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Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Earl Brooks at their home in Arden, Delaware, July 8, 1971, by Myron Blackman. Project: Delaware in the Depression. Mrs. Brooks' remarks are indicated by "A." Mr. Brooks' by "D."

Q O.K., just to start, when did you first become aware that the Depression was something out of the ordinary?

A That's a little hard to answer, because we never had very much to begin with. But at least my husband was working. He was a carpenter and a very fine stonemason. [Inaudible - tape interference] ... were partners and built several houses here. And then when the Depression came along there was nothing to do. Stocks and bonds never meant anything in my life, and I--and the stock crash didn't mean a thing to me. But I read an English novel and they talked about this awful stock crash in America, and I thought, "Well, maybe that's what's the matter with us now," you know, "maybe that's what happened." That's an ignorant sounding thing, but that's what I mean when I say that the Depression didn't depress me too much because we never had too much to start with. But then there was no work. There was a Mr. Shinn who had a grocery store in Claymont, and we had outgone our credit around here for groceries, and somebody said, "Well, you go to Mr. Shinn and he'll give you some groceries." Well, he must have been a wonderful guy, because you just went and told him your circumstances and you got some groceries, especially if you had children, which we did--we had three children. They were probably about eight, nine and ten, in there somewhere. And sometimes the county paid Mr. Shinn and sometimes they didn't, but he gave people groceries anyway. And he belonged to the same family as the Shinn Paint Company; it's still in existence around Wilmington. So from that of course we were interviewed and we went on relief. And my husband worked for a while for W.P.A. when the roads were put in here in Arden by the W.P.A.--that was a regular W.P.A. project. And they held up pretty well. One of the things that my mother noticed about the men on the roads, when they first began working, they just looked as though they couldn't push one foot after the other. And after they had been working and eating, apparently, for a while, they did a lot better. [Interrupted by phone call.] My little girl was about eight, I think, at the time of the road project, and she was terribly embarrassed because her father was doing that kind of work. He was just shoveling. And then she found out that the fathers of a couple of her intimate friends were in the same gang, and then she didn't feel so badly. And one of the things that impressed me the most, and I guess I could say the worst, about the Depression, and the thing that has hung with me the most, is the appearance of men in town who were just standing on the corner doing nothing. An old overcoat pulled up around their necks and scarcely talking to each other, just standing there in the sunshine with nothing to do. And I was glad at the time and I have been ever since that my children didn't see that particular aspect of it. They know the Depression, they know they went through it and what it meant. It meant going without practically everything but the absolute necessities. We did go without everything but the necessities.

Q Wasn't it a case where you didn't have meat very often?

A No, we had meat. We had canned beef from the Argentine, we had pot roast
for 10¢ a pound, and someone who thought my little girl was terribly under-
fed sent her oranges every week. And I think living in this community where
people were very conscious of the situation of their neighbors made it a
whole lot easier. Because people who had money—nobody had much—were sym-
pathetic in attitude [inaudible]. . . . And another thing, being in a com-
munity of this kind, that had always been a community, we still continued
to do, more or less, the same things we had done before. We had our club-
house, we had our meetings. Somebody that could speak Italian would have a
free class in Italian, and of course Don Stephens was always happy to start
an Esperanto class.

E Or a class in single-tax.

A Yes. And someone taught some of the youngsters typing and shorthand. And
we saw the same people. We were neighbors, and shared not money or material
things so much, but the cultural things that we had been used to having here
when we did have more money in the community. And there was never anybody
here that was very wealthy, anyway.

Q Could I—I was wondering about going on welfare or relief—I've been told
that it was called public assistance.

A Well, maybe it was, but we called it relief or welfare.

Q Well, people have changed the names, I suppose. But a lot of people I've
spoken to said that they would do anything to keep from going on relief.

A Oh, yes. I think that many people would and did.

E This thing was so universal, there was hardly any families who were not af-
fected by it in one way or another. A lot of people who had pride, and this
to them was a terrible thing, to be in a condition where they had to ask for
public assistance.

