

1997

## Studies in Matamoros and Cameron County history

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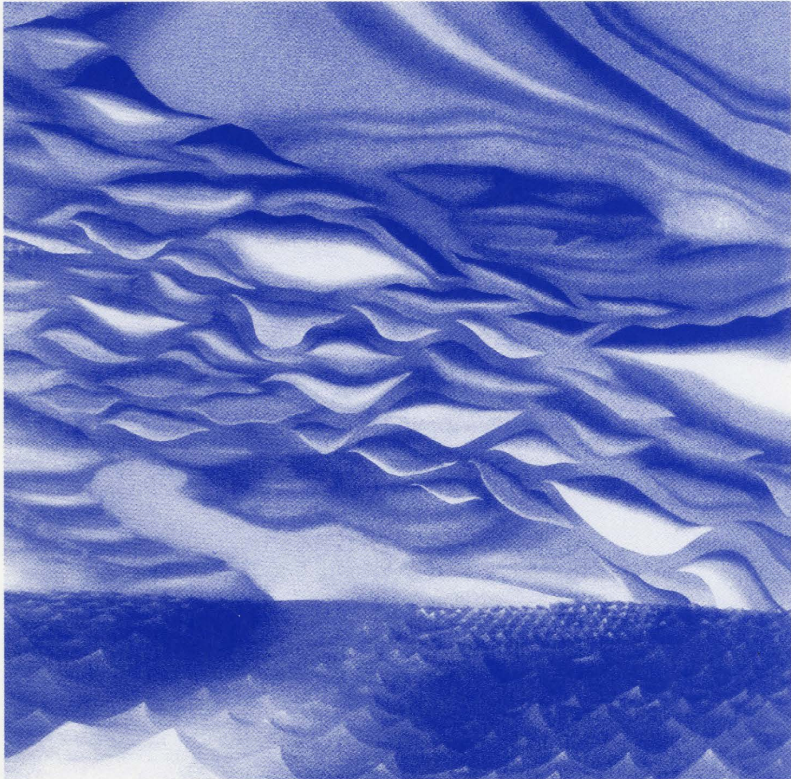
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The University of Texas at Brownsville  
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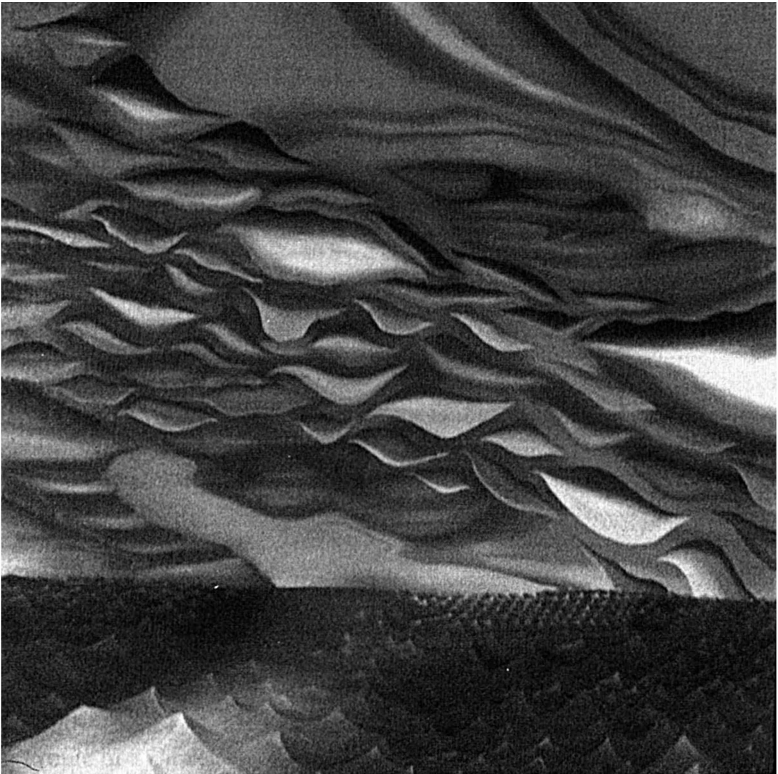
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# ILLUSTRATIONS

by Carlos Gómez

Associate Professor of Fine Arts at The University of Texas at Brownsville

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## THE ARTIST'S EXPLANATIONS OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS

### 1. PAINT WITH PASSION, 1994, Oil on Canvas, 48" X 48".

Paint with Passion is a painting that celebrates the wonder and beauty of South Texas. The lower Laguna Madre is depicted late in the afternoon with the sky full of colored clouds that travel with the sea breeze. Most of the images or objects in the painting are made up of "tiny" components of wild flowers that were enlarged many times over to represent clouds. The waters of the Laguna Madre were painted to resemble pyramids in an attempt to create a sense of how this land could have looked in earlier times before the coming of the European. (From Abstracted Sky Scapes of South Texas, in collection of Dr. Romeo Montalvo, Brownsville, Texas)

### 2. Madonna Morena, 1996, Oil on Canvas, 40" X 46".

This dynamic painting shows Mary as a proud Mother holding her son Jesus. Baby Jesus, on the other hand, I painted with a face which is consumed with care. I chose to paint Mary with dark skin to echo her role in the Mexican-American/Chicano culture and to proclaim her as the mother of the common Mexican. (From Contemporary Christian Iconography Series, collection of the Artist)

3. Madonna with Wood Cross, 1996, Oil on Canvas, panel one 40" X 46", panel two 36" X 30".

In Madonna with Wood Cross Mary is depicted with child in a state of joy. The field of crosses that surround her, however, serve as testimonies of the inevitable trials of Christ. The simple wooden toy cross which Mary holds in her left hand gives her a sense of peace; somehow she knows that it will play a role for hope. (From Contemporary Christian Iconography Series, collection of the Artist)

4. The Two Sides, 1995, Oil on Canvas, 96" X 48".

This painting is a statement on the "illegal" people who cross the Rio Grande every day along the U.S. Mexico border. The intention of the painting is to condemn the whole idea that people are punished for wanting a better life. The color stripes in the background of the tall river grass represent the illegal people hiding until the coast is clear for them to cross over. (From Abstracted Sky Scapes of South Texas Series, collection of the Artist)

5. The Mystery of Life, 1977, Oil on Canvas, 48" X 48".

This painting is about the birth of a human being in a world of "what ifs". The different images in the painting are relative to the infinite outcomes that are possible, especially in a place like South Texas. Is he going to be a mouse or a vulture? (Whereabouts unknown; last seen in Edinburg, Texas in 1977)

6. Woman with Long Hair, 1994, Oil on Canvas, 30" X 40".

The Pre-Columbian woman is shown here with what many think is one of her beauty characteristics--her long hair. I painted her in a fetal position to affiliate her with motherhood and death. (From Ten Nudes Series, in collection of Dr. Romeo , Brownsville, Texas)

7. Ebony Nude, 1990, Oil on Canvas, 96" X 48".

Perhaps the strongest of the trees in South Texas, the ebony is also a symbol of strength and endurance. I associate this tree with the endurance through hardships which the Mexican-American/Chicano people have shown through time. (Collection of the Artist)

8. Nudescape, 1994, Oil on Canvas, 30" X 40".

The South Texas sky, landscape, and brown-skinned women are celebrated in this painting (From Ten Nudes Series, collection of the Artist)

9. Deposition from the Cross, 1996, Oil on Canvas, 40" X 46".

This painting was done in black and white to remind the viewer about life without love and goodness. Christ having been brought down from the cross sits lifeless waiting for his father to carry his soul away with him. (From Contemporary Christian Iconography Series, collection of the Artist)



10. "La Biblia Es Bella Pero El Humano No", 1978, Oil on Canvas, 48" X 48".

This Self-Portrait is a statement on the emptiness one feels when one's life has no direction and meaning. I painted myself with a wicker weave surface to indicate that my soul was missing from my body. (Collection of the Artist)

11. The Resurrection, 1996, Oil on Canvas, 48" X 40".

The Resurrection is a painting which is indicative of the hope which many Mexican people have when they come to the United States of America. The universal association with the Resurrection of Christ also represents the family aspects of their culture. The Father takes care of his children. (From Contemporary Christian Iconography Series, Collection of the Artist)

12. Green Jay, do you know what love and passion are all about?, 1994, Oil on Canvas, 48" X 48".

This is a celebration of the Laguna Madre, shown with a storm approaching. (From Abstracted Sky Scapes of South Texas, collection of the Artist)







## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Dr. Juliet García, President of the University of Texas at Brownsville, for her encouragement; Dr. Chuck Comeaux for his administration of the institutional grant which paid for a part of the early computer typing; Carrie Escobedo for her part in that early typing; José Luis Briones and Sean Kearney for their help with computer problems; and especially Vivian Kearney for her invaluable service with subsequent typing and suggestions. The articles in Spanish are largely drawn from student research papers submitted for Fulbright courses taught by Milo Kearney in the 1992-1993 academic year at the Instituto Tecnológico of Matamoros. To these studies and the traditional articles on Brownsville and its vicinity, articles on Harlingen and San Benito have been added. The present publication thus has a wider geographic scope than the previous four books in this UT-B series.

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Brownsville, Texas

por

Miguel Gallegos

Brownsville Texas, Brownsville Texas, eres lindo sin igual,  
Tus resacas y palmeras son hermosas de verdad.  
Tus mujeres son preciosas y bellas de corazón,  
Tienes hombres orgullosos y valientes de a montón.  
Brownsville Texas, Brownsville Texas eres bello natural,  
Tienes clima muy caliente muy ardiente y tropical,  
No me importa si hay chubascos, tempestades, o huracán,  
No le temo a nada de eso, porque es mi tierra natal.  
Brownsville tú eres el orgullo de todita la nación,  
Porque tú eres ciudad limpia sin basura y sin smog,  
Aunque seas pueblo chiquito, tienes todo para mí,  
Tienes zoologico enorme y la Universidad UTB.  
Brownsville yo nunca te olvido, porque tú eres para mí,  
Un jardín en primavera con palmeras y con sol,  
Tienes partes muy hermosas y playa cerca de ti,  
Tienes gente muy amable y buena de corazón.  
Brownsville yo ya me despido, ahí te dejo mi canción,  
Para que todos te canten con orgullo y con amor.  
Brownsville por donde me encuentre, no me olvidaré de tí,  
Que viva Brownsville querido,  
Brownsville Texas sí señor.

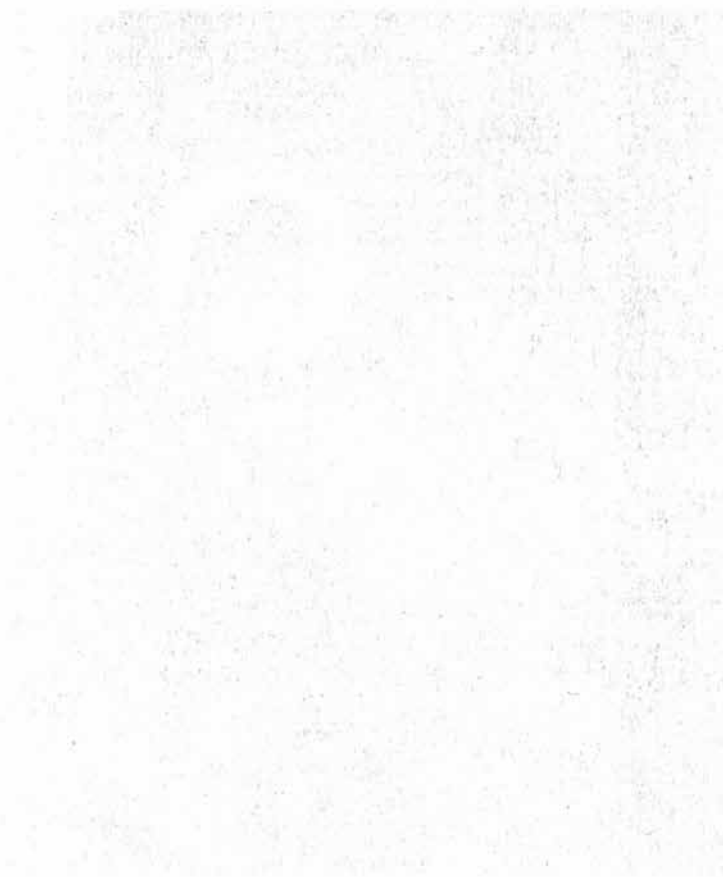
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**SPECIFIC HISTORICAL STUDIES**



THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE



## The Pineda Plaque

by

Don Clifford

During the winter of 1974, a group of amateur excavators unearthed at Boca Chica beach a clay slab that implies Alvarez de Pineda was the first European to land at the mouth of the Rio Grande. The writing on the slab is a form of "shorthand" Spanish which Smithsonian Institution experts translate to read: "Here . . . Capt. Alonzo Alvarez de Pineda [sic] in 1519 with 270 men and four of Garay's ships. Garay's colony." Although the slab is on public display at the Rio Grande Valley Museum in Harlingen's Industrial Air Park, it remains veiled in confusing controversy--despite the persistent efforts of former Director Eleanor Galt to determine its authenticity.

### Unexpected Find

The confusion is two-fold. First, the slab find was completely unexpected. In the excitement, apparently no one thought to keep detailed archaeological excavation field notes. The science of applied archaeology is itself destructive, which is why professional archaeologists painstakingly record every possible detail at each excavation level. Otherwise, the "in situ" circumstances of an artifact discovery--which could help explain an item of cultural history--are irretrievably lost. Today, only memory records the on-site circumstances of the Pineda plaque. It appears the slab was associated with a jumbled cache of unusual adobe bricks buried under two to three feet of sand and muck. Secondly, when the plaque discovery was announced publicly, latter-day historians rushed to library bookshelves for information about Pineda. Very little new information appeared. A few "landlubber" writers, unfamiliar with archaic nautical terms and the art of 16th century sail navigation, merely rehashed much of the old misinformation.

### Plaque is Main Clue

Therefore, the only firm remaining clue for authenticity is the plaque itself. But even here, expert opinions sharply divide over its calligraphy (writing style) and orthography (spelling style). Apparently, Pineda never spelled his name with a tilde over the "n", and the horizontal slash carved on the number "7" stem line is unknown on other Spanish epigraphs of this era. Secondary clues exist in 16th century documents, including a map of the Gulf Coast supposedly drawn by Pineda, and in the lives of three men into which the brief fabric of the Pineda story appears inextricably woven.

### First Focus on Pineda

Initially, we will focus on what little is known of Pineda. Then we will look into Pineda's connection with Francisco Garay, who financed his Gulf Coast exploration expedition; and his assumed connection with Anton de Alaminos, New Spain's top navigation expert. Throughout, the overwhelming presence of Aztec conqueror Hernando Cortez holds the fabric together--even though

he never met Pineda. We shall then focus on the Pineda plaque and bring the authentication controversy up to date. Hopefully, by examining each of these clues in as much detail as possible, we can sort out the various elements of confusion. In this author's opinion, the currently available evidence suggests that Pineda did not majestically sail up the Rio Grande in "tall masted ships"; and the Pineda plaque may be a commemorative marker planted on Boca Chica--either as a result of a navigation error, or a surreptitious attempt to establish a boundary claim after the fact.

### **Perspective: Exciting Time**

The early 16th century was an exciting time to be alive in Spain. Marco Polo's twenty year odyssey through the fabulous lands of Cathay and Cipangu beckoned young adventurers like a beacon. The first families of Spain, impoverished from seemingly endless wars with Islamic Moors, sought ways to recoup fame and fortune. The voyages of Columbus hinted a route to the Indies lay somewhere to the South and West. Already, the Portuguese, spurred on by Prince Henry the Navigator during the previous century, sought a northwest passage to the riches of the Orient. The expulsion of Islam from Spanish soil created a fierce national pride, and it may have spawned a strange religious zeal which had its roots in the dreaded Spanish Inquisition. It was to color "red" the relationship of conquistadors with native American inhabitants. No one knows how many poor souls were slaughtered in the name of a gentle and forgiving savior. By the turn of the century, mariners had improved somewhat the art of sailing. Development of the lateen (triangular) sail allowed ships to beat against the wind, but in an extremely cumbersome zig-zag manner. The pilot's wheel wasn't yet invented. The helmsman had only a tiller to change rudder direction. Most of the time he could not see the front of his ship and received course corrections from someone on the "con" deck. (1:170)

### **Navigation Hit and Miss**

Navigation was strictly a hit and miss science called "dead reckoning." No one in the 16th century knew how to determine longitude except by timing an eclipse. Columbus, an excellent dead reckoning navigator for his time, consistently made errors. In one instance, he couldn't get a firm longitude fix until he observed an eclipse during his stranded stay in Jamaica. Latitude reckoning was much the same. Columbus' chart plot for San Salvador is approximately one degree (60 nautical miles) too far north of its actual latitude. (1:531)

In 1516, Carlos I ascended the Spanish throne. Three years later he was anointed Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. By this time, Magellan successfully circumnavigated the African continent, dispelling forever the medieval myth that a man's blood would boil if he sailed too close to the Tropics. His pilot, Albo, had a new device for "shooting" the sun called a quadrant or astrolabe. His recorded latitudes of newly discovered places are quite accurate, but whether Caribbean/Gulf Coast pilots had such a device is unknown. Ponce de Leon had reached and explored Florida; Balboa just discovered the Pacific Ocean; and Cortez was about to launch his first attack against Moctezuma from near present day Vera Cruz. For Spain, the Golden Age of Discovery and the rape of the New World had begun!

## **Pineda and the Problem**

Alvarez de Pineda is a minor character in the overall drama of New Spain. He looms suddenly onto the pages of history as a young naval officer in the service of Francisco de Garay, Governor of Jamaica. Almost nothing is known of his boyhood, nor how he got to Jamaica. Neither is it known how he earned the governor's trust and was placed in command of a four-ship squadron to explore the unknown coast between Mexico's Rio Panuco and the western extent of Florida. Within two years, he disappears just as suddenly, probably into a ritual stew pot of the Huasteca Indians.

Historians agree he completed his mission of exploration, but sharply disagree on a prime element needed to prove the Pineda plaque's authenticity. Somewhere en route, Pineda's squadron spent 40 days at the mouth of some river scraping and recaulking the ships' hulls. Meanwhile, he and groups of his 270 men at arms, in longboats and pinnaces, explored upriver a distance of six leagues (approximately 18 miles). They noted at least 40 Indian pueblos on either side of the river. Some were two story structures. They took special interest in the gold ornaments the Indians wore.

### **But Which River?**

At The University of Texas in May 1973, Adan Benavides, Jr. wrote a brief history paper attempting to answer this question (2). He said, "Later historians (. . . after Navarrete, 1765-1844) have attempted to identify the 'rio . . . muy grande y muy caudaloso' (very big and very voluminous) . . . as (either) the Panuco, the Rio Grande, (or) the Mississippi." His analytic tally is a roll call of authors who predominately favor the Mississippi or the Rio Grande. However, he concludes, "It is my guess that the true landing of Alvarez de Pineda is the Rio Panuco and not the Rio Grande."

Other recent opinions differ. Since Benavides' paper, we can add four more experts to his box score:

Samuel Eliot Morison (1974)--for the Mississippi.

Morison, a crusty retired admiral, earned the reputation as the world's foremost authority on Columbus. Unfortunately, he merely muddies the water by stating the Pineda squadron, guided by expert pilot Anton de Alaminos, consisted of "three or four ships." During the closing months of 1518, they began from Florida, spent 40 days exploring the Mississippi, naming it the Rio del Espiritu Santo, and then ". . . had to fight their way around the shores of future Texas; and at a place called Chila, near the mouth of the Panuco River, they were heavily defeated." (1:517) Morison's narrative parallels the 1936 history of Carlos E. Castañeda. He differs with Castañeda's conclusion that the 40 day pit stop occurred at the Rio Grande.

Donald E. Chipman (1967)--for the Panuco!

Chipman, a history professor at North Texas State University, Denton, did extensive research on what was to become the Province of Panuco and Victoria Garayana under subsequent governor Nuno de Guzman. He suggests Pineda initiated Garay's colony during the year

with any current chart of North America depicting the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, the Espiritu Santo location fits better with today's Sabine River, rather than the Mississippi. This is merely an observation and not a definitive statement, for reasons discussed later.

To resume our narrative, the clues of "pueblos" and "gold ornaments" suggest Pineda's 40 day maintenance stop occurred somewhere other than the Rio Grande.

### **No Pueblos for Borrados**

According to anthropologist W. W. Newcomb, Jr., a recognized authority on Indians (8:29-71), a people called the Borrado inhabited the banks of the Lower Rio Grande. They were a sub-group of the Coahuiltecan-Tamaulipecan hunting and gathering desert cultures. As such, subsistence levels were probably minimal. In small family groups, they may have roamed a lot searching for food. Therefore, "permanent" pueblo structures and gold ornaments do not fit the Borrado's apparent lifestyle. Dr. Thomas R. Hester, Director of the Center for Archaeological Research, San Antonio, echoes Newcomb's description. He explored many archaeological sites in South Texas. None of his reports contain evidence of "two story structures" or gold in the Borrado habitat. (9:39-40)

The Rio Panuco fits the evidence better. The Huasteca Indians appear related to the Maya or Totonacs of northern Vera Cruz (4:26-27), and lived in an area once a part of the great artisan Toltec culture. They resided in permanent dwellings, were fiercely independent, avoided paying tribute to the Aztecs, and had gold. They sacrificed humans and preserved the skins of their victims, as Cortez discovered in 1522, when he found the remnants of the Pineda expedition on the Rio Panuco.

### **Careened Ships Vulnerable**

We must bear in mind while a ship was careened, the crew and passengers were most vulnerable to hostile attack. A beached ship is not an effective means of escape. What may have happened to Pineda did happen to Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba in 1517. As his ships approached Yucatan, a storm forced a landing near Cape Catoche. The Indians appeared friendly at first, in order to draw the Spaniards inland. Soon a large Maya force ambushed Cordoba's men but, keeping their wits about them, they successfully fought their way through the sprung trap.

In Pineda's case, one can imagine his men lulled into a false sense of security. At the right moment, the Indians turned on Pineda's force, vigorously pursuing his men in a desperate, running, downriver battle. Ambushed at nearly every twisting bend, the Spaniards suffered many casualties. A few survivors eventually reached the river mouth only to stumble into a final ambush. As ships burn and bodies toss in the rolling surf, they see their last hopes for escape ruthlessly destroyed. We cannot assert this with certainty. We only know Indians nearly obliterated a Garay re-supply venture attempting to bring in building supplies and additional manpower. Chipman deduces Camargo's three ship re-supply fleet arrived at Panuco just before a Huasteca revolt. Pineda and 40 Spaniards were killed while Camargo attempted to withdraw the entire settlement.

