TH: This is oral history. I am Teresa Haskell. Today, Saturday, March 29, 1975. I am going to interview Millie Hess from Rockland, Idaho. The general topic will be about the depression and how it effected upon her and her family. Mrs. Hess, where were you born?

MH: Plymouth, Utah.

TH: How long have you lived in Rockland?

MH: Fifty-five years.

TH: Where were your parents born?

MH: In Farmington, Utah.

TH: Have you lived there since your childhood?

MH: Yes.

TH: What was your occupation?

MH: My folks were all farmers.

TH: When were you married?


TH: When did you move to Rockland?

MH: In 1920.

TH: Did you own a farm up here?

MH: Yes.

TH: What kind of situations were you in?

MH: Well, we were in good situation then. We had farmed with father Hess, and then we come out here and bought a farm at Landing, Idaho, just out of Rockland.

TH: How many children did you have?

MH: We had eleven.

TH: Eleven. When did your husband die?
MH: In 1932. We farmed up until that time and that was about the time, all through there, when the banks went broke and people were out of money, everything was cheap. Then we had a good year or two after we moved to Idaho, and we did well on the farm. We were all healthy and the children started school at Landing.

TH: Did you have any of your children die?

MH: Yes, we lost one boy, baby. During that time, there was people were on delinquent taxes because we just weren’t making any money. And then my husband died in 1932, and that was the beginning of when the depression really hit. Everybody was back on taxes and having a hard time to get along. Cattle was real cheap, but we had good neighbors and everybody was in the same boat so we helped each other and got by. Then in the fall of 1929, or that summer, we started to build our house and stuff got so cheap: cattle, and that fall was so cheap that we decided not to go on with our house for until things changed, or we thought they’d change. And then my husband dies in ’32, so we had the house started. That year you couldn’t hardly give cattle away. The government bought up a lot of cattle to help people out and you could get just as much for an old poor cow as you could for a good steer. That year we had an old cow, and when she was old we was going to get rid of her but she got down in the meadow and we had to pull her out. We decided we’d get rid of her but we didn’t and so they said, “Oh, put her in, she’ll sell.” So we sold her just the same as the other cattle. We didn’t get much, but we held on. We paid what debts we had to and got our taxes caught up.

We worked, got in what we could, and raised our crops. We had a few dry years. Then the kids were all in school. We lived up to the ranch and when some of them started to high school, they went to and fro to Rockland. Then, I moved into Rockland in the winter so the kids could be in high school for a few years and then I rented the place for two years, and by that time my two older boys was old enough to run the place. Then they stayed there and took care of the cattle and worked, and I lived in town with the kids. Then there was a fall that cattle was cheap and when I say this, I think they’re going to say that couldn’t of been so, but I had quite a nice bunch of steers and I sold them for five cents and everybody thought I did so well to get five cents for all of them and the guy that bought them gave me a bum check, which I never did get. But that was the year the WPA started to help people to make a living. President Roosevelt started WPA and so the people could work, and I worked in a sewing room and made enough money to pay what I’d mortgaged on my cargo to buy some hay and to pay what debts I could and while we lived in town that year; but we got by somehow. I don’t like people to talk about WPA because it was abused. But it was good for people that didn’t have any money, and then we kind of pulled out of it as the years went along and the depression lasted, it seemed to me, for a long time. We worked hard and made ends meet, somehow.

TH: Did your children manage the farm by themselves?

MH: Well, yes. We stayed on the farm for quite a number of years and just ran it ourselves until the boys got old enough and then when one boy got married and they lived there. He married a school teacher there that was teaching school there at Landing,
so then I moved to town and just helped out when I could. But we still ran the farm then. Then the next boy went in the service when war started after Pearl Harbor.

TH: How many years did he serve in the service?

MH: He was in the service from ’42 until ’46, and but he came home and then he got married and then he run the ranch for a few years. Then he died and so then I rented the place for a year or two and we still hung on.

TH: What kind of things did you sew in the WPA?

MH: We made men’s pants, quilts. Oh, we made everything.

TH: Was that much pay?

MH: Well, it paid pretty good, in fact, we thought it was a lot because we had a pretty good living while we was trying to pay what debts we owed and keep us a going. Yes, we done alright.

TH: Did you ever finish your house you were going to finish?

MH: Well, we finished at it. It never was real finished. Then the boy that married, that was living there on the ranch, he started to fix it up and then he died. That was my oldest boy, he died and so we then again, I sold the ranch, this time. My next oldest boy wasn’t old enough to take over the ranch and some of the others got married and he got married and I lived in town, and I was still living in town. But we got down to where things were real cheap. One year the government bought the cattle and they bought cows, but they didn’t want no calves so they said you just as well butcher those calves. So some of the men butchered them and we dressed them, so we had a lot of meat, for a while anyway. We did our own and kept our own food stuff that we raised there on the place. Always had a big garden and so we didn’t really suffer with the depression like we would of done if we’d of been in town, probably. But after I sold the ranch, then well most all of the kids were getting married. I think I only had one or two that wasn’t married by that time.

TH: Why didn’t the government want the calves?

MH: Well, I guess they had no way of handling them. See, they had to ship those cattle out and they took the cows and they were shipped. I don’t know just where they were shipped, but we raised quite a lot of the calves. Oh, there’s lots I could tell you if I can just bring it all to mind. ‘Cause that was a severe time for a lot of people because people were in debt and low crops. Oh yeah, we had, I didn’t tell you we had a Model-T Ford and that was what we had was our family and it kept us for quite a long time and we changed and got a car now and again. We had to work hard, but we wasn’t the only ones, everybody else did too.

