

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Mary Hansen Gardner - Life Experiences of the Depression

By Mary Hansen Gardner

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Box 1 Folder 41

Oral Interview conducted by Bruce Gardner

Transcribed by Sarah McCorristin April 2005

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This is an oral history. I am Bruce Garner. Today, November 29, 1975, I am going to interview Mrs. Mary H. Gardner. The general topic will be the depression and the effect on her and her family.

Bruce Garner: Mrs. Gardner, where were you born?

Mary Hansen Gardner: I was born in Tetonia, Idaho on twenty-third of October, 1905.

BG: How long did you live in Tetonia?

MG: We only lived in Tetonia a short time, and when we moved into Parker, Idaho. In Parker, Idaho was where we lived when I first started to school my first year. At that time I was only five years old, when I started to school in first grade.

BG: What time did you move to Rigby?

MG: I didn't move to Rigby, Idaho until after I was married. I was married in 1929 which was in the year of 1930. We moved up there because my husband's brother had found this place up there and it was midway between Rupert where my folks lived in Afton, Wyoming, where my husband's folks lived. We thought this would be a real good location so that we could get back and forth to both families, and yet not be too closely connected with either one of them.

BG: Where were your parents born?

MG: My parents born? My father was born in Logan, Utah in 1878; and my mother was born in Smithfield, Utah in 1884.

BG: What was your occupation?

MG: You mean the time I was married?

BG: At the time you were married.

MG: When we first married, I was a housewife. This has been my occupation up until my husband passed away last year, I mean, nine years ago.

BG: Your husband was a farmer?

MG: Well, we lived in a rather sparsely settled area. It was an old area and the sort of a river bottom land. We were going to farm there. Now in this particular locality, there was no electricity and very little coal to burn. We were in a wooded area, and the men would gather together in groups in the wintertime and go from one place to another cutting trees and splitting wood so that we could have winter fuel. Our main source of heat was from these logs that they cut down or these trees that they cut down and sawed up. We had what we called an old kitchen range, but we fed it mostly with this big wood

and we also had this same thing in the living room. We would put a big old log in the heater at night and sometimes this would burn almost until morning. Now houses got pretty cold at that time. In fact, our home was not equipped so that it was heated anywhere except just in the living room and the kitchen and we had a stove in each of these rooms. It made it necessary during the winter months for my husband and my two children and myself to all sleep in one bed, which we did during the entire winter that we were up there.

We also had just a few cows that we milked in order to get a little money to buy food with. Actually, most of our food was canned during the summertime or dried and then we ate it in the wintertime. We didn't use much cash because we didn't have that much.

BG: Could you tell us a little bit about the hardships in your farming?

MG: Now, that first year that we were in Rigby was a tremendous year, because we were very poor so far as having any money was concerned. We had planted beets. It was impossible for us to buy inner tubes at that time and besides, conditions were such that you couldn't get inner tubes too easily. We couldn't buy them at the time that we started the farming operation. It made it necessary in order for us to haul our beets, for us to stuff rags or really burlap sacks is what it was, potato sacks the ones that were worn out and old, we'd stuff these into the tires to use so that my husband could haul the beets to the dump.

Also at that time, my husband was very much in need of glasses and we didn't have money with which he could purchase these glasses except by doing our own work such as thinning the beets and getting an advance pay on this as labor. So we labored and did those our self. As I remember, we had about seven acres of beets that year. My husband and I thinned all of those on your hands and knees in order that we might obtain the money that would be used for labor for him to get glasses. At that time I was carrying my second child. I remember thinning beets up until he was born. By that I mean that I thinned beets until six o'clock one night and he was born at nine o'clock the next morning. These are some of the things that we were required to do in order that we might get money sufficiently to get the necessary work done. To get means whereby he could see, because his eyes were very poor.

BG: Can you tell us a little bit about the tightness of money?

MG: Well that was it. I've often told my children that there was for three months that I didn't hardly see one dime in change, at all. We were able to get a quart of milk by my husband working for it, a quart of milk from the neighbors each day so that we could have milk for our older child so that he could eat that. This was another reason why we had to do the things we did in farming is because we just didn't have the money to pay the bills. Of course, we were not the only family that was in that condition; and therefore, they banded together a lot of times to do a lot of their work. For instance, in pea hauling, we raised peas and they would cut the peas and get them in rows and then the men would bring in their wagons and their teams and they would haul the peas into the thrashers. I

remember one particular time about five o'clock in the afternoon and my neighbor came up the road with an armload of corn in her hand and she said, "I just came up. I thought you could possibly didn't know that you are going to have the thrashers for supper tonight." Which meant about sixteen to eighteen men that we would have to cook for. She came up in order to help me do this cooking. We used to have good times while they were doing that, but it was a lot of hard work too.

