

## Kinsley Library Oral History Collection – on the Dust Bowl

Except where \* all complete transcripts and audio can be found on the Kinsley Library website.

**\*Elwood Agnew:** Born 1935 (From phone conversation with Joan Weaver, August 14, 2014)  
When I was 5 or so, my father owned Anne's Café on Main Street. Mrs. Skillet ran it in the summer when he traveled with the carnival, and he ran it in the winter. Across the street from it was the pool hall. I use to go over there and play pool. One day the dirt began to blow so you couldn't even see the buildings on the other side of the street. My dad called the pool hall and said, "Don't let Elwood out the door. There's too much dust."

**Buford Brodbeck:** born 1925

Buford: It was kind of tough, but I don't remember our family ever wanting for anything. We always had money. Dad could always give us a dime every time we wanted to go to the movie. We really weren't that bad. Sometimes, I think we were better off than a lot of them.

Weaver: You ran the penny toss (*in the carnival*) then. And people still patronized the thing. Did people still find pennies to toss then?

Buford: It didn't cost much to ride a ride, 10 cents you know. Sno-cone was a nickel and popcorn was a dime or a nickel a bag. But I can remember the dust storms worse than anything....When they'd roll in, it would just get dark. I had a cousin that lived out in Manter, Kansas. She got dust pneumonia real bad and my dad and mother went out and got her and brought her back here to live for a while. I thought, holy hell, it's worse out there than here! When you got hit, you just get in the house and tried to keep from choking to death. You'd put sheets up in the windows to try to keep it out. Wet them a little, and the next day they'd be just as black as you could see....

Buford: The worst thing I ever remember on the carnival, was one year the grasshoppers.... We were playing Guymon, Oklahoma. I wasn't very big, and my dad had me up on the platforms at the merry-go-round sweeping the dead grasshoppers off the steps 'cause if you'd step on them and they'd be slick! No, I got to thinking about it one time even after I was in the cleaning shop after I first bought it. We had a dust storm come up in here.... it must have been about 1950 or '51....I thought, holy Toledo, is this going to start over again? But it didn't last long. Well, according to some of the stuff I remember reading now, the dust storm moved clear across out to Washington D.C. And that's when they started passing resolutions to get these shelter belts in and change the farming and everything.

Weaver: It's amazing. I've read too about how Washington and New York City couldn't believe it could get that far. So, even with your other grandfather's garden and everything, you don't think there were any hardships for your family? Particularly during the Depression?

Buford: No, I really don't remember.

Weaver: We have found that Kinsley in general was sort of protected because of all the farming.

Buford: Well, yes, a little bit. I mean they could raise maybe 15 bushel wheat and think that was pretty good sometime. But things didn't cost that much either.

**Kay Carney:** Born 1922

Well, I remember the Dust Bowl, yes, I remember mother hanging wet sheets over the windows to help keep the dust out, and I remember my father standing out as crops were ruined and always saying well, there will be another year.

**Bea Coats:** Born 1927

Bea: I wasn't really aware of all this. I do remember, I must have been six or seven because Mom would say, "Run home quick and shut all the windows and the doors!" because there would be this storm coming. But that's one of the things I don't remember very much of. I don't know why, maybe because it wasn't hitting as hard up here as maybe it did further west.

Interviewer: You don't remember putting things in the windows? Sheets and things?

Bea: Well, putting stuff in the windows to keep the dust from blowing in, yes. I do remember that. Oh, I thought of something I was going to tell you about the dust....With my Dad going out to the country to try to collect money that people owed him (Father had a grocery store). He saved a lot of people . . . he gave food to a lot of people, and then they were supposed to pay him back. But I remember him telling once that a woman came in the store and saying, "Joe, could I have a little credit. My children are starving." I don't remember that, but I remember them telling me about that. So we were right through the Depression there, but Dad was pretty good at giving credit. But he didn't get paid back. He still had some bills when he died. There were still bills down in the basement there. Some people had not paid their bills. So that's what I remember about the Depression.

Interviewer: Do you remember your life being affected.

Bea: It was bad. Apparently we were better off than a lot of people because we weren't depending on the farm. We did have some land. Dad had some land out by Tribune, whatever county that is, but he sold that. I don't remember when he bought it, but he must have bought it really cheap. He sold it, probably because he needed the money. And we had some land here, but we weren't depending on that for a living. So the store must have been making a living anyway.

**Gordon Coats:** Born 1927

Gordon: I grew up during the depression, and I don't remember the first few years too well because we moved back to Missouri. Her dad came from Missouri. Most of my grandparents' folks all were southerners. Mom's side came from the north in New York and Philadelphia and that area. They came from England. I was almost school age before it began to bite down hard on us. My granddad owned that grocery store in Fellsburg, and they had that for quite a few years. Dad came back about the time I started school. I started school in Fellsburg. He came back and hauled coal in the winter and ice in the summer for the store and for people who wanted it. He worked for farmers and stuff. It was the best living he could make at that particular time. He was working for his dad part of the time and then haul ice and coal for whoever needed it besides. Most people burned coal at that time, because there were few trees at that time. Matter of fact, later on when Roosevelt got elected, Dad got on with the forestry.

Interviewer: With the WPA?

Gordon: Well, he got involved before that, when the trees were planted, he worked for the WPA. He worked all over the country planting shelter belts. That was before a lot of them got tore out after irrigation got started.

Interviewer: Jeff Meade told us they were planted out by him.

Gordon: There were shelter belts all over the country. About every mile had at least one, some of them had two or three. But those trees were all planted in the thirties. Prior to that there were hardly any out. Some of the old homesteads had a few cottonwoods, that they had to plant to get the land and stuff. But that was before my time. What few trees there were were large by then. Dust Storms were bad. When we'd see the dust coming...of course, if the wind blew, we had a sand problem. It'd cover everything up. The fencerows were covered up pretty much. If you parked something for two or three sand storms, it would cover it up. But, no. Between the sand and the dust, I remember when we used to hang gunny sacks on the windows and throw water on them and keep them wet to keep the dust from coming in the house so bad. It was bad anyway. And, a lot of people, when they'd go out, you'd have to wear a neckerchief to cover up your face with. It would choke you to death. There was a lot of people died of dust pneumonia. They called it dust pneumonia, I guess, it just killed them. That's about all I remember about the dust.

