TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

SANTA MIES

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

Santa Mies, arrived illegally in the United States in 1953 and lived in San Antonio, Texas until 1963. At that time, she was contracted to work for a company in Litchfield, Minnesota along with 16 others.

She discusses her loyalty to the company as well as the cooperation received from Immigration officials. She also indicates the help she provides to other Spanish speaking employees who work for the company.

This is an English translation of the original interview tape-recorded in Spanish. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH SANTA MIES

July 2, 1976

INTERVIEWERS: GRANT MOOSBRUGGER & RAMEDO SAUCEDO

MOOSBRUGGER: This is Grant Moosbrugger and Ramedo Saucedo, interviewing Santa Mies, in

Litchfield, Minnesota, on July 2, 1976, for the Minnesota Historical Society's

Mexican American History Project.

Saucedo:

Your name is?

Mies:

Santa Mies.

Saucedo:

Where were you born?

Mies:

In Chihuahua, Chihuahua.

Saucedo:

Your parents, what were their names and where were they born?

Mies:

My father's name was Santos Ponce. My mother's name was Santa Gonzalez.

They were both born in Chihuahua.

Saucedo:

Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Mies:

No.

Saucedo:

What year were you born?

Mies:

1945.

Saucedo:

When did you come to the United States?

Mies:

1953.

Saucedo:

How did you come to the United States?

Mies:

I was a wet back.

Saucedo:

Where did you cross to?

Mies:

San Antonio, Texas.

Saucedo:

Did you start to work right away?

Mies:

No. I came with an aunt of mine.

Saucedo:

Does your aunt still live there?

Mies:

No. She died three years ago.

Saucedo: Did you work there, in San Antonio?

I stayed with her until I could work. I started working when I was fourteen Mies:

years old. I worked in a factory that packed nuts, then in a meat packing

plant, until I was eighteen years old. Then I came over here. I heard on

the radio that they were contracting workers, so I went and signed up. I

came with a lady and her son. The first night that we got here we couldn't

ds a ro find a place to stay, they didn't want to rent us a room, we slept by a lake.

Saucedo: What town did you arrive at?

Mies: Here in Litchfield.

Saucedo: What year was that?

Mies: In 1953.

Who did you come with? Saucedo:

With a lady and her son. Mies:

What problems did you have when you came to Litchfield? Saucedo:

A lot of problems, because the only hotel in Litchfield was the Litchfield Mies:

House. We went there and they didn't want to rent to us. We had to go sleep

by the lake. It was in September, and it was getting cold.

Saucedo: Why didn't they want to rent to you? Didn't you have enough money to pay

the bill?

We had money. They didn't want any Mexicans in their hotel. Mies:

So you were the first Mexicans in Litchfield? Saucedo:

Mies: There were sixteen of us all together.

Saucedo: You were all contracted for a job?

Mies: We came to work for the Farmers Produce.

Saucedo: Did you get in contact with the Farmers Produce the next day?

Mr. Nelson came to get us. He asked us to forgive him and that he would fix Mies:

Mies:

everything. He took us to live in the Litchfield House. The company treated us very nice. But when they brought the trailer for the other workers, they didn't want to sell the land to put the trailers on. We had cleaned the land. They cut off our lights and water and told us to move out of town.

Saucedo:

What type of work did Mr. Nelson give you?

Mies:

Work in the turkey factory.

Saucedo:

How long did you work there?

Mies:

I am going on twelve years.

Saucedo:

That's a long time to work at the same company. Congratulations!

Mies:

I have worked at other places, when they were closed, but I always return there. They treat me very well. The Immigration Department caught me here. I was young and the company spoke up for me. They said that they would be responsible for me. They would get me permission to finish off my work. They took me to St. Paul to talk to the Immigration Department. They gave me every-

thing I needed. That is why I am very grateful to them. That's why I always

return to work for them.

Saucedo:

Did you have to return to Mexico?

Mies:

No. I went to Winnepeg, Canada.

Saucedo:

What year did you get you get your visa?

Mies:

In 1969.

Saucedo:

Did you ever become an American citizen?

Mies:

I put in an application, but everytime they call me, I am working. I do want

to become a citizen.

Saucedo:

What is the name of the company?

Mies:

Jenny-0.

Saucedo:

How many Mexicans work there?

Mies: About sixty workers.

Mies:

Saucedo: Are they all permanent workers?

Mies: No. They come and go. They come in June or July and stay until November.

Saucedo: Could you tell us the dates that you work and your vacations?

Mies: The Jenny-O Company, most of the time, is open from June until December. They close for two weeks in December and reopen in January. In April the company closes for one or two months to make repairs. They really don't have a certain date that they open or close.

Saucedo: Could you tell me what guarantees you have with the company?

Mies: We get our vacation, hospital and medical insurance, life insurance. If the workers want, they can buy bonds.

Saucedo: What kind of help do you give the new Mexican workers that arrive here?

Mies: If they don't know English, they call me into the office to help them fill out the application or to interpret for them. Or if they don't have money and they want to return to Mexico, I go and speak for them.

Saucedo: So you teach them how to do their jobs, too?

Mies: If the person doesn't understand how to do the job and the foreman can't explain it to them, they call me so that I can help them to learn the job faster.

Saucedo: Could you give us some information about the churches and the church you belong to?

Well, I am Catholic and I used to go to church every Sunday. Then I became friends with people that belong to the Jehova Witness and I like the way they are. They read the Bible a lot. I used to go on Monday until 12:00 a.m., and on Tuesdays until nine p.m.. We wouldn't go on Friday, but on Saturday and Sunday we'd go to people's homes to talk about the Bible. Then I became ill and stopped going. They still send me papers. When I am working, I can't go

Mies: to church a lot.

Saucedo: Were the books in Spanish?

Mies: I have sixteen books that are about the Bible.

Saucedo: What makes the people come to work at the Jenny-O Company? And what is their

impression of the company?

Mies: They really don't like the jobs. The work is very boring, because if they

work for ten hours, they have to stay in the same place. They don't last

long. There are people who come for a half hour, then they leave.

Saucedo: What opportunities have you had, working for the company?

Mies: They offered me a job as an inspector. I took and passed the test in Willmar,

at the post office. But I couldn't have the job, because I wasn't an American

citizen.

Saucedo: What do you need to become an American citizen?

Mies: It isn't hard if you know it. They asked me three questions, and I couldn't

answer them. Now I know the answers, but I haven't had the time to go to

St. Paul for the interview.

Saucedo: Could you tell us about the problems that you had with getting books from the

library to study for your citizenship?

Mies: Yes, I had a lot of problems. I went to the library to get a book I needed

and they told me "No". So I went to one of the inspectors and she had to go

to the library and talk to the lady and tell her that she would be responsible

for the book.

Saucedo: Why wouldn't they lend you the book?

Mies: Because, she said they had lend records and books to other Mexicans and they

never returned them. I told her that I had found a lot of books and I had

taken them to her, that it wasn't my fault if some books weren't returned.

Saucedo: Thank you very much for the interview.