BG: What did you do for a social life?

MG: Social life. We spent very little money because we didn't have money; therefore, we would congregate together in one another's homes and play games and do different things. One particular social I remember that we wanted to have, and we wanted it to be a little different. Now, my father-in-law (Brigham Ozro Gardner) was a man who was quite skilled in reading heads. So they got the idea that it would be nice to have him come down there and what they said was to tell fortunes and in order to get a little money, they decided to charge about twenty-five cents for a fortune. This man had studied these books quite a bit, and besides having a little gift of discernment on it, he was pretty discerning as to the types of people that came. I recall one particular time that one lady thought she would fool him. We had him come there to the church. He said to her, "How many children have you had?" She said, "Eleven". He looked her right in the face, and he looked down at her hand for a minute, and he said, "Seven of them are dead." She said, "That's right, seven of them are dead!" So they saw they couldn't fool him very much, that he was pretty accurate a lot of things he did.

Our social life was mainly just what you could make up yourself. We had radios, or course, so that we could turn on the radio and dial in and get things. Oft times we used radio instead of trying to buy a newspaper and just got our news over the radio media because of again, shortness of money. We had no way to buy papers and things of that nature. We even saved our scrap paper to write letters on sometimes.

BG: Were most of your social activities geared around the church?

MG: More or less with the church people. In fact, this community in which we lived was largely made of LDS people. They were a backward people. They had lived there and everybody was related to everybody else, and we were the newcomers that had come I and there were just one or two other families that were in the same position, but they had adopted us right into the family. We went right from one place to the other just like they did and had good times.

BG: Did you make any trips or take any travels during the time?

MG: Well, we did. We used to make trips down here to see my folks and some trips up to see my husband's folks. My husband had one brother by the name of Lloyd who had been transferred in the creamery business out into Rock Springs, Wyoming. He got pretty homesick out there because he hadn't been away from his family before. One time he sent a letter and he said, "Since it's the fall of the year and you'll be harvesting

potatoes, after the potatoes are harvested why don't you load up a load of potatoes on your pickup, trailer if you'd like." He said, I'll sell them to the people out here and thus you can pay for your trip, so you can make a trip out here and spend a little time with us." We thought this would be a pretty good idea, and we decided to do that. Everything went well. We had a four wheel trailer which might sound big, but actually this was only a trailer the size of an old wagon box that they used to have. So we loaded about twenty sacks of potatoes on the back of that pickup and about twenty on the trailer. We started out from Rigby and we got into Afton, Wyoming and visited with his folks for just a few minutes. Then were on our way out to Kemmer. I expect we were about fifteen miles this side of Kemmer when all of a sudden there was a clack and there was a drag and we discovered that one of the wheels on the trailer had broken. It was impossible to fix that out on the desert where we were. It was out there where the wind was blowing and was nothing but sagebrush. So after some deliberation, we decided that the only thing that we could do was that I would stay out there with that load of potatoes on the trailer and my husband would arrive into the nearest town, which was Kemmer and would try to sell that load of potatoes that was on the pickup and then come back and load the potatoes from the trailer to the pickup so that we could make our trip on to Rock Springs. Everything went pretty well, and he sold the potatoes to a grocery store and they were unloading them when all of a sudden a police officer came up and tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Don't you know that in order to sell these potatoes that you've got to have a license?" he wanted to see the license and my husband didn't have one. After some deliberation, when he had told him our predicament and how the other load of potatoes were out in the middle of nowhere and I was sitting out there on top of that load of potatoes with just a quilt wrapped around me and it was pretty cold weather, the policeman wanted to come out and bring me in to verify the story, but my husband said, "She will never leave that load of potatoes with just a quilt wrapped around me and it was pretty cold weather, the policeman wanted come out and bring me in to verify the story, but my husband said, "She will never leave that load of potatoes, that's the only way we've got of making any money to take this trip." So the officer didn't come out. My husband finally said, "Well, it looks like I'll have to go outside the city limits and just dup these potatoes." When the officer say that he was really serious, and that things were really wrong, his heart melted and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll just unload these potatoes just as fast as you can get out of town and get your other load, and when you come through, don't bother to stop only just long enough to let that trailer off and get on your way." This J.O. promised to do.

