

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Norris Fullmer – Life During The Depression

By Norris Fullmer

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Box 1 Folder 38

Oral Interview conducted by Boyd Fullmer

Transcribed by Victor Ukorebi January 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is oral history. I'm Boyd Fullmer, and today, March 31, 1974, I'm going to be interviewing Norris Fullmer who is my father, and I will be addressing him as Dad usually.

BF: Would you spell your name for us?

NF: N-O-R-R-I-S F-U-L-L-M-E-R.

BF: Thank you. The general topic of this interview is how the Depression of the 30's affected the people in Idaho and more particularly my father. Where were you born?

NF: I was born in Wallsburg, Utah.

BF: How long have you lived here in Menan, Idaho?

NF: Since Thanksgiving Day, 1926.

BF: How old were you when you moved here?

NF: Thirteen years old.

BF: And where did you live before that?

NF: I lived in the Lost Ricer Valley (Idaho) for about ten years. Before that, until the time I was three years old, I lived in Wallsburg, Utah.

BF: So you spent most of your life here in Idaho?

NF: A quite, quite a bit of it. Almost fifty-eight years.

BF: And what's been your occupation for the last, well for as long as you've been around?

NF: Livestock and farming. We've had sheep since I was a young boy. In fact, I got wool in my blood when I was about nine years old, and I don't seem to be able to get it out.

BF: You use to herd sheep up in Copper Basin area of Idaho, didn't you?

NF: Yes, Copper Basin. The canyons out from Copper Basin, Pole Creek, Boone Creek, Rider Creek, left hand fork of Fall Creek, and Dry Creek below the Copper Basin. We trailed sheep through from the Mackey Dam through Copper Basin over into our sheep range.

BF: How old were you when the Depression hit?

NF: It depends on when you term the Depression. In 1929, I would have been about 16 years old. That's when the crash came.

BF: And when did the Depression affect you and your family in this part of the country?

NF: Well, I think we began to feel it pretty heavily by about 1931.

BF: Now your father died during the Depression, didn't he?

NF: Yes, that's right. He died in 1933, the summer of 1933. Just after I had turned 20 years old.

BF: And you took over the responsibility of managing your farm, didn't you?

NF: Yes, I, with the help of my mother and the rest of the family younger than I, we took over the family farm, and tried to pay off the mortgage and indebtedness on it.

BF: How did you, how easy was it for you to pay off the debts you had?

NF: I was mighty tough. Dad bought some seed potatoes, and gave a crop mortgage in 1931 for his seed potatoes. I believe he paid about three and a half a hundred for them. We gave that crop in 1931 and 1932; we gave all of the potato crop; and in the spring of 1933, dad gave part of his wool check. We had a little farm flock of sheep at the tie. We'd sold out our range flock in 1926, but we still had a farm flock and he gave part of his wool check to pay those potato seed off in 1931. And when he died, we still owed some of the money on those seed.

BF: Was it, did you get into debt much during the Depression or was there that much to get into debt on?

NF: We had a hundred and sixty acres of ground here, and quite a few stock. I think about a hundred head of cattle, and probably about two hundred fifty head of sheep. We were about nine thousand dollars in debt. The livestock and land wasn't worth the indebtedness at that time. Incidentally, in 1932, we sold potatoes for then cents a hundred for number ones and five cents a hundred for number two's.

BF: What's the price on potatoes today?

NF: I think a farmer should, some farmers have sold potatoes this spring as high as ten dollars scooped up, including the culls.

BF: So that's quite a bit of difference between now and forty years ago?

NF: Yes, you can figure the difference between, about seven cents a hundred shoveled weight and ten dollars a hundred, if you want to compare them.

BF: Was it easy to get help to do the farming back then?

NF: You bet, a man was willing to work from daylight till dark for a dollar a day and board. Some of them worked for as cheap as fifty cents a day. I recall the.. Before my father died in 1932, the fall of 1932, my brother and I hauled hay for, well I started hauling hay for two and a half a day and furnished my team and had a steel wheel wagon, in the fall. Fed my own team. We'd go through Lewisville before it was daylight, going after hay, and go out southeast of Rigby, Idaho. Come back and unload after dark. Later on in the winter we hauled hay with a sleigh from out west of Roberts, and we worked there for a dollar and a half a day. But our team, was - a fellow furnished the hay for our teams of horses. We used sleighs at that time.

BF: How long did the Depression affect you here in Menan?

NF: Oh, I think that we were still feeling the affects of the Depression to some extent till about the time World War II started in 1941. Times were a little smoother by then from about 1936 til 41. But, we were still feeling some of the affects of the Depression.

BF: How did you pay off the people that worked for you? Sometimes did you have to give them livestock and such to pay them off?