## **Group Splits**

In the retreat, only two ships remained intact and the third was abandoned. There were too many survivors for the few rations on board, so the party split. One group attempted to reach Villa Rica by foraging overland, while mortally wounded Camargo sailed south with the remaining men. This is the incident Bernal Diaz de Castillo wrote concerning 60 soldiers arriving in Cortez' camp, sick, yellow and bloated (4:51) However, Chipman does not provide a contemporary source to substantiate his version of the Panuco incident. On the other hand, Pineda's 40 day sojourn suggests the careening and exploration occurred in relative safety at any one of the unnamed rivers--but again, where? Weddle rules out the Mississippi. (5b) This author rules out the Rio Grande and most of the other rivers north of Panuco. Another river exists as a possibility and, apparently, no one has ever considered it. The Sabine--a boundary line river dividing East Texas and Louisiana--fits the descriptions of a narrow inlet with a wide bay and friendly natives culturally capable of building two story structures and of possessing gold ornaments.

## **Caddoes Were Advanced**

The Caddoes of East Texas and Louisiana were the most advanced of any Texas Indian group. (8:283) They had a highly developed agricultural system that supported sophisticated classes of people, such as priests, artisans and other specialists. Also, they enjoyed a wide-spread trade system reaching to the great pueblos of the American Southwest. But here, more archaeological/historical evidence, is required to support a Sabine River hypothesis. If such evidence appears later, then we could safely suggest Pineda may have applied the name Rio del Espiritu Santo to the Sabine, and not to the Mississippi.

## **Sailed With Columbus**

Francisco de Garay, together with future Cuban Governor Diego de Velasquez and pilot Anton de Alaminos, shipped with Columbus during his second voyage of 1494. Garay settled in Jamaica, made his fortune raising hogs, and in 1511 became the Island's governor. He heard the successful venture stories of Ponce de Leon, Cordoba, Grijalva, and knew Velasquez had sent Cortez to Mexico. He applied to the crown for permission to settle the lands Pineda explored. Out of his own pocket, he financed the Pineda four ship fleet, but authorities disagree on the date the exploration began. Garcia and others state it was in the spring of 1519, probably April. (6:15) Morrison says late 1518. (1:517)

## **Cortez Nabs Emissary**

Yet, Bernal Diaz recalls when one of Pineda's ships encountered Cortez' soldiers in July or August 1519. (10:111-113) Cortez' men captured an emissary about to claim the area for Garay. Those on the ship apparently sensing an ambush, turned sail to the north, probably to Panuco. This was Cortez' first inkling of Garay's intentions, and that Pineda was at Panuco with at least three ships. Garay was Cortez' most serious rival for Panuco as the boundaries between New Spain and Amichel (the region

between Panuco and Florida) were still in contention after the 1521 royal charter. Preoccupied with the first assault on Moctezuma's capital, Cortez could not set out to subjugate the Panuco area and settle the matter until December 1522.

### **Garay Goes to Mexico**

Finally, in 1523, Garay left the shelter of Jamaica to see for himself the status of his Panuco colony. Chipman notes that Garay had continued to send monthly supply ships in spite of no communication from Pineda. The ships apparently sailed to Panuco expecting to find Pineda there. It suggests that Pineda's settlement site was definitely known, thus supporting Chipman's hypothesis that Pineda spent 40 days on the Panuco. (4:52) After several disappointing events, including the desertion of his men, and finding no trace of Pineda, Garay journeyed to what is now Mexico City. He wished to arrange a compromise with Cortez over the boundary issue, and apparently was ready to move his claim further to the north. Meanwhile, Emperor Carlos V approved Cortez' authority to the Panuco area, effectively negating Garay's position. Is this when a trusted Garay functionary planted the Pineda plaque on Boca Chica beach? We may never know.

### **Garay Dies Suddenly**

On Christmas Eve, 1523, Garay and Cortez attended Midnight Mass together, later breakfasting in Cortez' quarters. During the meal, Garay suddenly turned violently ill. As Bernal Diaz records it, two days later Garay " . . . died of a mortal pleurisy." (11:282-283) According to Castañeda, Garay, in his charter request to the crown, declared he had set markers on the ground to determine the extent of his jurisdiction. (3:11) This author has not seen a translated version of Garay's report and therefore cannot say he mentioned his markers in a generalized statement, or gave specific locations where the markers were placed. As far as it is known, Castañeda is the only historian who asserts anything at all about markers. The RGV Museum has a report that an engraved clay slab, nearly identical to the Pineda plaque, is in a schoolhouse at La Pesca, Mexico. La Pesca is a fishing village near the mouth of the Rio Soto de la Marina. Two minor attempts were made to find the "La Pesca plaque," but efforts proved fruitless.

### **Alaminos May Be Key**

Anton de Alaminos is the third person who weaves in and out of our brief Pineda fabric. Not much is known about him, either, yet he could be one of the keys to solving the Pineda riddle. Most of what is known comes from Bernal Diaz' "Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva Espana," written when he was more than 80 years old. Some historians urge using his Conquest narrative with caution, thus questioning the old soldier's accuracy of memory. The fact remains, he was there when it all happened. We can only speculate why Diaz names his work the "True History . . ." Possibly his contemporaries exaggerated or distorted the facts, and as one of the last eyewitnesses of the Conquest, he decided to set the record straight.



## Alaminos Top Pilot

As a boy or a young man, Alaminos sailed with Columbus and learned the navigational skills which eventually earned his reputation as New Spain's number one pilot. In turn, he sailed with Ponce de Leon and taught him how to navigate. By the time he joined the Cortez expedition in early 1519, Alaminos had already learned about the Florida Gulf Coast, the coastlines of Central America, the Yucatan and Mexico as far north as the Panuco. Because of the dates in Bernal Diaz' "History," it is questionable whether or not Alaminos could have sailed north with Pineda. Remember, Morrison states the Pineda expedition left Jamaica near the close of 1518—with Alaminos as Chief Pilot. (1:517) According to Diaz, Alaminos piloted the Grijalva expedition from April through July of the same year. We wonder if he would have had the time to explore the northwestern Gulf Coast and return to Cuba to join with Cortez? The period between July 1518 and February 1519 seems a rather tight schedule.

## Guiding Treasure Ships

Wondering aside, we know that Alaminos sailed out of the picture on July 26, 1519. He and another pilot were chosen to safely guide the first Moctezuma treasure ships to Spain. Shortly after Alaminos departed, Cortez captured the Garay emissary and learned that Pineda was at Panuco. Therefore, Alaminos could not have been with Pineda at this time, which could possibly explain the lack of geographic detail in the "Pineda" map mentioned earlier.

At this point, the history becomes further confused. When Alaminos departed for Spain, we can assume his ship stopped at Cuba and was refitted for the onward voyage across the Atlantic. We don't know if Alaminos continued on to Spain. There is some indication that Garay sent for Alaminos to learn more about the fabulous lands waiting to be plundered. Also we don't know if the interview occurred in Jamaica or Cuba. If Cuba, was Garay enviously visiting his former shipmate, Governor Velasquez? Bernal Diaz merely relates, ". . . Garay, hearing of riches from Diego Velasquez, sent for and discoursed with Alaminos, our principal pilot, on the subject." Diaz continues, ". . . Garay sent a three ship squadron with 240 soldiers under Pineda, which was defeated by the Indians of Panuco—one ship escaping and joining us at Villa Rica."

Another point of confusion is the whereabouts of Pineda at this time. Garcia states there is no known record of Pineda's return to Jamaica. (6:26) It is quite possible Pineda stayed at Panuco to oversee the settlement, and sent his report to Garay via one of the original four ships. This would explain the captured emissary's comment to Cortez that Pineda had three ships at Panuco. However, Chipman has Pineda returning to Jamaica, then ordered by Garay to resail for Panuco almost immediately. He states the second Pineda expedition left Jamaica in 1520 with three ships. (4:50-51)

**". . . no bone, nor hide or hair"**

Whatever the true circumstances, by the time Camargo's re-supply fleet arrived at Panuco, the Huastecas had removed all traces of Pineda's defeat, so that he and his men were not warned and were themselves ambushed. Supporting this premise is a follow-up supply voyage by Miguel Diaz de Aux, who said he ". . . found no sign, nor bone, nor hide, or hair of the armada of Garay." (4:52)

Thus the events surrounding Alaminos after he departs Cortez remain unknown. Did he sail on to Spain? Did he annotate the "Pineda" map for Garay's benefit? Did he ever sail with Pineda, and did he, too, suffer his fate at Panuco? Much more needs to be learned about Alaminos before these questions can be answered.

## **The Present**

On November 3, 1974, members of Harlingen's U. S. Navy Reserve Unit discovered the Pineda plaque while engaged in a community relations project to acquire Civil War artifacts for the RGV Museum. The site where they unearthed the slab was one of several suggested by Ray Penrod, former principal of Ben Milam School in Harlingen and amateur artifact collector. A few months previously, he found the partial remains of an old boat whose lap strakes were held together with wooden pegs. He felt the same general area would be a good location for the joint Museum/Navy Reserve excavation project.

During the course of digging, excavators found a disorganized pile of adobe bricks in one pit. Penrod said later that in 20 years of poking around the beach and the river's edge, he had never found any adobe bricks quite like these. (12) Several bricks were removed from the pit and randomly set aside. During a break, one reservist, Agripin Valderaz, happened to pick up a "brick," turned it over, and noticed the engraved inscription. From that moment, the quest for authentication began. Pan American University geologists identified the slab material as Kaolin--a common clay product found almost anywhere in the world. Experts noticed traces of thread clinging to the slab suggesting it had been wrapped and fired in some type of fabric. However, not enough thread strands remained for a Carbon 14 test to determine approximate age.

In early 1980, Museum Director Galt forwarded a small chunk of the plaque to the Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, for a possible thermoluminescence dating test. According to archaeologist Donald R. Lewis, such tests are used on ceramic or stone materials that have been subjected to high heat temperatures. At the time, he advised Ms. Galt that the testing device was inoperable. In a subsequent letter (13), he informed Ms. Galt of the apparatus' repair, but was not certain the plaque fragments would yield any positive results. That was October 27, 1980.

## **Research Center Mute**

To date the Research Center is mute on the issue. On several occasions, Ms. Galt wrote or telephoned the Center trying to reach Dr. Lewis. For inexplicable reasons, we do not know if Lewis or any of his colleagues performed the thermo-luminescence test. Meanwhile, language experts mulled over the inscription. Many comment that the writing style appears authentic, but the tilde over the "n" and the numeral "7" with a dash through it do not seem correct for the 16th century.

Ford Green, an examiner of questioned documents for the legal profession and a history buff, best explains the quandary. In a December 1977 letter from San Antonio, he writes that for several years he helped catalogue 25,000 volumes and 400,000 manuscript pages dealing with the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. "As to the Pineda stone," he writes, "the lettering has about as many pluses as minuses, with some of them as suspicious as Hell, but others accurate to an unbelievable degree for

anybody not an expert in the typography of that period."

## **Unusual Ballast**

Green also comments about the slab: "The rock looks to be a kind called 'cantera', very common in the interior of Mexico, (but) not near the mouth of the river. The edges are squared, which is not the usual case with ship's ballast of that period. That was loose, rough rock the size of a baseball to three times that diameter." He notes for comparison, the Antiquities Commission has several tons of ballast acquired from galleons shipwrecked in 1553. Most of it came from Europe. "If it was the cantera," Green says, "Pineda had no chance to get it from (interior) Mexico. It might have come from the islands, but that is a problem for geologic detectives." (14)

Robert S. Weddle takes a slightly divergent view, but succinctly expresses why authenticating the writing is so difficult: "In the last year (1977), I have looked at quite a few handwritten documents of the 16th century. While they do not seem to conform with the nature of the inscription on the (Pineda) rock, I must admit I have yet to find anything from that period to indicate what letters chiseled on a rock might look like." He continues, "I do find in the handwritten documents a tilde over the 'n'—or a small dot that evidently was used in place of the tilde. I have yet to find a cross on the '7.'" He concludes wryly, "It does seem that anyone trying to fake such an inscription might at least have spelled out 'Aqui!'" (5b)

In an earlier letter, Weddle neatly summed up the problem: "The answer cannot be found by comparing the tablet with either handwriting or painting. It can only come from comparison with several samples of inscriptions on stone or other hard material, or from the dating of the material itself." (5c)

## **Epilogue**

As of this writing, the quest to authenticate the Pineda plaque has ground to a halt. Obviously, more research is necessary, but what to look for is like searching for the proverbial needles in widely scattered haystacks. For instance, continued research in the many archives of Spain and Mexico might turn up more pieces of the Pineda puzzle, but it would be a time consuming process. Also, archives must exist in Cuba and Jamaica, but there is no indication anyone explored them. Regrettably, the current political climate in Cuba is not encouraging to individuals from the free world wishing to examine official documents--no matter how ancient. In addition, we tend to forget Jamaica was a Spanish colony before the English captured it in 1655. Were archival documents destroyed, or did some find their way into the archives of Great Britain?

## **Lack Alaminos Research**

As much as Anton de Alaminos weaves in and out of the exploration of New Spain, an archival search for his log books, or "rutters", and other related documents should be made as they could yield some new clues. Apparently, no researcher has yet focused on Alaminos. A more determined effort should be made to verify the existence of a "La Pesca plaque." Also, 16th century inscriptions may exist in Tampico and Panuco which should be explored for possible comparisons. If the Pineda

plaque is of a later century, Weddle suggests it could have originated with a Spaniard wishing to commemorate Pineda's achievement--perhaps Jose Escandon, or some of his people after their coming to this area in 1749. (5d) He admits that proving this would be difficult.

We mentioned earlier that the plaque discovery may have been the result of a navigational error. Castañeda, in support of his Rio Grande river theory, relates that Garay, pleased with Pineda's report, sent three ships under Camargo to occupy the recently explored lands. (3:14-15) A good supply of bricks and lime were on board the ships, together with a group of brick masons.

### Navigation Hit or Miss

Remember, navigation was still a hit or miss science. Camargo could have made landfall at the Rio Grande thinking it the Rio Panuco. Castañeda notes that after escaping the Indian attack, Camargo abandoned one of the ships at a river's mouth. (3:15) Could this explain the pile of adobe bricks, the Pineda plaque and the old lap strake boat remains? Were these same bricks once in the hold of the abandoned ship? Were the lap strake relics once a part of the very same ship? Unfortunately, we can only speculate because most of the archaeological possibilities are now destroyed. However, a proper archaeological dig might rescue a few clues, though the site is intrusively disturbed. Some of the adobe bricks may still rest "in situ." They should be examined and compared with similar bricks, possibly in Jamaica.

Admittedly, following through on the research just recommended is beyond the author's capabilities--and probably beyond most others' as well. But until more pieces of the Pineda puzzle are recovered, the controversy will advance no further. Meanwhile, we can content ourselves with the fact that Pineda was the first European of record to explore the Texas Gulf Coast. But is the plaque attributed to him authentic? And at which river mouth did he spend 40 days? Your opinion is as good as any choice offered--so far!

The Cameron County Historical Commission

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## El romanticismo hispanoamericano también floreció aquí

por

Jorge Green Huie

La poesía hispanoamericana desde mediados hasta casi fines del siglo XIX era dominada por aquella tendencia artística traída de Europa que conocemos como el Romanticismo, cuyos atributos principales son el yo predominante del autor, los sentimientos extremadamente tristes, el concepto sumamente trágico de la vida, ciertas palabras clave como "alma" o "pena" y una preocupación melancólica con la naturaleza y la muerte. Por ser producto de una época caracterizada generalmente por el caos económico y la inestabilidad política, en México y Centroamérica por lo menos, se publicaron relativamente pocos libros de poesía. La poesía que llegó a publicarse entonces apareció predominantemente en pequeñas ediciones de provincia y, muy especialmente, en las páginas de los numerosísimos periódicos de la época. Por consiguiente, las obras poéticas del Romanticismo mexicano y centroamericano se han estudiado notablemente menos que la lírica romántica de Buenos Aires y Bogotá.<sup>1</sup> Hoy estas obras duermen olvidadas en las hemerotecas y los archivos de las sociedades históricas. Los críticos actuales, preocupados más por las obras de poesía contemporánea, solo rara vez muestran interés por la poesía de aquella época, que debiera estudiarse, si no por otra razón, por ser de la tendencia literaria inmediatamente anterior al Modernismo, de tanta resonancia internacional.

Debemos a la gentileza del señor Bruce Aiken, Director del Museo Histórico de la Ciudad de Brownsville, Texas, el reciente descubrimiento de dos ejemplos curiosos de esta poesía, que se publicaron en un periódico de nuestra ciudad, una copia del cual figura en los archivos de este museo. The Democrat, en la página cuatro de su edición bilingüe correspondiente a la fecha del 14 de febrero de 1878, contiene dos poemas titulados "Aroma" y "A mi ángel", de las plumas de Josefina Pérez y de un poeta anónimo, respectivamente. Por lo tanto, hemos de concluir que el Romanticismo hispanoamericano evidentemente dio frutos poéticos también en esta ciudad ubicada en la punta más al sur del estado de Texas.

En ambos poemas predominan, de manera muy típica para aquella época, los sentimientos sumamente personales y altamente tristes pero desde perspectivas marcadamente diferentes: en "Aroma" la voz poética en un tono melancólico dominado por las penas recuerda una época anterior que había sido feliz; en el segundo poema, por otra parte, se refiere a un momento de felicidad amorosa dentro de una vida generalmente caracterizada por la tristeza y la soledad. Hay en el segundo poema, además, una breve mención de la nostalgia por la patria. En ambas poesías la vida humana se describe en términos explícitamente sombríos: la primera termina con dos versos que contienen las frases "mi pena", "mi dolor" y "la hiel de mi existencia"; la segunda incluye una referencia a "mi tormento", evidentemente causado por el destierro.

En ambas poesías se encuentran analogías entre el ser humano y la flor: La flor desde la antigüedad greco-romana se simbolizó, además de la fugacidad del tiempo, la brevedad de la vida humana. En "Aroma" hay cuatro analogías de esta índole. Primero, las flores se personifican como señoritas que en una época anterior habían tenido sus noches románticas con serenatas y besos:

. . . esas flores bellas  
Tuvieron sus amores y embelesos,  
Y sus noches de estrellas  
Y brisas, y perfumes y querellas  
Y rumores de trovas y besos.

Segundo, la postura cabizbaja de la poetiza se compara con la situación de la flor arrancada por el viento:

Y triste y pensativa  
Mí frente se dobló cual sensitiva  
Que el ábrego arrancó.

Además la acción de exhalar fragancia por parte de las flores se emplea como metáfora para la respiración humana; la fragancia en sí se utiliza como imagen de un recuerdo.

En la segunda poesía, la metáforas incluyen la frase "cándida azucena" como equivalente de la novia y la "flor" representa el alma del novio.

La primera de las dos poesías nos ofrece, asimismo, un sistema tripartito de tiempos verbales. Las formas del pretérito introducen el estado contemplativo de la poetiza con el que comienza el soliloquio sobre sus penas: "contemplaba" (primer verso), "admiraba" (tercer verso) y "pensaba" (octavo verso). Lo que pertenece irrevocablemente al pasado --concepto central de la poesía romántica-- se expresa con verbos en el Pretérito, que representan la mayoría de las formas verbales en el poema: "trajiste" (segundo verso), "formaron" (cuarto verso), "dobló" (sexto verso), "arrancó" (séptimo verso), "tuvieron" (noveno verso) y "acabó" (decimotercer verso). Un verbo en este tiempo --"sentí" (decimoséptimo verso)-- también establece un nexo entre la época anterior y el momento de la meditación poética. La meditación poética, problema central de la poesía que se resuelve al encontrar la poetiza consuelo en sus recuerdos, corresponde al empleo de tres verbos en el Presente al fin del poema: "toma" (decimoséptimo verso), "me pierdo" (vigésimo verso) y "viene" (vigésimoprimer y último verso).

La segunda poesía, por su parte, también nos ofrece otro aspecto muy típico de la poesía romántica. El poeta enamorado al dirigirse a su novia declarándole su amor profundamente sentido --"¡Tu amor tan solo mi tormento enfrena!" (último verso del primer cuarteto)-- emplea una de las voces predilectas de los poetas románticos cuatro veces en solo catorce versos: "alma."

Las formas métricas utilizadas en ambas poesías son típicas de la tradición lírica establecida en España durante los Siglos de Oro y continuada sin interrupción en todos los países de habla hispana hasta fines del siglo XIX. El primer poema es una silva, combinación de versos endecasílabos y heptasílabos con rima consonante pero sin estrofa fija y sin esquema regular de rima.<sup>2</sup> El segundo es un soneto clásico, catorce versos endecasílabos organizados en dos cuartetos y dos tercetos, la forma métrica que Garcilaso de la Vega adaptó del italiano al comienzo del Renacimiento español y en los mismos años de la conquista de México.

Además de los elementos típicos del Romanticismo hispanoamericano y los aspectos más bien tradicionales o clásicos, existe en el caso de cada una de las dos poesías algún detalle que pudiera interpretarse como algo notablemente típico de nuestra región. En "Aroma" notamos una referencia



al "ábrego," el viento del sur, que rara vez se emplea en la poesía en lengua española pero que está muy de acuerdo con las condiciones meteorológicas que predominan en esta zona climática unos diez meses al año. En la segunda poesía el poeta se refiere al regadío, un elemento característico del Valle: "Eres. . ./Para la flor del alma dulce riego." (último verso del primer terceto y primero del último terceto).

A continuación se reproducen las dos poesías comentadas arriba corrigiéndose solo tres faltas tipográficas insignificantes (un acento, un signo de exclamación y una vocal):

### Aroma

Hoy contemplaba las queridas flores  
    Que me trajiste un día,  
Y admiraba los mágicos colores  
Que formaron tu alegría.  
    Y triste y pensativa  
Mí frente se dobló cual sensitiva  
    Que el ábrego arrancó.  
Porque pensaba que esas flores bellas  
Tuvieron sus amores y embelesos,  
    Y sus noches de estrellas,  
Y brisas, y perfumes y querellas  
Y rumores de trovas y de besos,  
    Y que hoy . . . todo acabó  
Y al espirar inquieta y conmovida  
    Su postrimer aroma,  
Tan débil ¡ay! como su misma vida,  
    Sentí que mi alma toma  
De su perfume la divina esencia,  
    Que en forma de recuerdo  
Cuando en mi pena y mi dolor me pierdo,  
Viene a calmar la hiel de mi existencia.

