; we were paying sixteen cents a dozen for eggs. In May of that same year, sugar was selling for ten pounds for sixty-three cents. Eggs were two dozen for thirty-five. So you see, we didn't make very much on eggs if we paid sixteen cents a dozen and sold them two dozen for thirty-five. We weren't making a very big profit. Fresh Challenge Butter was thirty-four cents a pound. Fresh tomatoes were three pounds for a quarter. Fresh strawberries were two cups for a quarter. Mild cheese was twenty-one cents a pound. The same day a year later, I was interested to know, prices were up about five cents. Oranges were up to twenty-nine cents a dozen. Bananas were three pounds for a quarter. That's indicative of the way the prices were in those days, which is some different that 1982.

Forbush: Now I imagine that the sale of flour was quite big, because people in those days made their own bread pretty much, didn't they? Did you sell quite a bit of flour?

Cleo: I think I have flour some place in here (journal), but I can't see it on a sheet. Grapefruit was \$2.25 for a case of a hundred and twenty. Oranges were \$2 for a case of two hundred. Potatoes were selling for fifteen cents to twenty cents a bushel compared to a dollar and a quarter a year before. This was 1938. Wheat was seventy cents compared to a dollar and two cents in '37. Hay was \$8.30 a ton compared to \$7 in 1937. Butter 35, eggs 16, milk cows \$60 a head. I don't see right here the price of flour.

Norma: Well, we sold flour and we sold, I guess in comparison with other groceries a fair share of it. But in those days, people who raised their own wheat, used to take their wheat to the mill and have their flour ground. See there was still the mill there and for years and years after we were married you could take in your wheat and you could grind your own flour. So they didn't have to buy flour out of the store that much. The old Yellowstone brand flour we sold for years. We would sell it in fifty pound bags. It was unknown to sell a lesser quantity than that, like you can buy it now in five pound bags.

Forbush: Cooked cereal was important. Did you sell oatmeal and what other?

Norma: Germade. But you could also get that in, not oatmeal, but germade. My dad used to get wheat from my grandfather Bean and he would have germade made at the mill too. They did that up at the mil in Teton until very recent times.

Cleo: That's why we didn't sell a lot of flour and germade and things of that nature here. We had two sources where they could get it wholesale or trade wheat for it. That's what they did. We sold very little flour. We did sell sugar.

Norma: We ate very little oatmeal too. Because, you see people raised the wheat and you could get it made into germade. Germade was our cereal.

Cleo: Corn flakes were about the only ready made cereal.

Norma: Yes, corn flakes and shredded wheat we sold in the store. But in our home it was germade. Everybody had germade that they could get made from their wheat at the grist mill.

Forbush: Now you mentioned that you had not done much with dry goods. Shoes, and overalls, and things of this nature?

Cleo: We left that for the Sugar Merc to sell. They had a big stock of dry goods and competition with them and with the other stores in Rexburg was too keen. The grocery business was bad enough to compete with them.

Forbush: Did you hear much in the way of people complaining of hard times as they came to the store and visited? As you transacted your work there at the church, was there much comment about tough times?

Cleo: Oh, yes. There was a lot of it. Every bit as much as there is now. The amount they could get for working was so low but perhaps not any more in proportion with what they could buy. Gasoline was, I remember, twenty-nine cents a gallon. I can't remember the price of shoes and clothing and that. But people did complain. They used to wonder how they were going to make it from one day to the next. The young people especially. They had a hard time getting started and finding work that they could do. Most of it was farm work. Women didn't work too much after they got married in those days. They stayed pretty close to home and took care of the children.

Norma: Some of the women taught school. We had...

Cleo: Not too many of them after they were married.

Forbush: Now had you commenced teaching school?

Norma: No, oh no. We had four, five children. We lost our first one as I have said. Then we had a child in December of 1934. That's all we had when at the store.

Forbush: So you didn't teach until later?