Interviewer: Do you remember grasshoppers?

Gordon: Oh yes, one year plagued real bad. They ate everything, even wood. Back then when they built those lines, the telephone lines, they had those old long phones that you rang. They had those two big batteries in them. They were six or eight inches long and two or three inches in diameter. They just used cottonwood limbs or whatever they could stick two wires on.

### **Frank Castenada:** Born 1930

You know back in the 30s things was kind of hard to come by for everybody. In '34, '35, clear up into '37, I remember the dust, it seemed like it always came out of the north.

Interviewer: Did it come into your little house?

Frank: Oh yeah, the folks always put wet blankets and stuff on the windows to kind of hold the dust that would sift in. I remember that sometimes in the daytime, I was pretty small, but I can remember that sometimes in the daytime it got dark.

### **Kenny Dupree:** born 1926

Kenny: It was awful poor, I'll tell you. It was poor. It was in the thirties when I grew up. You want to know about the thirties? Well, I'll tell you something. When we was kids, the only thing we had for toys was, you ever heard of playing kick the can? Well, we played kick the can, and hide and go seek, and we walked stilts. That's a past art anymore, but we got so all of us walked stilts. And we played swords. We'd make a sword and have sword fights. We'd make wooden guns. We'd go down to Jack Moletor's service station and get an old inner tube and cut strips about this wide and put a clothes pin around them and put the inner tube around real tight. When we pushed the clothes pin, we'd shoot the rubber band. That was our guns, because we couldn't buy any.

I was living on West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in Kinsley....My dad was working on the WPA. Before that he worked for the City of Kinsley. But politics changed back in them days, and he lost his job. The thing then was when the Depression hit, he had horses. So he went to the WPA, and he made 18 cents an hour But he'd get a dollar a day for his horses. He had slips that slipped the dirt out of ditches when they went out to work up north of Kinsley.

Joan: So he was building roads for the WPA?

Kenny: Yes. He had horses. Three or four farmers, people in town, had horses: Warren Jarvis, Chris Franklin and my dad. So they paid him a dollar a day for the horses. He worked on the relief for six or eight years, and then he went to soil conservation. And he'd go out and plant trees on farms. Then they'd come back and hoe. He worked on that three or four years. Then he started working other places. He got 18 cents an hours. Then when he went to soil conservation he got 20 cents an hour.

Joan: And he had a family with four children.

Kenny: It was tough; it was hard.

Joan: Did you own the house?

Kenny: It was a shack with tar paper on the outside edge. And we didn't have no electricity, didn't have no gas. We had a wood stove. You heated with the wood stove and when it went out at night, it was cold until the next morning. We never had no lights in the house until 1938. A man named Peterson wired the house. When you went to the restroom, you walked about a block out in the woods. That was the restroom. I'll never forget it; it was tough....We had an outhouse, oh yes. We had our own cow for milking, had our own chickens. We had hogs. So we had eggs and milk and cream. We'd take the cream which mom would separate. Back in those days everyone would take their cream to the creamery. Even the farmers brought their cream in.

Joan: Did you have water in the house?

Kenny: Later on we put a pitcher pump in the house because you could go down eight foot and hit water. So we had pump water in the house. We never did have running water in that house.

Joan: How many bedrooms or rooms in the house.

Kenny: Two. It was so cold in the wintertime. I'd go to bed and Mom would heat up 4 x 8 bricks, and she'd wrap them up in a towel and bring them in to me. That was how we kept warm. When the bricks cooled off, you was already warm in the bed, and you'd last until next morning. It was tough. I never will forget it. In the thirties, I remember the dust bowls coming in, and it would come in so black you could not see. Mom would cover us up with sheets and put us to bed. When the dust storm would be over with, those sheets would be clear muddy. That's how we survived the dust storms.

Joan: So that sort of filtered the air for your lungs.

Kenny: Yes. It filtered the air to your lungs. Then along about '37 or '38 we had grasshopper plagues. The grasshoppers would come in by the billions, and they ate every ounce of limbs off the trees, all the grass off the ditches. There were no weeds in the ditches; they ate it all. They took over for two years. The bindweed shop used to mix poison and put it out, but that was a waste of time. But that went on for about two years, the grasshoppers. And then along about that time, the farmers all grew turkeys, and they fed on these grasshoppers and whatever else they ate. Then there was two turkey pools in town: Bear's Produce and the one right down next to the Fravel building. That's where they picked turkeys. But every farmer had turkeys. I'll always remember that.

Joan: So when they would come through, you would lose your garden?

Kenny: Oh yes. You lost everything that was green. All the leaves off the trees was gone; all the gardens was gone. The roadside ditches was clean. ... It was July and August. It was bad.

Joan: I take it your house wasn't very tight with the dust storms either.

Kenny: No, no one's house was back in them days. Then we had jackrabbits. We had jackrabbits by the millions. I went to one jackrabbit...

Joan: Was that because they had eradicated the coyotes?

Kenny: Yes, but they paid a dollar apiece for coyote ears at the courthouse. But the jackrabbits got so thick they had jackrabbit drives. About every ten foot a person went around for three or four sections and drove them into a fence. They sold them to get rid of them.

Joan: Did you eat jackrabbit too at that time?

Kenny: We ate cottontail. We ate lots of them, and we ate young jacks. Sure, everyone did.

Joan: Now were you involved in those, or were you too young?

Kenny: I went on a jackrabbit drive. I went up to Sts. Peter and Paul (*Catholic Church*) one morning.

Joan: Did they kill them by hitting them?

Kenny: Sure. Knock them in the head, any way to kill them. It was quite a sight.

Joan: I've never asked this question, but was it treated like a festival at all? With a dinner? Or as it...

Kenny: It was a big get-together. No, we didn't have no dinner at the end, but everyone from town came out, and the farmers all came out, and they would get rid of the rabbits. No, I never will forget that.