### A Mi Angel

    ¡Isabel! ¡Isabel! . . . dulce sirena,  
Nacida de las brumas de los mares,  
Hoy desterrado de mis patrios lares,  
¡Tu amor tan solo mi tormento enfrena!  
    ¡De inefable ventura el alma llena,  
Irán a acariciarte mis cantares,  
Como los rayos últimos solares  
Acarician la cándida azucena!  
    ¡Cuánto te amo, Isabel! tú eres mi vida,

Eres la luz á mi cerebro ciego,  
Eres la paz, del corazón perdida,  
Para la flor del alma dulce riego,  
¡Y tu alma bella con mi alma unida,  
Confunde en una nuestro amante fuego!

Invitamos al curioso lector a examinar otros periódicos locales de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. No dudamos que existen muchos otros ejemplos de esta poesía.

Universidad de Texas en Brownsville

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## Batalla De La Resaca De La Palma

por

Carlos Rosas

"What's this? Am I falling? My legs are giving way," thought he, and fell on his back. He opened his eyes, hoping to see how the struggle of the Frenchmen with the gunners ended, whether the red-haired gunner had been killed or not and whether the cannon had been captured or saved. But he saw nothing. Above him there was now nothing but the sky—the lofty sky, not clear yet still immeasurably lofty, with gray clouds gliding slowly across it. "How quiet, peaceful, and solemn; not at all as I ran," thought Prince Andrew, "not as we ran, shouting and fighting, not at all as the gunner and the Frenchmen with frightened and angry faces struggled for the mop: how differently do those clouds glide across that lofty infinite sky! How was it I did not see that lofty sky before? And how happy I am to have found it at last! Yes! All is vanity, all falsehood, except that infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing, but that. But even it does not exist, there is nothing but quiet and peace. Thank God!" (From War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy)

Dedicado a la memoria de todos los que, habiendo dado la vida en defensa de su pueblo, yacen anónimos y olvidados.

### **Batalla de la Resaca de la Palma.**

Lucha armada entre las fuerzas Norteamericanas dirigidas por el General Zachary Taylor y el General Mariano Arista al mando del ejército de Mexico, el día 9 de Mayo de 1846.

### **Las Fuerzas en Conflicto**

Sus líderes. El General Taylor, quien sería presidente de los E.U.A. de 1849 a 1850, contaba con 64 años de edad, había nacido ciudadano de este país y había desarrollado su carrera militar en una etapa histórica de expansionismo y conquista territorial. La desconfianza del Presidente Polk hacia él le hacía buscar triunfos militares que inclinaran a la opinión pública norteamericana en su favor.

El General Arista, de 43 años de edad, era un criollo aristócrata que había tomado el mando gracias a las gestiones de los Matamorenses, quienes habían rechazado al General Ampudia por su fama de cruel. A pesar de su fracaso, Arista llegaría a ser Presidente de México de 1851 a 1853.

Los Ejércitos. Los oficiales Norteamericanos, graduados de la Escuela Militar West Point se sentían presionados a demostrar su capacidad debido a las críticas del público Americano de aquel tiempo hacia esta Academia. Los soldados del ejército de Taylor pertenecían a las fuerzas regulares no habiendo recibido todavía éste los refuerzos de voluntarios. Eran soldados de profesión, de clase media, inmigrantes o descendientes de inmigrantes Europeos, deseosos de probar su patriotismo.

Dentro del ejército Mexicano existía una gran diferencia de clase social. Los generales y oficiales de rango elevado, por lo común criollos o extranjeros, pertenecían a la clase alta. La tropa se componía de mestizos e indígenas de origen campesino, con frecuencia reclutados por la leva. El

ejército de Arista contaba también con un gran número de rancheros y voluntarios, y con algunos regimientos de militares veteranos.

**La Organización.** El ejército de Taylor, habiendo recibido entrenamiento intensivo por varios meses antes de la contienda, era como una máquina bien aceiteada. Había alcanzado un alto grado de organización y eficiencia. Su sistema de mando permitía el aprovechamiento del ingenio y las iniciativas personales. Las diferencias sociales entre soldados y oficiales eran mínimas. Los esfuerzos del Secretario de Guerra Poinsett y otros oficiales en la década de 1840 por desarrollar una avanzada tecnología de guerra, rindieron fruto justamente antes del inicio de las hostilidades con México. En 1844 se implementaron los sistemas de instrucción para infantería, caballería, artillería de campo y montada y artillería pesada. En 1845 se publicó la instrucción para artillería de campo, caballo y pie, resultado de estudios efectuados por una comisión militar Americana sobre las más modernas técnicas de artillería Europeas, aumentadas y perfeccionadas por Samuel Ringgold para uso en su Compañía C del Tercero de Artillería.

La organización del ejército Mexicano, herencia del ejército colonial Español ponía énfasis en el uso de la caballería y de un sistema de fortalezas que lo hacían mas adecuado para un tipo de guerra de estilo medieval. Su sistema de mando vertical limitaba la iniciativa de los oficiales. Un buen liderazgo era esencial para el desempeño de este tipo de ejército.

**Armamento.** Un nuevo concepto de artillería, con la integración de elementos de caballería, al que se llamo "flying artillery" por su gran movilidad, se implementó con la dotación de cañones, morteros y howitzers nuevos, y con el uso de municiones de tipo explosivo (shells, spherical case shots y canisters), que al hacer contacto explotaban en múltiples fragmentos causando estragos, especialmente en formaciones compactas y en campo abierto. Diez años antes, Colt había patentado su famoso revólver, y los mosquetes americanos, aunque imprecisos, eran mucho mas certeros que los Mexicanos.

La artillería Mexicana consistía principalmente de cañones fundidos en España en el siglo XVIII. Sus disparos consistían en esferas sólidas de metal, de gran utilidad para derribar muros y para hundir barcos pero poco efectivos en campo abierto, ya que eran fácilmente esquivados por los soldados enemigos, y aun cuando acertaran en el blanco, las bajas que causaban eran mínimas. Por añadidura debido a la dificultad que presentaba el movimiento de estas piezas, las cuales eran maniobradas por la infantería, eran presa fácil de asaltos y disparos enemigos. En ocasiones se disparaban "grapeshots," que consistían en trozos de metralla envueltos en trapo y disparados como si fueran una bala sólida, cuyos fragmentos se dispersarán. Este disparo solo resultaba eficaz a corta distancia y contra formaciones compactas tales como cargas de caballería, debido a no poderse apuntar con precisión. Debido a lo tardado del proceso de carga y disparo de estos cañones, el artillero al ser atacado por la caballería sólo contaba con una oportunidad para defenderse con su cañon, después de la cual debía luchar cuerpo a cuerpo en una situación desventajosa. Los mosquetes usados por los Mexicanos habian sido comprados en Inglaterra, quien los había usado en su guerra contra los colonos de Norteamérica en la decada de 1770. Los reportes Americanos de esta campaña mencionan la pobre puntería de estas armas, a la cual contribuía el uso de cargas de pólvora inadecuadas. La caballería Mexicana utilizaba lanzas (de ahí el nombre de lanceros) con las cuales cargaba contra el enemigo a la usanza medieval. Aunque primitivo, este método les resultaba mas eficaz que el uso de armas de fuego a su disposición.

**Moral.** Después de la batalla de Palo Alto, y habiendo observado su gran ventaja en poder de

fuego, la moral y confianza del ejército de Taylor creció. El ejército de Arista por el contrario, después de haber sido arengado por sus generales y haberse asegurado su superioridad sobre el enemigo, se sentía frustrado y engañado. Se le ha lanzado contra la metralla enemiga solo para ser diezmado. Circulaban rumores de que Arista estaba un traidor que ha hecho arreglos a fin de que resulte vencedor el enemigo.

## Descripción de la Batalla

La mañana del 9 de mayo, Taylor se reunió en el campo de batalla de Palo Alto con su estado mayor. Había recibido información del retiro de las tropas Mexicanas, y se planteaba la alternativa entre esperar o seguirlos y hacerles frente. La mayoría de sus oficiales le aconsejaron esperar, pero él se encenó lleno de confianza después de su triunfo del día anterior y decidió continuar hacia el Fuerte Texas. En el camino los cuerpos destrozados de soldados y caballos Mexicanos lo convencieron de su superioridad, aumentando su determinación de atacar. Sus exploradores le informaron que el ejército de Arista se ha detenido en una hondonada conocida como Resaca de la Palma, obstruyéndole el camino hacia el fuerte. Taylor se detuvo en un estanque y se preparó a atacar alrededor de mediodía.

Arista, aconsejado por sus oficiales, había escogido el único sitio donde podía detener el avance de Taylor hacia el fuerte. La resaca consistía en el lecho seco del río, llena de agua estancada en tramos y rodeada de espesos matorrales, corre de este a oeste, y bloquea dos caminos que corren de norte a sur: el camino a Matamoros y el camino al Ramireño. En el centro del camino principal, Arista colocó una batería de cañones y a la derecha e izquierda, siguiendo el curso de la zanja, desplegó sus tropas a lo largo de una distancia aproximada de dos kilómetros. La caballería se situó en la retaguardia. Después de ordenar descargar el equipaje y delegar el mando a los generales Ampudia y de la Vega, se retiró a su tienda a escribir informes de la campaña.

La estrategia de Taylor estaba simple. Seguro de su superioridad decidió avanzar sobre el camino principal. Cuando la artillería Mexicana le impidió el paso, ordenó al Capitán May lanzarse a la carga con sus dragones. Un disparo de metralla les causó varias bajas, pero lograron tomar la batería y hacer prisionero a De la Vega. Sin embargo los soldados Mexicanos se reagruparon y recuperaron los cañones. Taylor entonces ordenó al 8vo regimiento recapturar y retener la posición, lo cual lograron. Mientras tanto Ridgley colocó su artillería voladora frente a la izquierda Mexicana y barrió con metralla el chaparral, a la vez que el 3o. y 4o regimientos cruzaban la resaca en un movimiento que envolvió a la izquierda Mexicana entre las fuerzas que han tomado el centro del camino y que doblando a la derecha se enfrentaron al Batallón y Guardacostas de Tampico, y el extremo izquierdo que ha quedado sin protección por la inacción de las fuerzas del General Canales que no intervinieron en la batalla y se retiraron sin pelear.

Mientras tanto Arista en su tienda desdeñó los informes que le llegaban de que una batalla en forma estaba teniendo lugar, replicando que se trató sólo de escaramuzas, y que la batalla verdadera será al día siguiente. No estaba sino hasta que los soldados Americanos empezaron a llegar a su campamento que reconoció la gravedad de la situación y salió a ponerse al frente de la caballería tratando de detener al enemigo. Sin embargo ya sus líneas de defensa han caído. El Segundo Ligero se lanzó contra el enemigo y fue diezmado a la vista de las tropas Mexicanas de la ala derecha, la cual al ver tomado el campamento Mexicano huyó en forma desordenada hacia el Río Bravo. Arista se

vió forzado a retirarse abandonando equipaje y pertrechos. La retirada fue cubierta por la caballería y por los cañones de Matamoros, pero la falta de transporte en el río causó la muerte de muchos que intentaban cruzar a nado. Así terminó la batalla que duró cerca de tres horas (de dos a cinco de la tarde). Al terminar, el ejército Norteamericano sepultó en varias fosas comunes excavadas en el sitio de la batalla, los cuerpos de aproximadamente 200 soldados Mexicanos, cuyos restos han permanecido ahí hasta la fecha.

## **Análisis de la Batalla**

Arista al elegir una posición defensiva en la resaca trató de limitar el daño que le había causado la artillería de Taylor. Al hacer esto, sin embargo, limitó su movilidad y sobreextendió sus líneas, lo que permitió que Taylor penetrará como punta de lanza y se concentrará en la ala más débil y más al alcance de sus cañones. La dispersión de las fuerzas Mexicanas aunada a la falta de liderazgo favorecieron su derrota. La ausencia de un plan ofensivo Mexicano permitió a Taylor atacar a placer y escoger sus movimientos sin preocuparse por la seguridad de su ejército. Se dice que Arista se encerró en su tienda por un exceso de confianza, lo cual es dudoso, ya que el día anterior había comprobado la superioridad del armamento Americano. Es mas lógico suponer que su orgullo le haya hecho negar la inminencia del fracaso de su misión. Es probable también que al percibir el deterioro de su imagen, haya preferido dejar el mando a sus subalternos. En todo caso, la estructura de su ejército requería de la presencia de un jefe. Tal vez fuera su orgullo también el que le impidió dictar medidas para una eventual retirada, lo cual hubiera salvado muchas vidas. Quizá si en lugar de haber intentado detener al ejército Americano en la resaca se hubiera retirado a Matamoros, sus posibilidades de éxito hubieran sido mayores, sin embargo el bloqueo del puerto por la flota Americana le hubiera impedido soportar un estado de sitio prolongado, mientras que Taylor hubiera seguido recibiendo pertrechos a través de Punta Isabel. La inferior calidad del armamento Mexicano, los rumores y divisiones internas del ejército y su baja moral al presenciar el sacrificio de sus compañeros de armas el día anterior, y una estrategia puramente defensiva que permitió a Taylor maniobrar libremente, fueron factores decisivos en el resultado de esta batalla. La imposibilidad de usar la caballería,--que era el orgullo del ejército Mexicano--debido a las grandes bajas que le causara la artillería voladora y la ausencia de posiciones fortificadas, impidió al ejército Mexicano desarrollar el tipo de combate para el cual estaba preparado. Más de la mitad del ejército de Arista incluyendo la caballería no pudieron participar, en parte por errores de estrategia, y en parte debido a la derrota psicológica de su general, al no haber podido cumplir sus promesas de victoria en Palo Alto.

Taylor supo aprovechar su superioridad de armamento, en particular de su artillería y la elevada moral de su ejército. Su estrategia, sencilla pero efectiva supo aprovechar de los defectos de la posición enemiga, la cual desbordó con relativa rapidez, no pudiendo causar mas bajas al dispersarse la tropa Mexicana entre el chaparral, lo que diluyó su ventaja en armamento. La huida de los soldados Mexicanos al ver perdida la posición fue por lo tanto una conducta acertada, sobre todo si se considera la falta de liderazgo.

Taylor consiguió en esta batalla reafirmar la superioridad militar Norteamericana y probar su nueva tecnología bélica. Ya previamente había logrado el principal objetivo que le encomendará el Presidente Polk, que era provocar un enfrentamiento que sirviera de pretexto para que el Congreso de los Estados Unidos declarará la guerra a México.

## Mitos relativos a la Batalla

El soldado Mexicano fue cobarde. Dadas las circunstancias, los soldados Mexicanos se condujeron en forma no solo valiente sino también prudente. Su huida les benefició no solo en lo personal, sino también a su país, ya que muchos de ellos lucharían contra el ejército Americano en batallas posteriores.

La batalla fue una derrota aplastante. Las pérdidas Mexicanas fueron de alrededor de mil hombres en las acciones del 8 y 9 de mayo. Sin embargo, el grueso del ejército de Arista sobrevivió. Al día siguiente, habiéndose reagrupado en Matamoros contaba con 5000 hombres. Aunque para muchos Mexicanos esta batalla fue una gran pérdida por las esperanzas que tenían de poder rechazar al ejército invasor, en términos generales no disminuyó la capacidad ni la resolución de México de continuar la guerra.

La posición Mexicana en la resaca era muy superior. En realidad la elección de este sitio fue un error estratégico, pues que impidió a Arista entablar un combate en forma. La poca movilidad que le ofrecía, la sobreextensión de sus líneas que le impedía concentrar su ejército en las zonas de mayor combate y la falta de un plan ofensivo, no compensaron la relativa defensa que ofrecían la zanja y el chaparral contra la artillería voladora de Taylor, quien pudo desarrollar su plan de batalla sin presiones.

Las tropas Mexicanas, veteranas de muchas batallas eran superiores tres a uno. Gran parte del ejército de Arista lo componían voluntarios e irregulares que, como los lanceros del General Canales, no entendían la estrategia o disciplina militar.

México provocó estas batallas y mereció perderlas, al invadir en forma insolente el territorio de Estados Unidos. En realidad, México, con grandes sacrificios logró reunir este ejército a fin de rechazar a un ejército enviado a su suelo con el fin de provocar la guerra.

Los Mexicanos merecían ser tratados sin misericordia debido a su crueldad en el sitio de El Álamo y con los prisioneros de Goliad. Este mito, muy favorecido por los Texas Rangers en su afán revanchista ("Remember El Álamo") se derrumba al recordar que en los momentos en que Taylor y Arista se enfrentaban, el presidente Polk hacía arreglos con Santa Ana por medio de su emisario Atocha, para que esté recuperará el poder a cambio de las concesiones territoriales que motivaron la guerra. Santa Ana había sido responsable de las acciones de El Álamo y Goliad, y había sido puesto en libertad después de San Jacinto con la posibilidad que podría ser útil en el futuro.

Las batallas de Palo Alto y Resaca de la Palma fueron enfrentamientos inútiles y derrotas vergonzosas que México debió haber evitado a toda costa. En realidad, estas batallas y el resto de las acciones de la guerra México-Americana sirvieron para limitar el apetito por "Lebensraum" de los Estados Unidos, que creía tener una misión divina en la conquista de toda América, de acuerdo con la doctrina del "Destino Manifiesto." La alternativa de ceder sin oponer resistencia hubiera resultado mucho más costosa a largo plazo.

Mitos Generales del Contexto. El resultado de estas batallas demostró la superioridad Angloamericana en raza, gobierno y religión. El mito de la superioridad racial, si bien sirvió para elevar la moral Norteamericana, le ocasionó también pérdidas importantes al subestimar al enemigo. Taylor había de aprender en Monterrey al igual que Custer en Little Big Horn que el pertenecer a la raza Anglosajona no era garantía de triunfo.

Gobierno. Si bien es cierto que México heredó un sistema autocrático y feudal de España, también

es cierto que abolió la esclavitud y favoreció la integración interracial mucho antes que los Estados Unidos, no obstante las declaraciones de éste último en favor de la libertad y democracia.

**Religión.** El odio de los protestantes de aquel tiempo hacia los católicos tiene sus raíces en las experiencias de los colonos Puritanos en las guerras de Reforma Europeas. México supo aprovechar este prejuicio en su favor al atraer a su causa a soldados católicos Norteamericanos, generalmente de origen Irlandés que formarían el Batallón de San Patricio.

## **Realidad del Contexto**

Esta batalla representa el enfrentamiento entre dos mundos que, inexorablemente debido a su situación geográfica, se habían de encontrar. Aunque su contraste era marcado, había también semejanzas importantes. La herencia indígena que en México estaba integrada en su gente y su cultura, en Estados Unidos empezaba a influir en la formación de una identidad Americana distinta a la Europea. Pensadores como Thoreau (quien por su oposición a la guerra fue a prisión), se identificaban a la naturaleza de America al igual que lo hiciera el nativo.

Ambos pueblos habían desarrollado un espíritu de frontera ("Frontier Spirit") al establecerse en regiones agrestes, con manifestaciones semejantes. En México el campero o charro y en E.U. el cowboy.

Ambas naciones habían logrado su independencia después de un periodo colonial en que habían sufrido la explotación de potencias Europeas: Inglaterra en el caso de E.U. y España en el caso de México.

Ambas naciones experimentaban con nuevas formas de gobierno. E.U. inspiró a intelectuales Mexicanos que buscaban alternativas a la monarquía. La corriente Liberal Mexicana imitó las estructuras de gobierno de los Estados Unidos, al que consideraba el ejemplo a seguir como hermano mayor en la vida independiente. Algunos como Lorenzo de Zavala y Lucas Alamán soñaron con la fusión de ambas culturas, pero terminaron despreciados por ambos pueblos al fracasar.

Al final fueron más poderosas las diferencias, por lo cual este encuentro terminó en conflicto. Este enfrentamiento representó el choque de una cultura Nórdica y una Latina; de una sociedad moderna, dirigida y formada por clases medias de origen Europeo, y una sociedad semi-feudal dirigida por aristócratas criollos y formada en su mayoría por mestizos e indígenas; de un pueblo protestante y uno católico; entre una sociedad racista y dominante y una mestiza y tolerante; entre una cultura progresista y emprendedora y una tradicionalista y resistente al cambio; entre un país que cree que el poder concede la razón ("might is right") y otro que prefiere perderlo todo antes que el honor.

## **Trascendencia**

Los hechos ocurridos en este periodo no han sido aún asimilados por ambos pueblos debido a que, consciente o inconscientemente se tratan de borrar. Es sorprendente el número de Norteamericanos que ignoran que su región sudoeste perteneció a México, y creen que ésta era habitada por Españoles y que España vendió estos territorios a E.U. De ahí que a los habitantes de California y Nuevo México se les haya considerado "Hispanos" a pesar de que estas tierras fueron parte del México independiente por 26 años y de la Nueva España desde su fundación, y a pesar de que sus colonizadores habían partido de lo que hoy es México y no de la península Ibérica.



El subconsciente Americano trata de olvidar que estas tierras fueron tomadas por la fuerza cuando las maquinaciones por corromper a los líderes fueron inútiles contra la voluntad del pueblo de México de conservar su integridad y de enfrentar en batalla a un enemigo con superioridad bélica antes que vender, arriesgando no solo los territorios en disputa, sino la existencia misma de la nación.

México quiere olvidar el trauma de la derrota, de la ocupación y desmembramiento de su territorio, las traiciones de sus líderes y de muchos hijos adoptivos a los que ingenuamente había dado acogida. México quiere olvidar la ineficiencia y el atraso tecnológico que lo llevaron a la derrota en una repetición del drama de la conquista Española. Al igual que en la conquista, quiere convencerse que la derrota con honor es mas valiosa que el triunfo, y como contraparte a Cuauhtémoc, crea el mito de los Niños Heroes.

Sin embargo, a diferencia de la conquista que se resuelve con el mestizaje y la fusión de las culturas hispana e indígena, la guerra entre México y E.U. no llega a resolverse. E.U. toma el territorio que quiere y deja a Mexico aquel que en virtud a su gran población de origen indígena no desea.

Este trauma en la infancia de México, al igual que los traumas infantiles de las personas, afecta su personalidad de nación adulta, creando dudas, inseguridad y baja autoestima. El Valle del Rio Grande cuyos pobladores apoyaron al ejército Mexicano en estas batallas y posteriormente fueron sometidos a fuerzas de ocupación, han sido victimas de los mismos mitos y del mismo trauma.