A Some people just could not face the fact that it was happening to everybody
and it wasn't the fault of any individual. I can remember a man coming to
our house one time to sell something, I think maybe groceries from a truck,
possibly just vegetables, I don't know. But he was standing, and I don't re-
member all the conversation, but I said something to the effect that well,
it wasn't my husband's fault that we were in this position. And he just sort
of sank back into a chair, and really had tears in his eyes, and said to my
husband, "Oh, God, I hope you know how lucky you are to have a woman that
will say that." He said, "My wife just can't understand that I can't give
her what she used to have. I used to have a pretty good grocery store and
I made enough that she didn't have to work in the store. And now I can't
give her anything," and he said, "She's breaking my heart. She thinks it's
my fault." And he says, "I love her, I would give her anything I could,
but I just can't make her understand." And that man, the tears were really
rolling down his cheeks. He was a heartbroken man. He was not from Arden,
though. He came from in town somewhere, trying to sell, I guess, perhaps
what he had left on his shelves when he had to close up. But we felt so
sorry for him. And I don't think there was anybody here that felt as she
did. It was just something that happened that had to be gone through. And
then this fellow—I wanted to talk about this project, this Arden project. Frank Stephens, who was one of the original trustees and the founder and the progenitor of the whole idea of Arden, was a—he was a patriarch. He got into lots of trouble with things he did and people who didn't like him and so on. But he had a tremendous heart, and he got the idea that if he could get this land across Keamans Creek, which is now Highland Woods and Indian Fields, particularly Indian Fields because it was out in the sunshine. And somebody loaned him the money to take an option on that land over there and he called it Ardencroft. And I don't know whether these kids even paid rent on their plot of land, probably didn't have anything to pay it with. But at any rate, they raised vegetables and at least fed themselves in that way, and sold some of it. Unfortunately he was never able to take up the option so that project failed. And then it wasn't until 1946—7—8—somewhere in there, that the farm over there on Veale Road was bought and ready developed into what is now Ardencroft. And that was Frank Stephen's son Don who engineered that project and another man here, [inaudible—sounds like Buzz Ware]. But I remember one thing that happened while we were on relief. Somebody came to the door with a bundle of clothing. They had asked me for the children's sizes and so on. And somebody delivered this stuff. And there were some unbleached muslin sheets which were too narrow for a twin bed—they might have been used on a cot. There was a couple of shirts for each of my boys, the smaller of which fit the larger boy, and I took the bigger ones and cut them down for the smaller boy. There was a dress which was miles too big for me, another which was too small for me and much too big for my daughter. And I got hysterical over it. And I thought, "This is just so funny, I've got to share it with somebody." And I had seen my neighbor out in his garden, and I went and called to him to ask if his wife was home, 'cause I thought I just had to laugh with somebody on this. But she wasn't home, so I just sat there and really became hysterical over the stupidity of the [inaudible] that had been sent to me. It was all made by hand. Women were hired to work on the relief projects, but they didn't have any sewing machines. These dresses and shirts and sheets were hand-sewn. Think how much more they could have made if they'd had a few machines.

P Part of that idea was to give these women employment.

A Yes, but if they'd had machines, they could have made more for more people, it wouldn't have been less people employed. And one of the women here in Arden worked on that project and then it was found out that she wasn't a U.S. citizen, she still had her English citizenship, and so she got fired—dropped, I should say. Oh, she was disgusted. Would she become a citizen of a country like that, no she wouldn't!

Q It seems remarkable that—you mention the men in Wilmington standing around with nothing to do, and yet I've spoken to a number of people who lived in Wilmington who didn't see anything like that at all.

A Well, maybe they just didn't go to the same places. I went, for instance, down Market Street to Woolworth's to buy a dollar's worth of ten-cent things. I went down King Street to buy vegetables in the markets there. The W.P.A. office at one time was in the old Customs House there at 6th and King and I went down Shipley Street where the relief office was. Maybe these other people just didn't go in those neighborhoods.
B Or maybe they have forgotten. This was some time back.

A See, now, if they—if there are people that you speak of were not on relief themselves, they wouldn't have been as aware of it as I was. They might have seen these same men standing there and think, as we might today, why don't they go to work? And I remember one time when I was at the relief office there was a quite elderly man behind me in line, and he was just griping to everybody that was within earshot, and he referred to the people working in the relief offices as "these here paid paupers." That's all they were, just paid paupers.

Q Did you and your husband have any of these compunctions about going on relief?