Joan: Well, we have some pictures of that here at the library that show all the rabbits.

Kenny: There was no crops for nine years. My brother-in-law farmed out north of town, and he lost his crops for nine straight years. Then in '40, he had a good crop. He only got about 18 cents a bushel for it, but that's when it started coming out. We started getting rains.

Joan: Did you know people who moved away that did not survive?

Kenny: Lots of them. I even know a person that got killed. Frank Bernazki had a boy (*Arthur*) that got killed in the dust storm because he choked to death.

Joan: What did they call that, dust pneumonia?

Kenny: Yes, that's what it was, just choked to death. During relief times it was so hard. My dad worked on the relief, but they had CC Camps. And they sent the young boys to CC Camps, and you sent half the money home. So my brothers wasn't old enough for CC, but they got NYA -- National Youth Association. You've heard of it? They got ten cents an hour, and they'd go do projects down here at the school. They'd bring in those great big old bricks from Hodgeman County. They'd have stones, and they squared them up. That's how that pink building in the park got built, through NYA labor cleaned brick. There's still those bricks. They was new, but they had to be trimmed up square. But the brick still sits out here at Coover's. There's a lot of them out here in a row. My brothers worked on them. That's how they got money to young people under 18.

Joan: Did they square them up by somehow...

Kenny: There was a square tool; they squared them up. They'd hit that old brick and square it up. There's a lot of bricks made bridges around here during the relief time. Anything those NYA boys could do, that's what they did.

Joan: What age were NYA boys?

Kenny: Oh, I'd say from 16 to 18. After that you went into the CC's. My brother-in-law went into CC's.

Joan: And what were they doing around here?

Kenny: He worked on the lakes all the time. I had two brothers-in-law that worked on lakes. They sent half the money home for their families.

Joan: So they left Edwards County.

Kenny: Oh yes, they had to leave and go out to the camps. There were a lot of camps. My brother-in-law worked out at Meade Lake. It was mostly lakes and stuff and trees and planting. I remember that. Then when I come home from overseas, you couldn't find a good job. Have you ever heard of the 52/20 Club? For 52 weeks, you get \$20 a week. That was an army deal. I signed up for it, but I got a job. And I never did use it. I got a job on the county....I got a job. I didn't use it, but I signed up for it. I had to go up to the court house to sign up for it.

Joan: Is there anything else you want to say about the Depression or the Dust Bowl time?

Kenny: When I went to school, I had two pair of pants. One I wore, and one Mom was washing. And when she washed, she had a great big old tub. It was a barrel. The boys would have to go out and heat the water underneath the barrel. We had an old washing machine that had an old gasoline motor on it. They'd have to go out and heat that water and carry it in to the washing machine about 100 yards. That's how she washed. ...It was in an old shed out there by the house....It was a Maytag washer that had a motor on it. I never will forget that.

### **Cordelia Froetschner: 1918-2011**

Cordelia: I was in high school then. When my parents would come and get us, sometimes we would have to stop because you couldn't see the road. Our farm my dad had bought had a tree-claim, the government sponsored it, and that was there when he bought it. There were a lot of locust and cottonwood in it, that's about all I'm sure of. Our folks took us to school, and in later years we rode with some cousins who were old enough to drive.

Interviewer: How did your "modern" house hold up in the Dust Bowl? Did the dust get in?

Cordelia: That's what I started to say. We had a lot of trees all around the house, and that helped. Then, the house was well built. I remember a mulberry hedge on the place and a small orchard too. This sister-in-law, my brother Adolph's wife, I have a picture of us standing on top of this tall hedge because it had snowed and blown in there so much. I thought that was something else, two people walking on top of a hedge full of snow. She was a tall woman, and the hedge was taller than she was. She must have been about 6 foot, so the hedge was maybe eight foot. It kind of served as a shelter for the orchard. It was pretty compact, it would have to be to hold enough snow to hold up two people.

**Norma Gatterman:** Born 1925

Norma: That was quite an experience when those clouds would come in. You would see them in the distance, and usually the wind would be blowing. But when it got next to you, the wind went down. Then when it got dark and the clouds went over, it would drop fine dirt on you.

Interviewer: Do you remember doing anything special to the house to get ready? Stop up the doors and all that?

Norma: We hung up sheets and blankets over the windows. My sister and I had a wreck during the storm. People who he passed said this man was going like 70 miles an hour. He hit us, and it was near our corner where we would turn to go into our place. Our parents were out looking at the clouds, and they said they heard this crash, but they never thought about it's being us. My nose was just cut pretty bad. They found this little piece in the car. So I ended up at Gleason Hospital in Larned for a little while. I remember my grandparents, the Jarvises, came after me.

Interviewer: How did you get from the wreck to the hospital?

Norma: I don't know. I don't remember; I was out. They took me to where LaVeda (*Cross*) lives there was a doctor. They took me there, and in some way I got up here. I don't remember much about the hospital.

Interviewer: Anything else about that time?

Norma: I remember how wonderful the merchants were in Lewis. Pop Barnes at the drug store. He was more or less a doctor, too. He would swab your throat, or pull a tooth, or anything you needed done. Once in a while then, they'd have a special. If you brought in a chicken egg, he'd give you an ice cream cone on Saturday night. That was a big time in Lewis, you could hardly find a parking place. Rex Brumfield was wonderful too.

**Gilbert Herrmann:** Born 1924

Gilbert: That one Sunday it rolled in from the north and boy it just got dark and everything. The one that I really remember.

Weaver: Were you at home?

Gilbert: Uh huh. It was just kind of like night time, darn near. That one was. That was the worst one, I think. I couldn't say what date it was or nothing. (*Palm Sunday, April 14, 1935*)

Weaver: Did you put the rags over the windows or was your house pretty tight?

Gilbert: No, it wasn't that tight either. Wasn't none of them that were that tight. In the house even you could see the dust kind of in the air. That was about the only one that I really remember that was bad, you know.

Weaver: How about the grasshoppers or things like that? Do you remember?