No existen motivos para que los Mexicanos o los Americanos de ascendencia Mexicana se avergüencen y traten de olvidar estas batallas. Las acciones de heroísmo de la batalla de la Resaca de la Palma, tales como la muerte del Capitan Arana a la cabeza de sus soldados del Batallón de Tampico, la muerte del Capitán Jose Barragán luchando al frente de sus soldados de la 4a. Compania, el sacrificio del Teniente Coronel Mariano Fernández dirigiendo el ataque del Segundo Ligero, la acción del Capitán Dolores Ramirez que al rehusar rendirse cae al pie de sus cañones, y en general, el sacrificio de los 200 hombres cuyos cuerpos tuvieron que ser abandonados en el campo de batalla, merecen ser recordadas con el mismo orgullo que las muertes del Teniente Ringgold y el Coronel Brown. Cuando esto suceda, el trauma habra sido superado y un nuevo día habrá comenzado.

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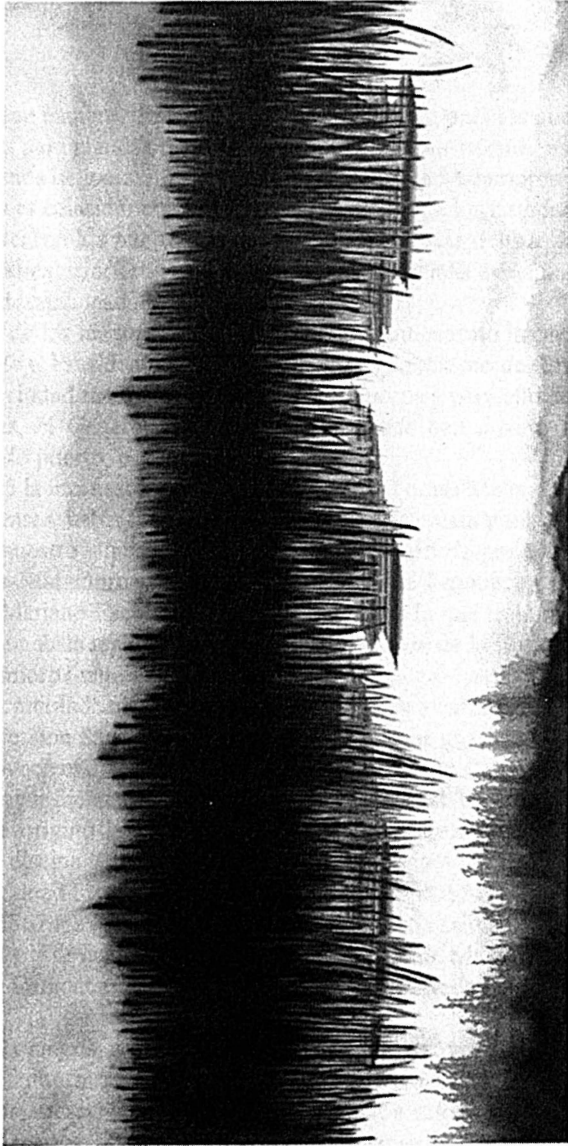
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## Los Matamorenses Fundan el Casino

por

Andres F. Cuellar

Las guerras que traen hambre, destrucción y muerte para los pueblos que las padecen, también significan oportunidades para algunas personas o regiones que por razones especiales les ofrecen la posibilidad de hacer buenos negocios. Este último caso era el de Matamoros durante los años de la intervención francesa, pues coincidió con la Guerra de Sucesión de los Estados Unidos. Cuando los Yankis del norte bloquearon los puertos de los estados esclavistas del sur, la única posibilidad de vender sus productos al exterior era a través de Matamoros y más exactamente por su puerto de Bagdad, situado en la desembocadura del Rio Bravo.

Aunque la mayoría de los matamorenses apoyaban con entusiasmo la causa de la república que dirigía en forma itinerante el Presidente Don Benito Juárez, el gobierno del Emperador Maximiliano no podía descuidar una ciudad tan importante como Matamoros y para ello comisionó a uno de sus más brillante generales, el General Tomás Mejía, para que con auxilio francés conquistara y administrara el destacado puerto, especialmente su aduana.

Para el año de 1865 la incansable actividad del General Tomás Mejía o el Indio Mejía como lo llamaban los Matamorenses, había terminado de construir Casa mata y un grupo de Matamorenses estaban construyendo nuestro suntuoso Teatro Reforma. El 15 de junio de 1855, un importante convoy militar que de Matamoros se dirigía a la ciudad de Monterrey, fué derrotado por los Generales republicanos Mariano Escobedo y Servando Canales lo que trajo como consecuencia que una semana después los también republicanos Generales Juan José de la Garza y José María Carvajal se apoderaran de Matamoros ante el júbilo popular que continuó hasta el día siguiente, en que se realizaron elecciones nombrándose a Don Miguel Tovar como alcalde primero.

El nombramiento de Don Santiago Tapia como Gobernador provisional del estado que hiciera el Presidente Juárez, provocó el disgusto de los Generales Servando Canales y Juan N. Cortina, que trataron de demostrar mayor fuerza con la colaboración del Coronel Thomas L. Sedwik, responsable de Brownsville, lo que originó la reacción del Presidente Juárez enviando al General Mariano Escobedo a imponer la disciplina, orden que cumplió, obligando a los Estadounidenses a cruzar el rio bravo y dejando la ciudad bajo la responsabilidad del prestigiado General Felipe Berriozabal.

Durante el año de 1867 los Matamorenses se enteraron de la salida de los franceses de nuestro país, del sitio de Querétaro y de la aprehención, juicio y ejecución de Maximiliano, Miramón y Tomas Mejía en el cerro y Las Campanas el 19 de junio sin faltar la entrada triunfal de Benito Juárez a la ciudad de Mexico.

Lamentablemente la alegría fue interrumpida en el mes de octubre de ese año 1867 con la presencia de un fuerte huracán que destruyó gran parte de la ciudad, incluyendo las torres de la parroquia y obligó a los sobrevivientes del puerto Bagdad a refugiarse en Matamoros. Ante la tragedia no les quedaba a los Matamorenses sino reconstruir la ciudad y enfrentarse a nuevos problemas. A los destrozos del huracán y sus consecuencias, hubo que agregar el fin del floreciente comercio por el Puerto de Bagdad, pues la Guerra de Secesión había terminado y nuestros vecinos exportaban sus productos por sus propios puertos. Tres años después, en 1871, los Matamorenses

eligieron un nuevo cabildo integrado por Don Francisco Fuentes Farías como Alcalde Primero y los señores Felipe Márquez, Pedro García Cavazos y Remigio Chapa como regidores.

Muchos planes y rumores circulaban entre los Matamorenses que trataban de progresar, entre ellos el General Porfirio Díaz que tenía importantes amigos en Matamoros como los Generales Pedro Hinojosa, Servando Canales y otros, se había revelado contra la reelección del Presidente Benito Juárez con el Plan de la Noria. Otras personas como Don Francisco Armendáiz se habían enterado que en la ciudad de Paris recién se había inaugurado un servicio público de transporte que se movía sobre rieles y era estirado por mulas. Él pensaba en la necesidad de implantar en nuestra ciudad esa innovación. Se argumentaba que el poblado de Santa Cruz, situado en lo que ahora es la Puerta México, era visitado por muchos Matamorenses que deseaban cruzar a los Estados Unidos o bien divertirse en el lugar.

Se proponía como ruta, partir del parían hoy Mercado Juárez. Por la calle Abasolo hasta la séptima (en ese entonces llamada Iturbide) hacia el norte y a la altura de lo que ahora es la Calle Galeana, tomaba hacia el noreste, siguiendo lo que ahora es la Avenida Alvaro Obregón hasta llegar al mencionado Santa Cruz, actualmente Puente Nuevo. De regreso tomaba el mismo recorrido hasta tomar la calle Sexta llamada Calle Real o Calle de César. Hasta la Plaza Principal donde tomaba la Calle González, entonces llamada Calle de Comercio hasta llegar a la Calle Novena, entonces llamada Calle de Catón.

Esta idea del Señor Armendáiz no se materializaría sino hasta el año siguiente, 1872 cuando se comenzaron a tender los rieles que pronto serían conocidos por los Matamorenses como Los Tranvías de Mulitas. Siendo Matamoros un doble puerto, tanto fronterizo como marítimo, es natural que hubiera extranjeros entre sus habitantes y que muchos de ellos tuvieran su religión distinta al catolicismo predominante; tampoco debió faltar quién hiciera labor de proselitismo y es muy posible que se aspirara a organizar su propia iglesia Protestante, idea que cristalizaría tres años después, en 1874 cuando con la dirección del Reverendo Anthony Thomas Graybill organizaron la primera iglesia Presbiteriana del norte de México que se llamó Príncipe de Paz.

Pero la idea que más entusiasmaba a un grupo de Matamorenses era la planteada por Don Bernabé León de la Barra que desempeñaba el importante cargo de administrador de la Aduana. Era reconocido como arquitecto y sentía la necesidad de establecer en la mejor forma posible el Teatro Reforma que tendría poco más de diez años de construido.

Don Bernabé debió tener gran capacidad de liderazgo, a juzgar por el gran número de personas que debió reunir Estaban los Consules de Estados Unidos, Inglaterra, Alemania y Cuba acreditados en Matamoros, así como residentes de Brownsville; en el año de 1867 fué creada la Sociedad Artística y Cultural Aurora.

Su interés no solo era el de organizar los mejores bailes de Matamoros sino también programas literarios y musicales y presentar conciertos y obras de teatro. Aunque esta agrupación no estuvo constituida conforme a la ley, trabajaba como grupo informal de hecho y era reconocida por las autoridades municipales quienes les permitían el uso del Teatro Reforma como recinto oficial. Les encargaron la organización de ceremonias civiles.

La sociedad recreativa Aurora años más tarde cambió su nombre y el 21 de mayo de 1871 nace el Casino Matamorense. Su domicilio social desde sus inicios hasta el año de 1921 fué en el Teatro Reforma en donde se celebraban todas las fiestas sociales.

En el año de 1922 cambió sus oficinas y salones al edificio ubicado en González y Sexta en donde

está una institución bancaria . Permaneció hasta el año de 1928 y de ese lugar se trasladó a los altos de la finca que ocupó la Lotería Nacional en González 6 y 7 donde permanece por largo tiempo. Luego ocupó el edificio ubicado en González 7 y 8 en donde estuvo ubicada la Mercería de Don Emilio Benevendo que se llamaba "Casa E. Benevendo sucesores" misma en la que nació Don Caledonio Junco de la Vega, y que fue propiedad de la señora María Montemayor viuda de Cárdenas, madre del expresidente de Matamoros, Don Augusto G. Cárdenas Montemayor. De ahí pasó al edificio que fue propiedad del Sr. Francisco González Villarreal. Estaba situado en González 4 y 5 y ahí permaneció hasta 1938 cuando se cambió a su propio domicilio en las Calles de Morelos y 6a. Este fue derrumbado en 1954 para construir el actual edificio del Casino Matamorenses.





# The Shifting Relationship between Harlingen and San Benito in the First Three Decades of the Twentieth Century

by

Milo Kearney

Western Cameron County first saw significant urban development at the outset of the twentieth century with the foundation of two major new towns--Harlingen and San Benito. Both towns were founded on ranch lands that had been part of the 1781 Spanish Concepción de Carricitos Grant to the Fernández family.<sup>1</sup> Similar in their origins, shot across the starting line of city founding at approximately the same time, it was unclear for over two decades which of the two towns would emerge as the major urban center of the area. Harlingen got off to a slight head start, but through the 1910s San Benito held a decisive lead. Yet, by the end of the 1920s, Harlingen emerged as the more dynamic. The mold for the evolution of the area through the rest of the twentieth century had been set.

## The Founders

Among the characteristics the two towns held in common were the similarities between their founders. Lon C. Hill, the founder of Harlingen, and Sam Robertson, the founder of San Benito, both grew up in the 1860s and 1870s on the edge of Dixie, Hill near Austin, Texas, and Robertson near Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>2</sup> Both were men of great vision and initiative.<sup>3</sup> Both were individualists, Hill letting his hair grow in a bushy mass half-way to his shoulders.<sup>4</sup> Both were plucky. Robertson refused to stay in bed for more than seventeen days after breaking seven ribs in 1904, insisting on returning to his job supervising track-laying.<sup>5</sup> Both were courageous, ready to join in an important fight and personally involved in local law enforcement.<sup>6</sup> Both were well-rounded in their interests.<sup>7</sup> Both were jovial and at ease with common folk.<sup>8</sup> Both also held very close ties to family and friends.<sup>9</sup>

This is not to say that the two men were exactly alike. Hill had enjoyed an easy start in life, becoming a lawyer.<sup>10</sup> He bought more than 100,000 acres of land in the Rio Grande Valley and rubbed shoulders with William Jennings Bryan, William Vanderbilt, O. Henry, and Will Rogers.<sup>11</sup> Rex Beach described him as Blaze Jones in his novel Heart of the Sunset.<sup>12</sup> Robertson was born into a poor family and had to work at hard manual labor jobs from a young age.<sup>13</sup> Despite the success of San Benito, Robertson himself flitted in and out of financial solvency and never made a fortune.<sup>14</sup> Both men worked well together from the first time they met and sat cross-legged together on the ground sharing their visions for their surroundings, in May 1904.<sup>15</sup> Their mutual generosity was a boon to both towns. At one point, in 1907, Hill rescued Robertson's town when its pump broke down, by pouring some of his irrigation water into the San Benito resaca.<sup>16</sup> At a later point, Robertson helped Hill's town survive a flood by sending some of his men to join in containing the ravaging waters.<sup>17</sup>

## The Relative Merits of the Two Choices of Sites

Hill and Robertson founded their towns on the basis of the presence of two determining factors: water for growing crops and a rail line for transporting those crops to northern markets. The town sites were chosen in areas lower than the Rio Grande River's natural levees and sufficiently close to the river to be able to divert river water down into the rich delta soil of their environs for gravity irrigation.<sup>18</sup> An additional factor in Robertson's choice of sites was a dry resaca bed, which he correctly surmised could be turned into a natural irrigation canal by filling it with water from the river a mile and a half distant.<sup>19</sup> Robertson in 1904, with James Landrum and Oliver Hicks, formed the San Benito Land and Irrigation Company, which started the job in 1906 and completed it in 1908.<sup>20</sup> Hill formed his Harlingen Land and Water Company in 1907 and had his irrigation system in operation the following year.<sup>21</sup>

The rail line was provided by the arrival of the new St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico line, later incorporated into the Missouri Pacific system. Hill guaranteed the railroad passed through his site, on 20 April 1904, by giving it funds, free right-of-way, bonus lands, and land for a terminal.<sup>22</sup> He worked closely with Uriah Lott, head of the railroad, and even named Harlingen after Lott's ancestral home town back in the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup> Robertson, who held a contract for track laying, in his plans for town development worked closely with railroad builder B. F. Yoakum, at first naming his town Bessie in honor of Yoakum's daughter.<sup>24</sup> The tracks passed through his town site on 6 May 1904.<sup>25</sup> Water and rails spurred a rapid emergence of local agriculture. In 1909, the local citrus industry was launched when L. E. Snavelly, later the Rio Grande Valley district manager of the American Fruit Growers, Inc., planted one hundred citrus trees.<sup>26</sup>

However, differences between the two town sites suggest that San Benito would probably experience a faster development early on, only to be passed up by Harlingen in the long run. San Benito's early advantages were its closer proximity to the river with its preexisting small Hispanic farm communities, and its town resaca. San Benito's more southerly location put it in closer touch with the Rio Grande River, the Military Highway, and more developed ranches, as well as with the one significant preexisting population center, that of Brownsville. The dry resaca bed allowed Robertson to develop a local irrigation system faster by simply filling it with river water rather than having to dig canals from scratch. A less central short-term factor may also have been that town's more attractive setting beside the palm-lined resaca, an element of landscaping lacking in early Harlingen due to the failure of Hill's plan to center the town right on the Arroyo Colorado.

Hill had chosen what would prove in the long run to be the more favorable site. Harlingen's long-term advantage rested on its additional location on the Arroyo Colorado and at the transportation hub of Cameron County. The Arroyo Colorado was a salt water inlet of the Gulf of Mexico, with water from eight to twenty feet deep over its whole course.<sup>27</sup> Hill's foresight saw the potential for dredging the Arroyo and transforming it into a ship channel to the Laguna Madre, with trade contacts to points beyond.<sup>28</sup> He helped to plan the Intracoastal Canal System at a meeting in Victoria, Texas, in 1904, and planned to use the Arroyo Colorado to tie Harlingen into it.<sup>29</sup> He would have preferred to build the town right on the Arroyo banks, had the town charter and plan for the railroad station not set a location a mile to the north, but the town would grow out to and beyond the arroyo in time.<sup>30</sup>

Harlingen also lay at the only major railroad junction in Cameron County. The building of the Hidalgo or Sam Fordyce branch of the railroad between Harlingen and Mission in 1904 gave

Harlingen train connections to the north, west, and southeast.<sup>31</sup> The new line also gave Harlingen two farming satellite towns, Combes and Primera, both to its northwest.<sup>32</sup>

The subsequent history of the two towns vindicate both Hill, who had the earlier pick of sites, as well as Robinson, who chose the best site in western Cameron County left after Harlingen. The choice of town sites also reflects the situations of each man. Hill, enjoying financial security, could afford to sit back and watch his town site evolve more gradually to greatness. Robertson, always on the edge of financial ruin, needed a site which could take off faster.

## **Harlingen's Founding**

Lon C. Hill came to know the area on visits both as a young man and again in 1898 when he acted as a lawyer in a case in Brownsville.<sup>33</sup> In 1900, he began buying land, and in 1902 purchased the site of Harlingen.<sup>34</sup> To develop that site, in 1903 he chartered the Lon C. Hill Improvement Company.<sup>35</sup> In March 1904, he put James Lockhart in charge of local workers clearing the land. The worker families called their isolated tent camp, which was located at the side of the Arroyo Colorado, Salty Lonesome.<sup>36</sup> Hill brought in Texas Rangers to guard the new community, and housed them in tents, too, until housing could be prepared for them.<sup>37</sup> Before the jail was built, prisoners were simply chained to a big mesquite tree awaiting transportation to the county jail in Brownsville.<sup>38</sup> An artesian well was dug. It took the workers to mid-April to lay out ten miles of streets with lots to the east of the railroad tracks.<sup>39</sup> One thousand one hundred blocks of the town were bought by developer F. Z. Bishop, for whom the town of Bishop, north of Kingsville, is named.<sup>40</sup> The arrival of the train was the most exciting event in the life of the work site. Workers would gather to wait for the train, filling their time with target practice. This custom brought the train porters to dub the stop "Six-Shooter Junction."<sup>41</sup>

A small cluster of buildings east of the railroad tracks and centering on the new train station arose by the spring of 1905. James Lockhart's family house was occupied in September 1904;<sup>42</sup> Lon C. Hill's house in January 1905.<sup>43</sup> Visitors to Hill's home could see two modern curiosities: a privately-installed telephone and a 1904 Buick Roadster.<sup>44</sup> One building belonging to James Lockhart on what was later called Commerce Street doubled as grocery store and post office.<sup>45</sup> A two-story hotel was opened by the railroad at Van Buren and First Street.<sup>46</sup> A school opened in the fall of 1905.<sup>47</sup> By the end of 1905, a poorer Hispanic "Mexiquito" settlement also grew up on the more flood-prone "wrong side of the tracks," centering on the simply-marked "Beer Saloon" and "Old Crow Whiskey" saloon on West Jackson Street.<sup>48</sup> Additional buildings in the following two years included a frame business building and a telephone exchange in 1906,<sup>49</sup> and a separate post office building in 1907.<sup>50</sup>

## **San Benito's Founding**

Sam Robertson's job as sub-contractor for laying down railroad track first brought him to the Rio Grande Valley in 1904.<sup>51</sup> He at once threw himself into buying land for his new town from the Powers Estate, from J. L. Landrum and Oliver Hicks.<sup>52</sup> In March 1907, he joined with his previous acquaintance Alba Heywood and Heywood's two brothers, actors from Michigan who had struck it rich in Spindletop oil, to form the San Benito Land and Water Company. This entity jumped into selling town lots,<sup>53</sup> while Sam Robertson's brother Frank set about digging irrigation canals with the

help of workers housed in a tent camp.<sup>54</sup> Like Harlingen, San Benito saw buildings rise in two clusters, a more Anglo business and residential center on the higher north and a poorer "Mexiquito" on the more flood-prone south side of the railroad tracks (which move mainly south through Harlingen, but then turn to pass more to the east through San Benito).<sup>55</sup>

### **San Benito's Faster Take-off**

San Benito rapidly left Harlingen far behind in terms of growth. Four thousand acres of lots were sold in the first two weeks in a rush for purchases that doubled the price of a lot.<sup>56</sup> By the end of its first year of 1907, San Benito could boast a two-story frame hotel, operated by Sam Robertson's wife Adele,<sup>57</sup> a telephone exchange (run by Sam Robertson's San Benito Light and Water Company,<sup>58</sup> and a school building. The latter opened with 48 students, compared to 14 pupils for Harlingen's school in its first year<sup>59</sup>

The year 1908 saw the founding of the San Benito Bank and Trust Company,<sup>60</sup> under Alba Heywood, on South Sam Houston. Business was brisk, and deposits grew to \$100,000 at the end of its first year.<sup>61</sup> John Lomax's Farmers State Bank was also founded.<sup>62</sup> New businesses included Sam Robertson's ice factory, the Valley's first plant for icing refrigerator cars,<sup>63</sup> J. Scott Brown's two livery stables, and H. E. Agar's newspaper office, and some general stores.<sup>64</sup>

### **Harlingen's Slower Take-off**

Harlingen did not fall behind by lack of effort. Lon C. Hill even bothered to tip the train porter to shout out "Harlingen" in a clarion voice when the train pulled into the station, to make sure passengers did not travel on to San Benito by mistake.<sup>65</sup> In 1908, he also opened a two-story brick Hill Building to accommodate various businesses, including Sam Botts' general store, Searcy Chambers' Harlingen State Bank in 1909, and at some point the office of The Harlingen Star.<sup>66</sup> The Harlingen cemetery was launched in 1909, with the tragic death of a teenager who had fallen into a vat of boiling syrup while trying to balance on its edge.<sup>67</sup>

It did not help Harlingen's growth that it was hit especially badly by the hurricane of 1909. The Lockhart house was one of those demolished,<sup>68</sup> while the area was so flooded that Hill's sons were able to fetch their father from Lyford in a rowboat.<sup>69</sup> San Benito at the same time threw itself into vigorous anti-flooding measures.<sup>70</sup>

### **Church Foundations**

Neither Hill nor Robertson exhibited a personal religious involvement, even though other family members did. Hill's daughters Paul and Eustachia (Sunshine) became active Presbyterians.<sup>71</sup> Robertson's brothers were active Baptists, one of them (William) a Baptist minister.<sup>72</sup> Sam himself would celebrate his second marriage in a Presbyterian service in Vienna, Austria, but merely as a matter of convenience.<sup>73</sup>

Nonetheless, both Hill and Robertson fostered church life in their towns in hopes of bringing a desirable ethical influence. In the days before there was a church in town, Hill often acted a host to itinerant preachers, who then delivered Sunday sermons in Harlingen's school building.<sup>74</sup> Hill went

on to donate free land for congregations which wanted to build a church. Baptists, Methodists, Christians, Presbyterians, and Seventh Day Adventists all received land in the mainly Anglo neighborhood east of the tracks, while the Catholics built a chapel in the Mexiquito district west of the tracks.<sup>75</sup> Robertson likewise set aside land for churches in San Benito. Here, too, the Catholics built their church, in 1910, on the poorer (south) side of the tracks; the Protestants on the more affluent (north) side.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Mexican-American Role in the Founding**

Mexican-Americans had long lived in the area as ranchers. They provided the bulk of the settlers in both towns, and played an important role alongside the Anglos as business entrepreneurs. Examples of Mexican-American business founders include Santos Lozano from Premont, Texas (near Alice), who opened a general store in Harlingen in 1904. Wanting to set up shop on Van Buren Street, then seen as the most desirable, he was forced to build instead on Jackson Street. It was only by an unforeseen irony that Jackson Street emerged as the center of the downtown section.<sup>77</sup> The Mexican-American families from the older ranches along the river gave a special boost to San Benito's early growth as they moved into houses in town or patronized its stores. Cavazos, Esparzas, Zepedas, the Villarreal (of the later Butane Company), and other such families simultaneously lent San Benito more of a Hispanic flavor than Harlingen from the first.<sup>78</sup> In 1909, L. M. Valdetero started a drug store and the first electric light plant,<sup>79</sup> and Julian and Placido Villarreal launched a dry goods store.<sup>80</sup> However, the Mexican-Americans were shunted to the side in the social pecking order and governments of the towns, and their considerable contribution has still not been properly researched and acknowledged.