A No. It was a necessity, that's all. We had three children to take care of and no other way of doing it. We didn't like it. We didn't at any time have the feeling that the world owed us a living. We never took it in that way. But just had to be done. During this time, my older boy suffered a very serious mastoid infection, and I don't know what happened to the hospital bill. I don't think we were charged for it. It was a private hospital, Mrs. Turk's. And the doctor didn't charge for it. And I expect he did a good deal of that kind of work because he was that kind of man. But he was a sick little boy. But later—let's see about 1930—we were still in—well, my husband—I don't know if it's not the fault of the Depression or what it is, but the marriage fell apart. And he just refused to go to work, because he wouldn't work for a creature like I was. And he told me that if he didn't have to bother with me, he could take care of the boys. So the daughter and I left. I went on W.P.A. I worked on the recreation project on the school ground, down at Mt. Pleasant. The Board of Education allowed us to use the building and the W.P.A. paid the workers. But I hated it, because we had no authority over the children. They just came in there and played and somebody suggested clay, and I started working in clay with them, and they found out that it was much more fun to make clay balls up against the cinder block wall than it was to make something out of it. And there wasn't a thing I could do, I had no authority to say, "All right, put the clay away if you don't want to make anything out of it." And that was just horrible to me. That wasn't the way I was brought up. And then when the summer ended, I went to work in the Board of Education working on the reports of the adult education section. And I worked there for about two months or three months and then went to work on another recreation project. That was in a condemned school building out in the St. Anthony parish. And again the Board of Education let us have the building. St. Anthony's Church bought games and a ping pong table and the W.P.A. paid the workers. Oh, at that same time, the theater project and recreation project put on six radio dramas, which was, oh, so much fun. Then my husband applied for W.P.A. or relief, and I was dropped, because they said I was not the head of the household, he was the head of the household and I should go back and live with him. And I tried to explain that it was impossible and that I had this child to support, but absolutely no effect. This stupid guy said, "He can't be responsible for breaking up families." I said, "But the family's already separated." "I'm sorry." I wanted to ask him what he thought women would do under those circumstances and how would he like to be responsible for that, but I didn't quite have
the nerve. I thought he might offer me that kind of a job—I mean, that's what I thought of him. So that was that. This is really getting a bit—oh, I don't know, how long did the Depression last? '39, '40 still be considered Depression?

Q I consider it until . . .

B Until World War II broke out.

A Well, my brother-in-law worked for the Hamburg American line. He was a tour conductor in this country for German businessmen from abroad. There would be six or eight of them in a group and he would show them around, although he had been in this country since 1926 and was a naturalized citizen, but of course he spoke German and was familiar with business aspects in the country. Well, when the war broke out, of course, he was out of a job. And just about the same time, my sister's job with state charities in New York folded up. So they moved down here. Since I left my husband, I'd been living with my parents, so that was four of us. And then they moved in, that was six of us. And we made a great joke of the fact that my daughter, who had a paper route for six Evening Ledgers, was the sole support of the six people.

B You must have had some savings or something.

A Oh, of course, we did. See, there wasn't any social security yet, then. My father wasn't getting any social security. But my sister loaned me the money to take a course in operating a comptometer machine. And an aunt loaned me the money for my transportation to Wilmington. And then I began to get to do little jobs. And of course I was always the last one hired and the first one fired on all these stupid little jobs.

Q But this was during the war . . .

A In the beginning, yes. I worked for the Delaware Hardware Company at the time the war broke out, and soon materials were hard to get and the last one hired got fired there. And I went to work for Bethlehem Ship Building Company. And they had as many as 3,000 on the force at one time. They were building landing barges, tank barges. And that was pretty good. I really wasn't earning very much, even though it was wartime wages weren't very high for girls. I probably got at the most $20.00 a week, except for overtime. When payroll days came around, we had to work overtime. And then materials were hard to get, or the contracts—I guess the contract was lost—anyway, that job fell through. And I went to work as a repairman for addresograph machines. Then I became the office manager and then that folded up and I tried to enlist in the Navy and was turned down because I had a few more spots in my chest X-rays than they liked. And then I went to work for an investment company, that wasn't a bad job. I lost that job because a soldier came back who had had the job before he went away.

B This was after the war had started, wasn't it?

A Yes. You see, this brings us up to 1946. From there on my job was very good. I went to work for American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia,
the refugee--foreign section. And that was O.K. I quit there voluntarily.

Q: But apparently it seems that you didn't start getting out of the Depression until after the war.

P: That's about the way it was. Things were dragging along.

A: I had what you might call a steady job while it lasted. And I was never long between jobs after I once started in with a steady job. I moved right from one to another. One lovely thing about the six of us in the same house, here was the parents and their two daughters, the husband of one daughter and the daughter of the other daughter, and we had the best time. We got along beautifully, we had no friction. The only friction that ever occurred, I think, was between the grandmother and the granddaughter. There was a gap there. I never had any generation gap with my children. I always felt that my children were my friends and they felt the same way about me. And I think I can say that about the grandchildren, too. Now, I certainly feel a generation gap now between myself and young people in general. I admit I don't understand them, I'm glad I don't have any children to be responsible for at this point. We have a grandson living with us now and going to school, and he thinks I'm pretty old-fashioned, I guess. But not grandfather—he's O.K. And I can't say that I have any real friction with the grandson.

Q: Can you [inaudible] questions now?

