

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farming During the Depression

Farming, the Depression, and
the way of life in Lake
Milton, Ohio

O.H. 67

LUCILLE RUSSELL

Interviewed

by

Dolores Margiotta

on

May 28, 1976

LUCILLE RUSSELL

Lucille Russell was born on June 20, 1889, the oldest of six children of Cyrus and Mabel Leyde Cole in Milton Township, Ohio.

Growing up on a farm enabled Lucille to prepare for the future. She had little formal schooling. Her mother died when she was sixteen and she then left school to care for her brothers and sisters.

In 1914 she married Harry Russell. They had three children; Myron, Kenneth and Jean, and they continued to live on the farm.

Lucille Russell was active in her church and many school activities, and also enjoys spoiling her four grandchildren.

Living on a farm during the Depression had its advantages. The Russell family always had food to eat and did not experience too many hardships, as those who lived in the city often had to face.

Mrs. Russell now lives in her own apartment in Youngstown, having sold the farm after her husband died.

Today, Mrs. Russell enjoys growing small plants and flowers. She continues to enjoy good health and keeps up with the world by reading and watching television.

DOLORES MARGIOTTA

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farming During the Depression

INTERVIEWEE: LUCILLE RUSSELL

INTERVIEWER: Dolores Margiotta

SUBJECT: Farming, the Depression, and the way of life
in Lake Milton, Ohio.

DATE: May 28, 1976

M: This is an interview with Mrs. Lucille Russell at 67
Mayflower Drive, Apt. 5, Boardman, Ohio. It is for
the Youngstown State University Oral History Project
on the Depression by Dolores Margiotta. The date is
May 28, 1976.

M: Mrs. Russell, you mentioned that you were a young girl
during the Depression. Can you tell me a little bit
about that and how it was?

R: Living on a farm during the Depression affected the fin-
ancial situation. Men were out of work and farmers
could not sell their products.

M: Did you have enough to eat?

R: We always had plenty to eat.

M: You couldn't sell what you grew on the farm?

R: We sold milk because my dad was a dairyman. When the
Depression came the price of milk dropped.

M: Do you remember what the price of milk was before the
Depression?

R: In 1929, I think, we were paid so much per hundred pounds.
I think an honest price would be, maybe, two hundred

dollars at the time, but it dropped down to below twenty.

M: That's quite a drop.

R: Yes, it was. That was the way it was for all farmers. Many people in town were not working and they couldn't buy milk. I think at one time, because they had so much milk, they had to dump it. Then, I think, they started giving milk away to people who would come to the dairy.

M: Where was your farm located?

R: The farm was about a mile east of Lake Milton on Route 18.

M: Is the town hall right on Route 18?

R: Yes. Our farm was right beside that town hall. It was the first farmhouse and they were all nice, well-kept farms at that time. All the farmers sold milk. The trucks would come along and pick it up in the driveway. The milk was brought to Isaly's in town.

M: Was that the only big dairy that the farmers sold to?

R: There was another dairy in town, I don't remember just what it was, but Isaly's was the largest.

M: Didn't they have a big dairy out there?

R: Well, they had a dairy farm out there, yes, of their own. Their milk went to that dairy building downtown. Truck after truck would come in there loaded with milk.

M: Did you ever come into town at that time?

R: Yes, we came into town often.

M: Do you remember any incidents about how the town was and what the attitudes of the people were at that time?

R: No, I can't tell you too much about that because we only came into town to shop.

M: Where did you shop for family apparel?

R: We shopped at department stores in town. I had a sister working at the business office of the YMCA and she went to Youngstown College. She was the first bookkeeper up

there and we would come in sometimes on Saturday and pick her up to do our shopping.

M: Did you shop around?

R: Yes, we shopped around. I had another sister who lived in Youngstown and one brother who had a bread route, but that fell through.

M: Was it difficult for some of your family? Did they work at regular jobs or did they experience unemployment?

R: My sister worked all along. I think her wages were cut, however.

M: Where was she working at the time?

R: She worked at the business office of the YMCA.

M: What effect did the drop in prices of the milk have on the farmers, because they weren't getting the income. How did they manage?

R: You just got along on what you had. You had to buy food and pay taxes. My husband had life insurance and he had to borrow money to pay on it one time. He had worked for Newton Steel Company until about 1930. In 1931, he worked part time and then the mill moved to Monroe, Michigan.

M: Did your husband continue to work for the mill after the company moved?

