

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY
The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin ValleyOral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Elbert Mendenhall

PLACE OF BIRTH: Ponca, Dixon County, Nebraska

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: April 17 and 24, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Kern City, Kern County

NUMBER OF TAPES: 4

TRANSCRIBER: Barbara Mitchell

Preface

Mr. Mendenhall is a tall, slender man who reminded me of the farmer in Grant Wood's famous painting. He is very hard of hearing and we stopped often to repeat or clarify a question. He has an engaging smile and a taciturn manner. Mrs. Mendenhall was careful to let us work without interruption but she sat in the kitchen and listened to us. She is a very pleasant person. Mr. Mendenhall had experiences somewhat different from most of the other subjects I interviewed; specifically, being from Nebraska and his work experience in the 1930s and 1940s in Los Angeles. His memory was good and he was able to provide many details concerning day to day farm activities.

Michael Neely
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Elbert Mendenhall (Age: 79)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: April 17, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Elbert Mendenhall for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 905 Hogan Way, Kern City, California on April 17, 1981 at 9:00 a.m.

M.N.: What year were you born?

Mendenhall: March 10, 1902.

M.N.: Where was that?

Mendenhall: Ponca, Nebraska with no doctor.

M.N.: What's the first thing you remember in your childhood?

Mendenhall: The most impressing thing was a flood we had when I was just a little shaver. I don't think I was school age yet--a rain, a big cloud burst and the creek rose and you could just see it rising up like this say a foot a minute and rolled out across the prairie. My dad sent us up the hill to my uncle's and he waded around in waist deep water trying to save his machinery and stuff. He had some sows. I don't know how I remember this so well but he had some sows in the hog shed and they had new born pigs and the pigs all drowned but the old sow sat up with her nose out in the air and it wasn't deep enough so they kept alive by keeping their nose out of the water. It went down pretty quick and of course [there was] quite a bit of damage around the place. It didn't quite get the house which was on a little higher bank. It came up just to the door sill but didn't get in the house. It got up that high but the porch was pretty high. That was the main thing. Then of course I started to school there. The teacher boarded with us and she was a pretty rough teacher and I remember that and other school kids and things

like that.

M.N.: What was the teacher like?

Mendenhall: She was strict and she tried to whip some of the older boys and they wouldn't go for it. They'd break up the stick for her. I remember that. I was kind of mischievous and once and a while --I didn't think much of school and I never did make much of a student--anyway, I'd crawl down between the desk just for mischief. Of course, I got balled out for that.

M.N.: Did you get paddled for it?

Mendenhall: Yes, I got spanked a little but not too much. I never got whipped too much. I wasn't enough aggravating to the teacher only just mischievous. I was born that way I guess.

M.N.: How many were in your class?

Mendenhall: I can't recall just how many was in where we went to school in first grade. There wasn't any such thing as kindergarten. I had some cousins there who seemed like they were grown men to me but they were probably only sixteen and going to school in the eighth grade and of course that finished our school there.

M.N.: Was that unusual for someone to finish the eighth grade?

Mendenhall: Well, if you were in the district and weren't needed too bad on the farm why they would probably finish the eighth grade.

M.N.: Was that considered a high amount of education?

Mendenhall: To my knowledge I thought that was all the schooling you were suppose to have until we got older. Of course, these boys were older and they just went back on the farm and went to work with their dad. They had a family of ten children. When the boys became twenty they went out and started working on the farm themselves so that kind of helped the family out. There were six children in our family--four of us were born in five years. My older sister was born in March and the following February my brother was born.

M.N.: What year?

Mendenhall: That would be 1900, 1901 and 1902 I was born. We were just a year apart or less. In other words my older brother and my older sister were the same age from February 14 until March 3. Then a year and some odd later--about a year and ten months--my younger brother was born. Then the four children started growing and nine years later Mother had another girl and then five more years another girl.

M.N.: Was she happy about that?

Mendenhall: As far as I could see she wasn't too unhappy. That was the end of the family.

M.N.: How old was your mother when the first child was born?

Mendenhall: I would say she was married at nineteen--probably married in 1898. It wasn't too soon. Dad appreciated kids very much but like my sister once said, "He loved us more when we were babies than when we got older" because Dad got a little bitter about things and he wasn't pleasant. Mother was always very good. Dad just wasn't a 100% good father.

M.N.: What was your father like?

Mendenhall: Well, he was a hard working man who wouldn't let up.

M.N.: Was he tall?

Mendenhall: No, he was shorter than I was.

M.N.: What would he look like?

Mendenhall: I could probably find a picture of him but he wasn't a bad looking man and my younger brother more or less looked like Dad of anybody. I looked more like mother's side of the house and my older brother looked like mother's side of the house and my older sister--which is pitiful now, she's senile and in a rest home and she doesn't even know me. My second sister looked more like mother's side of the house and the younger girl I don't know who she looks like but seems like she's a mixture of both--awful nice girl, poor girl. She had a tumor of the brain about three years ago and she came out of it fine. They operated on her and she's very fine now although she don't think quite as good as she did--she says--although we don't notice any difference.

M.N.: How did your father dress on the farm?

Mendenhall: Just overalls and in later years he would go to church sometimes not necessarily on Sunday but go to church sometimes and wear overalls. He wasn't real proud although he had suits. I could go a little farther about what my father tried to do when we moved from Ponca, Nebraska to Litchfield, Nebraska in 1910. It was north of Kearney, Nebraska about 40 miles and was just a little town of about 500 people--nice little town, friendly town. He bought 440 acres out there and in the corner of this place of ours he donated two acres for church and hitching rail. Before cars came in he donated that and helped build the church and was very active and he tried to be a good Christian but somehow or other it kind of worked on him in later years. He didn't follow it very good but he was superintendent and head of the church [and went] to fire

up on cold mornings and evenings when they'd have a gathering up there. He'd get the lights going and the fire up and warm. Of course eventually cars came in and from then on people could drive on by to the town church.

M.N.: When did cars come in?

Mendenhall: Dad bought his first EMF Studebaker [Electromotive Force] at farm sale. He paid a little less than \$600--he wouldn't go over \$600 and he got the car. Well he got it home I don't know how--EMF Studebaker. It wasn't a very good car, it broke the rear end out of it.

M.N.: What year was that?

Mendenhall: The car must have been the early 1913 or 1914. People bought Model T's too. He finally got rid of that and got a Pullman and that was a better running car but it was kind of weak structured. He got us six kids and Mother and Dad in there on rough roads in them times and our doors would fly open. It wasn't too bad. It ran nice.

M.N.: What was your mother like?

Mendenhall: She was a fine woman.

M.N.: What did she look like?

Mendenhall: Not a bad looking woman--a little on the dark complected side. Her parents came across from Germany during the Kaiser administration. They didn't want to serve three years in the Kaiser's army and somehow they got out and came to Nebraska and did well. Mother was born here and three of her brothers were born in Germany and she was married at nineteen. She wasn't a beautiful woman. She was pretty heavy woman and in later years she got a little thinner of course. She was a strong woman.

M.N.: What was her personality like?

Mendenhall: She was strict with us kids and she was a fine Christian woman in later years more than earlier years. Before she went to bed she'd kneel and pray.

M.N.: What was your home like?

Mendenhall: We weren't too unhappy at home. We moved to Litchfield, Nebraska and made all my friends there in growing up years--eight to eighteen. That's ten years and when I moved to Ponca--the next town--within a mile of town on a farm I was very unhappy so I moved back. When I became 21 I went back out to Litchfield and worked out on a farm and I was much happier out there. The fact

of the matter, I was so unhappy I was in a rut so I decided to go back out there and get hold of myself and that's where I met my wife. Then when we got married we went back to northeast Nebraska because central and southern Nebraska was more subject to drought and Dad said he'd give me a wagon team and a harness so I went up there and rented a little place sharecropping. We farmed ten years there.

M.N.: What did the house look like when you were a child?

Mendenhall: It was pretty plain. We had no running water in any of the houses. When I was a kid we'd go out and pump water and carry it in.

M.N.: What kind of pump was it?

Mendenhall: Just a well--maybe we'd have two wells on the place--one close to the house dug well perhaps.

M.N.: Who dug it?

Mendenhall: Generally well diggers in those days. I never saw a well dug. The place in Litchfield they claim there was a 100 foot dug well out in the prairie land there in a big pasture. We had 240 acres. It says 100 feet deep and it was just fence around it and all we did was throw dead animals in there to get rid of them. I never knew who dug it or anything about it but then they dug what they called hydrolic wells and they'd dig down 240 feet and put a four inch casing I guess and that would supply the stock and everything. Finally at Litchfield, Nebraska, we piped water to the house. It was a little upgrade and didn't have too much pressure but we did pipe it up there. We had a well right by the house with a windmill on it. We sold the structure and made a cess pool out of it. We put the pipe in--this well was a wonderful well--we had a 300 barrel cistern that would pump it full in one eight to ten hour day if you got a strong wind.

M.N.: A cistern? What was that?

Mendenhall: Just dug in there and plastered up like they have a neck about three feet wide and it went underneath the soil and made a big basin down in there and then they'd plaster that up and use that for the cistern.

M.N.: Was it under the house?

Mendenhall: No, up by the well--maybe a block from the house--a good big block up on a hill. When we tried to get pressure we'd put it up on the hill--if you get on the bottom land then there's pretty much of a problem getting any pressure so you just have to stay with the well and carry it in.

M.N.: Was the water good?

Mendenhall: Oh yes, wonderful water--Nebraska had good water. A lot better than the Dakotas up there. It was salty and alkali, but Nebraska had good drinking water.

M.N.: Can you describe the rooms in the house. How many rooms were there?

Mendenhall: I didn't pay too much attention to rooms--us boys just piled into one bedroom and that was it. The girls were in another room but when we went to Litchfield we had three bedrooms. Mother and Dad had one and my sister had one before the last girls were born--us three boys piled into one bed.

M.N.: What kind of bed was it?

Mendenhall: A big straw mattress--go out there and pile that straw maybe three feet deep or better and of course we'd nest into it and it will settle down and that was a straw mattress. That was our mattress in those days.

M.N.: Was it on the floor?

Mendenhall: No, we had a bed with old wooden slats in it and once and a while they'd break and we'd fix them up.

M.N.: Where did you keep your clothes?

Mendenhall: Well, we had closets. Dad's and my sister's bedroom there was a closet in the wall. You'd go from either bedroom into this closet and both took care of the same outfit and I don't remember that there was a closet in our room at Litchfield. We slept in there when it was cold and get up in the morning and the windows would be shut and the walls would be all frosty and the covers would be frosty from us three boys sleeping in that cold room.

M.N.: Did you have a favorite part of the house?

Mendenhall: Well, we lived in the kitchen and the dining room. We never lived in the living room. We always closed it off in the wintertime especially. Maybe we'd open the door but that was just for company. We never lived in it like they do now.

M.N.: What did you have in the living room?

Mendenhall: Just a dining room table and in the wintertime of course we'd put up the stove. In the kitchen the cook stove kept the kitchen warm. We'd always let it go out at night and sleep in a cold house. I'd get up in the morning and the thermometer hanging on the wall was 0°. That was cold--not always but that was the coldest weather. You'd get them storms and it would quiet down at night then drop down to -25° or -30° at the most. Another

storm when we were living at Ponca, Nebraska after we were married and that was the winter of 1935 and 1936--we had a chilly zero weather the day before and damp. But, the coldest I ever saw in Nebraska was the next morning the official temperature in Sioux City was -38° with a blizzard raging. You couldn't see out. The snow was so cold it was just dry. It blew in a little crack in the bottom of the double windows there. It was a regular hurricane wind sort of made a little drift up in there and went up to the upper window--just as dry--it just come in anywhere. It was just dry cold--just creep in anywhere and the wind was blowing 60 miles an hour between my house and the barn there was a 30 foot drift I got tired of shovelling through it so we just made steps over it. After I was farming in the spring when there wasn't so much drift I was plowing for corn and this drift was still there making a mud puddle and I finally got the ax and chopped it up and made ice out of it. It was making a mud hole between there and the barn.

M.N.: Let's go back and finish the house. What did the kitchen have in it?

Mendenhall: Well, we'd have a cook stove--six hole top cook stove with an oven in it.

M.N.: Was it cast iron?