Gilbert: Well towards the end I know we spread poison on the outside of the fields to keep them from working in. I don't remember them ever really, what you say a plague of them that damaged that much crop. I know we put poison out there for them that we could buy here in town and take it out there and spread it.

**Keith King:** 1928-1914

Keith: I remember Rabbit Drives. I went on a few of them. It turned my stomach. I didn't mind driving them, but when they got them in them pens and started clubbing them, it was too much for me. But they had to do it. They started down at the Parallel and ended up at my Uncle Warren Duggar's pasture there.

Joan: And they were just eating the crops and everything?

Keith: Yes, when I remember they were eating what little there was green.

Joan: There just got to be too many of them?

Keith: Well, I guess the government thought so.

Joan: What did they do with the rabbits after they killed them?

Keith: Shipped them all back to around New York and Boston and back in there.

**Marcile King:** Born 1928

King: I can remember them hanging wet sheets up to the window because we were the house clear on the far end of Belpre. We lived next to a field. They would hang wet sheets up over the windows to help keep the dirt out. That's about the only thing I remember. I don't know whether this was Depression years or not, but they would put up snow fences and they would have rabbit hunts or whatever. They would get them in this big fence and club them. That took place just next to us.

Interviewer: And you would watch that?

King: Yes.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel? Watching all those bunnies?

King: I can't remember any feelings; I just remember that they did it.

Interviewer: Did you eat rabbit then?

King: Yes. We ate everything because my four brothers, they all hunted. So we had rabbit; we had squirrel; we had frogs; we had turtles...

**About migrant working 1941:**

King: See, we moved to Idaho in '41. That was the only year that we left Belpre. We lived kind of in what I would call a labor camp. When I was there I picked up potatoes. I picked up onions. I picked hops. Do you know what hops are? And then you were paid by the pound, and they weighed like a feather.

Interviewer: How do they grow? They're a grain, so how do you pick hops?

King: Up on a ladder. They were up on a trellis thing of some kind. We climbed a ladder to pick them. We had a bag. The potatoes, we would just go down a row. The onions were the same way, with bags, and you picked them up.

Interviewer: And your brothers?



King: They weren't there, just us three girls. And then Daddy got his finger cut off, and the boys were all going to have to be going to the service. So we left Idaho on April 17, 1942.

Interviewer: It was a harvest crew; you were migrant workers?

King: Yes, we were migrant workers. It was a long...we had two rooms, and you had to go outside to go to the bedroom. The other room was the kitchen and living room. You went to a bathhouse.

Interviewer: About how many laborers were there?

King: There must have been a bunch of us because I've got pictures somewhere of the camp we stayed in. (*On the Kinsley Library website*) ...It was just a long row red wooden buildings. Also there, they had somebody that taught us crafts and things. The two bowls up there up high, (*indicating across the room on shelf above the fireplace*) I made them on a lathe when I was out to Idaho. Then the second semester of school, I went to school at this labor camp, and Darlene was a freshman in high school then, so she rode a bus and went into Twin Falls. And then the second semester, when we got to move into a little house, we did have a bathroom. For that second semester, I lived in a house that had a bathroom. I went to Twin Falls. The thing I can remember that was so scary, see it was so big. I'd never been in a...I don't know how big Twin Falls is now, but to me it seems like it was so big, and they would have these air raid things where they would do the siren and then we would all have to go to a shelter for a drill at school.

Interviewer: Was there a base there? Is that why you were having the drills?

King: Not that I'm aware of. I don't know, but we had those periodically, and those were really frightening to me because I wasn't sure where I was supposed to be.

Rosetta: Did you drive to Idaho from...

King: Yes, and, you know, it was during the war. So you couldn't get tires. We just had flat tire after flat tire after flat tire getting there....

Interviewer: You said you went to the school for migrant workers. What was that first semester like? How many kids or teachers...Do you remember?

King: It seems like we had more than one class, you know, more kids than one classroom. But I can't remember how many or anything. I remember when I went into Twin Falls and it seemed like it was overwhelming to me, because... It's hard to believe, but I grew up being a very shy little girl. In fact, when I went to interview for my job at the bank, Keith went with me because I did not want to go by myself.

Interviewer: Now, you're picking things. But part of the year, did you plant too? There isn't harvest all the time.

King: No.

Interviewer: So what would your dad have done during those months?

King: He worked for a farmer, and I can't remember what he...but see, that's when he got his finger cut off. That partly and because of the boys all leaving to go to the service. It did not turn out to be like what they thought it would be, I guess, when we were in Twin Falls. Because he basically, he didn't do this picking stuff like the rest of us did. He was working for farmers, and they had hay and cattle. My mother picked also with us.

**Wilma Lancaster:** Born 1930

Wilma: I remember just having to clean house and they'd put sheets over the windows. Like I said, I was little, so I don't remember all that much. I was doing ornery, naughty things instead of paying attention to what the weather was doing. But my brother had a (we called him Red, that's Reinhart) he got mastoiditis or something from all the dust. He was deaf in one ear from then on. He'd have been like a teenager when he lost the hearing in one ear. At that time you know, the doctors, they probably didn't know what it was.

Interviewer: Somebody told us about locusts and things too.

Wilma: Oh yes, the grasshoppers, and the stories they tell you about the great big pictures of grasshoppers and jackrabbits that came out. But you know, they had those rabbit drives...

**Earl McBride:** 1915-2011

Earl: After getting out of high school we were in the middle of the Dirty Thirties. The Depression, as everyone knows about. The younger generation doesn't know about it, but they have been able to read about it. One of the things that I remember about it was Dad and I were working on the windmill one day. We could see what looked like a black cloud coming from the north. He said, "We probably better get down off here; that thing is going to hit here pretty soon." We got down off the tower. When it hit, it just turned the afternoon into darkness. I never will forget the chickens. They were running to get to the chicken house and go to roost because they thought it was night.