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: What was it like to be a photographer during this period?

P: Oh, well, I felt it all right. Not right away, I didn't. The crash came in '29, I didn't feel the effects of it right away. Somehow or other it hit the rich people first. They were the people in the stock market, but after it'd been going a year or two, then it filtered down, the rest of us began to feel it. Now, I was in business for myself, as a photographer, just located here in Arden, but I was doing work for people in Wilmingon. I was taking pictures mostly of children and a lot of people'd bring their children out and have them photographed, or I'd go into town and make home portraits of them.

A: It was kind of a "thing" for a few years.

P: Yeah. And I was getting along fairly well the first two or three years. But when 1932 came, that's when I hit the bottom. I was looking over my accounts a few weeks ago, and I noticed that my net income for 1932 as a professional photographer was $1200, which is $100 a month or $25.00 a week. That wasn't a very big income for a professional man.

A: And you had a household of seven.

P: Yeah, at that time I had a wife and four children and my father-in-law all living in this house, and I was the principle provider. And we were getting along. Well, with my income of $25.00 and my father-in-law did a little taxi business, he might have made $5.00 or $10.00 a week. Let's
say it wasn't more than $35.00 a week, and this household of seven people was getting along on it. And we didn't really suffer like some people did. Of course we didn't have any luxuries, either. We didn't eat very high on the hog, and we economized every inch of the way. But I think I carried a little charge account at the grocery store here. We had a little grocery store right in the middle of Arden, it was run by a very kind gentleman who--like this Mr. Shinn. He advanced credit to anybody who wanted it and a good many people were carrying their groceries there and maybe being one, two, or three or four months behind on the payments. But he was very generous and he never pressed anybody or gave anybody any trouble. Everybody that could, of course, paid up as soon as they could. And that helped, because I was in tight spots once or twice and I had to charge my groceries for three or four weeks [inaudible]... I'd get a little job that brought me in a little more money than usual and I'd go and pay the bill. So I really kept my head above water. I never got very far behind. And then that year, 1932, that was the year that we got a bonus, a soldier's bonus payment. I'd been in World War I and after the war Congress had passed an act extending--giving kind of a bonus to all the soldiers who had taken part in it. And if you were overseas you got more than a person who hadn't been overseas and you got on the basis of the number of days you were in the service, something like that. I recall that I was supposed to get $1400, but the way they passed this act, it wasn't to be given right away. It was a sort of promissory note; I think it would be payable in 22 years, which didn't do us much good right at that point.

Q wasn't that because of the Bonus Army march?

B Yes, that's right.

A They went and demanded the payment right away.

E They went and demanded the payment right away. The Bonus Army went to Washington and demanded payment on it. So maybe partially as a result of that campaign, but I think more on the basis that the people in Congress thought, "Well, this is a chance to put money into circulation and kind of prime the pump," and that it'll help to bring us out of this depression. Because putting all this money out to the soldiers, they certainly were in no position to spend it. They would be out spending it right away. And that's what happened, of course. Well, they decided they wouldn't pay the whole thing, they'd pay half of it. So it was in that year that I got my $700. And I guess if you figure--if I had been--what's the word--cautious and so on and done my duty, I might have just kept that money for use on essentials as they came along. But summer was coming on, and during the summer months there wasn't much photographic business going on. It was almost dead, so here were two months that I would be idle and I thought it might be a good stunt if I would do something special to bring in an income for my photography. And I got the notion of making a series of color photographs for the National Geographic Magazine. At that time--this was a complicated thing--color film had not been invented. You had to make your color photographs on big plates, Lumiere color plates, usually about the size 5x7, that's what went into the cameras. And these plates were taken out and developed and they became positive transparencies, well, like Kodachrome slides now, and they were used largely by the National Geographic Magazine. So I had the notion that if I could maybe go to some scenic spot like the Canadian Rockies and get some good pictures, I'd have a
sale for them and really make some money instead of just hoarding this
money or letting it dissipate, you know, in small purchases.