### **The Result of the Founding Decade**

By 1910, San Benito's growth had pushed far ahead of Harlingen's. San Benito had 2,500 residents, while Harlingen lagged far behind with a population estimated as low as 300.<sup>81</sup> For the decade to come, San Benito had become the bold ebony tree beneath which the mesquite sapling of Harlingen passed little noticed. However, a storm was brewing, whose lightning would be concentrated upon that ebony due to its greater prominence.

### **The 1910s**

The 1910s were a period of growing pains for the still infant settlements. The two towns remained closely tied to one another, as they had been in their founding decade just before, even though they as yet had no road linking them and no bridge across the Arroyo Colorado except for the railroad trestle. The Methodist churches in San Benito and Harlingen shared one pastor, who lived in San Benito and commuted to Harlingen by walking along the railroad track.<sup>82</sup> There were also some curious parallels, for example that each town in this decade had an April mayor who turned around and immediately resigned—John D. Hill for Harlingen, in 1911, and Dr. Clarence Cash for San Benito, in 1916.<sup>83</sup> Yet the towns developed at notably different rates. Despite its slightly earlier start and its more advantageous location, Harlingen had fallen behind San Benito and remained far less

important through the whole decade. Harlingen grew to only 1,784 in 1920, compared to 5,070 for San Benito.<sup>84</sup>

## San Benito's Continuing Lead over Harlingen

San Benito's greater *afán* in this decade was announced by the Diez y Seis celebration in 1910 under the arcades of the San Benito Bank and Trust building on Sam Houston Boulevard. Music was provided by nothing less than the Mexico City Police Band, and the merrymaking spilled over to Robertson Street.<sup>85</sup> Another spirited celebration in this period was San Benito's 1914 Cabbage Day Parade celebrating farming success, with a pig contingent that ran so amok that some of the porky fugitives were never caught sight of again.<sup>86</sup> Movies came to San Benito early, bringing the city government to regulate them already in February 1913.<sup>87</sup> Harlingen's social events, including dances in the Lozano Building with music provided by San Antonio and Houston bands, were on a smaller scale.<sup>88</sup> Harlingen's first movie theater, the Rex, was in operation by 1915.<sup>89</sup>

San Benito witnessed a greater commitment to brick. In 1911, the San Benito Bank and Trust put up an imposing brick building on Sam Houston Boulevard. The building was constructed by W. Scott Heywood, who also had the adjoining two-story Alaska Building put up.<sup>90</sup> Harlingen's oldest brick buildings were the Hill Building of 1908 and the Lozano Building of 1915.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, no more than a single line of mainly frame buildings with covered plank sidewalks distinguished Harlingen in this decade.<sup>92</sup> The disparity of fortunes is reflected in the very homes built by the two town founders. Lon Hill intended to build an impressive brick home to replace his original frame house, and he made a start by constructing a grand stable of that material. The panic of 1907 and then the disruption of the First World War caused Hill to postpone these plans indefinitely.<sup>93</sup> However, Sam Robertson in 1911 built an attractive brick home on Sam Houston Boulevard in San Benito. The house featured thick walls and high windows for defense against bandits, a Mexican-style central patio and was built on creosoted railroad ties as beams.<sup>94</sup>

## The Role of the Banks

The banks played a major role in town development. For San Benito, this position was taken by the San Benito Bank and Trust, which in 1911 was designated as the city depository at a service fee of 3% interest. In 1912, J. L. Landrum, the owner of El Cipres Ranch, succeeded Alba Heywood as bank president, holding this position to 1924. Landrum had come into his local landholding by marriage to Frances Powers, the daughter of Judge Stephen Powers, who had gained a good deal of land in the region as pay for legal services in helping the Fernández family defend their land deeds in court in the disputed claims following the American occupation after 1846. Landrum, who had sold land to Sam Robertson for the town, continued to promote it, donating land for public parks.<sup>95</sup>

The Harlingen State Bank was the most important money institution for Harlingen's early growth. Its president, Lawrence S. Ross, was the son of "Sul" Ross, the former Indian fighter, conservative Democrat Texas Governor from 1887 to 1891, and president of Texas A & M College. He worked closely with the town government, providing it from April 1912 with offices in his bank for its meetings and other work, and serving as mayor from April 1912 to his death in October 1914.<sup>96</sup> In February 1912, the Harlingen State Bank's bid was accepted, making it the depository for city funds.<sup>97</sup>

When Mayor Ross died, the city government recorded a moving tribute to the loss they felt, praising Ross' energy in public affairs and his marital devotion in private life.<sup>98</sup> Ross' replacement as mayor was the city clerk Miller Pendleton, who had come down from San Antonio to work at the Harlingen State Bank. He and his wife were charter members of the First Presbyterian Church of Harlingen in 1910.<sup>99</sup> His sister Lualee was married to Hoyt Hicks Burchard, whom Pendleton in 1913 had persuaded to come from Gonzalez, Texas, to be Manager of the Harlingen State Bank.<sup>100</sup> Pendleton was at first elected by the city council in November 1914 to fill out Ross' term of office, and then was re-elected mayor by the city in April 1916.<sup>101</sup> The mayor's M. V. Pendleton Oil Company provided oil to the city during his term of office.<sup>102</sup>

## Business Development

In the realm of business, it was San Benito's Sam Houston Boulevard, centered at Stenger Street, which first emerged as the Harbenito area's commercial heart.<sup>103</sup> Sam Robertson in 1910 built the town's first forty-ton ice-making and pre-cooling plant, allowing local icing of refrigerator cars on the railroad.<sup>104</sup> Under the urging of B. F. Yoakum, Robertson also built an ice plant at Harlingen, as well as at Bay City.<sup>105</sup> In 1911, Sam Robertson formed the San Benito Irrigation Company.<sup>106</sup> Another San Benito business leader was Joe Ballenger from Alabama. Arriving in 1909, Ballenger launched a canal and road-building business that expanded in a big way.<sup>107</sup> San Benito boasted two canneries and three cotton gins by 1915.<sup>108</sup> In contrast, Harlingen lagged in business development. Its Chamber of Commerce was established in 1910, with a building in the triangle formed by Commerce and B streets.<sup>109</sup> In 1910, Harlingen's first cotton gin was built.<sup>110</sup> In November 1911, Lon C. Hill opened a sugar mill.<sup>111</sup>

## City Services

The much smaller size of Harlingen's population did not allow it to initiate the same sort of city services as larger and more prosperous San Benito. The disparity between the two towns can be seen in various types of city services. L. M. Valdetero built San Benito's first electric plant in 1909, followed in 1910 by a second plant owned by Sam Robertson with Alba Heywood.<sup>112</sup> Harlingen built an electric plant only in 1912. From time to time, the Harlingen plant was leased to private operators, but was constantly taken back into city hands due to poor management. The plant sometimes provided electricity for no more than two hours during the day and four hours at night.<sup>113</sup> Harlingen's first street lights, on Jackson Street, with lamp-posts donated by various residents, were put up in 1916.<sup>114</sup>

Harlingen's first telephone exchange was installed only in 1910, three years after that of San Benito.<sup>115</sup> Even then, Harlingen's telephone service was so inadequate that in August 1913, the city threatened to cancel the telephone company's permit to do business if the situation did not improve.<sup>116</sup> San Benito also obtained a higher grade of water service. In 1914, Sam Robertson's San Benito Land and Water Company (of which he soon relinquished control) received a franchise from the city of San Benito to provide water to the community.<sup>117</sup> Lon C. Hill's Harlingen Land and Water Company was awarded the contract already in 1912 to provide Rio Grande water to Harlingen's City Lake. Hill had created this reservoir by filling a *charco* or low spot with water from the Rio Grande back in March

1911. The city built its own pumping plant and other equipment necessary for distributing the water from there.<sup>118</sup> However, the water provided was so substandard that the city government ordered all mains flushed and placed a notice in The Harlingen Star warning residents to clear their faucets Friday morning and to boil all water to be used for drinking.<sup>119</sup>

In 1912, San Benito issued bonds for the grading of streets and (with the help of Sam Robertson's in-law's firm of Dodds and Wedegartner) the building of a sewer system.<sup>120</sup> San Benito already had sidewalks, and prohibited the riding of bicycles on them.<sup>121</sup> Then already in 1913, San Benito passed an ordinance to begin paving the main street, Sam Houston Boulevard.<sup>122</sup> In Harlingen in 1912, the streets were graded, concrete sidewalks were started, and wooden platforms were built at street crossings.<sup>123</sup> However, Harlingen would not start paving its streets until 1928.<sup>124</sup>

San Benito's first newspaper, then called The San Benito Light, a name later changed to the San Benito News, seems to have been founded in 1910.<sup>125</sup> While some writers place the start of The Harlingen Star by M. M. Osborn as early as December 1909, the management of the paper believes the founding came only in 1912.<sup>126</sup>

In education, San Benito opened three brick school buildings in 1911; Harlingen's first brick school building followed the next year.<sup>127</sup> The area high schools were launched in these years. San Benito's first three high school graduates received their diplomas in 1911. In 1913, high school courses, complete with Harlingen's first football team, were begun in Harlingen. In 1914, four students composed Harlingen High School's first graduating class.<sup>128</sup> The San Benito Public Library was started on the initiative of Mrs. Alba Heywood. She persuaded the San Benito City Council to proclaim 1 October 1914 Library Day, with a call for book contributions from the citizens.<sup>129</sup> It was two years later that Lon C. Hill donated a town lot to launch the Harlingen library.<sup>130</sup>

San Benito also held an edge in religious development. San Benito's Baptist church was the first church of the two towns, with a building erected in 1909 at the corner of Heywood and Dick Dowling.<sup>131</sup> Harlingen's First Baptist Church built itself a small sanctuary in 1910, and a somewhat larger one in 1916-1918.<sup>132</sup> The San Benito Methodists founded their church on the heels of the San Benito Baptists, in the same year of 1909, while the Harlingen Methodists followed in the next year.<sup>133</sup> The religious needs of Harlingen's Catholics were served by the Catholic priests of San Benito. St. Benedict's Church was founded in 1910 on South Bowie Street in San Benito's Palm Grove Section. In 1912, the congregation became a parish.<sup>134</sup> Down to 1927, priests from St. Benedict's would minister to believers in Harlingen at a chapel, founded in 1910.<sup>135</sup> Only in 1927 would this chapel be transformed into the Sacred Heart of Mary Church, later renamed the Immaculate Heart of Mary.<sup>136</sup> The Presbyterian churches of both San Benito and Harlingen appeared in 1910, with their first buildings opening the following year.<sup>137</sup>

## The Spider Web Railway

San Benito's momentary success rested in large part on the inspired construction in 1911-1912 of Sam Robertson's San Benito, Rio Grande Valley Interurban Railway Company, popularly known as the "Spider Web." This subsidiary rail network was financed in part by Alba Heywood, along with two other men and built under the direction of Sam Robertson's brother Frank. Robertson faced bankruptcy if he did not sell more land, which he could only do by providing railroad access to it. It crisscrossed the farmlands around San Benito, giving their produce access to the major railroad out



of the Valley, as paved farm-to-market roads would do in a later period. Railroad cars with produce came to San Benito's ice plant to be iced for preservation and then sent north. The system gave the region an economic shot-in-the-arm, with San Benito benefitting as the hub of over 200 miles of secondary rail lines. The system ran from San Benito to Rio Hondo to the north and to Santa Maria near the river south of Merced. By the end of 1912, it was extended as far west as Mission and Madero. A total of 128 miles of track divided into five branches were built. The value of the surrounding farms multiplied with access of their produce to the railroad. In 1924, the Missouri Pacific Railroad would purchase the whole system. Harlingen was not tied into the system, and suffered accordingly until truck traffic took over after World War II. The Spider Web was dismantled in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>138</sup>

In 1911, the plan for the Spider Web Railroad breathed into life the new town of Rio Hondo, on the Arroyo Colorado north of San Benito and north-east of Harlingen and twenty-five miles from the inlet's mouth. In 1908, Sam Robertson's San Benito Land and Water Company had given the area the Southwest's largest irrigation system, with the Rio Grande Valley's sole gravity canal. In 1911, W. H. Smith and the Reverend William Morrison bought a 1,000-acre land tract and laid out lots. They held a contest to name the new town, won by the wife of J. R. George from North Carolina with her Spanish name for "Deep River," descriptive of the precipitous drop of the banks of the Arroyo at the site. Her prize was a city lot, making the Georges Rio Hondo's first residents. The Georges built and operated a post office, country drug store, hardware store, and rooming house. N. B. Maynard launched a general store, and a grocery store was also opened by the Hartszog family.<sup>139</sup> A Catholic and a Protestant church were built. The town prospered, and by the end of 1912, boasted a water and electric lights system, telephone service, graded streets, and a school.<sup>140</sup>

While Rio Hondo would come to form a smaller but significant third corner of a Harlingen-San Benito-Rio Hondo business triangle, its new "Peavine" spur of the Spider Web Railroad for the time being tied it one-sidedly to San Benito, to that town's benefit. The tomatoes, lettuce, cabbage, and other vegetable crops from Rio Hondo's rich and well-drained, light sandy loam all moved to markets via San Benito. San Benito's families developed Rio Hondo as a recreational area and resort town, featuring use of the Arroyo Colorado. Attractions included a ferry over the Arroyo, Fourth of July picnics under the local ebony trees, and dining at the town's tourist hotel, the Arroyo Inn.<sup>141</sup> A 30-room bath house served a salt water bathing beach. There was also a 100-foot-long pier which gave fishermen access to such fish as red fish, Spanish mackerel, and trout. Alligator gar as long as 6'2" and as heavy as 125 pounds were caught. A 30-foot passenger boat, the Sea Gull, offered tours down the arroyo to the Laguna Madre and back. Hunters came for such game as deer, javelinas, boars, jaguars, white winged doves, ducks, geese, quail, and chacalacs.<sup>142</sup>

The question may be posed of why Hill did not build a comparable subsidiary railroad reaching to the farms in tracks radiating out of Harlingen, or at least tie his town into the rest of the system. Hill had helped Robertson hatch the idea for San Benito.<sup>143</sup> Hill had also helped Robertson with the financing.<sup>144</sup> Harlingen possessed its own ice house at some point in this period, which in 1921 would be purchased by Morrison and McCall of San Antonio and improved to handle icing up to eighty carloads of vegetables at a time.<sup>145</sup> It may be that Hill was too caught up in other projects. In 1913, the Hill family helped to launch the town of Los Fresnos, to the east of San Benito. The settlement was for a time dubbed Moseville, after Lon C. Hill, Jr. ("Moses"), who laid out the road to it.<sup>146</sup>

However, Harlingen's own two peripheral unincorporated towns of this decade, Combes and

Primera, both to its northwest, were small farming towns with neither the progressive spirit nor potential of Rio Hondo. These settlements had also sprung up along the railroad route.<sup>147</sup> Primera had some settlers already at the start of the century.<sup>148</sup> Edwin Templeton established the Combes post office in 1910, serving as the burg's first postmaster and storekeeper.<sup>149</sup>

## Signs of Future Greatness for Harlingen

There were indeed already some indications of forces that would in the 1920s help to propel Harlingen to the leadership position over San Benito. For one thing, Harlingen was more progressive regarding its approach to town government. Harlingen's first town government, of the commission form, was incorporated on 10 April 1910.<sup>150</sup> The strength in Harlingen of the short-lived Independent Party, with its commitment to progressive town government, and its weaker rooting in San Benito, may have exerted an influence here. Lon C. Hill was the Independent candidate for sheriff and party hatchet man in 1910.<sup>151</sup> The petition to the Cameron County Judge for permission to incorporate under the Commission form of government as a town with less than 10,000 population. Lon C. Hill's name headed the petition, followed, among others, by those of Hugo Letzerich, M. M. Osborn, Sam Botts, Santos Lozano, and James Lockhart.<sup>152</sup> In an election on 5 April 1910, the voters approved the proposal and elected the first city officials. Of the 72 qualified voters at the time, eight were Hispanic.<sup>153</sup> Ike McFarland was the first mayor elected, with John Hill (no relation to Lon Hill) and Homer Morrow as the first commissioners. M. M. Osborn, founder of The Harlingen Star, was appointed the city clerk, tax assessor-collector, and commission treasurer. A city marshal (E. W. Anglin) and a city health officer (A. M. Letzerich) were also appointed. The commission at first rented the building of the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce (or Commercial Club) for its meetings.<sup>154</sup>

The first concern of the town government was with voting bonds to construct water works and bridges and to smooth the dirt roads and streets, which was done on 19 July 1910.<sup>155</sup> In an attempt to bring a semblance of decorum to the streets, it was also forbidden to allow hogs, sheep, goats, unlicensed dogs, or vagrants, prostitutes, gamblers, beggars, drunkards, or people with uncovered weapons in their hand to run at large in the city.<sup>156</sup> In 1911, an unsalaried city health officer was appointed, on the heels of a concern over a health hazard posed by mosquitoes breeding in water from broken pipes between the city lake and the ice plant.<sup>157</sup>

Harlingen in 1911 voted to change to a city council form of government, which it was eligible to do by having grown past 1,000 residents. A. W. Cunningham, who had become mayor already in April, continued on in that post, while E. L. Fender, Jacob Miller, J. M. Denton, and Dr. C. W. Letzerich were also elected to complete Harlingen's first city council. The city commission began to meet twice a month rather than just once, and five aldermen were elected in place of the two commissioners of the previous system.<sup>158</sup> The leadership of Mayor Cunningham and his fellow city officials was sufficiently noteworthy to win them a standing commendation from the city council when Cunningham left office in April 1912.<sup>159</sup>

San Benito moved to incorporate as a city only in 1911, a year after Harlingen, and when it did so the effort was less businesslike, to judge from the city council minute books. John Breen was its first mayor (1911-1914). Its first action was to forbid the sale of merchandise on Sundays.<sup>160</sup> Other moves mirrored only a part of what Harlingen had done the year before: appointing city officials: a city secretary, policeman, and city scavenger.<sup>161</sup> Ordinances prohibiting hogs, dogs, and (after

hours) boys under age sixteen from running the streets, similar to what Harlingen had passed in 1910, was adopted in San Benito only in 1913.<sup>162</sup> Not until 1920 did San Benito vote to have a new city charter to expand from two to four city commissioners on the city council in addition to the mayor.<sup>163</sup>

Harlingen also showed special leadership in the area of town pride. At the start of 1911, the Harlingen Civic Club ladies carried out a campaign to clean and beautify the town.<sup>164</sup> In 1913, San Benito established a city parks committee, including Mrs. Alba Heywood and Mrs. J. H. Ewing.<sup>165</sup> In 1914, an organizational meeting of the Rio Grande Valley Federation of Women's Clubs (for the first two years called Federation of Civic Clubs) met in San Benito, at the call of Mrs. Alba Heywood. It was followed by a second meeting in Harlingen.<sup>166</sup> In February 1916, the Boy Scout Troop of San Benito petitioned the town council to be designated as the Secret Service of San Benito with authority to arrest anyone spitting on the sidewalks or scattering waste papers (as well as gambling). The request was tabled.<sup>167</sup> Harlingen also demonstrated an early concern for the needy, donating money to one of its ministers to be used for charitable purposes.<sup>168</sup>

## Impact of the Mexican Revolution

Just as the demographic and economic pattern of the region seemed to be set for decades to come, everything was thrown into the air by the effects of war, first of revolution in Mexico and then of confrontation in Europe. Both conflicts encouraged local Hispanics to express their grievances against the planting of an alien and arrogant Anglo colony in their midst.