**Fern McBride:** Born 1915

Fern: We were going through the Dirty Thirties in 1931 to about 1934, 5 or 6. We did not have any rain or any moisture enough to raise any crops. We had the dirt blowing. It was a might pathetic time for the farmers, the whole family. We would roll up towels and things to put in front of the doors to keep the cold out, the dirt out mainly, also the windows. When people would milk cows, the dirt that would come in from north up around Hays and Wakeeney, that dirt would roll in one big cloud. It would be so dense you couldn't see to be able to get to the barn or back to the house. But we had one friend that milked cows. He would get out to the barn, but he said he had such a time trying to find the house after that because he was carrying milk. So they would put a lamp in the window so that it would give him a little bit of a key to where to go. The dirt and wind blew so badly out west, I don't know exactly where that was, but it was past Sublette I know, rather west of there. The dirt had blown so much it would cover up their machinery from one season to the next. There was much sickness, much dust pneumonia. At that time nearly everybody had a cook stove. So if you had an old fashioned cook stove, of course you had warm water in the reservoir The humidity from just a tea kettle on top of the stove, boiling, gave the people a little bit of moisture in the air which helped some in as far as cutting down on some of the diseases and things, especially pneumonia. That was around Johnson, Kansas where the Dirty Thirties really had such a time. The farmers started strip farming to try to keep the ground from blowing. They could set up the way they wanted, would be maybe 20-30 acres or whatever. They had 20 acres of wheat and maybe 20 acres of maize or summer fallow. That way if the ground did blow it kept from getting over onto the next strip and starting it to blow. This worked out real well. We had all kinds of presidents through the years that had different ideas about what to do. They, of course, naturally wanted badly to have their name go down in history about what wonderful

things they did. But F.D.R., Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was one that I think helped out the farmers more than anyone. He talked about the strip farming and the reserve farming. He had what they called the C.C.C. There was a name for that, and I think it was Civilian Conservation Camp. They would let boys, 18 years of age (they had to be 18) work to be making dams or maybe recreation places. But it kept them busy, plus they had to do so much marching. That was good for them. Marching was discipline. All of them needed it, I am sure. They probably hadn't had it before. The boys didn't have any money at all, so that was a way to make a little bit of money. They enjoyed that. Then I didn't tell about the old time toilets. But it was a two-holer. It was usually made of terrible old lumber, but it was a place you could get in. There was a catalog hanging by the side to use as toilet tissue. During that time, when Roosevelt was president, they had what they called the WPA toilets. This was a nice little house toilet that had a cement round container that would have a lid you could lift. It was just a one-holer. This WPA was really quite a nice thing because it was more sanitary, warmer when you went into it, and you could shut the door. It wasn't just a lean-to like we had so many

### **Bill McLean:** 1916-2007

Bill: It was tough. It was tough. In 1934, I graduated. They were starting to get their farm programs in a little bit. So things eased up a little bit, but before that a peculiar thing about it, before 1929 when the stock market broke. They had money just pretty easily. I raised a crop of watermelons, and I came over here to Kinsley with a truck load and everybody was willing to buy one. I went home with my pockets full of money. The next think you know, you couldn't make a dime on anything. It changed that quickly. Sort of like right now

Interviewer: Did you have both livestock and crops?

Bill: At the time, we were growing wheat, and wheat only. And the drought come in, you know what I mean, the crop would be ready to come in, and you'd need the rain to finish it, and it would burn up. You'd go out and use the water hose in the low places to get your seed wheat for the next year. It was bad; it was tough. Then my dad went into cattle business. We bought cattle. They wouldn't make as much but we'd pass to the cattle. We'd make a little bit, about \$10 a head on them. I think it saved us through the Depression and a little later on. But he finally come on and give us the land like he said.

Interviewer: So you were earning the land all of those years.

Bill: You betcha, you betcha. They moved from Hoisington to the farm south of Lewis. They turned the farm over to my dad and moved to Kinsley. He purchased land in Western Kansas and was in debt during the Dust Bowl days. I remember harvesting wheat when it was 25 cents a bushel, scooping it on the ground to wait for a better price and scooping it up again for the same price.

**Evelyn McLean:** Born 1917

Evelyn: Well, first of all, I was getting \$85 a month to teach school at Lewis and I had the fourth grade. When we were married, Esther Brumfield wrote it in our contract that if I got married that that was the end of my teaching. The reason for that was, those were hard times, and only one person in a family could have a job. If two people in a family had a job, one of them had to give it up to somebody that didn't have a job. So, his dad was paying him \$25 a month for hard labor on the farm. So when we were married that was a big come-down you know. Because I had been getting \$85. But my dad lost the farm and I remember the Dust Bowl. Oh, it was terrible, terrible. Everybody's fields were blowing away.

Joan: What was it like inside your house?

Evelyn: We had to hang wet sheets at the windows, you know, to keep the dust out. It was awful; it really was awful. You'd see that big cloud of dust coming and it was just like...what would describe it, Bill? What would describe it? The dust clouds? You couldn't even see your hand in front of your face.

Bill McLean: A front would come from the north, like we have today. We'll have a front come out of the north, There'll be whirlwinds ahead of it like that. And it would be black, I mean black. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face, not for long, I'll put it that way. Then it would get dusty.

Joan: How often would those big clouds come?

Evelyn: Too often....When I was at school at Emporia, that's in eastern Kansas, they didn't have... but these dust clouds would roll in from the west as far as that. So we would have dust storms in Emporia. It was unbelievable.

**Jeff Mead:** Born 1930

Jeff: Okay. Three or four years ago, in the Hutchinson paper, there was a big article about Palm Sunday of 1935. That particular day, my Aunt Joan hadn't graduated from Centerview yet, so she was in a quartet. This was Palm Sunday, so the quartet was to meet at the Methodist Church in Centerview that afternoon and practice Easter music. And so I went with Grandpa, and we had an old rickety building out that where he kept the car. We got the car out and as we came around to park in front of the house here, so my aunt could take the car and go practice music, and there, I wish I knew how tall those clouds were. That rolling dust. It was coming toward us. Grandpa told me, "You get in the house, and I'll go put the car away. And it hit before he got back to the house. In this house, at 3:00 in the afternoon, of course, there wasn't any insulation in the house. When they built in those days, there was a wall, and it was all lath and plaster, that was the only insulation. But in this house, right here where we are setting, I would not have been able to see your face. You people would have been just a shadow in the dust.