R: No. He was on the farm with us. We were on my father's farm and my father died during the Depression. Eventually we took over the farm when things were straightened out.

M: What did you do for entertainment?

R: During the 1920's we used to go to Craig Beach. Often on Saturday nights we would go in and sit down and watch them dance. They had real good orchestras.

M: Did this continue during the Depression, too?

R: I don't think this continued for long. During the

Depression a lot of people lived at Craig Beach for the winter. Some of the cottages were not built for winter living at all, but a lot of people were moving into them.

M: Did they own or rent these homes?

R: Some of them rented and some of the homes were really nice out there. Some of them just moved in wherever they could find a place.

M: What did the owners do if they found out somebody was living there?

R: I think the owners knew that they were living there.

M: Did this continue throughout the Depression?

R: I don't remember if it continued that long. It started to go down, it had been prevalent in the 1930's.

M: Did you do anything else? I remember you saying you were married. Did you have any children at that time?

R: Yes, I had three.

M: Since you couldn't sell your dairy products, was it hard for you on the farm because of less income? When did the prices start coming back up again?

R: In 1929 some of the banks closed. Then after Roosevelt took office, I think the very next day or a few days later, all the banks were closed. You couldn't get a penny of the money you had in the bank.

M: Did you know anybody who had money in the bank and couldn't get it?

R: My husband did, but what could they do?

M: Did you ever get any of your money back?

R: We got a certain percent of the money later. We didn't have too much, but the bank gave us a certain percent back later.

M: You mentioned the fact that Roosevelt was President. Do you remember anything about him?

R: Oh, yes.

M: Did you like him as President?

R: Oh, yes. I think he did a good job. He tried to get the country going, I think. The WPA wasn't bad; it got men out. We had one good road, but a lot of other roads were not improved at all. They started making roads under the WPA. This drew men out from Youngstown in trucks and the roads that they made then are still there today. They are narrow roads, but they had been dug out and the men put in a stone foundation; they hauled stone from different quarries around there. Because of the stone foundations, those roads are still there today. They cover several miles in Milton Township.

M: In Jackson and Austintown Townships, too, you have Lake Meander and Lake Milton. What about the trees; were they planted by the men during the Depression?

R: That was out in the western states.

M: I thought they had built up that area during the Depression.

R: Probably.

M: Then as far as you are concerned, the WPA was building roads.

R: Roads, and also they built schoolhouses, which were paid for by the government.

M: What did they do on the schoolhouses?

R: Well, the WPA worked on an addition put on the North Jackson schoolhouse.

M: Do you remember anybody who did that work for the WPA?

R: Yes, I knew two men in our community were supervisors, but they brought men from Youngstown out to do the heavy work. The steel mills were not working. Men that were out of work were brought out in trucks to work on these roads. Maybe a few of them had a car they could drive if they had the money to get the gas. Of course, they were paid for this by the government.

M: Concerning transportation, how did you get back and forth?

R: We had a car.

M: How did you get your dairy products? Were they picked up? Didn't you have to have a truck?

R: There were trucks that came along and picked up the milk.

M: If you wanted to come into Youngstown or anyplace else, you had a car. Do you remember what kind of car it was?

R: It was a Ford.

M: Do you remember what it cost?

R: I don't remember what the Ford cost. I know that after the Depression was over, about 1938, my husband bought a four-door Chevrolet for six hundred dollars.

M: That was in 1938. How long did you have that car?

R: We had that car a long time.

R: We had that car ten or twelve years, I think. We started serving kids soup at that school during the Depression, as there were a lot of children who came to school without any lunch. I don't remember who provided the food. I think some of it was donated by a group of women from the community who came in, gave something, and cleaned up afterwards.

M: Did they get paid?

R: No.

M: This was a community service thing?

R: Yes.

M: Did they serve this to all the children in the school, or just to the ones that didn't have a lunch?

R: Those who didn't have a lunch.

M: What other kind of programs did they have for school children who might have been needy?

R: Well, I don't remember.

M: Being that Lake Milton was a small type of community, they probably were very close and most likely would have helped one another.