B Yeah, well, this is really—I felt it was a good business idea. At the
same time, it would be an awful lot of fun for me because I love the moun-
tains. Coming from California, I was used to hiking in the Sierras, and
the idea of taking your whole family out to the Canadian Rockies and see-
ing those was very attractive thing as well as being a business oppor-
tunity. So that’s what we did. I took the whole gang of kids, my wife
and four kids, in a Model A Ford, and we had camp equipment and all that
stuff, and we went to Jasper Park in the northern Canadian Rockies. It’s
about 200 miles north of Banff. So we went and we spent the two months
and we spent the $700. I came back and developed the pictures and sent
them to the National Geographic Magazine, who had encouraged me to do this,
and they sent the pictures back and said they were very sorry, they were
even very high quality pictures but they couldn’t use any of them because there
was no human interest in any of the pictures, they were all scenic and
there weren’t any people there, and they had to have people in their pic-
tures. And they sent me a little brochure saying what kind of things they
wanted in their pictures, in case I wanted to take some more. So I beat
my head against a wall. I wondered, "God’s sake, why didn’t they give me
that brochure before I went on this trip? I didn’t know they had to have
people in every picture." Of course these pictures that I took were way
out in the wilderness. I’d have had a hard time getting anybody in the pic-
ture except my daughter, who was with me. I hardly saw anybody else on that
trip. So every picture would have had my daughter in it—or maybe I could
have set it up and maybe I would have gotten in some of the pictures. Well,
anyhow, I didn’t do it, but that’s what they wanted. Well, anyhow, the $700
was dissipated and I didn’t get anything out of it in the business way at
all.

Q Was there a change at all through those years in the style of photographs
that were taken, that you would take? Maybe subject matter, or maybe ...

B Oh, I don’t know what you mean exactly.

Q Well, was there an interest—did you see a growing interest in sort of more
social photography, more ...

B Well, I’d say they were getting more personalized and things, you know. I
think that’s what overtook the National Geographic. I had seen old numbers
of National Geographic where they had just purely scenic pictures and no
people in it, nothing of that nature. But I think somewhere along just be-
fore I got into that business with them that they had changed their minds
and they had to have human interest in all the pictures. And I’ve seen it
growing more and more that way in not only Geographic but in all the maga-
zines. Sometimes they sacrifice a lot of other things just to show people
doing things. They figure that people are interested in people and so the
tendency is to show that.

Q I guess what I meant was during this time Dorothea Lange was doing her work
in the Southwest and California and Walker Evans did a book with James Agee about two particular farmers and . . .

B: Well, I didn't encounter any of that.

A: You mean like the Dust Bowl pictures and so on.

B: Well, I didn't get into any of that, no.

A: I think the trend was in that direction—the general trend, but not in his business. Although it was getting away from rich people's children—your business.

B: Yeah. Well, here's a little note I recall reading somewhere, to get an idea about the size of the Depression, and how much business was going on, somewhere I read a statistic in which it said that at the lowest point of the Depression, the gross national product that year was 75 billion dollars. That's how much we give to the military every year now. Of course at that time, that was on the value of the money at that time, not on the value of money now. If we're trying to evaluate that in terms of present-day dollars, it might be $225,000,000 [sic], at least three times as much as it was then. But I don't know what the GNP is this year.

Q: It's over 600 billion.

B: 600 billion, see. So you could just kind of figure out that things were pretty dull, business-wise in those days.

Q: A book I was reading had the first chapter called "The Gloomy Depression of Herbert Hoover" and the second was "The Exhilarating Depression of Franklin Roosevelt." Was there such a change when Roosevelt came in?

A: Oh, yes. Hope came back again.

B: Hoover hadn't the slightest idea what to do to make things change. There was nothing proposed except selling apples on the corner. And no one of his administration seemed to come up with any ideas at all. . . .

A: Wasn't he the one that promised a chicken in every pot? He never got it. And they probably thought that if Roosevelt was elected, wasn't it, the grass would grow in city streets. Or do I have the wrong man?

B: I don't know.

A: Anyway, when Roosevelt came in there was a general spring of hope, there really was. He was a vigorous man and he spoke his mind. He had appeal, he had great appeal.

B: And he surrounded himself with a lot of young people, college professors and so on, who had ideas about ways to end the Depression. He had this "Brain Trust," which was forever feeding him ideas. And of course, none of it ever came to a great deal, but things were a little better. It never really did end the Depression, nothing really ended it until the war economy came on
and there was a great demand for what we could produce in the way of munitions and supplies and so on.

A And the fact that the government was paying men as soldiers who hadn't been earning anything as workers. And their allotments came home and so on.

Q Did you ever hear any of Roosevelt's Fireside Chats?

A Oh, yes.

Q Practically all of them, I would say, I don't think we missed a one.

A His voice was really something. I remember, for instance, he said that people had been attacking him, you know. "How they even attack my little dog Fala." I forget what they had said about this little--it wasn't a cocker spaniel, it was a little dog about of that kind--and it was always with him. Somebody had attacked the dog in some way--verbally. Things like when he said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

B He really had what we call charisma. And I've often thought if we could only have somebody in Washington now that had that same sort of thing and would give us a Fireside Chat that would really pep us up and give us some hope instead of the blarney we get and the lies that we've been getting on these presidential reports now.

