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Interview with Mrs. Martha Malcolm at her home in Cranston Heights, Delaware, March 6, 1971, by Myron Blackman. Project: Delaware in the Depression.

Q All right, Mrs. Malcolm, the Depression . . . the years I'll be covering are 1929 to 1940, and you could just start and tell me what you were doing around . . .

A Well, I of course . . . my family and I were living down on South College Avenue in Newark and I can't remember now just exactly what my husband was doin' at that time. He was . . . he took care of the high school . . . or the school there in Newark for a couple of years or more, I can't remember now just how many years. And my daughters-- I'm not sure whether they were through the college then or not. I just don't remember that exactly, when they got through college. But my older son, I know, he was . . . he didn't . . . it was pretty hard to find a good job in a way. He worked at a store part of the time and then he decided to join the Army. So he joined the Army at that time and I don't remember anything that happened bad to us in a way. We got along just about the same as we usually did because we were able to make out anyway and we always worked, all of us, at anything we could work at. Sometimes I had roomers and my house was pretty good sized . . . and I can remember when it was and hearin' other people talk about it and about the banks havin' trouble and such things, but to tell you the truth of the business, to know too much about it myself, I really don't. So . . .

Q Well, I'd like to ask you a few questions.

A Speak a little loud, because I . . .

Q O.K. Do you remember when the stock market crashed in 1929?

A Remember when what?

Q The stock market.

A I remember the stock market was . . . I think they were bad then, I'm not sure, they went down the same as some of the banks, you know, they went . . . I can't think what you call it, you know, but I know they had trouble with them. But I just don't remember a whole lot about it to tell the truth of the business, because I'm not a politician and I don't get on to all those things like some people do. And I wish I could give you more information on it, but just to tell the truth . . . I know I worked at anything I could get to do, but I did that right along all the time anyway when the youngsters were goin' to college.

Q Do you remember people being in need, people being hungry?

A No, I don't . . . I imagine . . . I'm sure there was people that didn't have as much as . . . there's always people that--as a rule--that some don't have as much as others and up until now . . . I don't think

there's anybody now that asks for it that don't have aplenty, and a lot of them waste what they get, which I think is terrible. But they do. You see these people that's on relief go drivin' their Cadillacs around. Now, I'm not kiddin', that's the truth, and it's terrible. It's awful. I wouldn't want to see anybody hungry no matter what color they are, I have nothing against color in any way, shape or form. There's only one thing I don't approve of and that's mixin' black and white. I don't believe in that. I think it's wrong . . . wrong for the children.

Q Do you remember the election of 1932 when Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president?

A Franklin Roosevelt?

Q Yeah.

A Yes, I remember that.

Q Were people looking forward . . . were people happy that he was elected?

A I don't know whether they were happy or not, but he made a mess of himself, I'll say that much, when he was in there. He had people standin' out, just standin' out doin' practically nothin' and payin' 'em. I believe in payin' people for what they do, but I don't believe in payin' 'em when they do nothin'. I had no use for him. He set up a mess that we've had ever since he was in there. That's the way I believe about it. I may be talkin' against what you believe, but that's the way I feel about it, and I always have.

Q Did you like Herbert Hoover?

A Yes, I think Herbert Hoover was a good, honest man and he was blamed for a lot of things that he didn't do. I had a person say to me after this thing . . . after he was out and oh, I don't know, several years after that when he was doin' all he can and tryin' to help the poor and buyin' stuff and givin' to 'em, and I heard this person say he was takin' this bread and sellin' it and takin' the money himself, which wasn't true at all, it was absolutely untruthful thing to say. He was a good man, and he meant to do good, and he showed that he did. I can't see why people say those kinds of things, I really can't.

Q Do you remember people coming around to your house, possibly, during that time and asking for food?