- R: There was help for a family that was in need. I think they were taken care of.
- M: By the neighbors, or did they have to go into town somewhere to get Welfare?
- R: We didn't have Welfare at that time.
- M: What could they have done if they needed something?
- R: If you had clothing, you could give it to them.
- M: Was this through the school, or was it mainly through the Church?
- R: This was through the school, I think.
- M: How long did they serve the children at the school?
- R: I think that was the first time that food was served in the schools, and I think that the government came along and helped out. I know that first year it was a donation mainly from the women of the community.
- M: Who provided the vegetables and things? Did they get them from the farmers around there, or did the government provide them?
- R: That I don't remember. It seems to me that some of us gave some of it. All you can say is that people were out of work, therefore they didn't have the means to obtain food or clothing or anything, and a lot of them lost their homes.
- M: How about the farms? Did anybody use their farmhouses?
- R: No, I don't think so. I knew property value went down.
- M: Most of the farmers then were able to survive this because they had their farms and they produced their own food. How about clothing; did you make your own clothing for yourself and your children?
- R: Yes, we'd go out to buy material.
- M: Do you recall the types of material and what you used to make dresses for your little girl?
- R: Back in those days we had gingham and calico cotton, mainly, and in the winter we had woolen materials.

- M: From these you would make the dresses. What about clothes for the boys?
- R: When the boys were small, we always made their clothes; pants and blouses, we called them. As they got older we bought clothes for them.
- M: What schools did they attend during the Depression?
- R: My children started at the same school. The oldest boy went to a one-room school for about three years, then we had centralized schools. They went to that school.
- M: You mentioned the one-room schoolhouse. Can you recall anything about it? Was it similar to the one in which you had classes, or was it the same one?
- R: It was the same one.
- M: Tell us a little bit about that.
- R: There were eight one-room schoolhouses in Milton Township. The one that I went to burned down during the winter. We had a new school then, which was a better building than the older one, and was heated with a stove in the center of the building. The old one had burned down when the janitor covered the fire with coal the night before. The fire apparently had started up during the night. They would leave the door open and the fire caught from a spark, and fell on the floor.
- M: Weren't they able to put it out in time?
- R: No, no. There wasn't anyone there. By the time they realized it was on fire, it was gone.
- M: You said you went to the same schoolhouse that your son went to. Could you recall what a day was like in a one-room schoolhouse?
- R: School started at nine o'clock and usually those in the beginners' course were learning their ABC's. Some were learning to read in first grade. They put them in that order. We would usually have reading first, then there was a recess. After recess there was the arithmetic practice, and then we had an hour-long noon period.
- During the afternoon the smaller children would have reading again. We'd have history, geography, and spelling last. That's what the studies were called in those days. Now today, it's altogether different.

M: Do you recall your teacher? Did you have the same teacher for any length of time?

R: Sometimes we would have a teacher for two years. After that we usually had a different teacher every year or two. Yes, I remember several teachers.

M: Your son went to the same school?

R: He went to the same building for about two years. Then they built a centralized school where that building was. They sold that building and put up the new schoolhouse there.

M: So, from the time you had gone to the school to the time your son started school, were there any changes that you recall? Did it still look the same and have the same curriculum?

R: Yes, the school had changed. When my children started to school, they had different readers. We had the McGuffey readers. When they started school, they had different readers and there was a difference in other books. The books were all different.

M: How did you get to school?

R: Walked.

M: How far was that?

R: About a half mile.

M: You said that they had a coal burning, or was it a wood burning stove?

R: Coal. In the hall there was a pail of drinking water with a dipper on it. That was our drinking water.

M: What did you do during that hour at lunchtime?

R: In good weather we went outside and played games.

M: Did you have any kind of playground equipment? What kind of games did you play?

R: No, we didn't have any equipment, except I remember that some of the boys did have a ball and a couple of bats to play baseball. We used to play on, I don't know what

you'd call it, but there were three big stones in the yard. One was one base, one was the other base, and there the children would choose up sides on each base and run around and catch each other. We always had plenty of exercise.

M: Did the girls play by themselves?

R: No, we all played together.

M: What about in school, did you sit with boys and girls mixed up?

R: No, the girls sat on one side and the boys on another.

M: What did the students of that time wear to school?

R: We wore dresses always. There were no jeans. In my day when we went to school we were not wearing jeans.

M: What time did school let out?

R: Four o'clock.

M: What about the school year?

R: When I first started, it was divided into three terms. We had two months in the fall, three months during the winter, two months in the spring, and then we were out about the middle of May.

M: How old were you when you first started school? Did you start at six?

R: Yes.

M: Then this would have been around 1895?

R: Right.

M: How old were you when you completed school?

R: Sixteen.

M: When you finished school, then what happened?

R: I was at home.

M: You stayed at home on the farm, helping out with the farm? When did you get married?