Mendenhall: Yes, cast iron, yes--they carried on for years with them. Had a pantry there off the kitchen--a lot of stuff stored in there. Then we sort of had a little back porch there and we had a cellar under the house with a little door there on the back porch. We used it for a floor but when we'd go down to the cellar we'd lift the floor and go down there and that was quite nice--nice cool cellar and it was in the center of the house where it wouldn't get as cold as it would if it was out by itself. We had another cellar out a ways. A little incident I might bring up now--my mother after the second sister was born and before the last one was born she went out and wanted to go to the hen house. I don't know why they made a little trail up over this old dug cellar or cave. We just had a path up over there--I guess the weeds weren't so high. So she was carrying my sister and I suppose she wasn't over a year old and walked over and the shoring down underneath, just wood, caved in and down in the cellar she went. Of course, my sister was bawling away and mother walked out without a scratch or anything. I guess the loose dirt kind of cushioned her. She was a pretty heavy woman then but then we had to abandon that cellar. We used to call them tornado caves. That's what they were put up as. Even some schools [had them]. At our school we didn't have a cave but when we moved back to Ponca they had a cave up there in case of a tornado.

M.N.: You described the living room, bedroom and the kitchen--was there another room? There was your parent's bedroom.

Mendenhall: Well, yes, [it was] behind the kitchen on the south end and the middle room was the dining room we called it--that's the way they build them in those days. All separate doors--shut it all off if you wanted to. Then the living room was another door and then an outside door off the living room to go out on the porch, in the back of the living room was our bedroom.

M.N.: What color were the walls?

Mendenhall: Mostly paper--any color you wanted--mostly just paper walls.

M.N.: What kind of plates did you eat off of? Were they like now?

Mendenhall: Yes, we'd just set the table--knife and fork and generally we'd have our sugar, salt and pepper and maybe a little vinegar sitting in the middle of the table. We'd never take it off. We'd just have a little dish cloth and throw that over that till the next meal and jerk it off and save tracking back and forth--then set the table.

M.N.: What kind of food did you eat?

Mendenhall: Pretty plain food. Meat, bread and potatoes.

M.N.: What kind of meat?

Mendenhall: We'd butcher our own beef and our own hogs in later years. We didn't do it so much then. We'd take bacon and put it in a jar and cover it with stock salt and salt that meat and throw it in there. Then when we want to eat that in the summertime we'd have to get it out and par-boil it to get the salt out of it.

M.N.: You'd put it down in the cellar?

Mendenhall: No, just anywhere in the house--could go in the cellar, yes, but that salt would cure the meat and that's the way we'd eat it. Then we'd make sausage and make rolls out of it and throw that down in a big jar and cover that with lard--just hog lard. If you take a hog you'd get seven or eight gallons of lard out of it. That was quite a chore when we'd butcher a hog. We'd get in there and we'd always cut up the fat in little squares about an inch square and put it on the stove and cook it until we got all the water out of it and then it was pure lard.

M.N.: How did he butcher the hog?

Mendenhall: Different ways.

M.N.: Can you describe the process?

Mendenhall: Dad didn't have the system I did after I started butchering hogs on my own. We just go out on the lot and pick out a hog and

maybe shoot them, stun them and then drag them out.

M.N.: How would you shoot them?

Mendenhall: With a .22 rifle in the head--to save the struggle. In later years I've help butcher hogs and had to run them down and that isn't good for meat to get it warmed up.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

M.N.: Why didn't you want him to run?

Mendenhall: It takes the flavor out of the meat. That's one thing about butchering on a farm. The meat's much tastier if you have your stock right. I always did after I started for myself because I was quite a perfectionist so we'd get fine meat. I had a close friend down in Sioux City--I'd take him down a bite of meat when I'd go down there. He was manager of the Blue Valley Creamery Company and used to be my neighbor at Litchfield, Nebraska. He says, "How come that meat is far superior in taste to what we buy here in Sioux City?" I said, "Probably it's the way it's handled. You take stock put into the Sioux City stockyards, why, it's warmed up in shipping, excitement and it takes some of the flavor out of the meat and then the next day they probably gant them up. They don't like to have them full when they butcher them."

M.N.: What do you mean gant them up?

Mendenhall: Well, just take them off of feed. I did too when I butchered my own. I'd gently put them in a place where they couldn't do anything but that takes the flavor out of the meat then--a certain amount there when you eat it fresh. I had some of the finest beef you ever tasted. One year I butchered an 800 pound yearling--just melt in your mouth beef steak and it was good.

M.N.: When you went down to butcher how did you do it so the animal didn't get excited?

Mendenhall: Well, I'd coax them. I had a little alley way for the hogs. I'd just put them in there where they couldn't turn around and then when it came time to butcher them why I'd gant them up--give them water and that's all for about 24 hours.

M.N.: Why did you do that?

Mendenhall: If their intestines are too full they're hard to handle and it's just what we call ganting them up.

M.N.: Did they have a chance to empty out so they'd be clean?

Mendenhall: Not necessarily, when you go to handle a hog that's full of stuff and you go to open it up why it crowds you to open it up

to get at the entrails so you can take the entrails out.

M.N.: So you'd get it into this narrow place?

Mendenhall: Yes, and they couldn't turn around. Then when I butchered for myself I had a system that I'd just take a loop of chain around one of those back legs and the wife go around and had a hay mow. That's a hay lift up and then put it in the hay mow or loft in the track. So you'd go up and hit the track and go on in. One horse out there and about 225 pound pig--it wasn't too much. The horse would pull it up and as it pulled up we'd-- never stun a hog, don't shoot them. That isn't the thing to do with a hog but that's the way they do in the packing houses. Never stun them, just loop them around the leg and throw a knife in their throat and bleed them to death--I did that--I got so I was the butcher of the neighborhood.

M.N.: So you wouldn't actually kill it. You'd raise it up first and then just cut its throat.

Mendenhall: Yes, you don't exactly cut it. If you know how to do it you just go in there and hit that brisket and go down and then do this way inside then cut the veins that lead from the heart to the body.

M.N.: They didn't fight?

Mendenhall: They didn't like it but it was quick. It was just a minute and they were dead. The horse would hold it up there. My wife and I would always butcher but when anybody else wanted to butcher why they'd always call on me. "Why didn't you call me?" I'd say, "Because I didn't need you."

M.N.: Did you save the blood?

Mendenhall: No, some people did and made blood wurst out of it--the Germans did anyhow. They saved the blood and said that's the best part of it. We didn't like it. They gave us some but we didn't like it too well.

M.N.: What was it like?

Mendenhall: Pretty rich tasting and kind of mellow. We had a lot of meat we liked better so we just never saved the blood but just let it run out.

M.N.: How would you go about butchering?

Mendenhall: We had a little platform built out of anything we could find on the farm--nothing special, just set up there. Then we'd have boiling water on an old cook stove. A big old boiler about two feet or maybe thirty inches long and we'd fill that with several

pails of water and boil that and maybe throw a little bit of lye in it.

M.N.: How much lye would you put in it?

Mendenhall: Just enough to cut the dirt on the hog a little bit--not too much.

M.N.: What would be the first thing to do after you cut the veins?

Mendenhall: We'd go to the house and tie the horse up or tie it so we wouldn't have to hold it and raise it up a little bit and had this barrel kind of on a slope off our little platform we built about so high and the wife and I would go there and I'd handle it. She'd go out and handle the horse and pull the hog up and then let it down in this hot water in this barrel and I'd turn it around a little bit then pull it up.

M.N.: Before you even cut it?

Mendenhall: Yes, I'd scald the hog and take the hair off and then scrape him. Cattle, why, you'd skin them but not the hog. If you do it right, you've probably seen where they scald a chicken and pick the feathers off? Well, that's the same thing as scalding the hog.

M.N.: Did you pull them off or scrape them off?

Mendenhall: We had scrapers but the hair would loosen if you got it too hot then it would tighten so we'd do that and then I'd pull it over on the platform and she'd let the hog down and I'd turn it around and put a hook in the jaw--couldn't get both ends at the same time. Then we'd lay it down on this platform and scrape the hair off and clean it up and get the horse around again. Well, we'd spread the legs and put an evener in between the legs so it would open up the legs in the back so we'd take the entrails out and start right at the rear and come right down and take the entrails out.

M.N.: Was there any special way that you cut?

Mendenhall: Right straight down the center in order the keep from cutting into an intestine. I got a book on butchering. I push my fist in the inside with a knife on a sort of a 75° angle up and push my fist ahead and go right down and cut it. I've seen fellows happen to cut an entrail and that wasn't good so that's the reason for ganting them up. You wouldn't be crowded either. An hour or an hour and a half time in order to cool the hog and I'd open it up, cut the head off generally and put that in the house or on the porch where it wasn't too cold.

M.N.: How did you cut the head off?

Mendenhall: Just circle it until you got to the back bone and maybe you'd have to saw a little--just take ears, and jowls and everything--just one hog's head is what it would be. Then I'd take the saw and split it down the middle and maybe leave a little right at the ends so this evener in the back that's holding the legs apart wouldn't slip off one end and be unbalanced.

M.N.: When you cut him down the front how did you take the intestines out? Did they just fall out?

Mendenhall: Well yes, they were pretty loose in there. You'd just take them out and take the liver out and the heart. We'd eat the liver and the heart and just throw the entrails away--generally freeze them and then put them in the hog pen. The rest of the hogs like to chew on them for protein but sometimes the wife puts them in there without being frozen but they're liable to choke a hog and it might kill him.

M.N.: Would you save the stomach?

Mendenhall: No, we throw all the entrails away. Sometimes people would clean the entrails as a lining in there and then we'd put our sausage in sometimes and smoke it.

M.N.: You got the front emptied out and you would just take saw and cut down the back bone.

Mendenhall: Yes, cut right down the back bone--maybe cut a little in the back first but the saw would generally do it. It had a little tendency to open up on account of those legs spread apart with an evener back there but I'd usually use a single tree out of a wagon or something like that. You'd just spread them apart and hook it and right in the middle of it you'd have your way of cutting and when you cut it, of course it kept opening up. We continued to do that after we got the head cut off, we'd put it up in the hay mow or loft if it was pretty cold. If it stayed out in the open all night it would freeze if it was too cold so I put it up there to chill it overnight. Then the next morning we cut up our meat. I had Morton Salt--it was a salt that you could just knead into your pork. We put it on a porcelain table in a chilled room. In the wintertime we had a cool room and would season and keep our meat. We'd drip all the juice and blood out of it with the drain on one end. We'd do that for about thirty days then we'd take it out and wash off the surplus salt.

M.N.: It wouldn't spoil?

Mendenhall: No. Then we'd try it and put a little sage or pepper maybe just to season it a little bit and wrap a little cheese cloth around it then maybe a little clear paper then newspaper and bind it up. You know where I kept that? It was up in the attic

in the house all summer and we'd dig it out in the fall when we were short of meat. When we went to picking corn and we wanted more meat we'd use that up.

M.N.: And it stayed?

Mendenhall: Never spoiled or tainted or nothing--Morton seasoned it and it had the smoke in it already. In the older days we used to have a smokehouse on the farm and it would have a little trench and a little house probably ten by ten. You'd hang up the meat and smoke it in there--let that hang in there all summer after you put salt on it first. They seasoned with salt then after that. They just let it hang there and I've seen Dad go in and take his knife and cut off some meat without being cooked. You know trichina in a hog might accidentally get in your system but he never paid no attention to it. He'd go out with his jack knife and cut off a slice of that smoked meat and chew on it. We never made jerky--dried beef and salt it. Of course, boys on the farm used to carry some around in their pockets. We never did but they'd tell about it.

M.N.: Was there any difference in butchering beef?

Mendenhall: You stun the beef before you cut its throat and you cut their throat.

M.N.: How did you stun them?

Mendenhall: With a rifle or I could take a hammer and you'd just draw a line from the outside if they have horns to the eyes and center right there and I could knock a critter down with just an ordinary hammer. One time down here in Malibu boys didn't know much about butchering and this guy shot it two or three times shooting it too high and the poor thing was suffering death and I said, "Give me a hammer. I'll drop that thing" one blow, down it went. Then we cut the throat. Another fellow cut the throat and I said, "You didn't get them jugular veins so I went in there and found the jugular veins and cut it.

M.N.: Was there a different way of cutting up beef?

Mendenhall: Yes, you quarter it. You've heard about front quarter and hind quarter beef. You cut about half way up. You left a rib or two on the back I believe and that would be the hind quarter. I can't remember just exactly what but you just cut it in quarters. Our refrigeration upstairs where we lived wasn't finished. We had all the partitions up and the man never finished that upstairs and I never did know why. We had four bedrooms up there and he only had two children--I don't know why--probably had no time and didn't need it. Anyhow, we'd go up there and hang it out on a nail out of the window on the north side of the house which is cold--I've seen a time where it would stay cold indefinitely. It dried

a little bit but when we wanted some beef we take it out on the clean snow. I'd throw it down on the snow bank and get a nice sharp ax and carve a big chunk of beef for eating then hang it back up --carry it upstairs.

