

## TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

JESUS MENDEZ

INTERVIEWER: RAMEDO J. SAUCEDO

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Mr. Jesus Mendez, was born in Zamora, Michoacan, Mexico on August 4, 1910. He arrived in East Grand Forks, Minnesota for the first time in 1927. In 1943 he married Ramona, whose family worked in the fields near East Grand Forks.

Mr. Mendez, gives his family history, talks about his children, which Mexican customs are continued and his participation in organizations.

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview in Spanish translated to English and edited to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. AND MRS. JESSE MENDEZ

July 15, 1976

Saucedo: Today is the fifteenth of July. I am in Crookston, Minnesota. I am interviewing Mrs. Jesse Mendez. This interview is for the Minnesota Historical Society. Also with me, is Mr. Jesse Mendez. I am interviewing them both, at the same time.

Could you tell me what your full name is? Where you were born and how you came to the United States?

Mendez: My name is Jesus Arroyo Mendez. I was born in Zamora, in the state of Michoacan, Mexico, on August 4, 1910. My parents came to the United States in 1927.

Saucedo: Why did you come to the United States?

Mendez: My parents probably came here for a better life. That is why we came here.

Saucedo: What kind of work did your father do in Mexico?

Mendez: My father was a carpenter.

Saucedo: And in Texas?

Mendez: No. We were never in Texas. We crossed over in Laredo, Texas. That is where they contracted us to work in the beet fields in East Grand Forks, Minnesota, in 1927. The factory had set up a sort of colony for the people that wanted to stay for the winters. My father and other families decided to stay, because if you stayed, you would get a better price the next year. In those days, they would bring the people up here in special trains, not in trucks. On the trains, they would give you food and everything.

Saucedo: How many families came with you on the train?

Mendez: That's kind of hard to say, because it was all one train. The train started in Laredo. They started with about a hundred families in two train cars. From there, they would pick up people in San Antonio; Dallas; and Fort Worth. They would add on extra cars as needed. Like I told you, you didn't have to worry about food, or anything else.

Saucedo: Did you decide to stay here that year, in 1927?

Mendez: Yes, we did, because my father thought there weren't any other jobs anywhere else. The only job that my father, brothers, and I did, was cut wood for three years.

Saucedo: So you stayed in East Grand Forks, Minnesota, for three years, and then you returned to where?

Mendez: No where. We stayed here in East Grand Forks.

Saucedo: Until what date?

Mendez: We left in 1943, when I met and married my wife. She got sick and the doctor told us we had to leave the state so she could recover. That's when we went to Fort Worth, Texas. We stayed there from 1951, until 1958. The last job I had was working for the city, in Crookston. I became disabled in 1969. I have been to Rochester, Minnesota (Mayo Clinic). They said that I have a very strange, rare sickness.

Saucedo: You are working for Washington High School as part of the Migrant Educational Program?

Mendez: Just for seven weeks.

Saucedo: Mrs. Mendez, how did you come to Minnesota? Where were you born?

Senora: I was born in Texas, in 1927. We came here in 1942. My husband and I met in Waseca, Minnesota, in 1943.

Saucedo: Did your family come every year?

Senora: No. 1942 was the first year we came to Minnesota. We decided to stay, because my father didn't want to work in the coal mines. The work was very irregular.

Saucedo: Where were the coal mines?

Senora: Melacual, Texas. They weren't working like before, and my father was very tired. We didn't have anywhere to go. We stayed here the first winter, and then we stayed for three more years and returned to Texas. I was already

Senora: married.

Saucedo: How many children do you have?

Senora: Ten children.

Saucedo: How many are married?

Senora: Four of them are married.

Saucedo: Where were your children born?

Senora: The oldest was born in Minnesota. Four of them were born in Texas, and the rest were born here in Minnesota.

Saucedo: Do your children speak Spanish?

Senora: The three older ones speak Spanish, but the rest don't speak it. They understand it, because we always speak Spanish to them.

Saucedo: Do you celebrate the Mexican Independence?

Senora: No, here they don't do anything like that.

Saucedo: Do you celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe?

Senora: Only six weeks in the summer, when the migrants are here, and on December Twelfth, which is the Feast-day of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Saucedo: I notice that you bought your home. When did you buy it?

Mendez: In 1964.

Saucedo: You have worked here all your life. Have you ever felt any discrimination from the banks or stores?

Mendez: Concerning the banks, no we have never felt any discrimination. Before, the people that came from Texas weren't called migrants. In those days, they wouldn't even let them go into restaurants. But to my wife's family and I, they never did that. They knew us, and we knew who we were, Mexicans. That's how it was, until it started changing. Now it's ended, and open to everyone. That is why I won't go into places where they wouldn't let in migrants. I am Mexican too. But for us, there wasn't any discrimination like there was to the Texans. Now that is all changed.

Saucedo: How did you decide to stop working in the fields?

Mendez: I worked for farmers by the month. Then my family was getting big, they needed to go to school.

Senora: Our children never worked in the beet fields. Jesse and I worked in the beet fields, but they never did.

Saucedo: Did they ever miss school?

Senora: No. They never liked the work in the fields.

Saucedo: What desires do you have for your children?

Senora: Good education. The six oldest have finished school. The oldest is a nurse and the other got married. One just finished college. The boys all joined the service after high school. One worked in a store, Gibson Store. He did not make enough money and moved to Thief River Falls. Then the son we have home, who just returned from the service, is going to nursing school. We encourage our children to get ahead and to go to school. There are many opportunities for them.

Saucedo: Do you remember when you were a child in Mexico? And some of the difficulties your father had?

Mendez: I remember a little. My father never worked on any "haciendas". He did carpentry work. He looked for work in Zamora, Michoacan. We were a big family, and it was hard to make a living in Mexico. That is why he decided to come to the United States.

Saucedo: Was it hard in Mexico, during the Revolution?

Mendez: Yes it was. We always had trouble with the soldiers. There was trouble with the Huertistas. I remember in 1924 and 1925 there was a gorilla fighter, named Inez Chavez. I really wouldn't want to see myself in a war like that again.

Saucedo: What kind of Mexican customs do your children have?

Mendez: All of them. I was brought up that way, and they will be too, with Mexican

Mendez: food and everything.

Saucedo: Do you participate in any organizations in Crookston?

Mendez: No. I did belong to the Minnesota Migrant Council, but there are too many conflicts of ideas. Here in Crookston, I have never joined any organization.

Saucedo: In your opinion, is the Minnesota Migrant Council helping the migrants?

Mendez: Yes. I think so. They have improved the housing conditions. The Minnesota Migrant Health Services has helped a lot also. Mr. Jose Valdez, I thank very much, for what he has done for the migrants.

Saucedo: Is this list, in your opinion, very important?

Mendez: Yes. To me it is very important. I wish this list would be presented to the programs this school has.

Saucedo: Is there a program for the children that are older than five years?

Mendez: Yes there is, up to the age of thirteen. At fourteen, they let them work. Under fourteen, they can't work.

Saucedo: Thank you very much for the interview.

Mexican-American Oral History Project  
Minnesota Historical Society