San Benito's short-lived fortune in the 1910s made it the center of attention for the bandit attacks that plagued the Lower Rio Grande Valley in this period. It had been a shock for the local Mexican population to see the burgeoning of a new Anglo-led society in the heart of what had for the past five or six generations been Hispanic ranching country. It was hard for the Hispanic natives of the area to accept the role of second-class citizens to which most of them were relegated. A mild anti-Hispanic prejudice tinged the views of some of the Anglo settlers. This can be seen in the Harlingen city government's instructions to the City Marshall on 7 February 1917 "to hire Mexican for cleaning up town picking up trash, burning papers etc."<sup>169</sup> Mexican-Americans who came to San Benito's "confectionary" (ice cream parlor) would sit at their tables, ignored and unserved, until they got the hint and left.<sup>170</sup>

Both towns were divided between a more prosperous Anglo part of town (on the north or east side of the tracks, farthest from Mexico) and a poorer Mexican part of town on the south or west side of the tracks, closer to Mexico). Some San Benito residents harbor a memory of an official policy of encouraging Mexican-Americans to live only in its Mexiquito part of town. However, Santos Lozano had managed to build a combined store and residence on the Anglo side of the tracks on Harlingen's Jackson Street in 1905.<sup>171</sup>

Indeed, relations between the two groups were far from being all negative. Hispanics figured among the leading citizens of both towns from the first generation. Harlingen's Santos Lozano and San Benito's L. M. Valdetero, builder of its first electric plant in 1909, are cases in point.<sup>172</sup> A parochial school for Spanish-speaking children, the Escuela Guadalupe, located at Corral Street and Frontage Road, with Señora Carmen Martínez as teacher, was launched in San Benito in 1912.<sup>173</sup> Harlingen's first Spanish newspaper, El Precursor, was launched in 1915 by Gregorio García, a settler in town in 1910.<sup>174</sup> Some close Anglo-Hispanic friendships were formed, as in the case of a Mexican

who worked in 1908 and 1909 for the James Shafer family of San Benito. Known to them as Alvarand, he went on to prosper as a local rancher in his own right, but every year sent the Shafers a Christmas turkey as a sign of his continuing affection for them.<sup>175</sup> Sam Robertson, the founder of San Benito, was known to have particularly warm relations with many Mexican-Americans.<sup>176</sup> The First Presbyterian Church of San Benito continued the missionary spirit toward Hispanics that had marked that denomination in Brownsville in the previous century. A mission was established and supported among the Hispanics west of San Benito's resaca, with the active participation of missionary Anna Dysart.<sup>177</sup> Dr. Clarence Cash of San Benito never refused a sick call to anybody, often spending hours traveling to a patient whether Anglo or Mexican.<sup>178</sup>

Before enough town population built up enough of an Anglo settlement to uphold Anglo claims in the area securely, and before law and order had been regularized, cattle rustlers and general robbers took wholesale advantage of the vulnerability.<sup>179</sup> Since San Benito was both the faster of the two towns in its development, and also farther south, and thus closer to the main centers of previous population concentration, it bore the brunt of the attacks.

Starting from the very year of 1907 in which San Benito was founded, Texas Rangers and other peace officers had their hands full with helping the new towns assert their presence. By 1912, sixteen Mexicans had already been killed in the effort.<sup>180</sup> An early hero of the local Hispanics in the resistance effort was Jacinto Treviño, who lived on the south side of the Rio Grande, but had relatives in the San Benito area. A cousin of Treviño had been slapped by James Darwin, the engineer in charge of the pumping plant on the bank of the Rio Grande for Sam Robertson's San Benito Canal Company. Darwin had slapped Treviño's cousin for insulting Darwin's wife, but Treviño took this as an unacceptable affront to his family's honor. In May 1910, Treviño killed Darwin and took refuge in Mexico. Local authorities were informed by Jacinto's cousin Pablo Treviño in July that Jacinto was leading a band back across the river to eradicate one of the San Benito law officers bent on bringing him to justice. Pablo led the authorities to where Jacinto was expected to pass, but in the thick chaparral one group of American lawmen mistook another group for the enemy. An exchange of fire followed which left one Ranger, one Deputy Sheriff, and Pablo Treviño dead, with two others wounded. The Anglos had shot themselves in the foot; Jacinto Treviño's laughter echoed from across the river; and the banditry grew worse.<sup>181</sup>

Revolutionary turmoil in Mexico and World War I plots increased the malaise. However, even in that period, a totally simple polarization of ethnic relations never resulted, thanks to the complexity of relations between Anglos and Hispanics, as well as between political factions on both sides of the river. San Benito rancher Joe Ballenger sold large numbers of cattle to the Mexican revolutionary General Lucio Blanco to feed his troops, and with his wife joined another San Benito couple as honored guests of Blanco in Matamoros in June 1913. The two ladies even donned pistols and sombreros for the camera.<sup>182</sup>

Nervousness turned to panic with the discovery in January 1915 of an extremist conspiracy known as the San Diego Plot. The plan was to rouse the local Mexican-Americans to revolt, execute all Anglo men, and separate the area again from the United States. Although the plot was drawn up in more distant San Diego, Texas, it was by brain-child of two Brownsvillites--Luis de la Rosa and Anizeto Pizña--and was discovered with the arrest of a conspirator in nearby McAllen.<sup>183</sup> The irredentist cause drew strength from the sympathy felt for it by important elements in the local Hispanic community. Ismael Montalvo, one of the leading businessmen of San Benito, would spend

the rest of his life with a gun at his bedside in fear that the Texas Rangers would find evidence of his dealings with Pizaña's men and come to kill him. His father-in-law, José Esparza, of one of the old ranching families, cautiously helped Pizaña's men indirectly, while he personally remained aloof.<sup>184</sup> Many Mexican residents joined the outlaws, whose number reached from between 250 to 400 men.<sup>185</sup>

The raids reached a crescendo of intensity in the following months, hitting all along the northern bank of the Rio Grande. In May 1915, a large armed band of Mexicans raided the Los Indios Ranch south of San Benito.<sup>186</sup> On 28 July 1915, a prisoner was forcibly taken from officers near San Benito and put to death.<sup>187</sup> Three days later, a second raid on the Los Indios Ranch left another fatality.<sup>188</sup> The irrigation engineer at Hill's pumping plant, a Mr. Smith, was so afraid that Hill sent his son Lon, Jr. ("Mose") along with a worker to protect him when he had to work at night. Smith's fears were not unfounded. On 1 September 1915, he was taken prisoner six miles east of San Benito and together with a captured Anglo farmer was stripped, tied to a tree, and executed by an insurgent firing squad.<sup>189</sup> On 13 September 1915, a band attacked soldiers at the Galveston Ranch, killing one and wounding two. The raiders fled, but five Hispanic residents of the ranch were arrested and placed in the San Benito jail. That night, three of these were taken from the jail out to the road to Harlingen by the deputy sheriffs and shot.<sup>190</sup> At one point, the San Benito Culture Club was broken up by news that the rebels were in the area, causing members to scurry home in various directions.<sup>191</sup> San Benito's resident physician, Dr. Clarence Cash, informer and secret messenger for the officials, made night calls driving without headlights and sometimes guarded by a Texas Ranger.<sup>192</sup> Sunday evening church services saw only a few people, escorted by armed men, attending.<sup>193</sup> Many farm families took shelter at night in such makeshift refugee centers as San Benito's Masonic Hall.<sup>194</sup>

In the face of threats of theft, arson, and murder made against San Benito, on 7 September 1915 Mayor J. H. Lyons created a special police force of all men between the ages of 21 and 60. People were forbidden to leave the corporate limits without written permission from the Mayor, and all suspicious characters were to be reported without delay.<sup>195</sup> On 2 October 1915, the previous town night watchman was replaced by a new man.<sup>196</sup> Sam Robertson was one of the men who joined in the effort to protect the town, throwing himself into several bloody battles in 1915.<sup>197</sup> Already on 8 August 1915, Sam Robertson and Gordon Hill had been present with a group of law officers checking out the Norias Ranch north of Raymondville, when a group of sixty rebels attacked them. The outlaws had been driven back with five fatalities.<sup>198</sup> At another point, Sam found himself alone with a small boy behind a hand car holding off a sizeable band of outlaws for hours.<sup>199</sup>

Stringent measures were clamped on the local Hispanics in an attempt to stifle the agitation. Mexican workers were required to show letters from their employers proving their right to be in town, and one such laborer who had lost his letter would have been lynched in front of the San Benito post office had his employer, Dr. C. M. Cash, not happened by just in the nick of time to vouch for him.<sup>200</sup> In August and early September, at least nine Mexican prisoners were shot in the back in the night by authorities who said they had been trying to escape. The explanation sounded suspiciously like a local variation of Porfirio Diaz's *ley fuga*, whereby undesirable prisoners were shot on this pretext, and skeptical comments were made at the time.<sup>201</sup> Many Mexican-Americans were persecuted, evicted from their homes, or killed. Many of San Benito's desperate and scared Hispanics turned to Sam Robertson for protection. This Robertson extended to them as best he could, in the face of bitter criticism from many of the Anglos.<sup>202</sup> Robertson took in and raised one little Mexican boy, who had been left orphaned after a gun battle at a local ranch.<sup>203</sup>

In Harlingen, a Mr. Lozano was appointed as a night watchman in March 1915.<sup>204</sup> Women learned to carry six-shooters around in their purses, having been instructed in their use by their husbands. Children became precocious marksmen.<sup>205</sup> Yet these measures did little to stem the attacks. In September 1915, a lady was attacked at her farm outside Harlingen and wounded in the arm.<sup>206</sup> Nobody was immune from the threat. The private Hispanic night watchman hired to guard the Hill home and sugar mill was discovered to have prepared a band to attack the property. He had gone so far as to hide guns and ammunition under his house and to tie white streamers to fence posts as markers.<sup>207</sup> Lon C. Hill's son Gordon, labeled "El Scorpio" by the Mexicans, was especially targeted for death for having helped fight off a band of Hispanics at Norias Ranch.<sup>208</sup> Lon at once took over the job of guard himself, sitting with a ten gauge double barrel shotgun in a rocking chair on his porch all night long every night.<sup>209</sup> Each of his adult family members slept with a gun and a dark-colored robe at the foot of the bed for night encounters. His fireplace, which opened onto both the living and dining rooms, was given a false half back wall as seen from each room. It was intended that in bandit attacks, the children could be hidden on mattresses between the two false back walls.<sup>210</sup> Hill praised the Rangers, despite their cruel and brutal methods, and became known for his suspicion of all Hispanics and his agitation for vigorous measures against their rebel leaders.<sup>211</sup> Julian Villarreal, one of the most prominent of the Hispanic leaders, also experienced a close call when a band planned to ambush him. He was warned in time by a Ranger, who was duly rewarded with a Stetson hat from Villarreal's store.<sup>212</sup>

On 18 October 1915, a band--seemingly led by Luis de la Rosa in the name of the Plan of San Diego--wrecked and robbed a train ten miles north of Brownsville, killing its Anglo passengers.<sup>213</sup> In a meeting held at the Cameron County Courthouse in Brownsville, Sam Robertson, Lon C. Hill, and others were elected to go to Washington, D. C. to solicit protection. As a result, by 15 November 1915 over 20,000 troops and by 31 July 1916 110,957 troops had been stationed at or near the border.<sup>214</sup> San Benito was protected by three distinct groups: the 26th Infantry, which camped on Sam Houston Boulevard (where the Post Office is now located); a detachment of the Twelfth Cavalry was sent to San Benito from Fort Brown, which set up camp in Boulevard Heights; and National Guard units from a variety of states.<sup>215</sup> The balcony of the San Benito Bank and Trust Building was used as a lookout post for bandits by the soldiers.<sup>216</sup> Harlingen was occupied by elements of the 26th Infantry, the Sixth Cavalry, and the Texas National Guard.<sup>217</sup> The Harlingen town government provided the Texas Ranger camp with free water and lights.<sup>218</sup> Both towns in August 1916 appointed a City Health Officer or the soldiers.<sup>219</sup>

The troops first addressed the problem of returning law and order to the north side of the river. On 14 June 1916, one detachment of soldiers came across one insurgent group nine miles northeast of San Benito, killed one of them, and chased the rest of them across the Rio Grande.<sup>220</sup> The army in the fall of 1916 then carried the offensive into Mexico through various counter-raids. The towns' two founders played an active role as scouts and guides in this campaign. Sam Robertson of San Benito served the 26th Infantry both as scout and intelligence officer while on mining business trips south of the border. Robertson was ambushed at one point, but fought his way out with the help of a boy goatherd. The lad followed Robertson to San Benito, where he became Robertson's protégé and the soldiers' mascot. Later, as a scout for General John Pershing's expedition into Mexico in pursuit of Pancho Villa, Robertson had an even closer brush with death in Jalisco when his companion was killed and he was dragged behind a horse by a rope around his neck. When one of his

tormentors came close to verify that Robertson was dead, Robertson wrenched the man's machete from his surprised hand, held his enemies at bay, jumped on a horse, and escaped. Thereafter rope burns showed on his right cheek and neck, and a limp slowed his step.<sup>221</sup> Lon C. Hill of Harlingen acted as a guide for several forays across the Rio Grande, both for posses and U.S. troops.<sup>222</sup>

The U.S. Army's offensive across the river allowed a respite in San Benito and Harlingen. A tent show dared come to Harlingen in January 1916.<sup>223</sup> However, the attacks did not altogether stop for some time. One outlaw band burned Hill's sugar mill as late as 17 July 1917.<sup>224</sup>

## **Impact of World War I**

On the heels of the insurgency came the strain of the First World War. Many local men signed up, creating a further drain of energy and population from the infant towns. Those who served in Europe included Sam Robertson, who had to lie about his age (51) and health to get into the army. Given the rank of major initially, he organized the 16th Engineers in Detroit, including some of his old railroad hands. Sent to France in the fall of 1917, he was made superintendent of construction building railway yards at Abainville. He came back in 1919 with the rank of Colonel, the Congressional Medal of Honor, and a Distinguished Service Medal.<sup>225</sup> Lon C. Hill's sons Lon, Jr., Hickman, and John also signed up.<sup>226</sup> The women left behind showed their patriotism by organizing local units of the Red Cross in both towns in 1917. Sam Robertson's first wife Adele played a role in the early days of the Red Cross in San Benito, as did Lon C. Hill's daughter Paul (sic.) in Harlingen.<sup>227</sup>

## **The Setback Suffered by San Benito**

The result of all the turmoil was a halt to the area's progress for the time being. A great many residents had fled from the area, leaving their houses boarded up and their livestock wandering about loose. The railroad had not been able to evacuate the Anglos headed north fast enough, despite the addition of extra trains.<sup>228</sup> For their part, large numbers of Mexican-Americans took refuge south across the river.<sup>229</sup> The remaining population was further decimated by epidemics, most notably of smallpox in 1915, of flu in 1918, and of diphtheria in 1919.<sup>230</sup> The latter epidemic claimed hundreds of life in such a rush that bodies had to be buried in sheets without the benefit of a coffin.<sup>231</sup>

Prolonged rainfall at this time hurt farming all the more since the region's flood and drought control efforts had been put on hold through the insurgent upset and in World War I.<sup>232</sup> Only in 1917 did a group of San Benito businessmen found the Valley Water Conservation Association.<sup>233</sup> The sugar cane industry collapsed.<sup>234</sup> More highly developed San Benito had been especially hard hit by the theft of thousands of cattle and the loss of population.<sup>235</sup> These setbacks were only partially offset by the rise in the price for such crops as cotton and cabbage due to World War I.<sup>236</sup>

The social life that initially had given a light-hearted mood to the towns was dampened both by the many set-backs and complicated by an attempt of the churches to lift the tone of the area. An effort by the ladies of San Benito to keep up spirits by organizing dances for the soldiers met opposition from local church goers, perhaps mainly due to concern over the impact of the soldiers on the morals of the town's daughters. Neither soldiers nor town organizers took the aspersions lightly. An attempt to tar and feather, or at least scare, two local evangelists almost led to a

doneybrook between church members and opponents. The local authorities intervened in the nick of time and arrested several of the hotheads.<sup>237</sup>

All of these problems would have been surmounted had the greater geographic influences also been working to San Benito's long-term advantage. However, the geographic forces favoring Harlingen were about to come into play, so that San Benito's problems acted to precipitate a shift of focus to Harlingen.

### **Harlingen's Growth in the 1920s**

Harlingen also suffered in the late 1910s. The population loss and economic disruption caused by the Hispanic revolts, along with the burden of providing free water and light to the camps of soldiers stationed to protect the area, placed a special financial strain on the little town. Even with its more modest obligations, Harlingen's city government fell into a \$6,000 debt by July 1915 and had to order the amount to be funded by treasury warrants.<sup>238</sup> On 29 August 1916, the salaries of all city officers and aldermen had to be suspended for six months, while a \$2,000 loan had to be arranged for the needs of the Water and Light Department. It was decided, in consideration of the money problems, to shut off the water and light from houses in arrears on payment and not to turn them back on until a 10% penalty had been paid.<sup>239</sup> On 11 September, another loan, this time for \$600, had to be made.<sup>240</sup> Even so, on 14 November 1916, a warrant had to be issued on the Emergency Fund for \$100, for use by the Water and Light Department.<sup>241</sup> In January 1917, \$30.50 was advanced to the City for deposit in its emergency fund.<sup>242</sup> In June 1917, more financial stringency was being felt as a result of the abandonment of many houses and military camps with the resulting loss of income from water and light bills.<sup>243</sup> In September 1917, more funds had to be transferred into the City Emergency Fund.<sup>244</sup> Thus, for the time being, Harlingen's city services lagged behind San Benito's both in time and quality.

Nonetheless, the pause worked in Harlingen's favor. Had San Benito's early growth continued unabated, its emergence as the region's commercial heart would have been more difficult to turn around. As it was, by the time the years of trouble were past, new factors were beginning to come into play. San Benito, which had borne the brunt of the attacks and the accompanying fear, had developed more of a cautious, defensive stance, while Harlingen was catching its breath for a new effort.

Both Harlingen and San Benito advertized in the northern Midwestern states for settlers.<sup>245</sup> They touted the region's rich soil and warm climate, which let local vegetables be placed on the market up to two months earlier than those produced farther north. Real estate companies brought chartered trains of interested buyers from Chicago.<sup>246</sup> Tours with dinners in private club houses were offered to prospective buyers by the larger land companies.<sup>247</sup> In the competitive atmosphere, one fast-thinking agent in San Benito is said to have kept his group from seeing a sign they were passing proclaiming cheaper land sales by having them all shut their eyes in prayer.<sup>248</sup>

Most of the settlers in this decade chose Harlingen, bringing many new business starts. The Rainbo Bakery opened in 1920.<sup>249</sup> By 1921, Harlingen had six manufacturers, producing sheet metal, machine parts, soft drinks, ice cream, and (two of them) ginned cotton.<sup>250</sup> Santos Lozano's Harlingen store put out branches in four other Valley towns,<sup>251</sup> and most of the branch wholesale houses of outside firms in the Valley came to be located in Harlingen.<sup>252</sup> Whereas in 1920, Harlingen's



population trailed that of San Benito by 1,784 to 5,070, in 1930 Harlingen boasted a lead of 12,124 over San Benito's 10,753. That lead would only widen through the coming century.<sup>253</sup> The settlements that might have evolved into the San Beningen urban complex would instead become Harbenito.

### Reasons for San Benito's Slower Growth in the 1920s

In the early 1920s, it was not immediately clear that San Benito was not going to continue its position of leadership. Both the San Benito Bank and Trust and the Farmer's State Bank of San Benito were doing a brisk business.<sup>254</sup> J. Scott Brown, the Mayor for four two-year terms from 1922 to 1930, cooperated closely with these banking interests in trying to improve the town. Brown was an energetic six-footer raised in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and trained in civil engineering at The University of Texas in Austin. He had worked as San Benito's first school principal for a time and was a charter member of the First Christian Church.<sup>255</sup> Highly popular, Brown was initially elected mayor by a vote of 226 to two.<sup>256</sup> The accomplishments of his terms of office included improvement of the streets (by Sam Robertson's in-law by his first relative, F. W. Wedegartner and his partner S. S. Dodds) and the start of water supply and sewer systems.<sup>257</sup> In 1925, San Benito replaced the aldermanic form of government with a city manager answering to a mayor and four commissioners.<sup>258</sup>

High tax rates in the town tended to discourage new business from moving in. Sam Robertson led the fight to save his town's growth as president of the local Tax Payers' League.<sup>259</sup> However, he found he could do little to change the situation. In March 1922, he ran for the position of a town commissioner, but failed to get enough votes.<sup>260</sup>

Another reason for San Benito's deceleration was the divisive and retarding effect of ethnic tensions built up through the bandit-ridden 1910s. The Ku Klux Klan took advantage of these resentments, driving some Mexican-Americans from their homes and daring to ride openly in an Armistice Day parade in San Benito.<sup>261</sup> Indignities suffered at the hands of Anglo town leaders still rankle in local Hispanic memories. San Benito Montalvo, from a venerable ranching family of San Benito, remembers that the police seemed less prompt to defend Hispanic rights and recalls that one town official in 1924 remarked that Mexicans were supposed to live only in the Mexiquito section of town. He also suspected the town of charging Hispanics higher property taxes than Anglos.<sup>262</sup> Sam Robertson vigorously fought the KKK. In 1922, after he had failed to become a town commissioner, he was elected Sheriff on an anti-Klan platform, and held the office down to 1926. Robertson boldly interrupted a secret KKK meeting in the brush one night and warned the Klanners to stay away from his friends.<sup>263</sup> Yet the whole uproar over the KKK, following the inter-ethnic murders of the bandit era, conveyed the picture of a town fraught with problems which could only have discouraged many potential settlers.

Blocked by such strong negative forces from his plans for his town, in the late 1920s, Sam Robertson turned to developing Padre Island instead. He resigned as sheriff in 1926, despite ongoing popularity in that position.<sup>264</sup> In 1926, he tried to convert Padre Island into a resort accessible by a toll bridge at the northern end of the island and an Ocean Beach Driveway the length of the island--a scheme ruined by the 1929 Crash and the 1933 hurricane.<sup>265</sup> Robertson moved with his wife to Brownsville in the later 1920s, renting out his house in San Benito.<sup>266</sup>

San Benito's key business leaders also stood aloof from new business interests seeking to settle

in the region. Thus San Benito turned down Southern Pacific's request to come into town as a second railroad. A common suspicion expressed today, for the most part in confidence, is that the San Benito bankers did not want the Southern Pacific to come to town because they had money invested in or other interests linked to the previous railroad.<sup>267</sup> Opposition to the Southern Pacific was led by Colonel Edward Down, the taciturn, cigar-smoking owner of the San Benito Bank and Trust Company, a dry goods store at the side of his bank, and a produce packing shed.<sup>268</sup> Joe Ballenger from Alabama, a stockholder and a director since 1922 and later bank president and chairman of the board of the same bank, was another key banking figure.<sup>269</sup> A local rumor blames such community leaders from also discouraging other new business interests from coming to town, including that of H. E. Butt.<sup>270</sup> These rumors suggest two contrasting cumulative effects. In Harlingen, a fairly unified and stable community attracted ever more settlers, giving the town leaders an increasing orientation to growth. In San Benito, the disparity between the small Anglo leadership and the Hispanic community made the leadership more protective of its hold on the town and less open to the entry of new business interests.