Norma: No, our next baby was born in 1938, then Rex in '43, and our last in 1948. I started back at Ricks the year it became a four year college. I had two years and then in 1952, when our youngest daughter was four years old, I began taking a class or two. Marge Romrell, of Sugar City looked after my little girl with her little boy, Rex, for a couple of hours each day while I took a class. It took me four years to finish my last two years of college. That was including summer school. Of course, that was the length of time that Ricks was a four year school. Our oldest son was also going to Ricks then. He started the same year as I and graduated. Then I didn't start teaching until 1958. Our youngest daughter was in the fifth grade when I started teaching.

Forbush: Was that at Sugar?

Norma: No. I started in Rigby. We had moved to Rexburg in '65. I started teaching before we moved to Rexburg but I didn't want to teach in the same district where I had a child going to school. I had two there. Rex was still there. That hampers a parent and it is not good for the children. I did my practice teaching here in Rexburg and I did it in St. Anthony.

Forbush: Well, now going back to the store, how long did you have the store?

Cleo: About ten years. We kept on with it about ten years. During quite a bit of that time I found it necessary to find part time work to keep it going. So when Norma wasn't so

that she could look after it, why my sister came in and even my younger brother worked sometime there. Then we hired other people off and on to help out in the store when I was taking these other part time jobs. When I could, I worked at nights to get a supplementary income. But it got to the point where that was a little difficult to find work that would work out at night. So I worked in the daytime during the sugar factory run to make ends met and provide a living for us. So times were rough during all that time that we had that store.

And then Second World War started in 1940. In September we were getting news about the aerial bombardments between England and Germany. Hitler was boasting that he would be on English soil by September 15<sup>th</sup>. But on September 16<sup>th</sup> we were getting news that he was not on English soil.

Norma: But it was December 7, 1941, that we were bombed by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. That's when we got into the war. But we had the store and at that time we had three children and one of them was a little baby. Cleo was put in 1-A classification because he was not in an essential industry. We had nightmares about his being drafted and my being left with that store and three children. We had moved out of the apartment, we had outgrown it. We had bought a little house in Sugar and we were living away from the store. So we just decided, in order that I not be trapped that way if he was called into the Service, that we'd better sell it. So it was in, he can tell you when.

Cleo: I think it was in '43 but I am not sure whether it was '42 or '43. I quit keeping a daily journal for several years along at that time. We had a closing out sale and sold the last of the merchandise and the fixtures to Brother Thomas at the mercantile.

Forbush: So no one took over the store?

Norma: No one took over the store.

Cleo: Emer Harris took it over as a plumbing; put his plumbing business in there. We moved all of our groceries, dry goods, and fixtures out. Then was when I worked for Nelson-Ricks Creamery in Rexburg during the rest of the war years. I drove back and forth to work.

Forbush: You had a car by then?

Norma: Yes, we had a car.

Cleo: We bought our first car...

Norma: We had it before Larry was born.

Cleo: I think it was in '33 or '34. It was a little, one seated Chevy. We bought it for \$375 from my uncle who was working with Browning Auto Company in Idaho Falls. His name was Browning. That was our first automobile. It was a used one, it had gone

22,000 miles but we got it for \$375 with \$25 down. The rest of them after that, we didn't buy them on time. We paid cash for them.

Forbush: So essentially then, you relied on the income on the store for your livelihood and you would supplement that with what you could get in the sugar drives and others.

Cleo: We were talking that other day and you were wondering about the school lunch program. That we started while we were in the store and while I was president of the PTA for a year. We were able to get the school lunch thing going and maybe we should talk about that.

Forbush: Why don't you comment about that?

Cleo: It started out with three men that the government paid on W.P.A. project. Then I had two or three women. The first meals were cooked in the back of what later turned out to be the school lunch kitchen where they served lunches. But at that time we took, these men cooked the food in the back of our store. That was before we move in there, put our apartment in there. We put this big cook stove out of the, what do they call those...

Norma: It was out of the kitchen, the dining room where they served the workers.