A Yes, I remember that very distinctly. I lived just about two blocks from the Pennsylvania Railroad down there on South College Avenue and time after time I had men that would get a ride . . . they'd I guess get on a freight train and they'd get a ride and they'd get off there and they were lookin' for work, and they'd come up to my back door lots of time and ask me for something to eat and a cup of coffee. I always give them something to eat and a cup of coffee. And at that time I wasn't afraid of anybody, absolutely nobody. That's all they asked for, they never asked for money, they asked for food, and I

always give it to 'em. But I wouldn't do it now.

Q Why not now?

A I wouldn't open my door to a stranger. If I hadn't of been pretty sure of you today, you wouldn't have got in. Times are different now to what they were then. I never thought of leavin' my door . . . havin' my door locked then, no time. I used to leave my door unlocked in the evening and go to bed when my girls would be out to things at college. But I don't do it now. And it's a shame.

Q Yeah, it is.

A It sure is.

Q Did you have a radio during those years?

A Yes, I did, I had a small radio at that time, but I don't remember much about it. I remember my oldest son bought me a little radio. It's the first one I ever had. But I used it of course to listen to, but I don't remember anything much about what that done for me.

Q Did your children ever talk about the Depression?

A Oh, I guess they did, but I couldn't say what they said or remembered about it. I know that . . . I'm sure that's the reason that my son joined the Army at that time, because he didn't have to. It was because he couldn't get a job, a permanent job, you know, and he thought that would be something that he could do. And they didn't pay nothin' then much for people in the Army. He didn't get enough money to even have enough money when he wanted to come home, to pay his way back and forth, he'd have to thumb his way.

Q Did you live . . . have you lived in Newark . . . did you live in Newark all your life?

A Oh, no. No, I used to . . . oh, I've lived in North Dakota. My husband and I had a homestead in North Dakota, we filed on a homestead and we was out there . . . oh, I guess we was out there over ten years and then we moved to Princess Anne, Maryland and we was there I don't know how long now. I think . . . I can't remember just when we moved to Newark, but we moved there just when our girls, two older girls, were ready for college. And we moved there on purpose to send them to college.

Q You mentioned when I came in, you said that things are worse now than they were then.

A Well, what I mean is by the way things are now, they want to tell you what to do. The government wants to tell you, or somebody does, what to do with what you own and what . . . your home, your property and stuff like that. They want to come along and tell you what to do here and what to do there and all this, that and the other. Why they want-- if you have a place to rent, or sell, they want to tell you who to

sell it to. I don't figure that's right, myself. What's yours is yours. Now, you've got a right to sell it to who you please. Now, don't you think that's right? I don't believe in that kind of stuff. And to my idea, I'm not one that knows too much about things, but it seems to me like the government takes over too much stuff. Why don't they let each state run its own affairs like it used to? They got along a whole lot better when they done that than they do now.

Q Was the change . . . you know, when the government started taking over, do you feel that was during Roosevelt's terms?

A Well, no, not just exactly . . . well, it might have been, I can't remember that. It might have started in that a little bit. I guess it did. But it gets worse all the time. It gets worse all the time, it's not . . . I can't remember just exactly when that started, but . . .

Q If I were to ask you what was the Depression, what would you say to me?

A Ask me what?

Q Just say . . . if I didn't know what the Depression was . . .

A Oh. Well, I wouldn't know what to tell you, really, I wouldn't know what to say. I wouldn't know how to answer that. I just wouldn't know how to answer that.

Q Were any of your roomers . . .

A Huh?

Q Were any of the people who roomed at your place, roomers, the people who stayed at your place, were any of them in bad shape?

A No. They were all able to pay their room. They were workin' men. They were men that were workin'. I can't remember now, a lot of them, I think, were probably workin' on the railroad, I'm not sure. But they were all workin', workin' men.

Q Was Newark badly hit by the Depression?