Q I imagine that that means that both of you had radios during that time.

B Yes.

A Yes, we did. Homemade.

Q Homemade.

B She had a homemade one. Her son was very mechanical and he got the parts and made one. I think I had one that probably cost about $25.00; that was a real fancy model.

A Well, the first one we had was one that a friend put together for us. The one that my son made was fastened to the wall in his bedroom with all these wires and things running around the wall. And he would go to bed and listen, of course with earphones. But that was--let's see, Roosevelt was elected in '32, it would have been through that time--oh, and this same mechanical son was very proud that his birthday was the same as Roosevelt's. He said to me one day, "Mother, they're going to have big balls all over the country to celebrate my birthday." I knew it wasn't exactly that, you know, but I didn't know what it was. And he was very serious about it. And I asked him, you know, and he said, "Well, President Roosevelt's birthday is the same as mine.

Q Do you recall what you listened to on the radio?

A You mean in general?

B Amos and Andy.
A Show Boat.

B Yes. "Good to the last drop."

A And the dummy--Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd.

B Yeah. Mortimer Snerd, I loved him. He was my kind of a country boy. Gracie Allen, too.

A Oh, yes, Gracie Allen was wonderful. And we listened to Father Coughlin. I don't remember why. And my daughter couldn't stand his voice and his delivering and so on, and as soon as he would come on she'd tear next door and listen to the New York Philharmonic. So she had a real taste of music by avoiding Father Coughlin.

B The radios at that time were of course not very hi-fi. I think what I had was an RCA, built sort of on the Gothic plan.

A Like a church window.

B Yeah, a little Gothic plan. There were thousands of them like that. But we got quite excited sometimes, we'd get stations as far away as Pittsburgh.

A KDKA, ooooh! KFI. We used to get a station in San Francisco. We never could get the music, the actual program, but we could get enough that we knew we had San Francisco, KFI.

B The Father Coughlin programs, you know, they were very exciting. We used to listen to those just about as religiously as we did to the Fireside Chats, of course I guess for different reasons. This fellow Coughlin, he was really a stirrer-upper. And he didn't know whether to believe him or not. We were always on the fence about that, you know. He seemed to say a lot of things that were true, and he was certainly sincere and he was certainly hitting from the shoulder. So we admired him for being so forthright and all. He was sure that he was right. It was only in later years we found out that he wasn't so good.

Q Did you by any chance listen--ever listen to the Mercury Theater, Orson Welles's . . .

B Ah, yes.

A Yes, now I was starting to tell you--that's just what I was about to say when Ricky came. The night that he had the Martians invading the country, I was over at their house and there was a fellow there who was a reporter on the Public Ledger in Philadelphia. And we were listening to Charlie McCarthy. And I'd been so sorry that this newspaper reporter, who was in the crowd, you know, didn't hear this Welles thing. I've always just wished I could have seen his reaction to that. I'm sure he'd have been terribly excited. Now whether he would have swallowed it like most other people did, I don't know.

B There were people here in Arden that swallowed it completely. They were worried. wasn't Bob--your husband at that time, he thought it was real.
Yes, he was trying to figure out what to do with the kids. He had the two boys and. . . . But who was it that was the old bell ringer? A commentator, radio commentator, who said that the reaction to this Martian invasion just went to prove that all the intelligent people in the country were listening to Charlie McCarthy. Oh, I wish I could remember his name.

Q: Weltenborn?
A: Hmm?
Q: Was it Weltenborn?
A: Probably. Probably was, yes. He was that type of commentator.

B: There was a big series of broadcasts one time we heard every afternoon, every day for a long time. That was the investigation into the sinking—the fire of a cruise boat that was coming up from the Bahamas or the West Indies . . .

A: Oh, the Morro Castle.

B: Morro Castle, yes. It caught fire and burned just off the coast of New Jersey somewhere. And many people lost their lives, and they were having a great inquiry into this, had to find out the causes—where did the fire start . . .

A: That was the first time that such a thing had been broadcast.

B: The people that held the insurance were trying to find out what went on. Well, everybody in the country was very much concerned about it, because it was a great tragedy, one of the biggest sea disasters since the sinking of the Titanic. And we used to turn that on and listen to every session of it.

A: It really was fascinating. There was a Scotchman, he was on the investigating board, and he seemed to be determined to prove that it had been an electrical fault. And everyone that he interrogated, sooner or later he would have been saying, "And did you hear any sputtering?"

B: "Any sparks, any sputtering?" He wanted to look in the electric wiring . . .

A: He was bound that it was an electrical fault.