M.N.: Did you put salt into it?

Mendenhall: No, when it got so it began to thaw out we'd cold pack it.

M.N.: What's that?

Mendenhall: We'd put it in two quart fruit jars and put it on the stove in large containers of water and put the lids on it without being tight and I think three hours we'd boil it on the stove without being set right on the bottom. We'd have to have a rack up there and we'd boil it for three hours and that meat would boil in those jars too--cook it for three hours and take it out when it's hot and turn the lid tight and put it down in the cellar and next summer why you'd go out and get your meat. You could do that with pork too.

M.N.: It would stay fresh that way?

Mendenhall: Yes, just like canning peas or beans or cherries or apples or anything--same thing.

M.N.: Was the meat good?

Mendenhall: Oh yes, it was good but see like pork where there was quite a bit of fat it seemed like it would penetrate that meat. It was so rich. There wasn't fat on it but just some fat in it and it was just too rich for me. I couldn't go it too well.

M.N.: But the beef was good?

Mendenhall: It was better. It wasn't too bad because beef didn't have quite the fat. The hog has got so much oil on it and beef fat is different fat than hog fat. It's just not as rich. In other words, I used to like a little piece of meat with a little fat on it. In the cold weather you could down it good and I still like it but of course in this day and age we don't eat too much fat.

M.N.: What other animals did you raise anything but chickens, hogs and cattle?

Mendenhall: Chickens mostly--we didn't raise anything but chickens, hogs and cattle.

M.N.: What kind of chickens?

Mendenhall: We liked the White Rock pretty well. Mother would give me a

dozen hens when I started farming. I batched for three months before we were married and did my own chores and field work. I was pretty busy--mostly my batching menu was eggs and beans and bread. I always used to say, "Well, I've changed the menu everyday. Next day it's bread, beans and eggs"--just for a joke.

M.N.: Why did you like those particular chickens?

Mendenhall: Well, they're a little more rangy and they're better rustlers--not like a Leghorn--they're still good chickens to fry. Well, a Leghorn is pretty light and never get too many Leghorns you're going to eat for fryers. They'd grow quick and they were little better rustlers. Some of those chickens get a little lazy but these would roam more because a Leghorn would go half a mile from the house but we never raised any. We got White Rock. They were a nice chicken and we got in with a fellow who was buying our eggs for a hatchery. He had a hatchery on his farm. We'd raise quite a few ourselves and maybe we'd buy 100 from him of chicks hatched in the hatchery. We didn't have a brooder house. We weren't financially able to make our own and the landlord wouldn't furnish us any. Some people did and did all right that way.

M.N.: What kind of crops did you grow?

Mendenhall: Well, mostly corn and small grain and hay but I did sharecrop. I stayed on the same place for ten years and farmed myself. Just corn and small grain and a few hogs. I didn't have facilities for many hogs and only a few cattle. I started with one and when I had my sale in 1936 I had about ten head I think.

M.N.: When you started on a farm what were the first things you would do?

Mendenhall: Well, you'd rent this piece of land and of course you'd have to buy your equipment. I had no horses, no cattle, no machinery or nothing. When I rented this 80 acres I tried to farm more land than that. Outside my granddad had land and he wasn't farming too much of it. I got some from him and then I got some from a neighbor there and another from an uncle in town. For just a couple of years I just farmed the 80 and put it all to corn because corn would make a little money where oats wouldn't.

M.N.: How would you start with the corn? How would you get the land ready?

Mendenhall: When I was farming of course in the early days, they did a lot of differently in central-southern Nebraska. This was different up there, I plowed and harrowed. A lot of people just plowed. I was a perfectionist. I would harrow my ground. I'd plow until five o'clock then put the team on the harrow and harrow

it down till I knocked the clods down and make it more mellow and hold the moisture. We had some awful dry years. I'd get a real dry year and sometimes I didn't see how the corn would ever come up the ground was so dry but this would maintain a little moisture in the spring and it would get a better stand.

M.N.: So by harrowing it after you plowed it, it would keep the soil a little lower?

Mendenhall: Yes, it would knock the clods down and close the air pockets. You plow rough ground you know it lays up pretty rough so just knock it down so it would mellow nice. Talk about drought--at Litchfield, Nebraska where they didn't get nothing but a little fodder. That's part of it. It wasn't the dust bowl but it was just about as bad. Of course, we got a crop up there at northeast Nebraska the first year we farmed we got a good crop--that was in 1927. Then the rest were a little shorter until 1933 when we got a good bumper crop. Of course, it wouldn't be today because we figure 45 bushels up in the hills or 35 bushels up in the hills you've got a good crop.

M.N.: Per acre?

Mendenhall: Yes, of corn. Now, my cousin right there where I farmed for ten years he had corn there about four or five years ago he got a little hail and he was a little worried about it. His boy was farming it and was unmarried yet so when he married he moves from town. Anyhow, he said it looked kind of bad and he didn't know how it was going to come out. I asked my sister to check on him and I wrote to him at Christmas time. They had always sent their Christmas card out and we didn't get the answer so I had my sisters check. There was 100 bushel corn on hill land--on his poorest land.

M.N.: That was quite an improvement.

Mendenhall: Well, yes, hybrid corn--fertilizer and whatnot.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

M.N.: When you decided to move out on your own how did you make that decision?

Mendenhall: Well, I was just born and raised a farmer--you mean when I started farming for myself?

M.N.: Yes, why did you leave?

Mendenhall: You mean when I was home? Well, I wasn't happy there and I wanted to go out where my friends were so I went out to Litchfield and worked four years out there and met my wife out there.

M.N.: How did you meet your wife?

Mendenhall: It was up at a party up there. Her older sister and her come up there. I thought when I met my wife I thought she was older of the two. She looked more mature for some reason or acted more mature. Anyhow I never went with her then until I got a date with her older sister. I thought somehow or other a friend got a date for me and somehow or other she couldn't go but said, "My sister would like to go," when in reality that's what I wanted in the first place.

M.N.: What year was this?

Mendenhall: Well, 1924.

M.N.: How old were you?

Mendenhall: I was 23 and my wife was only 17 or 18. She was six years younger than I was. So we went together and when she graduated from high school I decided I was tired of being a bachelor and she just thought she wouldn't get married right away--wait until fall. I was tired of batchin so she came up there in June and we were married then at Sioux City, Iowa.

M.N.: How did you go about getting married? Did you have to get a license?

Mendenhall: Yes. I thought we'd get married in this little town of Ponca on the Nebraska side and the judge wouldn't grant me a license because she was too young without message from the parents. He said, "You can go to Sioux City and get married without parents' consent." Well, the parents had already given consent but she didn't have it in writing and the judge wouldn't give me a license so we went to Sioux City and got married.

M.N.: What was the wedding like?

Mendenhall: A private home--my brother went with me. We went up to the minister's house in Ponca and said we wanted to get married--"Well, that's nice, these young folks want to get married. You'd have to go to Sioux City." We found out we couldn't get the license so the brother took his car and the preacher down there and I took my little roadster and went to Sioux City. A school teacher's wife lived in Sioux City--they left Ponca where they taught school and they went to Sioux City. We knew them so she made a little decoration at her house and we went to the house to get married. Then they went home and we spent the night at Sioux City. The next day went right back out and went in the field. That was our honeymoon.

M.N.: Do you remember asking her parents if you could marry her?

Mendenhall: No, they knew it. She told them. They thought it was all right and I guess was well satisfied all the way through as far as I knew.

M.N.: Did you get along all right at that time with her parents?

Mendenhall: Oh yes, they were cooperative. They brought her to Grand Island, Nebraska and came to Fremont on the train. My brother--the great brother he was--he passed away with cancer three years ago Christmas time--anyhow, his girlfriend went down to Fremont in West Omaha and picked her up and came on up to Ponca. They she stayed at my folks' while I went back on the farm for two or three days. I'd ordered the furniture.

M.N.: Where did you order it from?

Mendenhall: Montgomery Ward I think. We got a nice blue enamel cook stove which she spent lots of time with anyhow.

M.N.: Do you remember how much it cost?

Mendenhall: Well, at that time it seemed it was the best stove and it was around \$80.

M.N.: How much was the furniture?

Mendenhall: Well, I think I spent about \$300 all together to equip our house the way we did and maybe later on we bought a little more.

M.N.: How did you fix the house?

Mendenhall: We had a nice kitchen floor. We didn't put anything on the kitchen floor but the others were a wide board so we put linoleum rugs in. We put another rug in the spare bedroom back there and we put one little one in there and then a linoleum rug in the living room. There was an awful small living room if that's what it was or dining room almost. There wasn't a closet and then we had a bedroom off of the kitchen.

M.N.: Did you own this house?

Mendenhall: No, this was a tenant house--in other words a sharecrop. My landlord lived in Ventura, California--never saw the man. I did all my corresponding with him.

M.N.: You mean even at that time he lived in Ventura, California?

Mendenhall: Yes, I rented it from him. My cousin was on the place and he knew my cousin. My cousin said, "Well, I was going to get on a bigger place" so he went over to another little town. He recommended me so I just wrote and told him so we drew up a contract at the bank there.

M.N.: What were the terms of your contract?

Mendenhall: Two-fifths of all grain and \$6 an acre for hay and pasture

land and that was about it. He took the note that fall to get the \$6 an acre hay and pasture land which I didn't do much of that I only had about ten acres of hay and pasture land and didn't have too much cattle. Later years Grandmother had 40 acre pastures. Granddad had passed away. Him and I worked together in his hay field there in the fall and he said, "I'll give you a third of it for helping me make that hay" so we took a few weeks, cut a little bit and did it all by hand so I got my hay that way.

M.N.: You cut the hay by hand?

Mendenhall: No, he mowed it and I'd rake it then we'd pitch it on the hay rack. I'd put a couple loads for him and then take one home so I filled my barn and things like that. That's the way I got my hay. It was cheaper that way for me and I was helping him and he might pay me with a load of hay.

M.N.: Did you feel the rent was fair for your sharecrop?

Mendenhall: Yes, at that time two-fifths of all grain and \$6 an acre for hay and pasture land. Of course, as times got tough in the dry years it wasn't worth \$1 an acre for hay and pasture land because you didn't get enough out of it. I'd put Sudan grass in for my cows and it did fairly well in the dry years and maybe I'd mow it too before it grew tall. It's hard to cure it. You have to let it dry quite a while and if it rains quite a bit why it isn't good. In the fall you'd cut it and it would dry pretty good because we didn't have much rain in the fall.

M.N.: What year are we talking about?

Mendenhall: I was 25 when we were married so it was 1927 when we got married.

M.N.: How did things go after you got married?

Mendenhall: Not too bad. We didn't have any children for about two and a half years. She'd help me pick a little corn--80 acres of corn when we started and I've had as high as 90 acres of corn. My uncle said, "50 acres is about all one man can handle with a single row cultivator." I said, "But then I put in a little more time. I can handle 90" and I did--80 sometimes according to how much small grain I put in.

M.N.: What would small grain be?

Mendenhall: Mostly oats--just for my horse feed. I never sold very many oats, I just used it for feed and fed it to the other stock too--some to the hogs but mostly fattened hogs on corn.

M.N.: That went pretty well?

Mendenhall: Yes, except for the dry years. We had one good crop in 1927-- that was a pretty good crop. The first year we started we were pleased then the next year maybe two-thirds of a good crop and maybe another year down as low as 15-20 bushels. Then 1933 another good crop and then 1935 a good crop and then 1936 complete zero --just dried out completely.

M.N.: Was it getting drier every year?

Mendenhall: It was a dry cycle all right but after I left there the farmers told me some of my cousins--two Miille families came over from Germany and I was related to everybody in the country pretty near --distant cousins. I had cousins who were neighbors of mine --of course I had a lot of full cousins. We'd have a family reunion on the Miille side of the house and there'd be as many as 100 people there. My granddad on my mother's side of the house--I forget how many children--there were ten or twelve or something like that--they all lived in that territory. Some of my cousins were born and raised there. Of course they got out and went places after they got older but some never been away from town then-- passed away there.

M.N.: You say 1927 was a good year?

Mendenhall: It rained.

M.N.: It rained?

Mendenhall: It rained pretty good--and a cool summer--we didn't need as much rain in a cool summer as you would in a hot dry summer. It stayed cool and the corn was a little bit moist. My brother had a little corn that soured a little bit in his crib but I had open cribs out on the high ground and I had no problem that way.