### Reasons for Harlingen's Surge in the 1920s

Harlingen's surge in the 1920s can be traced to some old factors now coming to fruition along with some new ones: the ongoing benefit of being located at the transportation nexus of Cameron County; the dredging of the Arroyo Colorado; the development of the local citrus industry; the supportive attitude of the town bankers; the freedom of the town from any outstanding blot on its record; the professional standards of the Harlingen town government; and the leadership acumen of Mayors Finn Ewing and Sam Botts. These factors will each be considered in turn.

The benefit to Harlingen of being located at the railroad hub of Cameron County was reinforced in 1927, when the Southern Pacific Railroad reached Harlingen from the west and continued on to Brownsville.<sup>271</sup> This additional rail line offered greater certainty of transport to area farmers in the face of frequent shut downs of particular routes due to flooding.<sup>272</sup> The hard-surfaced highway system, which came to Harlingen in 1921, followed the line of towns established along the rail lines.<sup>273</sup> This meant that Harlingen became a highway nexus, as it already was a railroad hub.

Harlingen also added water transport to its trade arteries by dredging the Arroyo Colorado at a time when the use of the Rio Grande as a steamboat trade route had recently lapsed. An election in July 1927 established the Arroyo Colorado Navigation District, designed to give Harlingen its own port.<sup>274</sup> A bond issue was passed which allowed the Arroyo to be dredged to a depth of nine feet, turning it into a ship channel for the export of local products and potential imports as well.<sup>275</sup> The continual dredging required to maintain the channel would prove to be beyond local financial resources, but the federal government would take over the responsibility for this in 1942, as part of its allocation of monies for the Intercoastal Canal.<sup>276</sup> With the increasing construction of bridges and dams on the Rio in the 20th century, some of the old river trade shifted to the Arroyo.

Harlingen's dominance of the Arroyo Colorado was reinforced by the creation of links between Harlingen and Rio Hondo, a ways east on the Arroyo. The two towns were connected to each other (and both to San Benito) by a system of paved highways, a steel bridge over the Arroyo into Rio Hondo, and a bus line in 1927.<sup>277</sup> Rio Hondo incorporated as a town on 12 May 1927.<sup>278</sup> The Harlingen Chamber of Commerce invited the members of the Rio Hondo Chamber of Commerce to

join it as guests, leading to a joint pledge of the two organizations to cooperate for the mutual advancement of their two towns.<sup>279</sup> Rio Hondo was thus aided in its emergence as a resort center. Several hotels, now long vanished, were built to lodge the hunters, fishermen, boaters, and--undaunted by a bad shark or gar attack in 1928--swimmers who flocked to the site.<sup>280</sup> By these moves, Harlingen drew Rio Hondo away from its previous links to San Benito via the Spider Web Railroad more into its own orbit.

San Benito and Brownsville at once saw Harlingen's port plans as a threat to their own trading interests. San Benito rushed in 1928 to form its own San Benito-Port Isabel Navigation District and by 1935 had dug a one-and-a-half mile long ship channel at distant Port Isabel.<sup>281</sup> Jim Wells headed Brownsville interests in filing a writ of error against the Arroyo Navigation District, in an attempt to halt its plans for dredging.<sup>282</sup> The application was denied by the Texas Supreme Court in October 1928, so that Brownsville turned to organizing its own navigation district in 1933, setting up the Port of Brownsville in 1936.<sup>283</sup>

Harlingen also benefitted from the success of the local grapefruit and orange industry in the 1920s.<sup>284</sup> Lon C. Hill had been one of the pioneers in citrus growing in the period before 1910.<sup>285</sup> By the mid-1920s, truck-fruit shipments from the Valley were doubling over a two-year period.<sup>286</sup>

Harlingen also received encouragement to expand from its two local banks, both located on Jackson Street. Harlingen State Bank supported local development from the start of the 1920s.<sup>287</sup> The First National Bank of Harlingen, under oilman A. B. Hoffman from Kansas and with John Nance Garner as co-owner, played its part after its founding in 1922.<sup>288</sup>

Harlingen's success in drawing in more settlers from the American Midwest might have rested in part on its somewhat greater Anglo population and flavor from early on in comparison with San Benito, with its larger Hispanic ranching base.<sup>289</sup> Looking for a more familiar environs, these settlers from the North brought with them the wealth of the expansive American economy of the 1920s, which was seeking new areas in which to invest. San Benito's reputation for ethnic tensions gained in the 1910s did not make it seem inviting (although, ironically, San Benito would later develop a reputation for being relaxed). While Harlingen was not free of prejudice, its small size still in the 1910s had removed it from the limelight of ethnic frictions. Harlingen thus came to be identified as somewhat more Anglo and entrepreneurial, and San Benito as more Hispanic and traditional. The very names of the towns hint at this distinction: Harlingen being named for a canal-rich town in industrious and Germanic Holland; San Benito bearing the Spanish form of the name of the Latin founder of the Benedictine Order.<sup>290</sup>

Furthermore, Harlingen's delayed take-off in the 1920s on what was still something of a *tabula rasa* gave it a fresh mood of community solidarity. The cooperative tone was pointed out in the almost total unanimity of residents in paying for sidewalk paving in front of their houses, in contrast to the constant breaks in sidewalks in other Valley towns.<sup>291</sup> One outside observer in 1926 noted that the town "has a spirit of doing things which is sure to accomplish results."<sup>292</sup>

Harlingen's upbeat mood created a variety of social and entertainment outlets in the 1920s. Its masonic lodge was founded in 1919, thanks in part to the efforts of Dr. Clarence Cash,<sup>293</sup> and its Rotary Club in 1922.<sup>294</sup> Harlingen's annual week-long Valley Mid-Winter Fair, the biggest event in the Rio Grande Valley for three decades, began in 1920.<sup>295</sup> It offered all sorts of activities in the 1920s, including Charleston dance contests, turkey shoots, horse races, football games (such as one pitting the "Fats" against the "Leans" in which speed won out over beef), beauty pageants, and free

public weddings.<sup>296</sup>

The social tone of the 1920s was more genteel than that of the boisterous early years. A growing church presence played a role in this transformation. By the end of 1926, the Baptists, Catholics, Christians, Christian Scientists, Church of Christ, Church of God, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Seventh Day Adventists had all founded local churches.<sup>297</sup> Blue laws forbade moving pictures and other public amusements on Sundays,<sup>298</sup> and the teen-age dances held upstairs in the Lozano Building with music from a record player were carefully chaperoned.<sup>299</sup> Harlingen went through the prohibition period with no recorded speak-easies, although cantinas flourished south of the river and bootlegging was a more notable problem in San Benito.<sup>300</sup> Sam Robertson as Sheriff of San Benito was kept busy trying to combat the blackmarket trade in liquor, and even had to arrest some of his old friends.<sup>301</sup> One frustrated boozier phoned Robertson at three in the morning and asked if it was true that Robertson was paying \$25 for each bootlegger turned in. When the sheriff affirmed the offer, the man replied that he would pay \$50 for one if Robertson would send him over.<sup>302</sup>

### **Harlingen Town Governments from 1918 to 1926**

The greater detail of Harlingen's city council minute books when compared with those of San Benito indicate a higher standard of town government as well. In the first term of S. A. Thompson, from 1918 to 1922, the government initiated many important programs. In 1919, it prohibited any more wooden buildings downtown, launching its transformation to brick and stone structures.<sup>303</sup> It launched regular garbage pickup and street lighting in 1921, the same year as in San Benito.<sup>304</sup> It began a several year effort of paving streets and constructing drainage ditches and a sewer system.<sup>305</sup> It also purchased a chlorinator to purify the drinking water.<sup>306</sup>

In the mayoral term of Joe Roberts, from 1922 to 1924, a volunteer fire department under a fire marshall, supplemented by a town electrical inspector, was introduced in 1922.<sup>307</sup> The first city hall was built that year, giving the town government its own permanent headquarters.<sup>308</sup> While in 1923, the first hospital was opened, a ten-room frame structure on Van Buren and South F streets, thanks in part to the help of Joe Ballenger and Frank Robertson of San Benito.<sup>309</sup> Sheets left in front of the hospital door one night were rumored to be a dubious donation from the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>310</sup> Many flood-control levees were also built starting in 1923.<sup>311</sup>

Harlingen's upswing continued under the return as mayor of S. A. Thompson from 1924 to 1926.<sup>312</sup> Measures of this term included the allocation of money for parks, the establishment of a County Health Unit, the building of a dog pound, and the installation of street signs.<sup>313</sup> In 1925, bonds were voted to build a city hall, a fire station, and a jail.<sup>314</sup> The Harlingen Library was donated to the city in 1925 by the Harlingen Study Club, which had been founded in 1921. The books would be housed in the new Woman's Building in 1927, pending construction of a public library building.<sup>315</sup>

By this time, the population was growing fast enough to start spurring various new housing developments. In 1925, Stuart Place was developed two miles west of Harlingen by Robert Stuart, the director of the San Benito and Rio Grande Valley Railroad and the owner-president of the Mid-Life Insurance Company.<sup>316</sup> The community was promoted by the Stuart Place Demonstration Club. The next year, this was joined by the Clio Demonstration Club, and in 1928 by the South O'Harlingen Demonstration Club.<sup>317</sup> Lon C. Hill moved his family into a new home at 421 East Harrison,<sup>318</sup> leaving

his first home to eventually be taken over by the city and converted into a museum. Sam Robertson's beautiful house in San Benito, in contrast, would nonchalantly be allowed to remain in private hands, which would alter its unique historical features with renovations.

## Harlingen's Burgeoning Under Mayor Finn Ewing

Harlingen experienced a notable acceleration of growth in the mayoral term of Finley ("Finn") Ewing, from April 1926 to the end of 1928.<sup>319</sup> Ewing's personal drive, integrity, idealism, and business know-how played a role in this development. The son of a Presbyterian minister in the area of San Angelo, Texas, and an active Presbyterian himself, Ewing had studied at The University of Texas at Austin and had served in the military in World War I. As a new settler in Harlingen after the war, he had joined in organizing the Valley Mid-Winter Fair Association, the local Rotary Club, and the Harlingen post of the American Legion, of which he twice served as commander. He also developed Harlingen's Finwood Heights subdivision.<sup>320</sup> Already as a city commissioner, Ewing won gratitude from the town by having wooden planks placed for pedestrians over the mud at street crossings.<sup>321</sup> Lon C. Hill cheered Ewing on with assistance and many welcome suggestions.<sup>322</sup>

Ewing's slogan when he ran for mayor was "Progress with cooperation." He had faith that Harlingen could become the leader in the region, and he worked to make it happen, currying state support for his plans by his work as Cameron County chairman for Dan Moody's gubernatorial campaign in 1926.<sup>323</sup> One change over which Ewing presided was the adoption on 23 February 1927, by election, of the Charter Commission form of government, to which Harlingen was entitled once it reached a population of 5,000.<sup>324</sup> Reelected in February 1927, Ewing continued as mayor under the new system.<sup>325</sup>

Ewing also helped convince voters to finance Cameron County's first paved roads, boosting the development of the surrounding farmlands.<sup>326</sup> Three towns were incorporated on its outskirts--the farm towns of Combes in 1926 and Primera in 1927, both to the northwest, and the resort town of Rio Hondo to the east in 1927.<sup>327</sup> Ewing also directed the Intracoastal Canal Association, which held its 1927 convention in Harlingen, and convinced it to back Lon C. Hill's plan to dredge the Arroyo Colorado.<sup>328</sup>

Another accomplishment in which Ewing took pride was the town's success in operating its own light and water system at a profit, at the same time holding down the town's bonded indebtedness. Ewing demanded a retraction when San Benito citizen Frank Ludden wrote in The Brownsville Herald that Harlingen's case illustrated how municipally-owned utilities cause financial problems for cities.<sup>329</sup> The present system of street names and numbers was launched in 1926<sup>330</sup> Also in 1926, town buses were licensed, and a bus line was opened between Harlingen and Raymondville.<sup>331</sup> Harlingen's gas lines were laid down in 1928 by a town franchise to the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company.<sup>332</sup> Street paving also began in 1928.<sup>333</sup>

Businesses were heartened. New town businesses in this period included Junkins Furniture in 1926, both Woolworths and J. C. Penney in 1927; and both Sears Roebuck and Piggly Wiggly (owned by local resident H. E. Butts) in 1928.<sup>334</sup> The Flatiron Office Building went up in 1926, as did the seven-story Baxter Building, and the five-story Reese-Wil-Mond Hotel. This hotel included a roof garden with a finished floor for dances and a movable stage for vaudeville presentations.<sup>335</sup> A cotton manufacturing plant began in 1927.<sup>336</sup> A 24-hour Gulf filling station started in 1928.<sup>337</sup>

Ewing's term of office was also a time of a great push to bring higher culture to Harlingen. The year 1927 was a highwater mark in this commitment, marked by the following highlights. Bonds were voted for constructing a 2,205-seat municipal auditorium.<sup>338</sup> This facility would allow Harlingen to join the tour circuits of many major groups, including John Philip Sousa (who promised to write a Harlingen March) in 1928,<sup>339</sup> a performance of the musical "Rio Rita" in the same year;<sup>340</sup> and the Freiburg-im-Breisgau Passion Play in 1929.<sup>341</sup> Harlingen's Little Theatre was formed,<sup>342</sup> and Harlingen's first opera performance, of Verdi's "Aida," was given at the Mid-Winter Fair.<sup>343</sup> The Valley's first radio station, KRGV, was launched in Harlingen.<sup>344</sup> Women played a conspicuous role in the cultural developments, centering on the Woman's Building constructed in that year.<sup>345</sup> The Harlingen Ladies' Study Club investigated Texas history,<sup>346</sup> and the Delphian Society for Literary Activity gave presentations on early Mesopotamia.<sup>347</sup> The Rio Grande Valley Historical and Landmarks Association with the active participation of Miss Paul Hill organized a story-telling contest at the Reese-Wil-Mond Hotel on the theme of the settling of the area.<sup>348</sup>

### Harlingen's Last Year of Growth under Mayor Sam Botts

Finn Ewing decided not to run for mayor a third time, so that the 1920s were brought to a close by the mayoral term of Sam Botts from December 1928 to the end of 1930.<sup>349</sup> Botts was a very similar figure to the previous mayor, with whom he had cooperated closely. He shared Ewing's above-mentioned characteristics of drive, integrity, idealism, and business know-how. With ten years of experience in town government as a city commissioner, he was also dedicated to developing the town. He, like Ewing, was a settler from Central Texas, coming from Bottsville, named for his family, located near Gonzales. He, too, came to Harlingen as a businessman, setting up the Botts Produce Company and running both a store in the Hill Building and a cotton gin.<sup>350</sup> Botts was active in all sorts of civic activities, heading the Valley Mid-Winter Fair Association and serving as chairman of the board of Harlingen's First Methodist Church.<sup>351</sup> It was on Botts' motion that Mayor Ewing's administration voted not to charge churches a building permit fee.<sup>352</sup> As a Town Commissioner under Mayor Ewing, Botts played a role in one of the earliest documented cases of Harlingen municipal care for the poor, at the same time as a similar effort in San Benito.<sup>353</sup>

Botts' administration saw the establishment of a flying school and passenger service at a new municipal airport.<sup>354</sup> Local construction accelerated still more,<sup>355</sup> and the town's houses were assigned street numbers.<sup>356</sup> A skating rink was opened,<sup>357</sup> and two magazines--the Baptist Valley Messenger and Texas Citriculture--began publication in town.<sup>358</sup>

Much more was planned. Sam Botts tried to buy the Arroyo Country Club for the town, despite John D. Hill (son of Lon C. Hill) taking legal action to block him.<sup>359</sup> A Valley Hall of Fame was to be built across from the City Auditorium.<sup>360</sup> Ewing's slogan of "Progress with cooperation" might have been applied even more to Botts. With striking prescience, Botts convinced San Benito to support Harlingen's new leadership for their mutual benefit. Bott proposed a "Twin City Junior College" between Harlingen and San Benito,<sup>361</sup> and tried to lure the Mexican Aviation Company to move its business from Brownsville with a plan to build a Twin City Airport between Harlingen and San Benito.<sup>362</sup> The Harlingen and San Benito Boy Scouts were joined in a "Twin City Scout Celebration."<sup>363</sup>

Success brought the prevailing national mood of giddy insouciance to touch on Harlingen, too.

Much ado was made out of a man who perched for four days on top of the flag pole on the roof of the Reese-Wil-Mond Hotel.<sup>364</sup> Similar hoopla attended a local boy who rolled a peanut with his nose for eleven miles from Rio Hondo to Harlingen.<sup>365</sup> Life seemed to be "just a bowl of cherries." However, Bott's farsighted plans had to wait for many years to come. As a Harlingen Star cartoon of April 1929 warned, the American investor was about to suffer a fall on the Wall Street Stock Market.<sup>366</sup> The thin cows of the Great Depression now surged out of the Rio Grande to devour the fat cows of the golden years.

## The End Result

Yet, Harlingen had taken good advantage of its brief gilded decade. By the close of the 1920s, Harlingen's position of commercial center of western Cameron County was assured. It had founded over thirty factories, a municipal auditorium, eight school buildings, and eight parks plus a municipal golf course.<sup>367</sup> Its low \$500,000 municipal bonded debt even allowed it to face the Depression years with less fear.<sup>368</sup> The tradition of Harlingen folks shopping at Down Brothers Store in San Benito had been replaced by patronage of Harlingen's own stores.<sup>369</sup> One observer remarked, "The improvements at Harlingen are almost beyond belief . . . there is no question but that Harlingen is the real city of the Valley."<sup>370</sup>

The two neighboring towns had reversed their initial roles, and were settling into their new identities. San Benito, now slower moving, would adopt the moniker of "The Resaca City," emphasizing its tropical beauty; while newly ambitious Harlingen would choose for its nicknames the "Capital of the Lower Rio Grande Valley" and the "All-American City."<sup>371</sup>

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365. The Harlingen Star, Tuesday, 13 November 1928, 1.

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## Reading Zane Grey in Brownsville

by

Mimosa Stephenson

Four or five years ago, because my aged father would read anything by Zane Grey, I picked up a used paperback at the university library for fifty cents, a book entitled *The Ranger and Other Stories*. As the fourth child of seven, I had learned early that Mother would ask the nearest child in sight to sweep the kitchen floor, and that if I could stay out of sight with my book, I might escape. I developed a love of reading in the Zane Grey books of my oldest brother, Kenneth. My favorite was *Shadow on the Trail*, a novel I read six or seven summers running. My younger brother Danny still collects Zane Grey books, and they bring a good price at used book stores. Zane Grey has long had a large popular audience; his biographer Frank Gruber says he is "perhaps the most popular author of the twentieth century," selling forty million books by 1968 (xi, 243). He has four national best sellers to his credit for the years 1906, *Spirit of the Border*; 1912, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, (Milton 8); 1918, *The U.P. Trail*; and 1920, *Man of the Forest* (Gruber 1). But critical acclaim has never been his and I think credit is due him.

When I read "The Ranger" to see if Zane Grey was still as absorbing as I used to think, I was interested to notice that the story is set in Brownsville. There is nothing particular in the story to connect it to this city except that it begins outside of Brownsville and concerns bandits from Mexico who cross the Rio Grande to steal stock and drive them across the border to escape capture. The setting also gives opportunity for stereotypical treatment of Mexicans: "All Mexicans were of a highly excitable temperament, and Uvaldo was no exception" (17); the hero uses their presumed drunkenness—"If there were anything that had dominance in the Mexican's nature it was the cactus liquor, *canyu*. Ordinarily he was volatile, unstable as water, flint one moment and wax the next. But with the burn of *canyu* in his throat he had the substance of mist" (32)—to mislead one of their captors; and the heroine beguiles another with the wiles of a pretty señorita. The heroine is a beautiful high-spirited flirtatious girl of mixed American and Mexican descent (but Spanish blood), who fits the stereotype of a young woman who might live near Brownsville. Zane Grey uses the same stereotype in *Knights of the Range*, where Holly Ripple, high spirited and passionate, and with half Spanish blood, hires a group of men with notorious pasts to work for her because she has been left an enormous ranch at the death of her father.

I also recognized in "The Ranger" the old story line I enjoyed and remembered from my childhood, which goes as follows: the experienced hero (perhaps an outlaw but really a good man at heart, someone who has a good family background and probably an education) should meet the heroine (a high spirited, flirtatious beauty all the cowboys are wild about who is of a higher class than the down-on-his-luck but brave cowboy) early in the story but should be separated from her, perhaps because she is kidnapped by the villain, who intends to rape her. In that case the hero must track her captors (and he is the best tracker in the West) on his magnificent stallion and rescue her against great odds, always showing great self-control when under threat of death. Usually the hero is a gunman, who outshoots a villainous gang, and often his great stallion must outrun a horde of pursuers after

him and the girl. Frequently there is a long journey across very rough but beautiful mountainous country, where the horses must slide down cliffs that look impossible to cross. After her rescue, she gratefully courts the gray-eyed hero, who has only dreamed she would love him, and they are presumed to live happily ever after.

What I found in "The Ranger" is that Vaughn Medill, a veteran Texas Ranger with a "gun record" (14) and "eyes of cool gray, and the tinge of white over his temples" (10), looks longingly, but apparently hopelessly, at Roseta Uvaldo, the beautiful young daughter of the foreman ("a Mexican of quality, claiming descent from the Spanish soldier" (11) on a neighboring ranch and an American woman; "she was young, rich, the belle of Las Animas, and the despair of cowboy and *vaquero* alike" (11). Vaughn's horse Star is "a big-boned chestnut" with "speed and endurance" (16). Roseta is kidnapped, and Vaughn studies the tracks left by her horse: "Vaughn was a past master at this cowboy art, long before he joined the rangers, and years of man-hunting had perfected it. He could read a fugitive's mind by the tracks he left in dust or sand" (19). Riding after her, he is held up by bandits, who have used the girl to lead him into a trap; after his capture, the bandits head south to take him to their leader, Quinela, who intends to rape the girl and to make Vaughn walk barefoot on burning cactus before killing him. During the long ride through the rocks, gorges, brushy slopes, and streams into Mexico, Vaughn cleverly manipulates his captors and bides his time with great self-control—"it would take iron will to hold his burning intent within bounds" (40)—until the moment to spring arrives. After killing some of the captors, he and Roseta race north for the border on Star, and the horse outdistances all pursuit. When they reach the Rio Grande, Roseta suggests they marry before he takes her back to her father's house. The story was so perfectly the Zane Grey story that it seemed a distillation of all those I had ever read.

