

**Effects of the depression**  
*an Oral History*

William Kaiser, Interviewee  
Of Princeton, Illinois

Interview Date: July 29, 1975

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Starved Rock Library System History Collection

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Narrator's Name: WILLIAM KAISER  
Tape Number: 1  
Date of Interview: JULY 29, 1975  
Place of Interview: PRINCETON, ILLINOIS  
Interviewer's Name: BILL KAISER  
For: STARVED ROCK LIBRARY SYSTEM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Q: This is Bill Kaiser in Princeton, Illinois interviewing my father about the effects of the Depression and I'd first like to ask him what were the conditions like in the 1930's after the 1929 crash?

A: Well, people were effected in different ways. Many of the wealthy people became very poor instantaneously, another words they lost everything, everything that they had and that they owned and it really took a toll on them because these people were not used to living a poor life. And in some cases some of the -- not too many, but some cases -- the wealthier people were even jumping out of windows they say, or committing suicide because they couldn't stand the burden of life upon them at the time. Now the middle class people and the poor people, by the way that would be where I would be classified when I was a young fellow, they had to struggle in life already and they knew what it was like to struggle. Therefore the effect on these people was not nearly as great because of this reason as it was on the wealthier people, and they survived and they survived with hard work and hardships but they did manage to survive. However, the poorer people struggled too.

Q: What do you mean by they struggled?

A: Well, for instance in my own case, I can remember my sisters and myself and my brother, we had to wear hand-me-down clothes, or homemade clothes, my Dad would fix shoes that were worn out by putting new heels on them and by using belting that the farmers used on their conveyor

A: belts for soles of shoes. We had our own little outfit where you'd sole your own shoes, you could do this with nails and in some cases even thread, and my Dad would fix our shoes in that respect. People raised many gardens, just about like it is today many people are raising gardens. But people did a lot of canning, they put food away for the winter, they smoked hams in places, they built places where they could smoke meat so it would be cured and they could keep it without refrigeration, and they butchered their own meat. Many of the neighbors would get together and they -- one person couldn't afford to buy a hog for instance -- so all the neighbors would get together and they'd buy the hog from the farmer and they'd together again they would butcher it and then divide up the meat in that respect. They did a lot of fishing, not necessarily with hook and line, but with nets to catch fish so that they would have something to eat. I can recall too where, to heat the house we would go down and pick up coal along the railroad tracks in gunny sacks and bring it back home. It was hard work but we didn't mind because that's what we knew. We used to cut a lot of wood and burn wood in the coal furnaces, of course you can burn wood in a coal furnace and that's the way we got our heat. But it was a conservative life, there was no nonsense spending.

Q: What was the Depression, was the Depression all bad? Like, were there any benefits for it?

A: Well, the Depression was bad for -- in most cases. But, yes, there were some benefits from the Depression. Many good things came out of it, it's hard to believe, but it's true. People lost homes but they rebuilt and came back, they lost a lot of items but they managed to get back on their feet. You might say it was just a good

A: experience or lesson in life, you know they say that experience is the best teacher. It taught people organization, which is a big part of anything. It taught them how to make the most of what they have. It brought togetherness, many families for instance were brought together, very close families because of this situation. They had to depend on each other for work and for their fun, their recreation, they had to make it themselves because they didn't have the money to go out and spend it. And it brought together families, it made good close relationships in families you might say. It brought neighborhoods together -- like I was saying before -- they butchered together, they raised gardens together, they travelled to work together in car pools to save money, or maybe they walked together, but it brought closer relations to neighbors and in this respect it brought the community together. The communities had struggled together on recreations for their young people, they tried to do what was best for their community by making their electricity cheaper and in as many ways as possible getting their roads paved or fixed up, there wasn't very much pavement then, but it brought communities together in this respect. It taught people to conserve. It taught people the value of the dollar, which is a very important item. Lot of times, for instance, here at home you might say you call me a tight-wad or your mother calls me a tight-wad, and I am. But this is the way I was brought up. I was brought up to turn lights out when you weren't using them, I was brought up to put things away and keep them because you might be able to use them later on for some benefit or another, I was taught to know the value of the dollar, not to just go out and blow it. In this respect it taught

A: people to conserve and I think helped many people. Of course, some people never did learn how to do this. But they had to struggle harder because of it. All in all I think in my own thinking it taught people how to come back after a set back in life and that's something that a lot of people have to learn.

Q: Okay, thank you very much, Dad, I guess that's about it, thank you.

A: You're welcome.

END OF SIDE ONE

END OF TAPE



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William R Kaiser X

(Interviewee)

BILL KAISER

(for SRLS)



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(for SRLS)







INTERVIEWER'S NOTES AND WORD LIST

Instructions to the Interviewer:

To assist the transcriptionist, please identify:

1. Passages which may be difficult to understand because of outside noise, other people in the room, problems with the tape recorder, etc.
2. Passages which are confidential and therefore should not be typed.
3. Passages which need to be treated in a special way.

Please list words or phrases which might be difficult to understand, all proper names, and unfamiliar terms. If there is more than one tape, note where the second and succeeding ones begin.

TAPE NO. \_\_\_\_\_

My father - William R. Kason

Sisters - Della, Blanche, Violet

Brother - Clemons

Fishing - Illinois River, neighboring streams

Railroad tracks - coal fell off open top coal cars near curves, and bumpy, rough spots.

Community - LaSalle - Peru

# After Effects of The Depression

## INTERVIEW CONTENTS

NARRATOR'S NAME Bill Kaiser

TAPE NO \_\_\_\_\_

TIME

SUBJECTS

- to 1. What were conditions like in the 30's after the 1929 crash
2. People effected differently
- to 3. Some rich lost everything
4. Middle class + poor were used to it but they struggled too
- to 5. what do you mean by struggled?
6. clothes - had me down - home made
- to 7. Gardens - working hard earning
8. Butcher Meat - neighbors get together use every drop
- to 9. Fishing - Illinois nets
10. heat - coal from railroad track falling of open cars
- to 11. Wood - chopp many hours for lumber for fireplace
12. Conservative Life - no sense spending money
- to 13. Was depression bad? Were there any benefits
14. from it? Mainly bad, but did benefit
- to 15. good experience, taught organization - make
16. most of what they have
- to 17. togetherness
18. Conserve - value of the Dollar
- to 19. Has to come back after a great disaster
- 20.
- to 21.
- 22.
- to 23.
- 24.

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS

*Bill Kaiser*  
..... (narrator's name) ..... Memoir

Interviewer's observations about the interview setting, physical description of the narrator, comments on narrator's veracity and accuracy, and candid assessment of the historical value of the memoir.

Note: Use parentheses ( ) to enclose any words, phrases or sentences that should be regarded as confidential.

*7/29/75*  
..... (date) .....

*William R Kaiser X*  
..... (interviewer's name) .....