Interviewer: And we're only about three feet away.

Jeff: Yes. And even if you got right against them, you're still not going to see the face right away. It was dark enough, of course, everybody had chickens in those days; the chickens went to roost. I'm not quite five years old, but the folks are down in the dumps. I heard them say, "Well, another crop gone, you know where." And the wind is just blowing terrible; I suppose 60 or 70 miles an hour. I don't know. But I do remember the folks had told me...we had a wooden windmill derrick. But the folks told me, even though that's wooden, do not touch that windmill derrick in a storm. The static electricity was just snapping off of everything because it was dry and dirty. Like I say, I wasn't quite five years old, but it comes to me, "Is this the end of the world?" It looked it.

**Thelma Negley:** Born 1918

Thelma: The dustbowl days mostly that I remember were the ones we had out here in Syracuse, because we had really bad ones out here, but more so than the ones I remember at home.

Interviewer: You don't remember having to put up sheets or...?

Thelma: No we didn't. But here when they would come in, my one little girl was just about two years old and one of 'em came up. She come looked out the window, and she looked back at us 'cause she couldn't see the neighbor's house. She was just kinda puzzled that, you know, that the dust was so bad. And then we were gone one time when one of 'em came up and the basement window blew out, and we had a lotta dirt to scoop out. But then it's easier to scoop dirt than it is to have water, I would think.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about the Depression and if it affected your family or not?

Thelma: Well, yes....I graduated in '37 and I wanted to go to college. I wanted to be a home economics teacher, but Daddy said "I just can't afford it." So I didn't go to college. I went to work at Posey's Café there in Belpre, and I cooked and baked pies 'til I met Paul. And then Paul and I were married in '41.

Interviewer: On the farm you probably...because you had a farm, you probably never went hungry?

Thelma: Oh no. When our chickens got up, we always had a chicken for dinner and a chicken for supper. You had nothing to keep 'em cold with, so we just had one and killed another one. We kept our milk and our cream in a big long trough that had pumped water through it to keep it cold.

**Bill Olsen:** Born 1930

Bill: The only thing that I can remember is one afternoon, we seen a big black cloud coming in and it wasn't long until you couldn't see. Well, the folks knew what was coming, so they had sheets on all the windows. You know, the houses weren't like they are now. So over the windows to keep the dirt from coming in. On the table, she'd always have a sheet on the table. When the food was on the table and ready to eat, she'd take the sheet off and we'd sit down and eat. Other than that, I can't remember

**Welton Parker:** 1923-2011

Welton: Well, I was young, but I can remember the clouds coming up, and the dust would be so thick you couldn't hardly see. Couldn't hardly breathe, but it was nothing like it was out west; I'm sure, at Syracuse and Ulysses and Johnson. It would get so bad that sometimes I think they just dismissed school because it was so bad they couldn't see to drive. I can remember back in the '30s too, we had so many jackrabbits we had jackrabbit drives and stuff. You'd take about six square sections and then scatter out and beat on pans or something to kind of scare them out until they got up closer. Then they had clubs and they'd try to get by you. The clubs got a little dangerous sometimes. You had to watch that somebody didn't get a little careless with a club.

Joan: Were there so many jackrabbits because the natural predators had been eliminated? The coyote

and wolf or whatever? Or had there always been jackrabbits?

Welton: Well, I don't know. Back then there were just jackrabbits. I think in that one book, the Wichita Northwestern book (*railroad*), that tells about a fellow riding from Zook to Belpre, counted in the 90's some, just on one side of the track he was riding on. So there was...they destroyed an awful lot of stuff. Then it was dry back then, it wasn't growing too good, of course, they didn't have fertilizer or anything.

### **Virginia Rapp** Born 1918

Virginia: We usually had a pretty good crop until we came into the Depression years in the 30's. During the Dust Bowl which everybody had a little rough time with it too.... I found this old diary, just happened to be looking though it the other day. I was 17 years old and it was in March. I belonged to this 4-H Club which is a big thing for the kids. We had gone over to Ray Field's. Probably Rosetta remembers them. May and Ray Field and their kids were in 4-H. We went over there for this meeting that night, and I drove with my brother. I know after the meeting we kids got ready to go home, and some of the boys went outdoors and they said, "We can't go home." You can't see a thing. So the Fields said, well you kids are not going to leave here. You are going to stay all night. Some of us girls thought that was a good deal. We laughed you know. We sat around and we played games and I think sang songs. I don't know, until finally they went outdoors and realized it had cleared up. That was going on at 1 o'clock. So we drove on home then. My brother was driving at that time. I was 17, he would have been 21. That day it had been (my diary said) 81 degrees which was real hot. Then the next day turned down to be about 32 degrees; so it was a front coming in. Then we kept having, I looked up there, we kept on having these storms until about, that was in March, until about June we started to get rains. From then on we had several good rains, and that seemed to be the worst of it. It had ended, at least for that year. And I think that might have been the worst year. I think we may have had some dust up in later years but I am not sure.

Interviewer: Was your home pretty tight or did you go through the usual putting rags up?

Virginia: Oh. It was terrible. You cleaned dust before you could set your table and eat. You just wiped off a place you know and your dishes you would wipe them off, oh yes. I remember that very well. Oh yes, yes. Some people hung wet cloths on the windows. I don't remember that we did that. Our house was built in about 1900 so it was pretty good shape, but nothing kept out that dirt I don't believe.

Interviewer: Because it was so fine.

Virginia: Yes, very fine, very fine.

Interviewer: Some people have told us about the grasshoppers and things. Do you remember that?

Virginia: I remember later when the grasshoppers came, I can't tell you what year that was. Yes, they were bad. I think maybe they ate the crops. But that must have been later, I am just not sure of that. I remember all of it, but dates I don't know.

**\*John J. Riisoe** Born 1925 Told during a phone conversation with Joan Weaver, August 15, 2014

John: We had a garden. It was so dry so it had to be watered using the windmill. It was my job to water the garden. One afternoon it got real dark at 4 o'clock. The dust started to blow. We had a porch on the south side of the east end of the house. It was about 3' high. In the morning the dirt was blown up to it and onto the porch from both side in a V. I had to shovel the dirt. There was a lot of dirt.