R: 1914.

M: At that time the Depression hadn't started, so apparently you didn't experience any major problems?

R: No, that was about the time of the First World War.

M: Do you recall at that time if any young boys who were going off to war were boys that you knew?

R: Oh, yes, my brother and brother-in-law were in the First World War.

M: Were they drafted, or did they enlist?

R: My brother enlisted and I think my brother-in-law was, well, they didn't call it drafted in those days, it was the same thing, but you had to register. When you were called, you went. They both went.

M: What did they do when they came back?

R: They went back to the same work they had done before the war.

M: That brings us up to the early 1920's, and times were still good. Do you recall if they were good on the farm in the early 1920's?

R: Yes, following the First World War, Hoover was sent to Europe to administer a good administration there, as those countries had been at war and could not raise crops. This country helped them out in that way because they had been at war for a few years before the United States entered.

M: So President Hoover had gone over to Europe?

R: He wasn't President, but he was sent by either President Wilson or Harding to administer the food administration in Europe. The price of wheat went up just like it has gone up in the past two years.

The same thing happened. The farmers kept raising wheat and more wheat. As time passed, the people in Europe were able to go back to farming and they didn't need all of that wheat. So, wheat piled up in this country and by the time the Depression came, wheat here was just about fifty cents a bushel. Then we had the dust storm because they had plowed grazing land. During those dust

storms you couldn't see in the sky here; it was invisible.

M: This was during the Depression?

R: Yes, this was during the Depression that we had the dust storms; it was the result of the farmers plowing the pasture lands.

M: Well, then what happened to the price of wheat after that?

R: It picked up some, naturally, and stayed there until conditions began to improve. Then the price of wheat went up some.

M: Did any of the farmers in your area grow any wheat?

R: Oh, yes. All farmers did.

M: For themselves, or did they grow it to sell?

R: All farmers grew corn, wheat and oats in those days. The wheat you could take to the mill for flour. The rest of the wheat you sold. They raised it to sell. The farmer sold what he didn't use; oats, corn and wheat. You farmed for yourself first. You had to use some for feed oats and feed corn.

M: On the farm did you have any type of equipment to help you, or was it mostly manual labor to get the crops in and whatever else you had to do?

R: To start with, it was mainly manual labor.

M: During the Depression, were you able to buy any equipment to help you farm, or did you have to use what you already had?

R: No, the farmers used what they had during the Depression.

M: In other words, no one was able to buy anything new?

R: No.

M: When do you remember that things started to get a little bit better?

R: I would say in 1934 or 1935.

M: So you said your husband had worked in the mill and on the farm after that. Did he ever go back to the mill?

- R: No. The mill he worked in moved away.
- M: But he didn't work in any other factory either?
- R: No.
- M: What do you think the Depression has taught you about money or the way you live years after?
- R: We had to be careful how we spent our money. We never bought things like we do today.
- M: What would you buy?
- R: If we needed something, we waited until we had the money to pay for it. That was the way with most people, I think.
- M: You didn't buy on credit?
- R: No. No credit at all.
- M: The Depression was a hard time. Did it teach you to be more thrifty with you money throughout your lifetime? Did this carry through with your children also? Did they develop the same attitude towards money?
- R: To a certain degree, yes.
- M: Do you have any last minute comments you want to add about the Depression? I know you weren't hard hit by it because you always had food on the table and you and your husband, as a young married couple, managed, but do you think our young people today could survive a Depression such as the one you have experienced?
- R: I don't know. It would be pretty tough on them.
- M: What about you, yourself? Do you think if the Depression would come again, would you be able to survive as well as you did then?
- R: Well . . . I would get along as best as I could. It would be much worse today.
- M: Do you think our government is doing more?
- R: I think our government is doing all it can to the hilt right now. I don't know what more the government could do during the Depression.

M: But even then, you say you had a hard time during the Depression. Do you think people in general were happy?

R: No, not during the times men were out of work.

M: The farmers never bemoaned their fates, or felt sorry for themselves?

R: No, I don't think so. Now, you hear a lot about people raising a garden, and that was one thing during the Depression that farm people did. People in towns could not get out to farm and have their own produce, like the farmers had in those days.

M: Today with the cost of living high and inflation and everything, people are raising gardens. I think it's good to know about that anyway. Do you have anything more right now that you want to add to this interview?

R: No, I don't think so.

M: Thank you very much, Mrs. Russell.

END OF INTERVIEW