I was out there about three hours and I had time to think about a lot of things, and dream about a lot of things, and dream about a lot things and wondered just what the future would hold for us. Finally, my husband and the two children came back and we got the trailer unloaded onto the pickup and drove through and left the trailer at a blacksmith shop to see if he could get it fixed by the time that we were on our way back. We arrived in Rock Springs about ten-thirty that night. When we got there, of course, all of the potatoes that we had on the pickup were already sold, and the people came after them the next day. We got our money so that we were able to finance our trip home alright.

There was one other trop that I remember that we took at that time. Because we had so few people we contrived the idea, my husband was a bishop and we needed to go to Salt Lake to Conference. So ten of us got in the back of the pickup. They had fixed some benches back there and put a top over it, a cover that we was fixed up. We went down to the temple to Conference. None of us had very much money so in order to get y that night when we got there, we decided that we would bunch up with the men in one room and the ladies in another room. I remember sleeping between two ladies in a double bed. You can imagine that we didn't do too much sleeping that night. We did have a nice trip and we got home again okay.

BG: What did you think of President Roosevelt?

MG: I was decided Republican at the time that President Roosevelt ran for office. The one thing that I didn't like that he was so much in harmony with was the fact that they would repeal the 18th amendment, which meant that liquor would flow very freely in the country and we had been in prohibition. While there was a lot of black-marketing, I presume you'd call it, that went on and liquor that was sold under cover, but it was still not as bad as it was when they put it right on the open market. At the time of President Roosevelt's election, I happened to work at the polls. The people were so daring when they'd come in and they just really didn't go into a ballot box a lot of times to mark their ballot. Some of them, especially on that repeal of the 18th amendment would just go over and mark it right upon the blackboard. Then they'd go into the ballot box and mark the rest of their ticket. After President Roosevelt went in for a while, I thought, "Well, now maybe things are going to be better." Yet the first thing that I do remember after he went in was the moratorium that was put on the banks. It seemed like there was, I don't know how many thousands of banks that had to run. President Roosevelt declared a moratorium on all of the banks were closed. Then in a few days, those who had been sufficiently able to cope with the test or examination or whatever it was that the government gave them were privileged to reopen again. We were somewhat alarmed at some of the programs that came out. At first they might seem that they were going to do a great deal of good like the NRA or the National Recovery Act, which was enacted at the tiem. That was supposed to get people back on their feet and give them great opportunities. I think there was never a President that was given more power than President Roosevelt was given. He was given the power on his particular occasion to take over industry, which meant as I got it in my mind anyhow, which meant that he could regulate the wages, and also the hours when they worked. Then he came along with another program that was called the AAA, or the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Both of these programs took into billions of dollars, which of course added to the, in fact, which I think was the start of the economic condition that the world is in today. Because of the fact that the government was borrowing all this money or using all this money for different programs. One program that I was thoroughly disgusted with was that CCC program. I'm sure that in the beginning when it started it was meant for a great thing. It was called the Civillian Conservation Core. Anyhow, it was supposed to give young men employment and besides that it was suppose to help build up roads and various things, improvements that would help the country. I think there was also a program that was called WPA which was the Works Public Administration or something. So that they have improvements to

all public buildings and things. The only thing that was wrong about this situation was the fact that when those men began to work, they were not required by any law or any disciplinary measures of people who regulated them to give a full day's work for a full day's pay. They were just literally sort of their own. They would work if they want to, and if they didn't want to, they wouldn't work. They'd draw their money and I think that this was the beginning of what was called the Dole System, or just hand something to somebody for nothing. That contribution that started right at that time, has just come on and on, farther and farther, until we have what we do today, when people don't want to work at all for the things that they get.

BG: Could you conclude what you feel the New Deal policy did to the morality of the people at the time?

MG: Well, in my personal view of this thing, just from observation of living before and after, I would say that the New Deal was very bad for the nation as a whole. Because it began the deterioration of the moral status of the people. To feel that they could get something for nothing, and also it contributed to their ideas that the world owed them a living.