M.N.: Then what happened in 1929?

Mendenhall: It was a little shorter crop but pretty good. I had 80 acres of corn that year.

M.N.: We're getting into the time of the Depression aren't we?

Mendenhall: That's the focus--the Depression and drought.

M.N.: Was that in 1929?

Mendenhall: No, I sold some pigs in 1929 for \$9.30 a hundred.

M.N.: Was that a good price?

Mendenhall: At that time it wasn't bad considering everything--more equalization than I think there is now. I had trouble with my pigs lazing around the old pens and the disease in the soil and

worms and everything so I bought four individual houses and put my pigs out. I just tried four sows--farrows 32 pigs and I put them out away from the house in a pasture out there--way off in a corner and hauled the water in the barrel out there and fed them out there. Then of course in later years I brought them in after they were grown pretty well and I think it wasn't much over six or seven months I marketed those pigs at 225 pounds--tops was \$9.25.

I remember that so well and I got extreme top, \$9.30 a hundred. That was four loads that day and I won on that deal. They were nice pigs--just beautiful. As I say \$9.25 a hundred at that time wasn't bad. The stock market broke in New York City but it didn't affect us until 1930s--the crop of 1930. Then things went to pieces. I don't remember that it went down too gradually. I think I got 40¢ a bushel and my cousin was raising hogs. He said, "Well, I'll buy some corn." I said, "I quit the hogs. They're not paying you." I kept a couple of sows so as to have a little butchering and maybe a few to sell. I told him, "Well, you aren't getting justification. You're paying 40¢ a bushel." "Well, it will come back." So he kept a bunch of brood sows--eight, ten, twelve, fifteen maybe. Them hogs broke him quicker than it did me.

M.N.: What did the price of hogs get down to?

Mendenhall: Well, practically nothing--you just couldn't hardly give them away. My neighbor had some scrap pigs. I know it was an actual case they weren't doing very well. They were scrawny. I said, "Well, I think corn is about 25¢ a bushel." He says, "I don't think they're going to pay me 25¢ a bushel so why don't you feed them pigs out?" "They ain't doing well." Another neighbor said, "Well, I don't believe they're going to pay me on my good pigs. I've got some beautiful pigs--maybe weigh 125 pounds." So this fellow trucked in and threw all 70 pigs in the truck and took them down to Sioux City and he got a check for 65¢ for the whole bunch.

M.N.: Sixty-five cents?

Mendenhall: For 66 head--that's just the way it was.

Well, what happened was you sent it down there--the trucking and the commission--that's all he had coming because it wasn't good. So this other fellow sent his down there and he got 35¢ a head. That was during the worst of the Depression. Corn, I had a fair crop, it wasn't a big crop but I had 1,000 bushels I wanted to sell and the elevator in town offered 8¢ a bushel. He said, "You got any oats? I'll give you a nickel for them"--a nickel a bushel for oats.

M.N.: In 1927 what did you get for corn and oats?

Mendenhall: Well, I think we got around 50¢ to 60¢. There was lots of

moisture so they knocked it down a little bit. They couldn't handle it it was too much moisture. They had to get it out in the feed.

M.N.: A good price for good corn would have been more than 60¢ a bushel?

Mendenhall: Well, not that year because it was all about the same--about a number five corn. Dry corn is number two corn and that will keep anywhere but you can't take shell corn and pile it up without it start heating, you know, unless you've got some way of drying it. Now they've got drying machines. Of course, they dry their corn if there was too much moisture.

M.N.: If it's moist and you pile it up it will get hot?

Mendenhall: Yes, as I say I didn't have any problems because I had cribs out on a ridge and I didn't have no corn crib I just had wire and put it around there and had three or four places to put it. I'd throw it in there and it would dry a little and dry a little and it was out in the open air where all the winds could hit it and I didn't have any problem but my brother lived in kind of low ground and the timber and things around there. [Crib was] say about three or four feet wide and about three or four high and the center of the crib at the bottom is soured--kind of browned up a little bit. It hurt the price of selling it but they fed it all anyhow. They didn't sell any corn.

M.N.: It wouldn't make the stock sick.

Mendenhall: No, I guess if it was sour though it might make them a little drunk.

M.N.: Oh, you mean it would ferment?

Mendenhall: It was that way to a certain extent, yes.

M.N.: Things got bad financially in 1931?

Mendenhall: Yes, in the fall of 1931 it was not very good and we were having our second child. The old doctor came out and I was getting awful short of money. I didn't want to give myself away so I had the corn out there so the doctor came out at six o'clock in the evening about three o'clock and of course he went back to town and made two more trips out there to check the wife over and everything. In those days the woman had to stay in bed ten days without getting up which was a big mistake and I don't know why they didn't find that out sooner. Now they let them up right away but anyhow he came out and I says, "Well, doctor." He said, "I won't have to come out anymore unless something goes wrong." It was twelve miles out there and he made three trips. My mother came out as a mid-wife and I helped both of my children's births. I helped the doctor and did more work than he did. "I guess I've got enough money left to pay you." "Oh good," he says, "I don't

get much of that nowadays you know." I paid the doctor \$25--today it would be \$2500 and that put us pretty short of money and in a short time we were out of money.

M.N.: You paid him \$25?

Mendenhall: \$25 was the entire bill.

M.N.: That was a pretty high price wasn't it?

Mendenhall: It wasn't too much for the time he put in and three trips out there you know.

M.N.: But if a load of hogs was worth 65¢?

Mendenhall: Of course, I wasn't selling anything then. This was from the previous year that I had the money left. I had 1,000 bushels of corn out there. It wasn't there then but I picked it but corn was only about 20 bushels per acre that year. That wasn't very big. I told Mother, "I sure needed that bad." Time went on and corn was no price at all. After Roosevelt went in everybody thought there was going to be a big boom.

M.N.: Did you vote for Roosevelt?

Mendenhall: I did, definitely, yes. I just couldn't see Hoover doing anything at all. If he went in again I was afraid the Depression would have never ended. My dad was a strong Republican and I was a Republican at that time and the family all voted for Roosevelt and I expect that 90% of the Republicans voted for Roosevelt. That's the reason he got in way over majority.

M.N.: What did you think Roosevelt could do?

Mendenhall: We didn't know what he might do but it couldn't get much worse we thought so we gave him a chance. Well, he closed all the banks in the United States--did you hear about that? Well, he just closed every bank in the United States until they straightened them out--closed those that weren't able to carry on business because they were in financial trouble.

M.N.: What did people think of that?

Mendenhall: They went along with it. Dad had a little money in the bank there. He didn't have too much. I didn't have any left so I didn't have to worry about that but he closed all the banks and said, "We can't go on with the bank situation the way it is. We've got to weed out the bad ones and try to make one good one." We had three banks in one town and two banks in another town close by.

M.N.: What did he mean we had to close out the bad ones?

Mendenhall: Well, they had no securities. They'd loan them money and they had no security whatsoever. Even when I was farming when I first started I said, "Well, I'm a little short for the next few months until I get some crop out and get some money. How about \$200 until that time comes along?" The bank just wrote out a note and I signed my name and I had \$200 in the bank--no security or anything. That's all there was to it.

M.N.: So what he wanted was banks that had security for the money that was out.

Mendenhall: That's right. Believe it or not my granddad had \$15,000--about \$8,000 in one town and \$7,000 in another town. They closed them up and the old man couldn't understand why he couldn't get his money. "I put my money in there and the bank is broke--well why? I put money in there." Well, they used it and put it all on poor security and just lost it. One bank paid 3% of the \$8,000 and another one paid 2½% on the \$7,000--that's all he got out of it. Lot worse there than it was here. One fellow there before the Depression got too bad, he said, "I've \$900 in my pocket", went into the bank and said, "I'll give you \$900 for the \$9,000 loan you've got on me and we'll call it square." Oh, they couldn't do that, says, "You're in the farming business." "Then come out and sell me out and get what you can." They wouldn't have gotten \$900. They took the \$900 and that was it--that's lost money.

M.N.: How did your grandfather cope with losing \$15,000?

Mendenhall: It might have hastened his death. He was in his 80s and it wasn't long until he had a stroke but he never could understand why he couldn't get his money.

M.N.: I just can't imagine a man working that hard for that much money and getting 3%.

Mendenhall: He raised a big family--conservative, very conservative--never owned a car. He just didn't want to--too old and besides he didn't know how to drive it. So nephews and nieces and sons-in-law and Dad of course [took him if he] wanted to go somewhere. Any time we had a family gathering somebody would always pick him up and take him. He didn't have a car.

M.N.: That must have been a terrible blow to him.

Mendenhall: It was and I think it worried him to death.

M.N.: How did it work out for you?

Mendenhall: When the Depression hit that hard we were without money from the time I paid the doctor off until the following spring. We didn't have any money.

M.N.: How did you eat?

Mendenhall: I'll have to tell you a little story about that. I was telling the general manager down here at Santa Barbara Savings. She said, "How did you pay your bills?" I said, "What bills?" "Well, your electric bill." I told her, "We had no bills that we had to pay but the telephone bill which was \$7 a year and it wasn't worth that because you couldn't get much service out of it." She walked off and didn't realize--water bill, sewer bill--never been to the country and didn't know what it's all about.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

M.N.: Where did you get food?

Mendenhall: Well, a cellar full of canned vegetables and meat, eggs, milk right there on the farm.

M.N.: So you had enough?

Mendenhall: We canned 125 quarts of tomatoes and used that for citrus. We never bought any oranges. We couldn't. Mother doled us out a little bit. Maybe you want to write your mother and you've got to have some stamps or maybe a little yeast and salt or something like that to make bread. We made our own bread. When we were going good we'd always buy ten sacks of flour and two sacks of sugar stuff to Sioux City. We'd just throw it in the house--never had a lock on the house or a door.

M.N.: Just put it away.

Mendenhall: Just threw it in the house and that would last us a year--bake our own bread, butcher our own meat, have our own milk, cream, butter and eggs, canned vegetables in the cellar and that's what we lived on. Mother doled us out a little bit. Then when it came spring and we wanted to buy some garden seed why here's a little more. She had a little change around--\$2 for vegetable seed for the garden and planted the garden and then I finally sold this corn for 16¢ a bushel. When Roosevelt went in why the feeders down on the river bottom--they had some hogs and they weren't making any money, "We'll give you 10¢ and come and get it." I was supposed to transport this corn to market if it was before March 1 of the following year. Well, I just got rid of the landlord's share. I think I sold out earlier and I hauled it to the neighbors and here come the fellows who said, "We'll give you 10¢ and come and get it." I says, "I won't sell my corn for 10¢ a bushel. My horses like it and I'll feed it to them."

M.N.: Put it back in the land.

Mendenhall: Yes. A neighbor there had a bunch of white faced cattle he was feeding. Well, he wasn't going to make any money and said, "Will you sell me some corn?" I says, "They're just offering 10¢

a bushel, I won't sell you no corn for 10¢ a bushel." "Well, I'll give you 15¢ a bushel." "That still ain't very much is it, Carl?" "I'll give you 16¢" I said, "You just bought 1,000 bushels of corn." \$160 for 1,000 bushels. I had some life insurance--I think that was \$61.10--why I straightened that up. I'd borrowed the money previous to that someway or other in the fall or had the money and sent it in because I wanted to keep that up in case something happened to me--only \$2500 policy but then that was quite a bit of money then. I said to my mother that I'd sold the corn and I can pay you back now \$5.35 from the time the boy was born and I paid the doctor off. I went to town and filled the gas barrel in case of an emergency for the car. Well, the battery finally went dead and that sat for three months and didn't drive it but I had a little gas in the barrel before the money ran out in case of an emergency.

M.N.: You'd only borrowed \$5 in that whole time?

Mendenhall: \$5.35--I remember that so well--fantastic I know that. It doesn't sound reasonable. Tell the young folks that, they just don't believe you.

M.N.: How many months was that?

Mendenhall: From October to May when I sold the corn. I've seen my son who was in the service--he got married, you shouldn't be married in the service you don't have enough money--well, he went along pretty skimpy for a while too but then since then he was never short of money.

M.N.: Let's go on from 1932.

Mendenhall: 1932--I know that 1933 was good and I said, "Maybe we'll get going yet" and corn went from lowest 8¢ a bushel to 40¢ the next year. I sold 1,000 bushels of corn for 40¢ a bushel. So then we praised Roosevelt--he had a lot to do with it, straightened the country out and that's the reason he stayed in so long. Dad voted for him and then he wasn't satisfied because Roosevelt wanted to kill hogs to keep the market up.