Q: Did you ever get to the movies at all?
A: Did we ever go? Oh, once in a while, yes. We saw Dumbo and we saw Fantasia, Gone with the Wind—I saw Gone with the Wind at Christmas two years ago, and I would go again.

B: Of course in those days the price that you paid for a moving picture show was nothing like it is now. And we could afford to go once in a while, even in the Depression era.

A: We caught the very first sound movie. The first one I saw was excerpts from
The Student Prince. And you heard—it was someone on the telephone, calling on the telephone, or some such thing.

E No, no, the first one I saw was "Tammy!"

A Oh, Al Jolson.

E Al Jolson. Was that the name of the picture, "Tammy"? No.

Q The Jazz Singer.

E The Jazz Singer, with that song. Well, I remember that, when that came out, very well.

A When—that goes in the history of Arden, not in the Depression story . . .

Q You mentioned the W.P.A. radio plays. What kind of quality were they?

A Well, having been in them, I'll tell you they were of excellent quality. But fun! Oh, we did Nevalle's Typee, and we had a big washtub, we were responsible for all our own sound effects, everything. They didn't give us anything but the money.

E They had to make their waterfall . . .

A We had this tub with water in it, we had some rocks where the falls coming down the side—waterfall, rocks fell in a bucket of water, and we'd pour it. And in rehearsal, you know, it just didn't sound right, didn't sound right, and I thought, "Something else has to be done to a waterfall." And I got a glass of water and—there were always people looking in the windows of the studio, you know—and I took this glass of water and got down on my knees, right under the mike, and went [makes sound], you know. But people just fell back from the window, at this crazy woman gargling into the microphone. But oh, they were fun. And at one point they go through the tall, dry grasses. And one of the men had—you know these little things that are like a bamboo screen, that they paint calendars on and so on, he had that and a piece of cellophane and that was what he made the walking through the dry, tall reeds. And another time—oh, they let down a boat, and he had a little coffee grinder, old-fashioned coffee grinder, for the wench to let the boat down.

Q How did you get involved with that?

A Well, it was just one of the things they cooked up to keep people going on W.P.A. It was part of the Writers Project, part of the Actors Project, and part of the Recreation Project.

E I remember seeing some of those plays put on by the Actors Project. They were pretty good.

A Yes, some of them were very good. The Julius Caesar and [inaudible]. And the Arden Music Guild and the W.P.A. Theater Project combined and did the Mikado. That was a good show. Carl Elmer was the musical director. They were fun, too. Oh, but making these sound effects—it was so much fun to
make the sound effects that you kind of forgot that you were a great radio actress. And in rehearsal, the director would say, "Well, now, let's see. Make sounds like crickets." So we would all make sounds like crickets. And then he'd say, "O.K., you and you, you're the crickets." And we did Zen Hur. And at one point a rock falls--a stone falls from the wall, you know, on the horse of one of the centurions. And of course we had one man, big chested--he made, I guess for the horse and [inaudible - tape interference].

Q: Do you think that the country has learned a lesson from the Depression?

A: In a way. I don't think that they have learned not to do the things that bring on depressions. But when they see them coming, they realize that they've got to use some policies of some sort to hold it back. I don't think that they really learned to prevent it, but they just stop-gap it before it can get too bad. So that every once in a while we have a recession but nobody will admit it's a depression.

B: One of the little things was the insurance on the bank deposits. See, when Roosevelt came in, the banks were falling right and left, thousands of banks were being closed and there was almost a panic in that regard. And he took over the banks right away and closed them all and said, "They're gonna stay closed until we get this thing organized. Nobody should panic, everybody's gonna get their money. There isn't any reason to make this run." So he got things reorganized and when the banks reopened, why every thing was all right and nobody panicked. But I think one of the earliest things that he did after that was to get some means of stabilizing the banks so that they wouldn't--oh, people wouldn't be--oh, people wouldn't be stampeded by it. So they got this insurance on bank deposits and everybody knew that well, even if the bank failed or closed--had to close, or whatnot, they get their money. It was guaranteed by the government, you see.

Q: Do you think a depression like the Great Depression could happen again?

B: I think it's possible. I think it's possible.

A: It would depend. Now, if we had, in the White House, a man with no more insight and initiative than Hoover, it could happen. But we haven't had anybody like that, quite, since. I think that if someone, say the President, could see quickly enough that something had to be done and then have the courage to do it, then we needn't have that kind of a depression again. But of course, conditions in many places are just as bad--in the area--I'll say everywhere in the country--as in the Depression.

P: I can see it coming as a direct result of the inflation that we're going through. This is somewhat similar to what happened in 1929. That was a tremendous inflation going on, and values were going up so high, people would buy anything today and sell it a week later for 50% more.