TH: How did it affect some of the town’s people? (Depression)
MH: Well, lots of the town’s people worked on WPA, the same as I did. When they started WPA, they put men on the teams and I wanted to put on the teams because we needed it bad and they said well your boy isn’t old enough to work on here with the team and I said well I’m old enough and can drive that team so I said put me on, I’ll drive that team. And then, they told me that they would put the boy on, so he drove the team. That was when WPA first started and from there on I worked and he done other work.

TH: How did the bankruptcy affect you?

MH: Well, we didn’t have enough in it to make and hurt us too bad but, it was all we had. I think we had when the Rockland Bank went broke; we had seventy-five dollars in it. I don’t remember whether we ever got that seventy-five dollars but, our bank that we banked with in Utah never went broke. I still dealt with it until after or when I sold the place. It never went broke, but most all the banks did go broke.

TH: Did it affect the town people really bad? What that went broke?

MH: Well, I imagine it did. I don’t know how much money they got back but, everybody that had any in it lost their money or got it paid back, you know, in little bits.

TH: How did you plow up your farm?

MH: With horses. We had enough horses to do our farming and we had one old white horse that we put on the “footburner”. You don’t know what a “footburner” is, but you put a horse on it and plow it and that was what me and the kids plowed our garden with.

TH: You had a large garden?

MH: Oh, we always had a large garden. Even after I moved to town I raised a big garden. You had most all that you worked for was what you had to have. It wasn’t like it is now. You didn’t go to town and buy all these sacks of groceries; you raised all your own. I done all my own sewing, and raised my garden, and canned fruit. And so we didn’t buy like we do today. We always had our own meat, so we had, usually, the neighbors helped us butcher.

TH: Did you have pigs and sheep and that to keep you going?

MH: Yes. You said pigs? Yes we always had our pork for the winter and the beef. We always had plenty to eat because we raised it right there on the ranch.

TH: With the depression, how did the winter take about?

MH: Well, we always got out plenty of wood; we didn’t have electricity up to the ranch. We got at wood out of the canyons and burnt wood and coal, and it took a lot of hard work was the expense.
TH: How did you manage the energy for your car?

MH: Gasoline.

TH: Was it hard to get?

MH: Not that I’d remember. And I can’t remember it being so high in price. I think it must have been moderately cheaper.

TH: How cheap did it ever get? Can you remember?

MH: I don’t remember. Seems to me like, though, that gas was maybe twenty-five cents a gallon, but I’m not sure. But anyway, it didn’t take a very big lot to keep a Model-T Ford. Then we got other cars later.

TH: Did your children walk to school?

MH: Yes, up to Landing. They had the school two miles down from our ranch, and in cold weather we took them with the team. We’d run them down to school but otherwise they’d walk. That was the hay day of their lives, walking to school. They had lots of fun because there were plenty of kids along the way. They’ve all got families of their own, of course, and grand kids. I’ve must got around, I must have better than a hundred grandchildren and great grandchildren and I’ve got one great, great grandson.

TH: After your husband died, it was quite a hard change for you, wasn’t it?

MH: Yes, it surely was. At that time things was so hard going in ’32, was when the real bad times was on. Of course, bad times don’t wait for, debts don’t wait for bad times, you know.

TH: How was it about the tax, how did this come about?

MH: You mean delinquent. Well, people just didn’t get the money to pay. If your taxes you pay in the fall, and then you could pay half of them, but if you couldn’t pay all of them and then in the spring by June the first you could pay the next half. Lots of people that had more than we did had delinquent taxes too. There was lots of that. But I got it all paid off and got out of debt, I never owed anything. It was a long time before I sold the ranch. But all who went through that depression, they really knew it was the depression. We think stuff is cheap now, that’s why I told you that cattle, five cents, and I thought I done a hundred, and everybody else. We had cattle buyers at that time, we didn’t ship our cattle to a sale yard. These cattle buyers would buy our cattle. This cattle buyer, I had sold to him for a year or two along with others, there were lots of people that sold to him. And they come out and bought cattle see. We didn’t ship them or take them to a sale road sale ring, like they do now but, sometimes we’d ship our own cow, put them on the cars from American Falls and ship them, maybe to Ogden or somewhere else.
TH: Did they have a train at that time?

MH: Oh, yes. We didn’t have a train up there, but we’d go to American Falls. American Falls had the closest train, the only train, we still don’t have any trains.

TH: Did it (the Depression) affect the train?

MH: Well, no. Not at that time. The trains up ‘til how many years back, not too far, that the trains did very well. Lots of trains, but not they don’t. I suppose trucks and all that has taken the place of trains. Anyway, they claim they don’t make money so I don’t know how that all comes about. But, I do know that if you’re willing to work hard, why, you can usually make out.

TH: It was hard for you to manage the ranch plus your job with then…?

MH: Oh, yes. And the family and everything, it wasn’t easy but I guess we weren’t looking for easy things then. Everybody was in the same boat, and we just worked. Then later I worked and kept the kids in school. I run the hot lunch, the school hot lunch for eleven years. And all that of course, brought us through it all.

TH: Then your food situation was fairly good?

MH: Well, as I said, yes, it was because we raised it all, took care of it and if we had to start a winter like they do nowadays without plenty for the winter it would really scare me if I had a family because I’ve done all of my canning and we always raise our meat and worked hard to get it.

TH: Thank you very much Mrs. Hess. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by future researchers.