M.N.: How did that work?

Mendenhall: Dad wouldn't go for it. He thought that was terrible, which it was.

M.N.: What did they do?

Mendenhall: They didn't have to do it, you know.

M.N.: What did Roosevelt want to do?

Mendenhall: Kill them to keep the price up--diminish the supply.

M.N.: Just kill them outright?

Mendenhall: Yes, they killed hogs--just slaughtered them--buried them or something just to get rid of them.

M.N.: Not even use the meat?

Mendenhall: No just destroy it--same way as they do with crops now. They destroy it here if the price isn't right. Potatoes they haul out and dump. They still do that to a certain extent but not as much as they used to.

M.N.: That must have been hard for a farmer that raised those hogs.

Mendenhall: Yes, I think the government subsidized a little bit but that was the problem right there--a matter of distribution of that meat. The poor countries could have used it but we didn't have the finances to send it over there so we just destroyed it here. They could have eaten it. I never saw it done. I didn't have very many and I didn't go for it. One year when times got a little better they were trying to hold you down on raising so much crops. I didn't go for it until such time when you could only have so many acres and I think I had 80 acres of corn that year and didn't have to plow any under. They just wanted to plow it under so I went in for this deal and they paid me \$125 for not having too much corn. I'd been having my quota and couldn't go over that quota. The fellows had to plow it under but you could raise all the oats you wanted to so I farmed all the land and put it into oats and I thought my uncle said, "Well, I ain't going to go for that." I said, "It's this way, Uncle, if a fellow comes up and says I'm going to hit you between the eyes and I'm going to pay you so much money and I'm going to hit you between the eyes anyhow whether you want to take it or not." So, I says, "I'm going in for it."

So I got my \$125 check and I don't remember what he did. My uncle had his farm, he had a mortgage on it and he was called up from town and says, "Mr. Meyers come in and get your flour." "What flour?" Said, "Well, they were distributing food around you know. Well, you've got a mortgage on your place and we've figured out that you're entitled to ten sacks of flour." "I'm not destitute." I don't know whether he went and got it or not. He was a proud man and worked hard. I said, "Uncle, if you don't want it, I'll take it." I never found out whether he went and got it or not.

M.N.: How did things turn out in 1934?

Mendenhall: That was a dry year again and wasn't too good. We just went along on a shoe string just getting a little money and things like that. Then we had a good crop in 1935 and I thought, "We'll get going yet."

M.N.: What did corn get up to in 1935?

Mendenhall: I can't remember all those prices. It went up some, probably wasn't much over 40¢ to 50¢ a bushel then but we had a big crop--lots of oats and lots of corn. Hogs went up some but I don't recall the prices after that.

M.N.: What happened in 1936?

Mendenhall: We had this severe winter--coldest, snowiest winter in the history at that time--although they had some in later years really snowy. It turned out to be the hottest and driest summer in history. From one extreme to another--why we never knew--hot winds come. It's hard to make anybody believe it but I was out cultivating in the morning. It was hot and dry but I thought, "A little faith, keep on cultivating." It was the Fourth of July and I had oats that was turning ripe. I had a little bit I could cut. There wasn't much. I only got three loads of oats and I had men come in with their wagons and hay racks to haul bundles for me and we thrashed out three or four of them in a day because there wasn't nothing to do. In a short time we had the thrashing run all done. One fellow had to go home. I didn't have enough bundles to fill several racks so he went home without helping me. Then I went on down to help him. He had some bottom land and barley so we thrashed down there. I came in at eleven o'clock for lunch and the wind had risen and was blowing at a hurricane [strength] you might say--just a strong tornadic wind. I don't mean a tornado but as the wind blows in Nebraska it blows awful hard sometimes and probably did so in Oklahoma. It would blow your hat right off your head.

M.N.: Was it a gusting wind or a steady wind?

Mendenhall: No, just steady wind at 116°--just like blowing out of an oven. The leaves on the trees--it was dry anyhow, not much moisture in the soil--the leaves on the trees all curled up to protect themselves. The next morning they opened up some. Corn just stood up there like a pinnacle--curled up. I wouldn't go out. I wanted to cultivate and the rest of the family went to Sioux City on a picnic. My brother was there from northeastern Iowa and come on down. I said the family could go if they want to. She wouldn't go unless I could go. I came in at noon and said, "I'm not going back out there with the wind blowing like that if I starve to death--ain't no sense to it." I just turned the horses out in the field, laid down in the dining room and went to sleep.

The old well about went dry. If we pump it slow we kept water going but if that went dry I thought, "What will we do?" That was cool water out of the well so the flies had gathered on there like a swarm of bees piled on top of one another on the stockwater tank. It was cool water and they were burning up and they didn't

know what to do. They sat on that and as the sun moved around they moved around on the cool shady side of the cool water. I never seen it before or since. It's hard to believe.

M.N.: How was it affecting the stock?

Mendenhall: I was working them in the morning at 116° and they were used to heat and of course you wouldn't press them to hurry them. They'd just go along. Next day it was 116° but it was a Sunday so I didn't go out in the field then. We never worked in the field on Sunday back there which they do now. Sioux City, Iowa registered 116° and they were upriver from the wind blowing across this Missouri water there and it cooled it and they were 116°. We were probably 120° out in the country. Of course, it completely ruined the crop that afternoon, what was left. I thought, "We might come out of it yet" but it just completely ruined it and we didn't get any corn. We went out with the milk pail and tied the team in the middle of the field. There would be a picket on the north slope where it was a little cooler and maybe the drifts drifted out and got a little subsoil there. Wife went with me and we took a milk pail and picked out a pocket and we got half a milk pail full of corn. We didn't want the livestock going in there picking out that spot and eat too much corn because they weren't used to it. They'd get sick. One day's time, the whole 80 acres, we got about 14 bushels out of that whole thing in the bottom of the box--that was it.

M.N.: How did you feel about that?

Mendenhall: Just hardened to it and said, "Well, I guess this is it. We'll just clear out." I knew only farming. Then when I came to California--I don't know how I got the courage to do it because I had no money. I was broke. I had my sale and owed about \$1100. So I called the sale October 22, 1936 and said, "Well, I'm going out this fall." I had the lease until the next spring--March 1 is when the lease was up. Well, I had nothing to do there. I was going to quit anyhow so we pulled out in the fall. The auctioneer came. We didn't have any lunch at noon--you've heard about free lunch at noon before a sale--have you heard of that? Used to be they'd start selling at one o'clock or ten o'clock in the morning and then have a free lunch at noon--oh, a few sandwiches and coffee and stuff like that but I didn't have a big sale so I thought, "One o'clock sharp we'll start selling." They quite that a little later. They put out a catering service for a big sale. I don't know whether they have those anymore or not.

The auctioneer came at one o'clock and started crying the sale. We had all our household goods. We'd accumulate a little bit from time to time. When we got a little money we'd buy a little more for the house and buy a little more machinery. When I started I only had two sows and one cow and I had accumulated about ten

head of cattle--I had butchered some--my horses, machinery that I'd farmed with for ten years, and canned stuff from the cellar. He cried from one o'clock until dark that night and couldn't get \$1,000 worth of stuff. That was \$900 and some odd dollars. The county clerk there said, "Did he mention anything was a minimum of \$20 for sale?" "No." "Well, \$19 and some cents for the auctioneer."

M.N.: So you paid your debt, paid the auctioneer and had nothing.

Mendenhall: No, he collects that out of the county clerk--said he might have to give him \$20. All that money came in in two weeks time--all but a few cents. That's fantastic. Nobody had any more money than I did because they dried out too. I paid all but \$300 off and got credit for that and headed for California with \$300.

M.N.: How did you actually make the decision?

Mendenhall: I was broke. I had to buy my hay and I didn't want to go in debt any more.

M.N.: Did you talk to your wife about it?

Mendenhall: Oh yes, we were together right and left all the time working and decision and everything like that. When I had a good year the time I sold those hogs I saw a family coming on I thought we'd better have another car. I spent the money for the car instead of paying off the debt. It was a big mistake. I shouldn't have done that but it was actually a God send in the first place because we wouldn't have had anything to get out of the country with without that little roadster. We loaded up that car after we got credit--\$300. We went to see our folks at Litchfield, Nebraska--they still lived there. We spent the night there with a few other friends and headed on for California. We loaded up the car and had a 1300 pound load.

M.N.: What did you take with you?

Mendenhall: Mostly bedding and cots so we could get a cabin for \$1 a night and the kids could sleep on the cots and we had blankets and things. We brought a few scrawny potatoes that big around. We ate them and just a little bacon but we sold all our canned stuff out of the cellar. We couldn't carry that--bedding mostly. The boys would get sleepy in the afternoon. We all had to ride in front. Just enough room in back so a boy could climb back and nap. About sixteen inches between car roof and our bedding. We stuffed one back in there and let him take a nap then we'd pull him out and put the other one back there and take a nap.

M.N.: How old were the children?

Mendenhall: Five and seven.

M.N.: How old were you at this time?

Mendenhall: I was 34 years old.

M.N.: Your wife was about 28?

Mendenhall: Six years younger, yes, that would be it.

M.N.: What were you hoping for?

Mendenhall: Just to find a job. I went out in the building trade. I went to Douglas first.

M.N.: You didn't have any idea what was going to happen?

Mendenhall: I thought, "I'm energetic I'll find something to do, I'll bet you, by the time we got all our arrangements made to stay."

M.N.: Did you know anybody out here before you came?

Mendenhall: Well, I thought my uncle was here and when I got here I thought he could help me but he'd fallen and broken his shoulder and he was in the hospital so they couldn't help me.

M.N.: How did your wife feel when you left there?

Mendenhall: She wasn't too worried because we knew we were destitute there and I had to go in debt more and I had no way of knowing whether I'd ever get out and I didn't want to do that.

M.N.: But you did feel you could work your way out of it.

Mendenhall: I tried Douglas and they said, "We've got a lot of applications here." They were taking applications. Well, if I'd fought it a little bit and gone back there two or three times I think they would have hired me--said just keep pestering them--they'll put you on, find someplace for you. I just applied once and went out and got in the car and went to where they were building ready foundation houses. I was just lucky because I worked like a trooper. I put out twice as much work as some of those other men so I'd get a reputation. Well, I was used to working hard and went down and here comes the general contractor. He'd gone broke during the Depression and he was paying his men. He wasn't subletting anything. He was paying them right out of his own pocket and managing his own. He drove up and I says, "I'm looking for a job." "See Glenn, he's got the crew there"--he was paying them. He said, "No, I've got a full crew." This fellow was dressed up. I said, "Well, I've just come out of that drought stricken area in Nebraska and I'm looking for a job." "Oh, you come from Nebraska. Well, come out tomorrow morning I'll put you to work." That's just the way he spoke--by the name of Thornberg.

M.N.: I want to go back before you made the trip. I'm really interested

in how you thought about your future.

Mendenhall: We just knew that we were going to do something else. When we got to Salt Lake City we didn't know whether we'd go to Oregon or California--that's the decision we made.

M.N.: But you felt you didn't have any choice, you had to leave?

Mendenhall: Yes, I thought so. There are surely better things than to work away all your life and I thought, "Well, it will never come" but, of course, it did and made money.

M.N.: What would have happened if you'd stayed?

Mendenhall: It's just hard to tell. I couldn't see borrowing any more money and going deeper into debt and working my head off without having some way of paying it off and I just decided. They had eighteen years after that and never had a failure--good crops. The boys that stayed there made out fine.

M.N.: But of course you didn't know that?

Mendenhall: No, but I came out here and some of them cousins see me and say, "You're doing all right. I guess it wasn't too bad a move for you." I say, "No, we're satisfied." We worked our heads off. Of course, I missed my friends and things like that back there but all I did was work out here then.

M.N.: When you made the decision to leave all you could see was nowhere.

Mendenhall: As I say when we got to Salt Lake City we didn't know which way to go--whether to go to Oregon. We had nothing in sight up there but had an uncle down here so maybe we'd better go to California.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

Session Two April 24, 1981

M.N.: We were going to talk about your trip to California.

Mendenhall: Well, we didn't come on into northern California when we come. My brother had a notion--he was farming too. He had a little money and he undertook to go to Oregon with a car. He bought a one-wheel trailer, loaded that up with a little food, canned stuff and a bed for him and his wife and a cot for me and my sister and a girl friend went along. So we decided to go out to Oregon and come down through northern California. He thought he'd buy some land up there. That's the reason he went there.