A: But that they've prevented, too, because you can't buy on margin like you could then.

P: Well, you can buy--or get a deposit on land in Florida and things like that. There can be an awful lot of investments or down payments on this and that,
anticipating continued inflation, and then all of a sudden, everything gets saturated, super-saturated. It just gets to the point where it can't expand anymore. I think we're approaching that. Prices go up on everything we buy, wages go up, prices go up, wages go up, and it's getting to the point--I think it's getting to a danger point.

A Well, I think that the--I guess you'd call it devaluation of American money abroad has kind of put a brake on things. I mean, I think the powers that be in this country see that we can't go on that way. Something's got to be done to keep our value in our money.

B Well, my pessimism is further backed up by what they're doing with the interest rates at the banks. They keep on raising the interest rates. And they'll soon get to the point where people just cannot borrow money because they cannot afford to pay this heavy price for mortgages. When that happens, then business is going to slow down all around.

A Of course what bothers me, it's food. I keep saying we just have to stop eating! But Earl says that's the last thing we're going to give up, is food.

B Well, the food prices'll go up and then my price per hour goes up and the food prices go up again and my price per hour goes up--it can't go on forever that way. And there's so many people in which there's a lag. Anybody that's on pension or social security or on insurance payments and so on, steady income and no chance to raise it, there is suddenly going to be a lack of buying power among a great number of the population. And when the buying power goes down, business goes slack and workers are let out of their jobs and they can't buy so much--that's the way it was in the Depression.

A Yeah, when the DuPont Experiment Station begins laying people off, things are getting bad.

B And of course, what's happening to Lockheed, though I'm in favor of it, what's happened at Lockheed is just an indication, you see. Here these thousands of people got out of there job for a certain number of weeks, thinking they can get unemployment compensation, but that doesn't go on forever.

Q If there would be another depression, how do you think the young people of today would get along in it, compared to people in the '30s?

A What could they do?

B They would be among the first to be hit because there wouldn't be any chance for say college graduates to get a job of any kind, whether they have a degree or not. And being young and with more energy and foresight maybe than some older people, they would probably become much more violent than they have in the past and much more insistent we make a change. I would look favorably on that. I think somebody ought to have the guts to make a protest and cause us to change our ways, and of course there are a good many young people that are trying to do that. Among the older people, they're complaining, "Well, they don't have anything to offer in place of it." "They don't know a thing, they don't know what they want, they just want to tear things down." Well, that's the way with every revolution that's ever happened. The energy comes from people that are very much oppressed and they have never
cogitated about new systems of society. They probably haven't read Karl Marx and they don't know the intellectual answers to all this, but they've got the energy and the motivation for making a disturbance. But when they do, they'll let...

A I'm reading this Miracle at Philadelphia about the Constitutional Convention. And one of the leaders there said that was have an opportunity that there's never been in the world before; we're not just revolting against what was, we are gathered here together with the opportunity of building a country on laws that can endure, a rare and only—a unique opportunity. And of course they spent from early May until September.

Q When you look back at the Depression, what do you see? How do you view that era, that decade?

A Well, I feel that we were in a favored position, living in the community that we were. I don't think that we would have the same attitude that people just in an ordinary city would, where they weren't a community as we were and always have been. I think—my judgement at least couldn't be the same as a person who just moved from the city. And of course my reaction wouldn't be the same as someone who lost a lot of money, whose father jumped out the 32nd-story window or some such thing. I had a friend who worked in New York as a stenographer during the Depression and she used to say that they never knew what they'd find on the pavement when they came back from lunch. So it was miserable, of course. We had—my family at that time—we had a big house. The living room wasn't as big as this—it was 18 by 24, and a dining room and a kitchen and a back room, three bedrooms, no bath—there was going to be but there wasn't any yet. But we only had the dining room and kitchen heated. We were completely cold all over the place the rest of the time. We had a coal stove, potbellied coal stove in the kitchen. While we had a big house and a well-built house, we couldn't use it.

B Now that you mention it, that's the way it was down at my house. We had a potbellied coal stove in the living room, had a fireplace. We wouldn't start building coal until it got pretty cold. We would burn wood in the fireplace. See, the house is in the woods and we always had a good supply of wood. We would chop down the dead trees and saw them up ourselves. So we would keep the fireplace going until perhaps Thanksgiving or later. When it got real cold, then we would buy coal and get this potbellied stove going. But the living room and the kitchen were the only rooms in the house that were heated. The bedrooms were always cool.

Q It's near the very end of the tape. Thank you both very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]