A Well, I really don't remember it being hit too bad. It don't seem to me that I do. I don't remember anybody havin' . . . I know that . . . I guess it was durin' that time that I was on a committee or two for helping people like that. I'm not sure whether that was the Eastern Star or not, I believe it was. [Phone rings] I knew that darn thing would . . . [Tape is stopped, then restarted.]

Q Could you . . .

A Well, I was on a committee for . . . when we knew that there was . . . if we could find out where there was a family that needed anything, why we'd try to do what we could for 'em. I remember one time I went to the store there, the department store that was there in Newark, and I told the man . . . I had a little bit of money, you know, they'd given

me a little money to use, and this was a family that had two or three little children, and I understood that they needed clothing and things, and I went down and got the children and the mother and took 'em up to the store. And I told the store man, Mr. Hanloff was his name there in Newark, and he give me off a lot on the stuff that I bought for 'em. I bought 'em some shoes and different things, I can't remember now just what, but I do remember gettin' 'em shoes for the children. And just little things like that we'd do, you know, from the different organizations that you belong to. And I guess the church did a lot of things like that, too, but I didn't happen to be on a committee for any of them. And that's the only thing that I can remember that I done in that way, was just things like that that we would try to help them with.

Q Do you remember the name of that committee?

A No, I don't. No, I can't remember what it was called. I can't remember it.

Q I've heard from some people that a lot of people were too proud to take charity.

A Well, they would be people . . . there's people today that's too proud to take it. There's people right now, today, that needs welfare that won't ask for it, because they prefer to work, and if they can just get work, they prefer to do that, to make their own livin' instead of havin' somebody give it to 'em, and I think that's wonderful that people feel like that, although I don't think they should go without things they need when everybody else is gettin' somethin'. I think they should ask for it. A lot of 'em ask for it that don't need it. I happen to know, here not long ago, my grandson had a man a workin' for him and the man had a family. And pretty soon he said he was gonna quit, he said he could get more from the welfare than he was gettin' there. Well, I don't know what my grandson was payin' him, but I know it was a good price, because there's nobody works nowadays without they get a good price by the hour. And he went back to the welfare place and I understand the woman told him, "Oh," she says, "I can give you more than you're gettin' there." Well, that was a poor way for her to talk, instead of encouraging him to work. And if he hadn't been gettin' enough workin' to took care of himself, he would've still been a gettin' some welfare. He wouldn't have been cut off. But that's the way they look at it.

Q Can I ask you about . . . I'm interested also in what it was like in North Dakota. If you wouldn't mind talking about it.

A Well, North Dakota was quite a state. It's awful cold there in the wintertime, it was 40 below and more than that below zero. And we got a snow in the fall that never went off 'til late spring and it blowed so hard when it come on, just this fine snow, that it packed down 'til you could drive a team over it. You could drive a horse and a sleigh right on top of that snow. And they just drove across the prairie, there's no trees there, only just down in what we called the coolies [sp], down in the low places, you know, between two hills. Like there'd be a few little bushes, and that's all the trees there

was, and the wind blowed all the time, summer and winter. I used to think I'd be glad if I ever got to where the wind didn't blow. All the time. You'd have to tie a hat on your head, if you wore a hat in the summertime. It was cold. But we made out.

Q Why did you go out there in the first place?

A Why did we go out there? We went out there to file on these homesteads, 160 acres you got if you lived on it . . . let me see, now, you could live on it so many years, I don't know whether that was three years or two years, you could live on it and then you could pay so much a acre, which was a very small amount, and you could prove up on it, and it would be yours and you could do as you pleased with it or you could live on it . . . I guess it must have been . . . I don't know whether it was just five or six years you had to live on it before it was yours, without payin' anything, but we lived out there a long time after we proved up on ours.

Q What year was this?

A Huh?

Q What years?

A What years?

Q What years did you go out there?

A Oh, my Lord, I'd have to look that up. I went out there before my second daughter was . . . I went out there when my . . .

Q Well, how old . . . about how old were you?

A Hand me that red book on the table there.

Q O.K.