In August we loaded up the trailer and the four of us were going to

to take a fourth and my brother and his wife were going to take a fourth. We all rode with him and took the car and did well and had good luck. We traveled about three weeks and we went 5,000 miles. We went up through the Black Hills--Black Hills has caves up there you know and the Black Hills is quite an attraction with all the faces on the mountain side and went into the mountains in northern Montana. We'd sleep right out under the stars--blanket up. I don't know whether we could have got a cabin there or not. I'm sure not.

Next morning my brother and I walked down the road a little ways. I remember it seemed so fantastic. When we left Nebraska it was 100° every day and we got up there and there was frost on the bridge. That was quite a sight for us with it being so warm and then we came up there in the mountains--of course, that was high altitude. Went up through northern Montana pretty high--of course, Black Hills are about 7,000 feet. It didn't seem so high when we got up there. It was so much different than what we were used to. We'd never seen the mountains, never seen the ocean. The farthest we went out of Nebraska was Sioux City, Iowa. I went over the border to Kansas one time to an auto race down there when I was a young fellow. Then we went harvesting one fall out of Nebraska into South Dakota but wasn't no good there so we went on to North Dakota and harvest there--50¢ an hour you know. We'd come a little late into Oregon and had seen the beautiful lights--it was quite a sight. We went into Oregon and into Ridgefield, Washington where my uncle lived and stayed a couple of days with him. A fellow named Francis gave us some good advice. He said, "You can't get a job. Go back and sell out and come out. You've got to be here when the time comes for the job."

We took that advice and went on down along the ocean and stayed in cabins at night for \$1 a night. We'd cook our own breakfast and make up our lunch there in the mornings with sandwiches and such and in the evening we'd cook a pretty good meal. We didn't eat out at all. We didn't have much money so we went into northern California and stopped at a place for \$1.50 a night, went down the road two or three miles and got a room for \$1. They had cabins in a peach orchard. We saw these peaches hanging on a tree. "[They said], pick all you want!" They had already harvested so we had empty cans and canned peaches at ten o'clock at night--filled our fruit jars full of peaches. That's the way we traveled.

We went on and of course we saw a lot of fantastic things. Wife was disappointed when I said we didn't have anything and we didn't know what to do because there weren't any jobs available that week unless somebody was an awful good friend who could put you to work when you came out. We didn't get that kind of an answer so we went on then and traveled and saw fantastic things that were new to me and the wife stayed home because we couldn't afford to both go.

M.N.: She stayed home?

Mendenhall: Yes, she stayed on the farm and took care of the chores. Her folks lived 250 miles away so they came up and brought one of the boys up to stay with her and help with the chores in case something went wrong. There was nothing to do but maintain the property. She wanted to go of course but we couldn't both go. I went to see what it was like. The only thing, the mountains were very lonesome--not very many people. It would be kind of lonesome in the mountains and we didn't intend to stay in the mountains. We saw the Salt Flats and went into Salt Lake and saw lots of other things along the road. Saw that river that runs underground--then went into Salt Lake and went into the Temple and checked our hearing. The Temple is made with wooden pegs and carries sound very well. We sat in the back of the Temple and could hear someone rubbing their hands together at the front of the Temple.

M.N.: Did you go to Salt Lake before Oregon?

Mendenhall: No, we went the northern route up in through Montana. It was quite fantastic and we had good luck on the road.

M.N.: Were you going to go to California?

Mendenhall: No, we went into northern California. Brother was still interested in Oregon some so we didn't go to San Francisco. We struck in on Highway 20--that's way north of San Francisco.

M.N.: What month did you leave?

Mendenhall: In August--we traveled three weeks.

M.N.: August 1936.

Mendenhall: Yes, we were gone three weeks.

M.N.: But you were looking for work.

Mendenhall: Well, we wanted to see what it was like. Of course, we got to see the Pacific Ocean which was quite a novelty. We wanted to see if we could get some work but we didn't get it. That fellow in Portland told us you've got to be here to take the job. When we got back the wife was disappointed. She thought it might be nice to get off the farm which wasn't doing any good. When I got back I said to brother Lloyd, "How much do I owe you?" One-fourth of all the expenses was \$28 and some cents. That's hard to believe but it was actually so. I had a little money from the 1935 crop which was pretty fair. We didn't get much results.

So when we left there we debated night and day what to do--thought we couldn't carry on on the farm. We may have. We had ten years there and we couldn't pay off our debt when we got a crop

occasionally. We didn't know what was coming on so the brother decided to leave for sure and that swung me over too. He took a four wheel trailer--an old Model T frame and put a wagon box on it and loaded up with quite a little stuff. He had a gas operated Maytag washer and loaded that in, some farm tools, shovels, maybe a little furniture, whatever he could get in there. He pulled that four wheel trailer and he went to Long Beach. He left before we did and went down through Missouri where she had some relatives. They stayed some time and then went to Raton, New Mexico--that's quite a pass if you've ever been there before they fixed it up. He pulled this four wheel trailer and it snowed pretty hard and that was in November.

We didn't leave until sometime in November. We arrived in Los Angeles on November 14. We stayed with her folks a couple of days at Litchfield, Nebraska which was about 250 miles from Ponca and we went right on through Lincoln Highway to Salt Lake City and then struck south. We decided in Salt Lake we'd better go south so we pulled off the road and I gave the car a grease job beside the road and changed the oil and got into Las Vegas and stayed all night. The next day we got up early and got into Los Angeles. We didn't know what to expect and got into San Bernardino and it looked like paradise all the way--palm trees and orange groves.

M.N.: It was you and your wife and two children?

Mendenhall: Two children that's right. We got into Santa Monica where my uncle was and got a motel to stay all night. I think it was about \$1.25 a night. We couldn't find another place and we couldn't find a place that took children. I was surprised at the time. We finally found a place and was in that auto court for three months. My uncle was there.

M.N.: Your uncle was there?

Mendenhall: Yes, he was in the hospital. He'd broken his shoulder. I thought maybe he could help me get a job. I got a job all right.

M.N.: How did you go about getting a job?

Mendenhall: I saw some fellows putting up a foundation and the general contractor was there--I didn't know it but he was. He went broke during the Depression but was doing well again. He was left with an old car and a house and they said he was worth \$50,000. He hired all his men direct--he didn't sublet anything. I asked him for a job. He said, "See the foreman." "No, didn't need anyone, filled up." So I told this general contractor that I'd just come in from the drought stricken area in Nebraska and I've got to find a job. "Oh, you're from Nebraska, come out tomorrow morning and we'll put to work."

M.N.: Why did he do that?

Mendenhall: He thought, "Drought stricken area off the farm --probably be a pretty good man--able to work." In other words, a lot of them don't work very hard. He put me to work and I worked for him quite some time and finally my brother said, "You can make more money than \$4 a day. You can do carpenter work. We can work together." I did. You can get \$6 a day for a couple of weeks. He said to me, "Do you want to carry hod?" I said, "I'd try it."

M.N.: What is hod?

Mendenhall: It's just plaster and you mix it and the outside is stucco and the interior is plaster. It's mixed with a mixer and dumped in a box and carried in with a hod carrier. You put it in a hod rack and shovel it full and take it in and dump it on the board. Hod carrier has a scaffold and has to clean up the floors when the plastering is all done. It's quite a job. It's about the hardest job a man could do even considering the farm--even picking corn. Picking corn is hard work. You'd spend eight hours picking and then have to unload a 35 to 40 bushel load with a scoop shovel after putting in eight hours of hard work in the field. It drags you down.

M.N.: Hod carrying was even harder.

Mendenhall: Yes, it's heavier work. The hod weighs 175 pounds and you carry that all day long. I've seen a time I never did stop walking all day long. I'd just load up. Somebody was doing the mixing and two of us did the carrying and from the time we started in the morning and went until quitting time that night. Never did any scaffold building or anything but most of the time they gave you two plaster. You scaffold your rooms for individual housing. They got so they would plaster inside. They called it a scratch coat and then put on a brown coat. They double it up right after it is absorbed right into the button board. First we'd scratch that and just put on a coat of stucco and make three coats outside, put on a coat of stucco and scratch it. In other words, just rough it up for the second coat. Then the second coat was brown but they'd scratch that outside with the double garage in the back and then go inside and brown the whole thing out ready for the finish coat in one day--eight hours. Believe me, you were moving.

They'd finish the inside in a day. That was an easier day because it didn't take so much to finish the inside. Then it took a little more work and they'd brown the outside. We'd get about two a day--that wasn't so bad. I've climbed a ladder all day long thirty feet high and never stopped--not rushing but just going. I was pretty tired at night. I didn't want to get out of the car but the next day, ready to go again. You got used to it. It was a job.

M.N.: You didn't have much choice did you?

Mendenhall: No, I was in for all the money I could get. The wife finally went to work in California--\$3 a day. She'd wash, iron and clean the house from stem to stern and get the Mrs. some lunch at noon for \$3 a day. During the Depression girls would go to Sioux City from Ponca, Nebraska and work for \$3 a week, room and board--just be with the mistress of the house, tend the baby and live right with them.

M.N.: So \$3 a day was quite a bit better.

Mendenhall: Yes, she earned every cent of it because she just worked, washed and ironed, cleaned the house from stem to stern. She did a good job. She had all she could do. Of course, she didn't want to work all the time--three or four days week. I'd carry hod all day and she'd get on a bus. She could drive at that time but had some problems. She worked hard. She was working for one woman--nice but lonesome--she'd work until noon. She'd say, "Come on in, I want to play ping-pong with you"--that's all she'd do. "Now we'll go to Farmer's Market," she had a lot of money so she didn't mind doing it. Most of them would keep her right there all day and work her head off but she didn't mind, she was used to hard work. This lady said she was too good to be doing housework. She knew she had quite a personality. She says, "We'll go down to Farmer's Market and see if there's not a better job than what you have." She went to Safeway right across the street and asked the manager for a job and he said, "Yes." The war was coming on so she went to work there for \$22.50 a week--right across the street. The boys going to school could come over there and see her and they'd play around the house. She was young yet.

M.N.: That was about 1939?

Mendenhall: I would say somewhere near that. I just can't name the year because we were going along and I couldn't say for sure.

M.N.: You were making \$4 a day?

Mendenhall: I was hod carrying for \$5 a day.

M.N.: And she was making \$22.50 a week--that's pretty good money.

Mendenhall: Well, it started putting us on our feet that's for sure. We didn't accumulate too much until 1938 when she started working housework. We just thought that was extra money and I was getting \$5 a day carrying hod. Finally after I got going good this contractor decided to sublet so then we got \$7 a day so that put us up on our feet and we began to think, "Well, maybe we can enjoy life and can get a little more money." She worked for that Safeway constantly until such time the manager wanted to start a business of his up above Ventura up on the road up there. He recommended that my wife manage the store so my wife managed the

store for about ten months during World War II. The boys began to come home and they said they had to give her job back to the boys. That bothered her some because she did such a good job--worked her head off, of course.

M.N.: Doesn't seem fair does it?

Mendenhall: No. Well, when they left as manager after the service naturally they wanted to come back to their old job. They were entitled to it. She did way better than the fellow who was there because he wasn't up to par. He drank a little but was never drunk on the job--just kind of easy going. The wife got after him one time. She said, "Ted, you ain't doing justice by this store." Believe it or not, he listened to her. His wife, nice person, said, "Well, between you and I we might make a man out of him yet." He recommended her when he left for Ventura. When the district manager came down he hated to do it--wife said tears came to his eyes--hated to tell my wife that he had to give her job back to the boys. He said maybe she'd better change stores since she'd been here so long so she went over to Westwood and worked with a fellow over there. She knew the store so well. When they set up the produce then they had to put it in cold storage and bring it out in the daytime and some things you had to sprinkle.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

M.N.: So he selected her to set up the store in the morning?

Mendenhall: Yes. The manager came in and asked who was helping him set up the store--"Me and one of my girls"--she worked fast. When the customers came in and wanted to get out fast, they knew her. They'd come to her stand every time. At times she'd put out two customers to their one. She worked too hard and then she had a hysterectomy. It shattered her nerves and after she got over that she tried it but she got so nervous she'd almost scream when somebody else would come in the check stand--for no other reason, she was just nervous so she took disability and never went back. We were doing all right.

M.N.: What were you doing at this time?

Mendenhall: I went to Douglas in 1942.

M.N.: How did that come about?