**Carman Rodriguez:** Born 1930

Carmen: Well, my mother was very ingenious about wetting bed sheets and putting them up against the windows to catch the dust. Otherwise, you could just open your mouth and you could breathe in all the dust. But she always kept...we helped her keep a wet sheet on the window to keep the dust from really blowing in the house. Yes, that helped a lot, because by the time we took the sheets down, they were literally black with dust. Other than that, we all did our share of keeping the wet sheet up against the window to keep the dust from really blowing in all over the house. Otherwise, it would have been pretty bad.

Joan: Do you remember the clouds coming in and everything?

Carmen: I remember that you could open the door and you could hardly see outside. The dust was so heavy and fine that you could look out and all you could see was just dust. Maybe you had a glimpse of a building or something like that, but other than that, it was just to where you could hardly see. That's how dusty it was. Anyway, I remember that, being so dirty going outside that you could hardly see, and the minute you went out, you felt like you had dust in your eyes and you were breathing it in. So as little as possible, we just stayed inside.

**Jake Roenbaugh:** Born 1931

Jake: You couldn't see anything when it come rolling through. We had lots of rags at the doors and the windows. We walked around with wet washcloths a lot, so we could continue to breathe.

Interviewer: Over your mouth?

Jake: Yes. The house that my folks lived in was moved there when the town of Greensburg folded up. There'd been a tornado come through there, and they rebuilt part of it. There was no insulation in the house. There was just the siding and then the plaster on the inside. No boxing or nothing. Pretty open, so a lot of that dust and dirt come right on through. One time my older sister and I found a snake in a turkey nest. We went back to the house. Grandma Roenbaugh lived with us at that time. She grabbed a spade or a hoe, but by the time we got back out there the snake was gone. But she had to lead us back to the house, because the dust or the dirt came in and we couldn't see. Naturally, we caught hold of her hand and that's how we got back into the house. This was when it was really bad.

Interviewer: How far is Fellsburg from Greensburg?

Jake: 20 miles.

Interviewer: So they moved that house 20 miles? Through the sand?

Jake: I don't know how they got there, but they did. There were several houses. The house that Susie and I started living in and remodeled. It was moved there and just set on a stone or a block here and

there. With no foundation under either one of the houses. Naturally, the varmints and everything would come round. I took and got metal in rolls and then nailed it to what was left of the house and put it around the outside of the house to keep the skunks out mainly. 'Cause there were times when they would get underneath the house. You know that creates a lot of smell. When our children were little, there were lots of days they sat in the corner. We had a card party there one night, and they started screaming, "The skunk's dead!" I told everybody to get everything they had, lipstick, shoes, anything, and get the hell out of the house. Not all of them wanted to believe me, and some of them had trouble getting out of the house. But that's just what happens when houses were moved in like that and no foundation put underneath them. But we had the same problem in both houses.

Interviewer: Do you remember the Depression at all? Or any effects at all? Again, you were a young person...

Jake: I don't know exactly what all we did without. You know, as a little kid you really don't know. But we made it. We did without this and that. Mom bought flour and stuff like that in sacks so she could make her skirts or aprons or whatever. She made a lot of the clothes that the girls wore. We didn't hurt for anything. We were fortunate enough that our health stayed pretty good most of the time. So I guess that's the best I could answer that.

Interviewer: That was the advantage of living on a farm. You didn't go hungry.

Interviewer: That's right. Mom had her regular little deal. She'd go catch a chicken out there and wring its neck, scald it. She already had the water to where she'd scald it, and we'd have something to eat. My dad couldn't work. He was dependent on somebody to do most all of the work. So consequently, I was not very old and I learned how to milk a cow. The reason he couldn't work was he had a double hernia. It had been operated on, when I don't know, but that made it a little tough in the sense that he couldn't ride a tractor either. He couldn't pick up anything.

### **Edward Scheufler:** Born 1927

Well, I was just like four and five years old when I would go out to the farm. There would be a big cloud of dust coming up and my Dad would gather us kids all up and make sure we all got into the house. When the dirt came in, we wetted down newspapers and cloth and anything we had and put all around the windows to keep the dust from coming in, but we still had dust, I could see dust in the air. It was the drought naturally. Then in '35 we had the real bad drought. My memory of that is of it being so dry; we had lots of those large yellow grasshoppers. The telephone poles were just lined, clear to the top, and they followed the shade around as the sun went around. My dad would always have corks in his water jugs, and they would completely eat the cork stop out of the jug. We salvaged everything, nothing went to waste. We had hogs, chickens, just the general run of farm things.

### **Paul Scheufler:** Born 1924

Oh yes, they used to call school out, because it would get so dusty that you wouldn't be able to see to get home. They would leave school out, and of course we always had cows to milk, and if they were out in the pasture, we had a hard time finding them to get them up to the barn. The only heater in that bus was the exhaust pipe that they put up through the floor and then out the back end of the bus. That was the heater we had in there. It was better than nothing, and the more kids you got in there, the warmer it got.



**\*Charlie Schmitt:** remembered in the library one day, 2014

He recalled the saying "Patch upon patch and a hole in the middle" to describe worn out clothes. He remembers that his dad had a threshing machine. The boys threw bales for money. One time, when they tried to collect, their dad said, "Those people need money worse than we do." So the boys were not allowed to charge them and they worked for free.

**LeRoy Sparke:** Born 1929

LeRoy: I remember the Dirty Thirties. They'd come in...we raised our own chicks then, you know. You'd set your own hens. We had coops out there. I remember it drove in from the northwest one time about dark. It would get so bad. We'd take old sheets and crammed them in around the windows and stuff to keep half of the dirt out. We just had kerosene lamps then. We didn't even have Aladdin lamps. We just had little old kerosene lamps and lanterns that we took out to the barn, but we never noticed any difference. That's the way it was until we got an Aladdin lamp. I remember that! Millers (*moths*) and stuff would get in there, and of course you had to put on a new deal (*cloth mantle*) all the time because they'd get down in there below that. So we'd have to redo that again. But it made a lot brighter light.

