

Oral History of Illinois Agriculture



Farming in the Great Depression

Illinois State Museum



[Http://avbarn.museum.state.il.us/](http://avbarn.museum.state.il.us/)

Illinois Farming During the Great Depression: Evidence from Oral Histories

Documentaries, literature, and other media have told us stories about the hardships suffered by farmers during the 1930s Great Depression (e.g., bank failings -- *It's a Wonderful Life*, Dust Bowl -- *Grapes of Wrath*).

How did the Depression actually manifest itself among Illinois farmers? How much did the Illinois farm economy suffer from 1929 to 1940?

Search the AVBarn database for Depression-related topics and listen to the interview

clips. Use other sources to verify or contradict findings, and write a report. Was the experience of Illinois farmers similar to, easier than, or worse than the experience of farmers in other plains states?

Describe the effects of the Great Depression on Illinois farmers as represented in the ISM Oral History of Illinois Agriculture database. Include in your notes any quotes from Illinois farmers about their experience.



The Dead Tree
Raymond Breinin, 1937
Illinois State Museum collection

The WPA program for artists had a theme called *The American Scene*. Artists painted and sculpted subjects that reflected the realities and the imagination of the Depression.

See more WPA scenes at
<http://www.museum.state.il.us/ismdepts/art/WPA/gallery.html> and

http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/de_as.html

The Great Depression—online resources

Special points of interest:

- Introduction
- Great Depression
- Links, Resources
- Teachers and Parents
- Learning Standards

Here are some Websites about the Great Depression, which is in the back of everyone's mind when the economy falters.

<http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/depression.htm> from the

Department of English at the University of Illinois

From the **New Deal Network:**

<http://newdeal.feri.org/> links to images and lessons.

A living history farm

in Nebraska offers information about the Depression there.

http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/life_01.html

Print resources on page 2

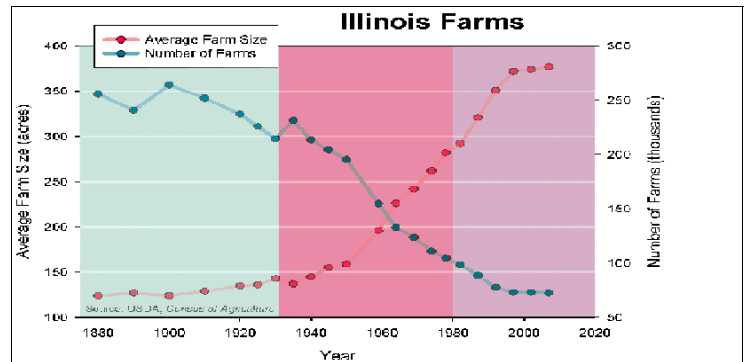
Activity

Search the database of audio and video audio oral histories on the ISM Web site. The search can be made by choosing terms from the list of categories in the **Clip Search**, or by typing in a keyword.

Topics could include bank failures, loss of farms, college attendance during the Depression, lack of cash, credit accounts at shops, crop failures, crop sales.

Listen to the search results on a topic and take notes. **Compare** experiences among different farmers, noting their locations. **Report** your summary findings.

Search elsewhere in print and web resources for statistics and narrative on the topic. Compare to other oral histories online from other states (another option). Keep track of sources and take notes.



Graph of Size and Number of Illinois Farms, 1880 - 2010

Ray Ackerman, 90 in 2007, experienced the Depression on a farm when he was in his teens.



More Resources on the Depression

U.S. National Income and Product Statistics Born of the Great Depression and World War II

www.bea.gov/scb/pdf/2007/02%20february/0207_history_article.pdf

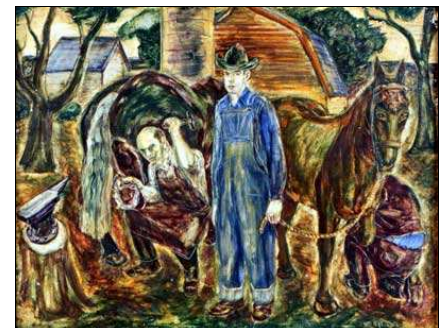
Hard times in Illinois

from the State Archives:
http://www.sos.state.il.us/departments/archives/hard_times/home.html

The Worst Hard Time by Timothy Egan, Mariner Books, 2006.

Dust to Eat: Drought and Depression in the 1930s by Michael L. Cooper, Clarion Books, 2004

Search for books on the Depression in online bookstores.



Walter Paul Robinson (1903-)
 Horseshoeing, 1937
 egg tempera on Masonite, 12 by 23 inches
 Illinois State Museum collection

Teachers and Parents

Assessment: Cite all sources. The summary should include examples from the oral interviews, text, and statistics.

Rubric:
 4 points – used a large number of oral history clips (20+), summarized

them clearly by topic; report to class was accurate, clear and organized.
 3 points – used fewer than 20 sources in oral history, summarized them by fewer topics, report to class was accurate,

attempt at organization made.

2 points – used fewer than 15 sources in oral history, summarized them by fewer topic, report was less clear or less organized.

1 point - used fewer than 10 sources in oral history, attempt at summarization was less than satisfactory; report summary lacks order and cohesiveness.

Learning Standards for Language Arts and History

National Language Standards

#7- research -students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, posing problems – gather, evaluate, synthesize data from various sources and communicate discoveries for purpose and audiences.

#8- technology use – students use various technologies and information sources to gather and synthesize info and create and communicate

knowledge.

National Social Studies Standards for History, Grades 9-12

The Great Depression Era 8:

* Understands the causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American society

* Understands how the New Deal addressed the Great Depression, transformed American federalism, and initiated the welfare state

ISBE Standards and Goals for Social Studies: History: High School: 16.A.5a:

Analyze historical and contemporary developments using methods of historical enquiry (pose questions, collect and analyze data, make and support inferences with evidence, report findings, etc.).