A Well, we must have went out there about 1907.

Q And you were . . . and when did you come back? To Maryland?

A When we left there, all together . . . now, let's see . . . '16, '17, '18, '19 . . . about 1920, I guess.

Q What kind of . . . what did you farm out there? What did you grow?

A Well, we raised flax and wheat and oats . . . you could grow . . . we always had a very good garden, but we planted a little corn that they call squaw corn and it only grew oh, about that high, and you could plant that stuff and in about six weeks you'd have roastin' ears. It come quick because the season was so quick, you know. The season was so short, I mean, that things grew quick . . . we always had a nice garden and chickens and we had cows. We had plenty of milk and butter.

Q Were you glad to come back East?

A Yes. Yes, I was really . . . I didn't mind it out there as . . . if I was somewhere where I knew I was gonna stay, it never worried me, I just took it as it come and that's the way it went. My husband was county commissioner out there for . . . I think he was county commissioner twice for four years each time and then we also . . . we were 18 miles from the post office, which was Holiday, called Holiday Post Office, so we got a fourth-class post office there at the house. And he was postmaster for four years and then he was out so much that I was . . . I took it over, I was assistant at first, and then I took the postmaster business over. We run that post office right in the house just in one little corner in the house. I wrote money orders and all that kind of stuff, just fourth class. The mail come out from Hebron, 40 miles. It come out in a horse and wagon.

Q Did you like living in such an isolated area?

A Well, there was people all around. We had plenty . . . we had neighbors. They wasn't right at the door, of course, but they was a mile and a half or two miles away. And a lot of 'em were German-Russians and some of 'em . . . a lot of 'em were Americans. And I didn't mind. I mean it didn't . . . I was always busy, I had so much to do I didn't have time to worry about . . . we had a little church out there. We had a minister that come and we had church in the schoolhouse. And of course the German-Russians, they had their churches, too.

Q Did the minister travel?

A Well, he didn't live too far from us there. I can't remember now just where he did live, but he didn't live too far. I think that was the only place that . . . I think they had a homestead out there, to tell the truth of the business. I think they'd taken a homestead.

Q Why did you come back? Why did you leave the farm?

A Well, because we were tired of bein' out there. We didn't go out there to live there always. We went there to get the land and we sold that and bought back down in Maryland, down near Princess Anne.

Q I imagine Newark was quite a change from North Dakota.

A Oh, yes. Any of 'em's quite a change from North Dakota.

Q Yeah. Let's see . . . oh, well, I've been asking people if there was any lessons that the Depression taught the country, you know, the hard times taught people about living in the country . . . in the United States. Do you think that . . .

A I didn't get that.

Q Well, do you think that the Depression, the hard times, the troubles we

were in, taught this country a lesson in some way.

A Well, oh, yes, I think that all those kind of things teach people a lesson, but I don't know just exactly what I would say that the lesson it taught 'em. Of course, everybody don't think alike. But I should think it taught 'em that they should be careful about lettin' a thing like that happen again, that's what I would think. But I don't know.

Q Do you think that if there was a depression now, how do you think my generation, or the people today would act in . . .

A I haven't the least idea. I haven't the least idea how anybody would act nowadays. There's so much stuff that is different to my ideas of being what it ought to be that I wouldn't know what to say on that line.

Q Did you ever get to the movies?

A No, not out there, huh uh.

Q No, I mean in Newark.

A Oh, yes, I went to the movies lots of times there.

Q Do you remember any of them?

A No, I don't remember anything about what they were like now, to tell the truth of the business, I just don't remember. I never was a movie fiend, I never went an awful lot, but I did go once in a while. And I don't go now. And I'm not a television fiend now. There's lots of little things I like to look at, and I listen to the news. I like the news and I get so provoked at the advertisements, you can't hear nothin', it's a half a dozen different ones in between anything you try to hear.

Q Well, I think . . .

[END OF INTERVIEW]