Joan: Do you remember grasshoppers or anything like that?

LeRoy: Yes, they came through. We were on the way out to Colorado Springs to see my grandparents one time, and I couldn't believe it. Out here along the border, they were just sticking on the buildings. Just a mass of them sticking on the buildings. There were so many of them. They ate the bark off of everything. There wasn't anything there; they just cleaned it! Yes, I remember that too. And in the Dustbowl days it covered up machinery and fencerows. What we'd do there where we were at, we'd just put up another fence when the cows would start walking over the fence. We'd just put up another one on top of it. Yes, there were three bad years when Dad, well nobody, raised much of anything. Everybody was in the same boat. Dad went to work for the WPA. We had two horses, and he pulled a fresno (scraper) to move dirt. The curve as you're going on the east curve as you go south towards Greensburg, he worked on that until he got that curve built up.

Joan: That's on Highway 183.

LeRoy: Yes, it was old No. 1 then. They did that, and then he worked over by Rattlesnake Creek over by Trousdale. Over there he had to do the same thing. But yes, he'd leave early in the morning and have to feed the horses and go over there and everything. He left the horses over there, of course. And then it would be late when he came home. That's what we did then.

**Robert Stach:** 1925-2011

Stach: Well, I was too little to know very much about what all went on; I know I remember Franklin Roosevelt becoming President and supposedly be kind of the savior of the nation; and Dad had been a farmer; we'd lived the farm life; we were butchering animals out there and the big old steam pot where they made soap with their lye and all of that stuff up there and did all the cutting up of the beef and boiling the meat and stuff, and then things just got so rough that there wasn't any money anywhere, so Dad went to work for the WPA and they were building roads and stuff. I remember some out in the bigger area up there where probably maybe now there might be a bridge or two. But it used to be, I've seen them working out there when they had horses and Fresnos, you know, the

scoops and stuff that they built up there, instead of bridges, the bridges were too high, too expensive to make then, and maybe concrete wasn't all that prevalent, then, too. I do remember having the rabbit drives, when the rabbits got to be so terribly horrible. I never could stand to even think about going on one of those, but they used to shoot rabbit; we ate a lot of rabbit because it was a handy thing, and I do remember the dusty days and stuff before we moved to town, and then after we were in town because I remember what they called the Dirty Sunday in 1936 when mother had my brother and my older sister then, and we had walked across town to the Ford Station corner there in Kinsley and we lived over on the north side park, and that Sunday up there, Dad had helped Oscar Stinson who was a truck driver, had a trucking company, and Oscar delivered a combine out somewhere here in western Kansas. Dad rode out with him; Mother went over there to visit some friends of the family that were in the south end of Kinsley up there. I remember pushing a bicycle back because there was too much wind and stuff for her. We couldn't stand up. Mother was carrying my older sister who was a very small little budy. I remember the bus from being on the farm out there when you could see the clouds coming. I remember the static electricity; people really hesitated to get close to the fences when they went up to repair fences, you always had to do something to take the shock off of it first because it would always shock you when you reached up there.

Interviewer: That's a story that we haven't heard before

Stach: Well, there's a little more to that but it isn't fit for ..

Interviewer: Yeah, I can imagine!

Stach: But I suppose there were a lot of little puppies that were running around there, too

Interviewer: Did you have problems with grasshoppers?

Stach: Yes, the grasshoppers were, there was the dust and the grasshoppers in the houses; you couldn't leave the windows open at all. I remember mother used to have, we didn't have towels and stuff, I mean like for chinaware and stuff, the kitchen towels and stuff; those are the lighter weight towels up there, and those are what we wet and hung over the windows to keep the dust settled, to keep it from blowing in the house too much at times

### **Jean Titus:** Born 1922

I was probably about 11 or 12 years old when the dust storm really hit and it was terrible because we'd see a dark cloud coming up and instead of being rain it would be dust, and it would often fill up around all the machinery and stuff, and in the house, if the house had any open places kind where the partitions and the like were, the dust would even cover the linoleum that was on the floor in just one day. When we went to bed at night we'd cover our faces, our nose and mouth with damp cloths to keep from inhaling that dust so we wouldn't get dust pneumonia. One time I was at the Garfield School, which is closed, and they had a new addition built on, just had finished it, and we was having a 4-H club meeting there and the dust come in through that new building so bad you could hardly see across the room, and then we thought we would never get home because you couldn't see where you were driving, so it really was real bad. On out west it covered up a lot of machinery and the farmers couldn't even sell the ground out there, and so they just had to walk off and leave it. Some people would get about four dollars an acre out of it and people around Lewis bought ground out there for just a cheap price, and now they have had gas wells and stuff on the ground, so they did have pay off from it.

Interviewer: How long did a dust storm last? I mean, was it like an hour or two hours?

Titus: Oh, no, you know how the winds are here now. It would just come up and would blow for a long time and then kind of go down again and of course there was no rain and no trees hardly at all in this part of the country, and finally they went to planting trees and making shelterbelts so that helped break up the wind currents, so that really helped.

**Bob Weidenheimer:** Born 1931

Living in Harper I certainly do. Yeah. Had lots and lots of dust storms. People were really hard up naturally. Use to run around with a wet wash rag around your face all day, try to keep the dust out of your system. It was not a very pleasant scene down there. It wasn't anywhere I don't think.

**Irene Woolard:** Born 1928

I remember one distinctly. I don't know how old I was, I couldn't have been maybe nine or ten, no... I wasn't that old. All I remember is it started to get dark and the sun went away and it started getting darker and darker. My mother said, "We need to hang wet sheets up by the window because there's going to be dust." And there was, it was just like night. She hung wet sheets and blankets up by the window because the dust was so very fine it seeped through everything. It wasn't like sand, it was like talcum. I remember thinking this was really kind of neat, all the windows covered up. I don't think my parents thought it was too neat, and then there were drifts but I was kid enough that I thought it was kind of fun. But it wasn't fun, because a lot of crops were ruined. That's about the only one I remember