

Rox P. Mann
Interview 115a
November 17, 1987
Tina McClenden, Interviewer
Retyped by Elaine Lawrence

Abstract: In this interview with Tina McClendon, Rox P. Mann reminisces about the Great Depression. Mr. Mann recalls working in the fields, hunting, and making wooden tools to support his family during the depression. He speculates that a new depression would be worse because modern workers wouldn't know how to support themselves without a corporate job.

Tina McClendon (hereafter TM): My name is Tina McClendon, I'm interviewing Rox Mann. This interview is taking place on November 17, 1987 in the Beulah, Texas area. We are going to talk about the Great Depression. Can you tell me about the works before the Depression?

Rox Mann (hereafter RM): There was pretty good work in this part of Texas, mostly all sawmilling and farming. Of course, wages were cheap, all the best wages I can remember before the Depression wasn't but about \$3.00 a day, that was from the time the sun came up until it went down and that was at the sawmill. It was public works, you might call it. The farming, I don't remember anything about the farming in the '20's only just farming. You had to make a crop and if you had a good one that was fine. But the work on the farm, and for sure after I got old enough to work on the farm, was \$1.00 a day for our work, from sun 'til sun. Of course, when we worked farming we did a lot of stuff, take care of it, you know, we had corn and cotton, potatoes and peas and what have you. You might say that's the way we lived, everybody, too. Most everybody had milk cows, hogs in the woods that we killed for meat, had all the milk and butter they wanted, eggs, what have you.

TM: So everything was pretty high priced, the food?

RM: No, they were cheap, real cheap. The first meat and lard I ever remember buying and that was after I was pretty well grown, we gave \$0.04 a pound for lard, \$0.07 for bacon.

TM: What were the working conditions during the Depression?

RM: Well, due to the Depression there just wasn't hardly no work at all. It was the same thing, it was just farming and sawmilling and on the railroad. There was a long time that the saw millers, they couldn't get no money, there wasn't any money, they'd take – the companies, most all of them, made their money, their change, you might call it, what we call silver money now. They would take aluminum things and make it like a washer and then put copper inside in that hole and that's what we spent, we would have to spend it back at their commissary. Like Temple over here, they had a big commissary and had

food and clothes in there and a drug store in that place and that's the way people got their money. They called them checks.

TM: You couldn't spend that anywhere else though?

RM: No.

TM: Just right there?

RM: Just right there. There might have been a place or two in Lufkin that you could spend those old company checks and they could have brought it right back to the company and got their money for them at the end of the month. Or maybe at the end of the year, I don't know how they did that. We did it at Trinity, I say "we". I know they could at Trinity and Onalaska when they were issuing the checks at Onalaska and Trinity you could spend them just about anywhere downtown and the company would redeem them. About the same thing on the railroad that went through that territory. The farmers, it was just the same old thing, everybody that farmed tried to make a crop, they would make something, you know. But that was about the way we lived, everybody lived during the Depression. If it hadn't been for the farmer we would have been in to it. We had land that we could have farmed in those days if you saw an empty house somewhere and wanted to move into it, you just moved in, didn't nobody object. If you had any land, clear land around the place, well, work it, nobody didn't care. Most of the farmers, poor farmers, they rented land, worked on the halves or what they called "The third and fourth, if they had their own team and tools they would work on the third and fourth, if they didn't have a team and tools, they worked on the halves, the Company furnished those, the landlord furnished them.

TM: Who?

RM: The team and tools and seed planted, what have you. It was miserable back then for some people. We talk about expense of things, go to town buy a pair of overalls and a blue shirt, in them days, most people wore overalls and blue shirts, or khaki suits, you know. I have bought many a suit of clothes for \$1.50, a pair of overalls for \$0.75 and shirt, blue chambray, they called it, for \$0.50. I've bought khaki clothes for \$1.75 a suit, you could buy a pair of khaki pants for \$1.00 and a shirt for \$0.75, and shoes, I've bought lots of shoes for \$1.00 a pair.

TM: Okay, talking about President Hoover, can you tell me about him?

RM: No, definitely I couldn't tell you anything. I know everybody ran him down for having things so high and nothing to do. He just brought on the Depression and wasn't nothing at all for people to do, no money to be had.

TM: What about President Roosevelt?

RM: Now when Roosevelt got it the first thing he started was the WPA and CCC and he started a program they called something like the Forestry Service now. They called it "The Tree Army", had camps, just about every county had its camp, some of them had tools, I know there were tools in Trinity County, never talked about that much over here, didn't know what they had in this county, and I believe they had three in Trinity County and some in Houston County. I know they had one at Groveton, and if I'm not mistaken they had one over here at Apple Spring that was serving Trinity County. Just about every county had one or two. All the boys that were out of school could get in that Tree Army and that paid \$1.00 a day right on, \$30.00 a month. It actually didn't work out as a dollar a day but that was a big help, I'll tell you. That's what broke the Depression. The next thing then, actually the next thing war broke out so that put everything on the boom again.

TM: What was the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corp]?

RM: Really, I don't know what that was, I don't remember about that.

TM: What about the WPA [Works Progress Administration]?

