

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Julian Broadbent- Hard Times During the Depression

By Julian Broadbent

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Box 1 Folder 16

Oral Interview conducted by Judy Broadbent

Transcribed by Sarah McCoristin February 2005

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This is an oral history. I am Judy Broadbent. Today, November 30, 1975, I am going to interview my father, Julian Broadbent. The general topic will be the hard times of the depression.

Judy Broadbent: Dad, where were you born at?

Julian Broadbent: Grantsville, Utah.

JB: And how long did you live there?

JB: I don't remember. I left when I was real small. I was about three years old. Then we moved to Canada.

JB: And where were you living when the depression was starting?

JB: In Remond, Washington.

JB: And do you remember how you learned about the depression?

JB: Yes, we were on a vacation in Utah when it happened. We come back up as far as Idaho on our way back home, and there was a letter waiting for dad telling him there was no need to come back there, the depression had hit. The man he was working for was broke; he couldn't even afford to pay his back wages. So there was no need of him coming back up there.

JB: So where did you go to live then?

JB: WE lived in Wieser, Idaho.

JB: You never went back to Washington?

JB: No.

JB: What did your day do then for a job?

JB: Almost anything he could do. He dug ditches, cut wood, worked for farmers, shoveled coal off of coal cars, downtown. Just anything he could find to make a nickel.

JB: Do you have any ideas about what caused the depression?

JB: All I can remember was somebody said something about the stock market went broke and the country went bankrupt.

JB: How did the stock market affect these rich people who had all their money in the stocks?

JB: Some of them were broke overnight. They'd been a millionaire today and the next morning when they woke up they didn't have enough money to go downtown and buy a cup of coffee. Lots of them jumped out of three and four or five story buildings to commit suicide on the sidewalks, others shot themselves and a lot of them found themselves in a bread line the next morning.

JB: What kind of working conditions did people have? How many hours did they work?

JB: When I went to work, we worked ten hours a day. From seven in the morning until six in the evening with a n hour off for lunch, if you were lucky.

JB: What kind of work was that you were doing?

JB: I worked everywhere when I was a young fellow trying to make a nickel. Sometimes I worked from seven and a half cents to ten cents an hour, ten hours a day. You didn't dare gripe nor worry too much about whether they was overworking you or not because there was always two or three people standing around waiting for you to quit so they could have your job.

JB: Did you always get money for your pay?

JB: No. Lots of times I worked for more than one farmer. At night when I came home I'd carry a chicken, a dozen eggs, maybe after a week I'd even have a pig to bring home for something to eat. Wasn't very much money in them days.

JB: How many people in your family were working to support your family?

JB: Just my father and I.

JB: How much did things cost then?

JB: Well, they were really cheap compared to today. In those days, you could buy a pair of shoes for a dollar and a half, a pair of Levis for a dollar fifty, buy a shirt for thirty-nine cents, a loaf of bread for a dime. You could buy a brand new automobile for less then seven hundred dollars, if you had seven hundred dollars.

JB: How many, how much money do you think it would take to say get your supplies for the winter, your supply of groceries?

JB: Well, the very minimum which we've done more than one winter, I know we'd go to town in the fall with forty dollars to buy a winter's supply of groceries. Of course, we always had our own milk and milk cows, a few eggs.

JB: Where there a lot of people that didn't have jobs?

JB: Yes. You had to have a family and unable to find a job of any other kind.

JB: Was it mostly just outside work that they did?

JB: Oh, I think there was some inside, but I know most of it was outside. They did take a few bookkeepers, stenographers and such, but most of it was outside work.

JB: Do you know of any places around here where they built things like parks or something?

JB: No, they didn't have time for parks and such in those days but mostly what they were doing was road building, and they were trying to improve rural districts. That's when they built what they called the WPA houses, specifications with doors and a floor in it.

JB: Was it easier for people to find work in the summer than in the winter?

JB: Yes, because the farmers would always need some help in the summertime. There was potato harvest come on, used to be the biggest thing around here in this part of Idaho for years. In those days, a good potato picker could make five dollars a day, which was unheard of wage in those times, because most of the time you worked for thirty dollars a month if you were lucky to find a steady job.

JB: What kind of houses did people live in?

JB: Oh, they were all older, frame houses. Most of them were just single frame construction with a board and a bat on the outside and maybe a single board on the inside. Most of the places didn't have any electricity in those days, no furnaces. We used kerosene lamps, and wood and coal stoves to cook with.

JB: Where did you get some of the fuel that you needed?

JB: A lot of times I've spent with a gunny sack on my back going up and down a railroad tracks picking up coal that had dropped off a coal cars from the railroad, down on the river and the creeks picking up all the driftwood that drifted through.

JB: Did you ever go hunting for game to supplement your food?

JB: Well, we never had enough money to buy a rifle, or the shells, but I've taken muskrat traps down on the river, which was illegal. But we went down there with corn and spread around the muskrat traps and trapped wild ducks all winter long to help have meat on the table.

JB: How long did the depression last?

JB: Well, about a ten year period, from 1929 through 1939 before things started improving a bit. Then about that time World War II came along. All eligible men left for

the war and that left everyone else with a shortage of labor, so the prices started improving.

JB: Do you think that wars help the economy of a country?

JB: Oh, I don't know about that one.

JB: Do you think the depression was harder on the people in the eastern states than in the western states?

JB: Yes, because here we did have all this agriculture and we're not near as heavily populated. People back east, where there was absolutely nothing for them to do. It's where they formed up bread and soul lines. People would stand in line most of the day in order to get a bowl of soup to survive for that day on. Where out in this part of the country where there was usually something that could be done if you were willing to.

JB: Was there a lot of people that moved from the east to the west?

JB: Well, the biggest time we had people moving from the eastern part of the United States to the west was when the Dust Bowl blew in Oklahoma and out through the middle States. Everybody got blown out the dust and they started moving back west.

JB: Could you sort of summarize the depression years?

JB: Well, most I remember about them they were real tough. Everybody was so busy trying to find another dollar somewhere to buy a few more groceries or another pair of shoes for one of the kids or fuel for the house. All I can remember is real tough in those days. Never knew from, hardly, from day to day whether there was going to be anything to eat on the table from the next day or not.