Mendenhall: What happened, I was working for a contractor and he knew me well. He was doing pretty fair but he was up for the draft and he didn't want to be drafted and just wasn't cut out for it. He was married and had no children and he had no business head on him at all so he went to Idaho on a farm. He didn't make anything up there in Idaho. He wasn't a farmer. He put his farm in beans and anyhow the wind came along and cut his beans off so he

decided to sell out and got a place somewhere where the wind didn't blow that much. He got a nice place. He thought his partner up there knew Idaho and knew what to buy but he didn't. Then he made a little money but he was up there from about 1942 till 1945 and he made a little money and started as a plastering contractor. The first job he did he lost all of that. A material man who knew him said, "I'll tell you men don't put out the way they used to and wages are higher"--he figured low. Material man said, "I'll back you." He was the guy who sold material and he was just a salesman. Then he started in business during the war and he was making good. Just as a plaster contractor he made himself a million then he started in as a general contractor.

M.N.: This is your brother?

Mendenhall: No, my boss--plastering boss. He went into general contracting. We did 300 houses over there in the valley for him one time. His brother in a month was out of work. He was a good worker but he had no business head but his brother had a good business head --two brothers. I went up to Santa Monica to the hospital--one of the hardest days was the first day I got there. I mixed 225 sacks of plaster--four ten-ton loads of sand and I had that all shoveled up by night--that's the biggest day's work. He paid me \$1.50 an hour. I was doing two or three men's work. I did work hard and he knew it. I was foreman of the material too. He knew I could do it but I didn't want to but that's the reason he paid me \$1.50 and that's the reason he went broke. He couldn't get men. Some of them were in the service and some in other jobs. He couldn't get good plastering men--class A job but he couldn't find them. The union was abusive to me.

M.N.: The union was abusive to you?

Mendenhall: They said, "Well, you're just the bird we're looking for"--they insulted me. Here comes the plastering business agent, "What local do you belong to?" "300, I guess." "Well, we've got no record of yours." "Well," I says, "Scott Jordan is supposed to take care of it, my boss." He never said a word to them--he didn't--so I was put out and they said, "You can't work here today unless you join the union and I don't know whether they'll want you or not." I was insulted. My boss said, "I guess you'll have to join the union."

M.N.: Your impression was that he would get you into the union?

Mendenhall: He just wanted to try me out as a mixer man and told one of his main plasterers, "Can you find me a mixer man?" So I went up and introduced myself to Jordan and he says, "Can you run a mixer?" "I certainly can." Says, "Well, that's what I'm looking for." They let me ride for five weeks and never said nothing to me.

M.N.: Why didn't you join the union?

Mendenhall: I was insulted and I thought the plastering business was going to play out on account of the war. They couldn't get materials that had to go into defense. This big old pot bellied guy says to Scott Jordan, "Get this man off the job or I'll throw a picket line up around here." I says, "Listen, Mister, you look big enough to start pushing. I've got as much right to be here as you have-- maybe more so. I'm not working here. They won't let me." He never said another word. That's the trouble with the union men. They give some kook that doesn't know anything about running the business. Agents don't know how to handle men. Scott says, "You can't work here." I wasn't mad at Scott but I was really disgusted with him because he said he'd fix me up with the union and he didn't do it. Said, "Well, I can't pay you now. Come back at noon. I'm too busy right now." I said, "I've decided not to join the union. I haven't been back to see my mother since I came out here and that's five years and I can afford to go back."

I decided I'd go into the defense plant and made arrangements to leave, went back and spent five weeks on a vacation and I drove slowly because I knew I wasn't eligible for tires if I blew one out. So I just drove 45 to 50 miles per hour to keep from blowing my tires. We went back there and visited her folks and went back to see my folks, visited my aunts, uncles and cousins and came back in five weeks. We were doing okay and got back to Las Vegas and they froze the gas. Nobody sold gas from noon until six o'clock so we got to Las Vegas and wanted to fill up with gas. Roosevelt declared a half a day to get all the used rubber in because we were short of rubber so take the tires in so they'd melt them down. I guess they piled them up and never did use them. About three o'clock I thought I had enough to go to six o'clock, thought I'd find gas along the road. I found gas and went on home and then I went to Douglas and hired right in.

M.N.: You just went down to the employment office?

Mendenhall: Went down to the Douglas employment office. I had a job. I went from \$1.50 an hour to 60¢ an hour--quite a drop.

M.N.: Why did you pick Douglas?

Mendenhall: Close to home and that was a good move in the long run. I didn't make the money then, but they had a little labor trouble there. Douglas was easy going. They'd hire you for whatever they could get for you so I just went in and whatever they offered I took it. I didn't think anything about getting top wages. Our lead man was suppose to get a nickel more than the highest paid man. Well, some of them were getting 65¢ an hour. The lead man was only 20 years old and wasn't no dummy.

The fellow I carried hod to was working there and saw me. Pop Tolly saw me and said, "You're the last man and the last hod on my board down on the depot in Los Angeles." He was quite a union man and he

wouldn't come for 65¢ an hour but would come in for 75¢ an hour. "Okay, we'll hire you." Well, that's what raised a ruckus down there because what the foreman did was bring a lead man out to check, "Here's the checks, you pass them around." When he went to pass out Tolly's, he said, "How did he get that much money?" Pop told him, "I'm getting 75¢ an hour" and he's only getting 70¢ an hour. Pop Tolly said, "We'll straighten this out. We'll get an arbitrator from Washington, D.C." I went from 80¢ an hour to \$1.06 and a buddy of mine got the same thing. We didn't form a union but the arbitrator said, "We've got to get some organization." The union finally got into Douglas years later--they had an agency shop. It was \$5 a month if you wanted to work there and the company accepted that. The company had a little labor trouble --not serious--never did strike. I never voted for a strike. I didn't think it was right.

M.N.: Why not?

Mendenhall: If I'm working for a fellow and he's satisfied with the work he should pay me more without a strike. Of course, that's the problem, they ain't all doing their best. I just didn't believe in a strike. I belong to the union but I didn't believe in the strike. That's just my way of thinking. I didn't think that would solve any problems. Instead of getting labor and management of the plant farther apart by arguing they should try to build themselves closer together and get more work done. If efficiency was up where it belonged and people were conscientious like they should be working for somebody, Douglas would have so much work they'd never get it done and that's true in all factories. I worked there for five years during the war and I went back hod carrying for two years then they kept calling me back and I lost my seniority because I didn't go. I was getting quite a bit more money outside. I was about 47 years old and didn't know if I wanted to do this the rest of my life.

M.N.: How old were you when you came to California?

Mendenhall: 34.

M.N.: And you were 45 when you started carrying hod again?

Mendenhall: When I was carrying hod again I was 45 and I said, "I'm getting close to 50." Douglas kept calling me back but I lost my seniority because I didn't go back. They keep track of you. They needed men bad. They had a little trouble with the DC-6--a little fire hazzard in the wing or something. They wanted to iron it out and they grounded them. The foreman asked my lead man where he could get some help. "Well, there's El Mendenhall." "Well, we'll contact him by phone" and they did. My boss was slowing down a little. I said, "Listen, Elmer, I'm getting a little tired and a little old." He said, "Well, yes." I said, "I have a notion to go

back for Douglas." "Well, you do that." He says, "I don't have too much in mind"--that was when he was swinging over to general contracting. I knew something was going on. I said, "Well, maybe I'll go up there." "Well, if you get out of a job I'll put you back to work, I'll find someplace for you"--he would. I went up to Douglas and they put me right in. Said, "We're open nights." I said, "I'm not interested in nights. If you can't offer more than nights, I don't want it and got up out of my chair." "Well now, wait a minute, wait a minute."

At that time they were supposed to go by seniority and put the guys on nights on days if they wanted it. Well, they hired me and some of those fellows on nights said, "Well, how did you do that?" I just said, "I didn't want a night job so they gave me a day job." Well, they arbitrated around and finally the union came in when they began to lay off. I did have to go on nights and I had to take it or else go out the door so I went on nights. Went along and had a temporary lay off. I went and collected unemployment insurance which I never collected a dime in my life but applied anyhow and had to wait two weeks.

I called up my plastering contractor boss and said, "You got anything for me to do?" I got tired of laying around after that first week. Yes, they need a truck driver out there to haul material around the houses--nails and stuff. So I worked a week and Douglas called me back. I called up the boss and says, "Who do I contact to tell them I can't come back? I'm going to work Monday." "Don't contact nobody, just don't show." I says, "I don't want to do that." "That's all right just don't show. They'll get somebody else on there." I believe it was 1949 or 1950 they laid me off. The wife and I never had a honeymoon and we decided well now's the time. I didn't have a car at the time. The boys bought me out. They said we could use their car once and a while to go see people. That didn't work out. "Well, I've got a date, Dad."

M.N.: How long had you been married at this time?

Mendenhall: About 23 years. They had a car apiece and they decided to stay at the house. They didn't want to do their own cooking so we farmed them out. Well, she got sick so one boy went to the house and another boy went to another friends and boarded out with them over in the valley from Santa Monica. They made out all right. She got sick and couldn't take care of them anymore. They did all right.

M.N.: How old were they at this time?

Mendenhall: About 21 and 19 I guess. They were going to work awhile and then go to college later on. They wanted to earn some money. They never did go to college but they both did pretty well. One is managing Safeway over on the Catalina Island and the other boy is with the bus service over in Simi Valley. He's educated himself

pretty well. Of course, he went to school at night some. He was over in Santa Monica and they had 200 buses over there and they poured work on him so bad. Simi Valley wanted to hire so he quit his job in Santa Monica--little too much for him--but he did well and so did the other boy. I don't know whether a college education would have helped them. I believe in a college education but I don't know whether it would have helped that much or not because they were ambitious to get going and they did pretty well--satisfactory anyway.

M.N.: Well, did you get that honeymoon?

Mendenhall: Yes. We took off then. The morning we left we bought a new car--we didn't have a car. So we bought a new car and got everything arranged and we left about nine o'clock. Took off up the coast--that was 1949--went up along the coast and I forget just where it was that we traveled. It was quite interesting, [stopped at] this pear packing factory somewhere along the line--I don't remember if that was south of San Francisco or north. Anyhow we went to San Francisco and Daly City and saw my aunt and cousin there.

M.N.: How long were you gone?

Mendenhall: Ten weeks.

M.N.: You had a long trip.

Mendenhall: Yes. We got a little tired of it. We shouldn't have taken quite so long. We haven't traveled too much since that way but anyhow went up through San Francisco and went on across the bridge. The foreman's wife was a top packer at this pear packing factory. She packed 125 boxes in a day and after supper packed some more. She was just a regular machine. Those other fellows there were pretty good but they couldn't keep up with her. They'd wrap them in paper and pack these boxes. She didn't have to handle the boxes but she'd pick them up and snap that paper and in the box. I thought that was fantastic. We asked the foreman if she got cramps in her fingers at night and he said, "No, she was a strong, healthy girl."

M.N.: How old was she?

Mendenhall: In her twenties somewhere--probably no children. She was fast. Then we went up north of San Francisco and went across to Grant's Pass and stayed all night with some close friends there that we used to know. The woman there had one child probably eight, nine or ten years old and she used to work for the wife when the wife managed the store so we stayed a couple of days with them and went on. Went from the coast to Grant's Pass and then back across the coast again--a couple of worker friends over there at Coos Bay, Oregon. We got there in the morning and stayed the rest of the day and we took off. We headed inland again across the mountains over to Willamette Valley then we went up to McMinnville and visited

an old neighbor that used to live in Nebraska, stayed all night with her a couple of nights, went on across into Washington and saw some friends there.

M.N.: You had a good trip.

Mendenhall: Oh yes, then we went to see my uncle at Ridgefield, Washington on a little farm and I believe they were there yet and we stayed all night with them, then we went on to Coulee Dam and saw that went onto Spokane--an old buddy of mine that I played with back in Nebraska--stayed a couple of nights with them--nice folks. Then we went on into the Black Hills and through the Bad Lands and on to Ponca, Nebraska and stayed quite a few days there.

M.N.: Did you see your old farm?

Mendenhall: Yes, it was pretty well run down--nobody living on it. My cousin's folks bought it for her so she inherited that 80 acres. Buildings were falling down. They made a granary out of the old house. The windmill fell over on the house and it was a mess. Then we went on from Ponca. Wife wanted to see the faces and the snake pits there in Rapid City--showed how they milked a rattle snake.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

M.N.: You showed your wife how they milked rattle snakes?

Mendenhall: Yes, saw that and then went down through Rapid City and on through South Dakota. A girl we knew well who worked at Douglas, we wanted to look her up and we had no chance. We called and called. They must have been out doing chores. We didn't go out there so we went on into Sioux City and saw my sister there and then on up to Ponca on down to Litchfield to her folks, to Lincoln to see my uncle. He wasn't there so we went across the river to see some of her folks at Sidney, Iowa and stayed all night. Then we went back to Lincoln to see my uncle because he was quite a great uncle. She promised we would come back so we did.