RM: They would hire people to work the roads, or do something like that, work on the roads. Back in those days, there weren't hardly no hard surface roads, just dirt roads, gravel roads, the highways were gravel. In wet weather they would wash away the drain, holes and what have you.

TM: Sort of like a construction crew today?

RM: People would just go along fill up the holes, fill the ditches back up and just repair the roads. A lot of different ways the WPA paid off, they had canning plants, things like sewing rooms and things like that that the women could work in. My mother was a widow woman at that time, had five or six kids at home and she had to take care of them someway so she worked in the canning plant and the sewing room. I don't remember how long.

TM: What did they do with the things they canned and the things they sewed?

RM: They were handed out to the people, kind of like they do now with the government projects where they get their cheese and butter.

TM: Just like that?

RM: Yes, something like that. Every so often you could go get a supply of that stuff that they were giving away.

TM: Can you explain to me the living conditions in general during the Depression?

RM: Maybe, it was just hard, I'll tell you, it was hard, hard on everybody, and surely the poor people. Like I said, there wasn't any work to do until Roosevelt got things started again. There was nothing to do, person would do anything in the world he could get to do. I have, me and Mama have picked cotton for \$0.35 a hundred. Me and her daddy made hoe handles and chairs, axe handles and things like that and sold them. That was the way we got by, there just wasn't any work to do, only farm but this time of year there wasn't any farm work. As you lay a crop by in the summer time, nothing to do then until gathering time. People had to do something, some of them did, some of them couldn't get it to do and didn't know how to do anything. A lot of people didn't know how to do anything to make a living. I was just one of the lucky numbers, myself. Her Daddy would take a piece of wood and make anything out of it. I learned that trade right quick, that's the way we got by. People did everything, coon hunt, possum hunt, anything that would make a living. There just wasn't any work to do. There was a lot of work that could have been done but people didn't have any money to pay for it to get it done. Like farmers, I have known lots of farmers just wasn't able to hire help for what needed to be done. During that time of laying by, then after the gathering, well, there were just plenty of farms, big farms that could have done to take care of themselves for another year but couldn't pay people. The living conditions were bad. It was rough, you know, how it would be now, for instance, if people weren't working. That is just the way you can look back and see the Depression, just what you are going to do. Just if your family weren't working.

TM: You had lots of problems.

RM: A lot of people nowadays, they just can't see that, they can't see how people could get by if they don't have the money. I know it can be done, you see, I sure know it can be done because we did it.

TM: Do you think another Depression can happen?

RM: Yes, sure it can happen and if they don't make some changes it is coming fast.

TM: What do you think caused the Depression?

RM: Just like it is now, the Stock Market, bottom fell out of the Stock Market, that stopped the flow of money and if it gets farther enough along our banks in this county can't borrow money from foreign banks to carry on, see? Like the paper mill up here and Temple over here, own the big industries in the country, the old foundry, it just works when it gets ready anyhow and if the time was to come that the paper mill or Temple couldn't borrow the money to operate on they just wouldn't operate. Now Arthur's got the money to operate, Arthur Temple, and he ain't going to turn his money and lost it if he can't see some coming back, you know. That wouldn't be good management at all. Like his daddy done, his daddy, he just kept running the sawmills, it got to where he couldn't even sell a board anywhere, he run that sawmill so much a week just in order to hold these people there because he knew that the Depression would break sooner or later. When the Depression broke and he got to where he could see what lumber he had and

what he could cut he owed over four million dollars, Mr Temple did, owed over four million dollars. It didn't take him long to pay that back. Now Arthur ain't working that way, times going to get tight, sales fall off bad, he just slows the saws down, work just so many hours, you know.

TM: Do you think conditions would be the same during the Great Depression if we had a depression now?

RM: No, because, just like I say, there are too many people that don't know how to get by when they don't have the money.

TM: They would be worse, really?

RM: Yes, there would be more killing and robbing and stealing that you ever heard of because, well, you take that boy of mine, Charlie, he doesn't know a thing in the world about taking care of his wife and kids if he didn't have that job down there, he wouldn't know how to get out, he could get out on four or five acres of land and make a living but where would he get the land? These people, just like that old field right out there, half of Angelina County could live off of that old field out there if they could work it but that man ain't going to do away with his cows to let them work it. It has done got now, it wasn't like it was then, during the big Depression we would go in the woods and hunt, go out and kill a hog, most everybody had hogs and we could kill a hog, kill squirrels, anything we could find to eat, we would kill it and take it home and eat it. After – of course, the Depression had been broke and everything was going fine when they brought all those game laws, just about everything we done. When they did bring along game laws there wasn't hardly any game left. Nowadays there would be plenty of game in the woods for people to live off of for awhile, but the law won't let them go get them. That's what is going to hurt. There would be more killing because there is many a man who would kill a game warden in a minute before he would see his wife and kids go hungry. If he could get out there and kill a deer or a sack full of squirrels or something in the middle of the summertime, or the middle of winter, it wouldn't make no difference, when he needed them he would go get them. Ninety-five percent of the working people would go right back to the woods and hunt again if he got plumb out of work before he would see his folks starve, you know. Game wardens would try to put a stop to it and a lot of them would be dead over it, too.

TM: Okay, Pa, I think we have just about covered everything. Thank you for letting me interview you on this topic.

END OF INTERVIEW