Cleo: Served the workers up at the sugar factory. We were able to get that stove. They donated it I guess or else the PTA paid them or something for the rent of it. Anyway they move it into the back of our store and these men would cook these supplies. Most of food was furnished by the government and it was supplemented with whatever we could sell the lunches for. It started out; I think it was three cents apiece. These men would take this hot soup and crackers and they would take it on a hand sleigh and a couple of five gallon cans down to the elementary building. They would serve lunch down there around 11:30 and then they sent it up to the other one a little later. Then they sent some to the high school. That's the way we served the lunches and I think it was three cents apiece. That was enough to buy the crackers that the government couldn't furnish and whatever other small items there were. The labor was paid for through W.P.A. work. That's the way the project got started there in Sugar City. I don't know whether it was going on in other communities or schools around at that time or not. Anyway it went on from there, grew from that beginning in Sugar City.

Forbush: Well, very interesting. I surely want to thank you for sharing with me these items. Before we complete though, Norma, do you have any comments to make as you reflect back on this ten year period approximately?

Norma: Well, although Cleo has said that people complained some about the times, I think they complain whether things are good or bad. It seems to me like you never come to a period when people are totally satisfied with the way things are. People pay their tithing. We know that because Cleo used to receive it. They don't do that anymore now. It goes right to the Bishop. Because Cleo was accessible there in the store, people used to

bring tithing. People paid tithing then on what little bit they had, you know. They were as willing to do that as they are now. It seemed to me like we didn't realize that times were as bad as they were. I think. Until things got a lot better. They had to get better because of the war and we didn't like that. But then we got the better economic situation. To me it was a bad trade off.

Cleo: Yes, I went over to the library and looked at some of the old annual reports from when the Sugar Ward, actually when it was Sugar 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. In 1936 the population of the First Ward was 376 and Second Ward was 454, which would make 830 people. I believe the sign on this side of Sugar City says 850 people are the population of Sugar City.

Forbush: So virtually everyone who lived in Sugar City was a member of the LDS Church?

Cleo: Almost 90 or 95%. Now, of course, the ward boundaries went out farther than the town boundaries so this total of 830 would be more than the population of Sugar City because it only included a half square mile area. While the ward boundaries went out much farther.

Forbush: Tell me, a little question on the road. Was the big bend north, let's see, east of Sugar, was it traded in those years or was it before. They used...

Cleo: It used to be a square turn.

Forbush: And at a different place wasn't it?

Cleo: No it was about the same place. The one on the south side of Sugar was two square turns instead of the rounded curves like they have now.

Norma: That was later on.

Cleo: When I worked, just before we opened the store, for the government on the roads we had a dozen men or so. We had horses on the wagons. We hauled gravel on to the Sugar City streets. Before that they were all dirt roads, all through town, dusty and everything. But then they graveled the streets of Sugar City with W.P.A. labor.

Forbush: That was in '33 and '34. About that time?

Cleo: Yes. Now, of course, they have black topped them with curbs and gutters and everything. Very nice over there now with beautiful homes. Since the flood, of course, most of the homes were destroyed. The three homes, places that we lived in Sugar City during those times we were in Sugar are all gone. Even the store, where we had our store, that building has been torn down. Now there is a Maverick store there, a gasoline store. The older home where we lived, the old Addison Kidd home, we paid \$600 for. Then we paid out another \$600 to have it remodeled. So that one cost us \$1200 with the

two lots that it is on. The farm home we had northwest of Sugar City about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile was taken down at the time of the 1976 flood, the Teton Dam disaster. A new home is built there now. With the freeway going through northwest of town, why its changed the accessibility of the town. Lot of changes has taken place since then.

Forbush: But the people who live there and the population have increased fabulously now. There are four wards.

Cleo: Yes, there are four wards and they each have about the same population as I was reading here, around 400 to 450 members.

Forbush: So upwards of 12-1500 people.

Cleo: I would say on the ward records.

Forbush: And they still possess that pride and competitive spirit?

Cleo: Yes, pride in their town. Proud of their basketball team and their high school and so on. It is still there. But with only one grocery store, one hardware store, one service station, one elevator, one or two potato warehouses, no passenger trains going through, freight trains once a day I guess, bus service goes to Ashton, one day up and back. Used to have train service, at least one freight train and a lot of passenger trains twice a day and the Yellowstone express that used to go through at midnight.

Forbush: Things have changed haven't they?

Norma and Cleo: Yes, yes.

Forbush: Thank you so much.