BG: I understand that around this time, you moved to Hazelton, Idaho. Is that correct?

MG: That's right. About 1938 we moved into Hazelton.

BG: Can you tell us about some experiences while you were here?

MG: Yes. When we came here we lived in a little shack. In fact, we were asked to come down here by the church, to come into this community and to buy a farm. We didn't have sufficient money to put a down payment on a farm, so the man who was in the Stake Presidency of the LDS church offered to put the down payment, at least half of it and that it only required \$600.00 for the down payment. We knew about the first thing that we would have to do would be make some better living quarters than what we had because this was just a flat roofed house. It was very small and it was in such a dilapidated condition that I'm not really kidding when I tell you that you opened the door and hollered "shoo" to get rid of the mice before you could start to get a meal. There was another family who were also wanting to build a house who were living in about the same kind of a shack, and that was a man by the name of Lee Coulson. So we got together and decided that the men would dig basements and we would, if necessary, live in the basement house until we could manage to build the upper part of it, which we did. We lived in our basement after we got it completed for three years before we finally completed the upper part so that we could live up there. In order to get the upper part, lumber was high and it was hard to get lumber and my husband's relatives up in Afton, Wyoming had a mill up there and could get lumber much cheaper up there by even making the trip up with the truck and hauling it down here, which he did. He hauled lumber down here and got the upper part of the house started. His brother came I and helped, and we built the upper part of the house. By that time, it was war time, the second world war was on, so it was real hard to get a hold of fixtures for bathroom; a

bath tub and a stool, and a wash basin and this we brought and put in the hosue. These were hard times. Again, when we built the barn which is out on that farm, again, he made a trip into Star Valley to get a load of lumber in orders. When we built the shed, he took the truck wand went up, I remember the last load that he got. He got home about four o'clock in the afternoon on Thanksgiving Day. We were quite concerned because it had taken them so long to get here. These are some of the things that were necessary to do in order for us to progress and get the necessary living accommodations that we felt that we should have to rear our family.

BG: When was your child born?

MG: My third child was born in Montpelier, Idaho and he was born in 1937. well, I should back up here just a little bit and say that after we left Rigby, that we did live in a place called Geneva, Idaho. My husband, thinking that farming was getting harder and harder and because in his younger day he had been a cheese maker, he got an opportunity to go into Geneva, Idaho which was just across the mountains from Afton, Wyoming, and go in there and be a cheese maker. So for three years, we were up there as cheese makers, prior to our coming into Hazelton. That's when he was born.

BG: Were your times in Geneva as rough as times in Rigby?

MG: Well, they were not as rough so far as getting a hold of a little money was concerned because we were working for wages. My husband only made \$80.00 a month but yet with the living conditions and prices as low as they were at that time, we were still able to make ends meet. However, again in Geneva we had no electricity. We had gas lights and in the creamery, of course the cheese operation was done completely by steam. This was worked up by a sort of a furnace like thing that they had. I remember one very interesting thing that happened. I was not a cheese maker but I had to make the cheese one day because my husband was called with two or three other men to go up into the mountains. A lady had lost her mind and she was a large person and she was giving them so much trouble up there that they couldn't possibly these men to come up and administer to had to see if they couldn't possibly get her calmed down. They were gone for several hours. I had been with my husband many times making cheese and iw as a little afraid maybe I would have a gassy cheese because I didn't know just exactly the technique. But between my son who was only seven years old and myself, we were able to get it cooked up right and get the test made right on it and drain the whey off. We were in the midst of during the turning the big sheets of cheese, they lay in great big long layers, you know, and you cut them and flip the over. Between the two of us, we could get those sheets flipped over, and that day we made the cheese.

In our social gatherings and things, at least in Geneva, there was about eight couples of us who used to get together once every week and we played Chinese Checkers and some of those games like that we had. We had a lot of fun doing that, we'd bring our families together and bunch up.

BG: You've lived in Hazelton ever since....?

MG: 1938 and my last child was born in 1937.

BG: Do you have anything that you'd like to add to complete it?

MG: Well, I can't think of anything else except to say that although we got through those times and they didn't seem too bad at the time, I have no desire to go back to them again. After experiencing and tasting what it is to have means and shall I say "the luxuries of life" because of in comparison of what we lived in then, they were luxuries. Things that we have today are luxuries.

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