Dr. David L. Crowder Oral History Project

Charles Orrin Douglass – Life During the Depression

By Charles Orrin Douglas

December 4, 1975

Box 1 Folder 33

Oral Interview conducted by Karla Piquet

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Brigham Young University- Idaho
This is Oral History. I am Karla Piquet. Today, December 4, 1975. I am going to interview Orrin Douglass. The general topic will be the depression.

Karla Piquet (KP): Mr. Douglass, where were you born?

Charles Orrin Douglass (COD): Smithfield, Utah.

KP: How long have you lived in Teton Valley?

COD: Seventy-seven years.

KP: Where were your parents born?

COD: Well, my father was born in Smithfield, Utah. My mother was born in Chicago, Illinois.

KP: What’s your occupation?

COD: Farmer

KP: When did you notice when the Depression started?

COD: Well, it was about 1929. The jobs begin, they begin to lay off men and in the railroad and the …. Everything just went to pieces. You couldn’t get a job nowhere. I used to play for dances, and we milked a few cows. We could take a ten-gallon can of cream in and get six dollars out of it. We had a few chickens, and I raised a few pigs. We had to depend on what we, what we raised ourselves in order to get….to live. We had a car but we couldn’t run it because we didn’t have no tires, and we have no money to buy any nor no gas if we’d a had tires. So we worked along that way far, I don’t know when it begin to end. Not until we got rid of President Hoover. We never got nowhere as long as we had him. He did nothing, absolutely nothing for the poor people. He just sat there in the Whitehouse and didn’t do a thing. Finally, they got him out of there and got Franklins D. Roosevelt in and he told the big bankers and stuff like that to let loose of that money or he’d issue some more, and then it began to ease off. So he even created jobs for men. Now we got… we was allowed to do public works…like putting in water lines and stuff like that in the cities and like that. We got… we was allowed to make twenty dollars a month, that’s all we could make. We would work that much…ten days and they pay two dollars a day and then we was off. They had em then he put em to work the CCC’s they called them. I forget what that means, but they worked on roads and forests and stuffs like that. I think they got thirty dollars a month and their clothes and their board. They had to go out wherever they sent them they had to go and work. But as far as telling you anything there was so many things that happened. We used to, in order to get our clothes; we’d send to Montgomery and get our clothes because they was so much cheaper there than we could get them here. Then we’d get our flour, a forty pound sack flour, you could get it for eighty-five cents if you had eighty-five cents. There was a lot of them that didn’t have it. Cattle wasn’t a right big steer, nine hundred pound steer you might get fifteen
dollars out of him. I had a hundred little bunch of sheep, and I sheared them. I got ten cents a pound for the wool, and when I sold the lambs that fall, I got two dollars and fifty cents a piece for em.

KP: Was like, was that an awfully lot of money though?

COD: But you could buy as much for a dollar than you could with seven or eight now. Now you see flour, I don’t know what it is now, it’s around four dollars or five dollars a sack, we’d get it for eighty-five cents. Eggs, we I can remember the first case of eggs we took in. For thirty-dozen I had to pay thirty cents for the case, and I got five cents a dozen for them. Oh there was a lot trouble there. I’ll tell you one thing that the depression done for me, it make the best democrat out of me that ever was. Franklin D. Roosevelt was the best President that they’ve ever had in my span of life. He didn’t only talk it, he done it. And then when they put him out and they put Harry Truman in, Harry Truman was just like him. Then they have to get some Republican in there, and they ain’t never had anything since. But I could… there’s so many million things as happened while I was, while that depression was going on. Yet I could remember half of em… I know that I couldn’t there was days and days that I couldn’t get a job. You could get coal then for four dollars a ton, a lump coal for four dollars a ton. It’s forty dollars now. But I didn’t have no four dollars to buy a coal, so I’d take my team and go to the canyon and get a load of wood, and I hauled wood for all through the depression. We never burned no coal. I’d take and go to the canyon and get a load of wood and fetch the home, and then I’d saw it up the next day while my team was resting and the next day we’d go to the canyon again.

KP: Well, like what did you do for fun?

COD: Didn’t have any. Oh, I’ll tell you what we did. We used to, we had house parties. There was a bunch of us…oh, there was quite a few of em. Oh, six or eight families…married couples you know. They’d have a house party to one place. They all make a picnic. It would happen about once every week, maybe two weeks apart, and we’d dance and we’d play games and monkey around that way. As far as boughten pleasure of any kind, we didn’t have it.

KP: Didn’t you go to movies or anything like that?

COD: Huh uh. You couldn’t afford no movies. They was a dime. It cost you a dime for a ticket to go to movie but you couldn’t go because where we lived, it was too far to the movie for one thing to drive the team and we couldn’t drive a car cause we didn’t have no tires on it.

KP: Well, like when you played for the dances like, what did you play and stuff?

COD: I was a trap drummer.

KP: Did they have like dances every week or something?
COD: Well, they was, it would vary. I have played as high as fourteen nights straight with the exception of Sunday. May be it would go along for a while and I wouldn’t get to play for anything. My average income from that was about a dollar and a half a night, and we’d play from...oh, from about nine o’clock to sometimes three or four o’clock in the morning. We’d drive a team from here clear out to Drummond. I drove my team clear to Drummond one time.

KP: How many miles is that?

COD: Oh, about twenty-five miles. I started out in the afternoon and drove down there. Played through the dance and after the dance loaded up and come back.

KP: How many guys were in your band?

COD: Four

KP: Were there lots of people that went to those dances? Were there lots of people that went to house dances?

COD: Oh, there was a lot of people. In fact, we had at that time, when we was playing all the time we had the, there was several orchestral here. We could get the crowd away from everyone of em. All they had to do was say our orchestra was a playing and they had all they could get in the house. But, they couldn’t charge very much a dance ticket. Fifty cents, that's what their ticket was. Was fifty cents. Some of them didn’t have the fifty cents. I know one time some boys we used to live down here I was playing over here in old Hayden in the schoolhouse, me and Preston Fullmer and Sterling Sawnder. That wasn’t the bunch I always played with, I played with Dick Egbert and Benson from Blackfoot and Milo Daley from Driggs and when sometimes we’d had Thora Beasley, she a girl that played with us. She played banjoy in the Orchestra and she sang. Oh, we had a big swing here I'll tell you when it came to orchestras. We took here and one year we played for the Freshman’s Ball up in Driggs. Man was that there professor mad cause they didn’t have his orchestra, school orchestra. Went and hired us. We played for all the Junior Proms and all that. See they had a high school in Victor then we and we played in Victor. They had an orchestra up there. They got mad at us. We didn’t care. Then we played for a lot of church benefits and dances. We never charged for that. Like the Relief Society, they put on a dance to raise some money you know, we’d play for that. We wouldn’t charge them. You know if there was a benefit dance for some disabled or sick person, we never charged for that. They used to have them years ago you know. Like a man get sick down and out he never has no money none of them had any money, that was out. We'd go and play maybe we'd get em had any money, that was out. We’d go and play maybe we’d get em ten dollars, that would be about the size of it.

KP: Did you work for the railroad at all during the depression?
COD: Yeah. I worked on my section for two different summers. I got three dollars and four cents a day. I worked all summer… well, when winter come by they laid off forty crew. Me being one of the youngest men, of course, I got laid off. My brother, he worked right on through because he was an old hand. He put in forty-seven years on the section.

KP: Thanks a lot. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by future researchers.