NF: No, we were always someway or another able to pay them off. It was pretty tough sometimes, but we were always able to pay them off. I remember of some of these men working, one fellow I had, my cousin working for us even to 1937 for a dollar a day and board, and he was getting up at daylight and milking the cows and then working in the field and then he would have to help do the chores after we would come out of the field at six or seven in the evening, sometimes he would tend the horses or milk cows which ever he was needed to do.

BF: Did you have much implement, motorized equipment on the farm then?

NF: No, we didn't. I think along about 1937 or 1938 we bought an old steel-wheeled tractor, a Hartpare tractor we called it. It ran on two cylinders, a gas tractor. And you'd have to turn the wheel about six times to get it to turn the corner, and sometimes we missed the corner and took the ditch band or the fence. In about 1941, about the time of World War II, we were able to buy a little Ford-Fergusson tractor, rubber-tired tractor. We really thought that we had the world by the heels then. We had a real tractor.

BF: And you used horses more then before that?

NF: Yes, we used horses. We used horses quite a lot even after I was married in 1938, to do a quite a lot of the farm work with.

BF: How did your marriage back then affect you, was it kind of hard? You went to Salt Lake to get married right?

NF: Yes, we went.

BF: Was it hard for you to get the money to go down there?

NF: Well, your mom and I left early the day we headed for Salt Lake to get married. So I stopped in Pocatello and I guess the, at the Production Credit to borrow money to go to Salt Lake to get married on; and we had to buy a little used furniture for a little one-room cabin that we had; and I think, maybe they felt sorry for us down in Pocatello in the P.C.A. office and loaned us a little money maybe to get rid of us, I don't know. But, I borrowed a hundred and fifty dollars and this was to furnish our home and start out the spring work and make our trip to Salt Lake.

BF: How much did your room cost at the hotel you stayed at in Salt Lake?

NF: Well, a dollar and a half as I remember it. We had twin beds, a hug room. I think they thought they saw a couple of hayseeds, the people at the hotel, and I think they were having some fun with us. We used both beds too, incidentally, that night.

BF: Your first child came about a year later, didn't it? Did you have much problem with paying for the birth of your child?

NF: No, you could raise kids a lot cheaper then than you could now. I think we paid thirty-five dollars for the doctor. The child was born at my wife's father and mother's home, and they took care of her. Incidentally, shortly after we had this baby, the first night that we went to a movie, my mother insisted that we go, they had drawings for cash prizes; and drew forty dollar prize that night. This seemed like a lot of money to us then, ad it really was because it was hard to come by, and this paid for our baby.

BF: So I guess it was cheaper then, but it still just as hard for you to get the money?

NF: Well, it may have been, it may have been a little harder because money was hard to come by, even in 1938-39.

BF: Do you feel that there was much difference between the people around this area as far as money went, before the Depression as it was during the Depression and shortly after the Depression?

NF: Well, I don't hardly understand what you mean by that, but I think that the people were a lot more helpful with each other. We changed work with our neighbors in threshing and haying and worked together, kind of a community project in our threshing and haying; and people were some more helpful I think and even more thoughtful of each other. I think that it made us appreciate each other more, having to do without and being willing to do without and being willing to help others.

BF: That was during the depression?

NF: Yes, well, even before the Depression too.

BF: And then after the Depression you didn't have so much community working together?

NF: Well, not nearly so much. We still have some of it in our neighborhood now. If a neighbor gets down and out, I think the community as a whole, tries to help them out, especially in a case of sickness or an emergency where somebody's been injured or a death or something in the family. People still try to help each other out a lot in our community.

BF: Did people live, as far as their housing went and I guess you would say the class of living that they had, was it much different before the Depression as it was during the Depression?

NF: Oh, it certainly was. I think it was probably 1940, before we even had power in our house, electric power. We had three children and were ready for the fourth one in the little one-room cabin before we were able to build on.

BF: What do you feel the Depression had the most affect on you?

NF: Well, I believe it made me feel quite conservative. I've always been taught to be saving and try to be thrifty, try too... I think it made us feel like we should give an honest day's pay for an honest day's work and vice versa; and when we do something for somebody, we should give a full day's work for a day's pay.

BF: Do you have anything else you would like to discuss about the Depression?

NF: Well, I don't know that I do particularly, except that I think that the price that I mentioned on potatoes, other crops pretty well compared with it price-wise. I remember that during the Depression after my father passed away in 1933, that winter we sold cows for as low as twelve dollars per head. Now I've sold cows this winter for as high as six hundred dollars. This is a quite a contrast, and these cows that I sold for six hundred this winter, had I of bought them and bought the feed and sold the, they were cows I raised, incidentally, they would have cost me a hundred and fifty dollars more than the cow and the feed, time I figured the price that she brought.