We went on back to Ponca and Mother was going to go with us to northeastern Iowa where my brother lived--he'd been there at a lumber yard for years. All right, she rode over there with us and we stayed a few days with them. They had adopted a couple of children. He'd lost his first wife at childbirth. She kind of just grieved herself to death so he remarried of course later so they adopted a couple of children. That worked out fine--a brother and sister--we stayed there. We had to take Mother half way down to Dubuque to catch a train to get back to Sioux City. So we bad Mother good bye and went on to Belvidere, Illinois. The folks I'd worked for in Nebraska on the farm when I left home I stopped in to see her and she wasn't there so we went to the daughter's farm. The daughter

didn't recognize me but the daughter called the mother and said, "I don't know who it is but they want to see you." We stayed all night with her. We didn't go through Chicago but went by it. Said, "We know what a big town is like. We don't have to go to Chicago."

We went into New York and tried to find a motel--in those places they didn't allow them in town. We found a place and we thought it was elaborate. It was September and school was on--all brick building--wrought iron. We stopped there but I thought it might be up to \$12 a night. The most we paid was \$5 a night. We asked for a room and the guy charged us \$6 and we left the car there and caught a bus into New York [City]. We wanted to see Times Square and we went up on the Empire State Building and the lights came on at night. We went and got a bite to eat somewhere and caught the bus back to our motel. The next morning we headed for Washington, D.C. We started early and got a little confused on the freeways and had to go about a mile or two farther up the road to get back on the one we wanted. We probably could have backed up. There wasn't much traffic because it was early in the morning.

We made it down to Washington, D.C. and we got a place there. It wasn't very clean but evidently business wasn't enough to keep it clean. There was a little dust on the floor but it was all right so we stayed there all night and got out the next morning and we drove by the White House. We didn't care to go in necessarily so we just drove around there awhile and took off and I believe it was in Georgia we got a place to stay there and it was pretty warm--90°. It was kind of warm that day and we stayed all night there. We'd always walk in the evenings. We didn't have any relatives outside of my cousin in New York. We went to the same school. So we traveled on our own and got down toward Florida. The hurricanes were kind of threatening so we didn't go into Florida. We came on Highway 80 and back through there.

We stopped at this tobacco farm where they were selling tobacco. It was a big tobacco barn, then we went on a little farther. We hadn't noticed any cotton growing in California at that time--way back in 1949. We stopped at an old house without windows and there was this colored woman sitting there with a baby on her lap and a chicken sitting on the window sill and hogs under the house. That's the way they lived down there so we went along a little farther and we stopped. We were going to look at this cotton and here come a southern girl out--nice person. She was one of the owners of the farm. She wanted us to come and visit for a while but no, we just wanted to stop and look at her cotton. She picked a couple of bolls of cotton for us but of course when we came into California they took it away from us.

We went on and nothing radical happened till we got clear back to

Amarillo, Texas where the brother lived. Then we went up to Springer, New Mexico where the other brother lived on a farm. We stayed awhile with them. We stayed in Carlsbad and they'd had a hail storm the night before--water standing all over. We saw the caves with the bats in them--that was quite fantastic. It was beautiful and worthwhile seeing if you ever travel much. We stopped in at noon at Las Cruces, New Mexico and there was quite a wind storm so we thought we'd better hold up instead of getting sand blasted. We took off about two o'clock in the morning. That's the biggest drive we had--drove 700 miles that day. It was tiresome. It was a 1949 Chevrolet and it wasn't as quiet and insulated. We came on up through El Centro and we came on in and there was snow on the mountains west of Palm Springs --that was in October. We tried to visit my aunt at Riverside but they weren't home. We drove 700 on our last day's journey home. That was the end of our honeymoon.

M.N.: After this trip did you go back to work at Douglas?

Mendenhall: Yes, they wrote me a letter that said they'd made a mistake. I had a little seniority. I had a few months seniority and I didn't care to lose it so I was suppose to report in two days time. I went down and they hired me back in. They called the union and explained that I was out of town when the letter came and that I didn't want to lose three months seniority. So they granted my seniority and it worked out fine. It was a good move going from hod carrier to Douglas Aircraft--nice steady job. Wages went up, of course not as much as in the building trade but steady. In the building trade you lost time. If it rains you have to go home.

M.N.: Did you stay with Douglas until you retired?

Mendenhall: Yes. I retired there after twenty years--day after Thanksgiving in 1964.

M.N.: Were you 65?

Mendenhall: I was 63 minus three months. They penalized me for three months. We'd worked a long time and she wasn't very well. I thought it was later than we thought so I thought maybe we'd better try it. It worked out far better than we anticipated.

M.N.: What have you done since you retired?

Mendenhall: Mostly garden work. I took to managing the garden club down here.

M.N.: When did you move here to Kern City?

Mendenhall: The day I retired. I had the house bought. We had a load waiting there and I said we'd be up the next morning. So I retired

on a Friday and we were ready to move.

M.N.: Have you been happy here?

Mendenhall: Oh yes. I missed it awhile. It wasn't good for a little while. I missed going to work and missed my co-workers. It just didn't seem quite right that I was sitting around here doing nothing. That's the reason we moved out of Los Angeles. I couldn't stand being home and watching all my neighbors go to work. I thought that was like pulling teeth. We made some money by selling our house in Los Angeles. It wasn't much by the time we paid the commission down there and got in here and spent money here.

M.N.: You've been busy since you came here?

Mendenhall: Oh, yes. She's been extra busy up at the center and I do a lot of reading and I work down at the garden with the fellows and help them all I can. I'm down there four hours a day, seven days a week most of the time. I manage the place. I enjoy working in the soil--old farmer you know. Like they always say, "You can take the boy off the farm but you can't take the farm out of the boy." I enjoy it. I developed a lot of things, not that I'm a genius, but I just like to change things and see if it won't work better.

M.N.: Looking back on your life how do you feel about it?

Mendenhall: There have been rough spots--bad. When I was 22 years old I should have died but I didn't. A mule kicked me and broke five ribs and sheared off two like this and five ribs otherwise and drove them into my lung and of course punctured it bad. I suffered a lot of pain. I don't know why the blood settled down here outside of the lung. They didn't tap me. I kept putting out a little blood. Doctor said, "They brought him in to die." Pneumonia would have taken me. I never got pneumonia. Of course, I was young and healthy but took me seven weeks before I went back to work and probably too soon then. That cost me a year's wages of course. The wife had to have an operation and it pretty near killed her --fever went up to 104° or 105°. By the time the doctor got there the fever had broken because they gave her penicillin.

M.N.: So it sounds like you've been pretty fortunate.

Mendenhall: Well, yes, in that way. Then I came up here and got Valley Fever. That about took me. I went down to skin and bones. You wouldn't think anybody could go down as thin as I was and make it. An old doctor had a garden down here and he said, "Well, he just won't make it. He'll just dehydrate and pass on." I fooled him too. My doctor said, "We'll put you in the hospital." I'd drive to the doctor's office a couple of times a week but I was tough. They gave me a penicillin shot and they got a gold shot they give

people that are on the last stages. He says, "That makes you sicker than a dog but it might save your life." I got over it in two months.

Then I got cancer of the prostate and they removed that. It's a funny thing. I didn't know there was a thing in the world wrong with me in any way shape or form. The doctor just found it when he examined me and he sent me to a specialist. They took a biopsy. It was malignant and they removed it. I got along fine and it's been eleven years last November. He examined me every year and finally released me says, "I see no reason for you to come back anymore. Just write me a card once a year and let me know how you're getting along."

M.N.: Do you feel that life has been fair to you?

Mendenhall: In some ways. I had some rough spots. I was in a rut until I got to Litchfield and met my wife and worked on a farm on my own.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

M.N.: Do you feel that coming to California was a good thing to do?

Mendenhall: Yes, I believe it was a good move although the fellows that lived back there on the farms made out well. Most of them are in their grave now. I outlived them. Some of them died young--55--62. It was because they actually worked too hard I think. One cousin died in his early fifties. He bent over backwards to help you and he wasn't a very big man but he was a wiry little guy and worked just as hard as a big man. He had a heart attack. When she got home from the hospital he'd already passed away. Another fellow had a heart attack. Doctor told him he couldn't farm anymore but he got better and went to farming for two or three years. Then he got another heart attack and that stopped him for sure but didn't kill him right away. He had a few chores to do. One night he didn't come back to the house at supper time. He'd passed away in the barn.

M.N.: Things might have been very different if you'd stayed on the farm.

Mendenhall: Well, I might have lived until 90 years old--farmers will do that. It's a hit or a miss. They made out well--eighteen years without a drought. That's a lot of years and prices went up and of course they made good money. We're satisfied. We've paid our bills. During the Depression we didn't have any bills--thank God for that. Here we've got money to still pay our bills. If I'd been on the farm and had been taking in my social security and her social security and my Douglas pension each month I could have bought half the county back there on the farms then but we didn't have that kind of income then. It is difficult. I don't like to see this inflation going on because it is hard on the country.

It's terrible. Everybody knows that.

M.N.: Well, you've seen hard times before though.

Mendenhall: Oh yes, we sure have. Ten years on a farm, that was just ten years down the drain with both of us working hard. We didn't accomplish anything. In other words we were worse off when we sold out than when we started. We came out here and work like slaves and scarcely went out and that's all we knew was hard work. She went to work and I went to work nights so long that I hardly saw the family, you know, but it all worked out in the long run.

END OF INTERVIEW

Ivan Joseph Mendenhall
b. 1877, Fort Wayne, Allen Co.,
Indiana
[His parents from Indiana]

Lena Miille Mendenhall
b. 1879, Ponca, Dixon County,
Nebraska
[Her parents from Germany]

Elbert Lucern Mendenhall
b. 1902, Ponca, Dixon County,
Nebraska
Education: 10 years
Church: Methodist

m. 1927 → | Eva Irene Trook
b. 1908, Sidney,
Fremont Co., Iowa

Norris Eugene Mendenhall
b. 1929
Manager, grocery store

Leon Russell Mendenhall
b. 1931
Superintendant of Transportation
Municipal Bus Company
mechanic

INDEX

- California
 - First impression, 34, 35
 - Ventura, 18
 - Long Beach, 35
 - Los Angeles, 35
 - Santa Monica, 35
 - Kern City, 46
- The Depression, 20-24
- Education
 - In Nebraska, 1, 2, 7, 17
 - College, 43
- Family Life
 - Chores, 34
 - Cars, 4, 30
 - Cooking/Food, 8, 13-15, 25
 - Dating, 17
 - Marriage, 5, 17, 19, 42
 - Sense of community, 28
 - Problems, 3
- Farming
 - Income, 15, 18, 21, 22, 25, 26, 34, 35, 48, 49
 - Methods, 15, 16, 19
 - Land ownership, 3
 - Land rental, 5, 15
 - Sharecropping, 5, 15, 18
 - Crops, 15, 16, 19-22, 27, 28
 - Drought, 5, 16, 20, 28, 29
 - Floods, 1
 - Dust storms, 16
 - Government policies, 26, 27
 - Butchering, 8-13
- Health
 - Diseases, 3, 38, 47
 - Health care, 1, 22, 23, 47, 48
 - Birth of children, 1, 2, 22
 - Causes of death, 24, 48
- Housing
 - Homestead in Nebraska, 5-8, 18
- Impact of Experience, 48, 49
- Migration to California
 - Attraction of California, 32
 - Reasons for move, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35
 - Shelter, 30, 33
 - Belongings, 30, 35
 - Funds available, 29, 30, 34
 - Cooking, 30, 33
 - Route, 32-34
- Nebraska
 - Ponca, 1, 4, 7
 - Litchfield, 3, 4, 16, 35
 - Kearney, 3
 - Grand Island, 18
 - Return to, 40
- The New Deal
 - Roosevelt, 23, 24, 26, 27
 - Voting, 23
- Oregon, 29-34
- Relief
 - Type received, 27
 - Attitudes toward, 27
- Religion
 - Churches, 3
- Work
 - Migrant labor, 33, 34
 - Permanent jobs, 31, 36-38
 - Employers, 31, 35-40
 - Unions, 39-41, 46
 - Strikes, 40, 41
 - Wages, 36, 37, 39-41
 - During WW II, 37, 38, 40, 41
 - After WW II, 38, 41, 42, 46