As a child I only knew I enjoyed reading Zane Grey's novels, but now I am trained to know what makes great literature and to find those traits for myself. Academic circles greatly favor Larry McMurtry as a Western novelist, but after reading *Horseman, Pass By* with its amorality, I like the comment of C. L. Sonnichsen:

The implication is always that McMurtry and his tribe are telling it truly—at last. The publishers call *The Last Picture Show* 'a sensitive, poignant and powerful work of fiction' which portrays accurately 'the wild, heartbreaking condition called adolescence' as experienced in Texas. I believe the publishers are wrong. I do not agree that McMurtry's primary object is to describe Things As They Are. I wonder sometimes if he may not have been outside his peer group in high school and is out for revenge, but probably his aim is simply to shock the reader (160).

I was an adolescent growing up in Texas, and Lonnie Bannon's experiences are nothing like mine. Academics do discuss the appeal of popular fiction as seen in the following comment of Henry Nash Smith: "But the *persona* created by the writers of popular fiction was so accurate an expression of the demands of the popular imagination that it proved powerful enough to shape an actual man in its own image" (103). Cynthia S. Hamilton speaks specifically of Zane Grey's appeal: "Grey's heroes are all self-reliant, independent, competent and strong. They all have an internalised code which acts as their 'moral compass'. The plots of Grey's Westerns allow these heroes to achieve personal happiness as well as social and financial success. These are stock American values, stock American

dreams. . ." (90-91). Carlton Jackson says Zane Grey has his audience because he condemns urban life in favor of the rural (40). Despite the critical establishment's dismissal of popular fiction, teachers must coerce reading the classics with quizzes, tests, and papers while I (and others like me) love to read Zane Grey on my own time. Following are some of the reasons I see.

Patterns, such as those found in formula fiction, appeal to our human spirit. We enjoy the rhythm of music, a dance, or a drum beat and even of meter in poetry. Even as small children, we love the same storybook over and over as the known, the familiar, comforts us. Once we have read one of Zane Grey's novels, we delight in recognizing the vintage in the next and the next. Most commonly the heroes have gray eyes like Vaughn Medill, Renn Frayne of *Knights of the Range*, Jim Traft of *The Drift Fence*, and Lassiter of *Riders of the Purple Sage*. They have good backgrounds and some education, frequently in the East; Pecos Smith of *West of the Pecos* is from "one of the old families" (700), Gene Stewart of *The Light of Western Stars* was "once a gentleman" and came "of good family" (175), and Jim Wall of *Robbers' Roost* has been a school teacher. They are most frequently gunfighters like Lassiter, and most are outlaws in some way. The most obvious of these is Wade Holden of *Shadow on the Trail*, who has been a bank robber, but Renn Frayne of *Knights of the Range* is called "the outlaw" throughout the novel. Lin Slone, the hero of *Wildfire*, tracks a horse to capture it and then must track the girl to rescue her. Another of these magnificent trackers is the part-Indian Jean Isbel of *To the Last Man*. The race for life on the mighty stallion that is found in "The Ranger" is most obviously seen in *Wildfire*, where the horse of the title races through a burning forest to save the hero, and in so doing wins a race against the mighty Sage King, which is carrying the heroine to safety from the fire. Black Star and Night, Jane Witherspoon's favorite Arabian horses in the most acclaimed of the novels, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, are outrun in a race with Wrangle, the magnificent stallion favored by Bern Venters. In each of these novels the hero lies about which horse won the race to spare the feelings of the defeated horse's proud owner.

The stories are full of excitement, usually variations on the rescue of the fair damsel by the knight errant. In several of the novels the hero rescues the girl far from home in the wilderness and brings her safely back home, but the most daring of the escapes is that in *The Rainbow Trail*, where John Shefford rescues Fay Larkin by leading her sliding down cliffs to the Colorado River, which they raft in a raging flood. The most exciting of the journeys against time is that in *The Light of Western Stars*, a novel set in Arizona in the teens, where Majesty Hammond and her driver Link Stevens race across the desert of northern Mexico to rescue her husband Gene Stewart, who is to be shot at sundown. Most of *Robber's Roost* is a journey as one of the outlaws succeeds in rescuing the heroine far out in the wilderness at the robbers' hideout and brings her safely back home through a raging storm and flood. The heroic cowboys are even called knights in *Knights of the Range*.

The stories employ elemental themes of greed, jealousy, revenge, and lust, but also of courage, loyalty, sacrifice, and love. A novel which uses all these motifs is *Riders of the Purple Sage*, which tells of Jane Witherspoon, a Mormon woman who maintains her independence and refuses to marry the older man, with several wives already, who wants both her and the property she has inherited from her father. Lassiter, Zane Grey's most famous hero, is in Utah seeking revenge because his sister Milly had been abducted in Texas by Jane's father. Of course, Jane and Lassiter fall in love; and in the famous ending, fleeing from their enemies, they are saved but trapped in a well-stocked lush green valley, the entrance to which Lassiter seals by pushing over a balancing rock prepared for their protection by Indians millenia before. Another novel, *To the Last Man*, is the old Romeo and Juliet

story based on a real feud in Arizona. There are new twists to the story as Ellen Jorth lies to Jean Isbel, denying her innocence because she does not want her father's enemy to know she is ashamed; still he treats her with respect and stands up for her honor. This feud begins over Ellen's mother, who was engaged to Jean's father but jilted him. The ending with the second generation marrying reminds me of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the plot for which Brontë stole from John Gibson Lockhart's *Matthew Wald*.

The novels glorify the beauty of unspoiled nature with long descriptive passages suggestive of a Wordsworth poem. *The Thundering Herd* begins with a description of millions of buffalo/bison stampeding on the unspoiled American plain before the arrival of Columbus. One of the best examples comes from *The Vanishing American*, which like many of the novels has a sacred mountain worshipped as a god by the Indians. The Indian hero, Nophaie, was stolen from his desert home and raised in the East, where he became a football hero and a brilliant scholar. Choosing to return to his people, he finds himself unable to accept either the white man's god or that of the Indian until he makes a pilgrimage to the natural formation revenged by his tribe: "Naza! The Nopah God! Bridge of sandstone! . . . Those walls had been cut by the flowing of water, by the blowing of wind. Thousands of millions of tons of sand had eroded away—to leave Naza arched so magnificently there, as if imperishable" (301). There he finds peace: "For Nophaie the still, sweet air of that canyon was charged. In this deserted, haunted hall of the earth, peace, faith, resurging life all came simply to him. The intimation of immortality—the imminence of God!" (302).

Structure and symbol give order and meaning to the world of the novels. The basic structure of most of the novels where the young man and woman fall in love, are separated, and then are reunited has a pleasing shape. Zane Grey prepares well for the denouement of his stories. There are a few O'Henry surprises at the ends, but the alert reader sees that even those endings have been prepared for. Each of the four stories in *The Ranger and Other Stories* has a twist at the end, but the seeds have long been sown. In "The Ranger" Roseta Uvaldo suggests that Vaughn Medill elope with her in the last paragraph; however, at the beginning of the story when she is abducted, even Vaughn assumes she has eloped. In "Canyon Walls" the hero figures himself a fugitive in the opening scene, but when the Arizona sheriff arrives at the end and sees the constructive work Monty Bellew has been engaged in, including fathering a son, he has no charges. This same scene occurs at the end of *Shadow on the Trail*, where the novel opens with Wade Holden's fleeing from a bank robbery and ends with the captain of Texas Rangers, seeing how Wade has saved a family and fathered a child, fails to recognize him as the fugitive. "Avalanche" ends with the girl the foster brothers have been fighting over suddenly married to "young Stillwell," but she has gone to the climactic dance with the same young man to avoid choosing between the brothers. In the last story, "From Missouri," the young school teacher discovers at the end, that the rancher, Bill Springer, had written some of the letters supposedly signed by the cowboys and has indeed been courting her from the beginning, but the reader sees that Springer has been in town to meet the train and involved in the whole escapade.

The values found in the novels also appeal to our inherent sense of right and wrong, and especially to our hope that wrongs can be righted. *The Hash Knife Outfit* tells how Jed Stone is able to clear himself with neighboring ranchers after having been an outlaw for fifteen or twenty years because he took the blame for someone else. The novel begins with his happiness that a couple of men his band has shot are going to be all right and ends with his risking his life to rescue the two young heroines, who have been captured by his band. The novel shows humility, courage, honor, caring, honesty,

hard work, intelligence, reformation, and most importantly, loyalty and sacrifice. The heroes who are outlaws have come to that state through faithfulness to friends or have killed rustlers who have pretended to be honest citizens. Or like Hellbent Wade of *The Mysterious Strange* and Wade Holden of *Shadow on the Trail*, they spend their lives righting wrongs to atone for the wrongs they have committed. At the end of each novel the erring, but repentant, man with the good heart comes out cleared and the villain lies dead.

Except *The Vanishing American*, the books have happy endings against all odds, the wrongs are righted, the good guy wins the beautiful girl, and they live happily ever after. Our literary establishment chooses to believe that there is no happiness, but I have married my sweetheart, and I am most content with him. There is as much truth in the romantic "and they lived happily ever after" as there is in the opposite where all is disillusionment and unhappiness. Even though all wrongs are not righted, many of them are. Accepting that there are no solutions and that everything will go wrong gives one no reason for living. Knowing that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5) gives hope and a reason for going on. The positive builds up while the negative tears down. There's a good argument for seeing the best in life instead of looking for the worst.

I am not the only one who has benefitted from these novels, for such books encourage reading. Zane Grey writes clear, graceful sentences that I would like my students to emulate. *The Hash Knife Outfit* begins: "It was a rainy November night down on the Cottonwood. The wind complained in the pines outside the cabin and whispered under the eaves. A fine cold mist blew in the open chinks between the logs." Zane Grey taught me how to read and through that how a sentence should sound on paper, and he has taught many others also. His works are an important part of our culture, and that not only in Brownsville.

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After the Boss:  
Twentieth Century Political Trends of Brownsville City Government

by

Anthony Knopp

A characteristic phenomenon of American city government during the Gilded Age was the city "boss". These individuals and the political machines they controlled manipulated the swarms of immigrants entering the U.S. during this era by providing various direct personal services in exchange for personal loyalty and votes for machine candidates. The boss utilized the power thus obtained for graft as well as to provide certain city services. From the early 1880's until 1910 Brownsville, Texas, was under the control of just such a boss—Jim Wells. In the case of Brownsville, Mexican-Americans (and Mexicans) filled the role of immigrants elsewhere. The story of the Wells regime has been definitively detailed by Evan Anders in Boss Rule in South Texas. The sequel to this story, however, is little known.

Development resulting from the coming of the railroads and frequently the introduction of large-scale irrigation were major factors in disrupting the political status quo of the United States border communities. In the case of Brownsville, "Boss" Jim Wells may have been the agent of his own political demise. After backing earlier unsuccessful attempts to build a railroad to the Rio Grande Valley, Wells served on the board of directors and as general counsel for the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway, handling the acquisition of land titles. The new railroad brought to the Valley thousands of land-purchasing Midwestern Anglos who were not inclined to tolerate the manipulation of Mexican voters and the ensuing corrupt government. (Anders 12; Richardson, 10-11)

Probably Boss Wells allowed his business interests and his state and national political involvements to distract him from local conditions. This allowed local Republican leader Rentfro Creager to organize a new Brownsville political party comprised of Republicans and disgruntled Democrats. The Independent Party platform condemned the Democrats for indulging in "machine methods, bossism, corruption, and graft" and promised "honest, efficient, economic, and wise business methods" in administering local government. (Anders, 148-49) The Independents were already utilizing the rhetoric, if not the spirit, of the Progressives. Despite the new style, the Independents relied on many of the same electoral tactics used by Jim Wells, including the manipulation of Mexican voters.

The initial challenge of the Independents in 1908 was turned back by a narrow margin, but in 1910 the new party succeeded in electing Benjamin Kowalski as mayor. The Independents also made a run at the Wells-controlled Cameron County government with only mixed results, but Wells was determined to regain control. The Wells machine accused the Independence city administration of excessive taxation and various abuses, but the Independents had compiled an impressive record in providing public services and utilities, as well as the construction of a new city hall and market. The Independents retained control in the election of 1912, but the results were disputed in the courts and--violently--in the streets. One perceptive local observer concluded that the "overriding concern of the Independent and Democratic leaders alike was the acquisition of political power, and both sides were willing to stoop to any tactic in their pursuit of that goal." (Kearney and Knopp, 202-04, Schmeling, 318-19)

Faced with the frustration and outrage of the Brownsville business community over the election scandals and violence, the Independents called for a compromise ticket for the next election and persuaded some leading Democrats to join them. The Independents also returned to their original reform strategy by proposing a new city charter based on the progressive commission plan of government with non-partisan elections. Former Wells ally Augustus A. Browne was elected mayor along with the rest of the Independent slate in 1914, and promptly delivered on the party's promise

of a new charter, which actually established a city manager from of government. (Anders, 163-65)

Jim Wells maintained his control over the Cameron County government until 1920, when he lost the county Democratic chairmanship. Wells himself described the results of his defeat: "Cameron County has ceased to be the 'Banner' Democratic stronghold... and it is now 'Anybody's and Everybody's County,'... which is due... to the fact that the 'Snow-diggers' are in the majority and fast increasing." (Anders, 278-79) For all practical purposes competitive politics had come to an end in both the city and the county, and with it the importance of the Mexican vote. Mexican-American officer-holders, who had been used to recruit the ethnic vote, nearly disappeared during this period. (Binder, 430-37)

Political stability accompanied the prosperity of the Twenties. The Independent Party of the reform era established political dominance and gradually faded away from lack of opposition. Supported by Brownsville's socioeconomic elite, Mayor A. B. Cole held office throughout the Twenties. Similarly, Oscar Dancy was elected county judge in late 1920 and would hold that post, with one interruption, for fifty years. Judge Dancy's main focus during the Twenties was on the construction of concrete roads. (Washington, 274-75)

The interregnum of Judge Dancy's long career occurred as a result of the election of 1932, and the economic impact of the depression was clearly a factor in the anti-incumbency mood of the voters. Dancy could claim foresight for building the concrete highways, which required few repairs, in an era of funding shortages, and he was returned to office in the next election, after it became apparent that there were no simple political solutions to the depression. (Washington, 275-77)

At the time of his defeat, Judge Dancy said it appeared "as if everybody who was connected with taxes is beaten." (Brownsville Herald, 25 July 1932, 1 and 6) The tax burden, necessitated by bonded indebtedness, was also a problem in Brownsville, where a serious challenge to the political establishment was first mounted in 1935. Fausto Yturria, wealthy descendant of a pioneer family, headed the People's Party ticket in an unsuccessful race against Mayor R. B. Rentfro. One of the losing commission candidates was Robert Runyon, a photographer and botanist, who would constitute the major threat to Brownsville's elite establishment for the next twenty years. (Kearney and Knopp, 233; Gilbert 223-27; Samponaro and Vanderwood, 2-15). In 1957 Runyon ran unsuccessfully for mayor but his allies gained control of the city commission and hired Runyon as manager.

Principled but temperamental, Robert Runyon became embroiled in a lawsuit against the Brownsville Herald and political disputes with his erstwhile allies on the city commission. When the city commission fired Runyon, he promptly filed for election as mayor. Running on a program of improvements for city parks, Runyon and his entire slate won by sizeable margins in the 1941 elections. By mid-1942 the new mayor was in court, accused of ballot fraud. A hostile Brownsville Herald called for "the eventual permanent elimination of the Runyon political ring from our community." (Brownsville Herald, 2 Nov. 1941, 1-2; 22 July 1942, 1) The continuing controversies led to a thorough defeat for Runyon and his allies in 1943. (Kearney and Knopp, 235)

Despite the bitterness of the political struggles in Brownsville in the early 1940's the issues were the traditional issues of local government: taxes, debt, public services and patronage. Robert Runyon's challenge to the elite establishment was not a proletarian revolution but an attempt by bourgeois entrepreneurs and businessmen to wrest power from an entrenched establishment. The early 1940's highlighted the bi-ethnic composition of Brownsville politics: for three terms the city commission had a Mexican-American majority comprised of young business and professional men, including Reynaldo Garza, who would later become the first Mexican-American appointed to the federal bench.

The challenge to the political establishment mounted by Robert Runyon had been crushed in the early Forties. The traditional business elite supported the regime of Mayor Herbert L. Stokely who held that office for a decade beginning in 1945. Stokely was the immediate past president of the Chamber of Commerce, so it was not surprising that his administration would focus on such projects

as a new civic center. Favoritism toward the elite in a transfer of park land was the issue which sparked the rise of a new challenge to the establishment. Margal M. Vicars, a laundry operator, was encouraged to run against Stokely in 1955 by other civic-minded young businessmen and Robert Runyon, who became Vicars' political mentor and close friend. (Knopp, 405)

Given little chance of success by the Brownsville Herald, Vicars waged a Populist-style campaign charging the Stokely administration with excessive tax and utility rates, reflecting Runyon's original attack on the establishment in 1937. When Vicars appeared to have achieved a razor-thin victory, the Herald noted "a sort of numb shock" among supporters of Stokely, who feared "that an enormous tragedy had overtaken Brownsville, the sort of political calamity one would assert, if, say, Liberace had been elected President." (Brownsville Herald, 2 November, 1955, 4) Vicars triumph, however, was diminished by the defeat of most of his allies, including commission candidate Robert Runyon. Even Vicars' narrow victory was in dispute, and his election was overturned seventeen months later in a lawsuit that reached the Texas Supreme Court. (Knopp, 405-06)

Vicars sought and achieved vindication in the next election; not only was he narrowly elected, but the other members of his ticket won a commission majority. Vicars team won by carrying the heavily Mexican working class precincts while losing the well-to-do Anglo neighborhoods in an election which brought out seventy-five percent of the registered voters. In the process, Vicars had made promises to fund new projects while reducing taxes and public utility rates. In trying to fulfill these promises, the inexperienced commission majority ran up a large deficit, causing the city's auditors to recommend reductions in spending and "drastic steps to cut personnel costs." Vicars saw his commission majority crumble and then suffered a stunning rejection at the polls when he sought reelection. The Fifties ended with the elite establishment again in firm control of Brownsville's city government. (Knopp, 407-09)

The ethnic transformation in local United States office-holding beginning in the 1960's was particularly evident in the lower Rio Grande Valley. In Cameron County, the fifty-year tenure of County Judge Oscar Dancy terminated with his retirement in 1970. Dancy's chosen successor was a Mexican-American, Ray Ramon. By 1986, nearly eighty percent of the county commissioners, constables and justices of the peace were Mexican-Americans. A recent development has been the reemergence of partisan competition in Cameron County politics, resulting in the election of Republican lawyer Antonio Garza as county judge in 1988. A second Republican was elected to the county commission in 1992. (Kearney and Knopp, 260-63; Binder, 427-31)

The city of Brownsville has had a long history of Mexican-American participation in its government, although normally in a numerically inferior position. The early 1940's saw a Mexican-American majority on the city commission, but politics and government underwent little change. When populist Mayor M. M. Vicars was defeated in 1959, Antonio (Tony) Gonzalez was a number of the victorious establishment commission slate. Gonzalez was elected mayor in 1963, the first Mexican-American to hold that office, and was reelected three times. As commissioner and mayor, Gonzalez focused on the creation and operation of the Public Utilities Board, which provided electricity and water to city residents. (Gonzalez)

Mayor Gonzalez' preoccupation with nuts-and-bolts government activity during the era of national civil rights activism was indicative of the low level of ethnic conflict in Brownsville, although there was ample evidence of subtle forms of discrimination. Much of the discrimination, however, was in the nature of class bias, as many Mexican-Americans of the elite and middle classes participated fully in the social, economic, and political life of the city. Elections reflected class divisions to much greater extent than ethnic divisions. Both Anglo and Mexican-Americans candidates on an establishment slate received strong support in prosperous neighborhoods and low totals in poorer area. (Brownsville Herald, 8 December 1971, 1A; Kearney and Knopp, 261-62).

Even the success of an anti-elite candidate in the tradition of Robert Runyon and Vicars did little to change the status quo. Emilio Hernandez, whose family had backed Vicars in the fifties, was elected mayor in 1979 by promising to represent "all the people", which was a slogan aimed at lower

class Mexican-Americans. Hernandez may have had the interests of the poor in his heart, but he and his associates had become successful businessmen with little interest in socioeconomic upheaval. After two terms, Mayor Hernandez left office under a cloud of investigations into possible corruption at city hall. Hernandez' subsequent exoneration seemed to confirm the suspicions of his supporters that he was the victim of an elite plot, and his political influence continued to be felt in later elections. (Brownsville *Herald*, 1 January 1987, 10B; 1 January 1989, 1A).

Hernandez was succeeded as mayor by Ygnacio "Nacho" Garza, son of Reynaldo Garza, senior federal appeals court judge and one of the Mexican-American city commission majority in the forties. Garza's election seemed to signal a return to elite control of the government, but the political situation proved to be much too fluid. Garza, who became a successful spokesman for the city, did not seek reelection and Brownsville faced the nineties with divided leadership and no clear sense of direction. (Kearney and Knopp, 263-64).

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# Ethnicity and Political Participation in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties: Mexican American Voters and Nonvoters

by

J. L. Polinard, Robert D. Wrinkle, and Norman E. Binder

This paper examines differences and similarities between Mexican American voters and nonvoters. Although our initial focus is on voting in the 1990 Texas gubernatorial election, we examine also alternative activities of political participation. We also ask whether Mexican American voters present different attitudes toward selected policy issues than those presented by Mexican American nonvoters.

Specifically, our inquiry focuses on three issues concerning Mexican American voters and nonvoters in the two most populous counties of the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. First, we identify who the Mexican American nonvoters are and compare their demographic characteristics with voters. Here we seek to identify those variables that predict the propensity to vote among the Mexican American population. In effect, we ask whether Mexican American nonvoters constitute a different electorate from voters. Second, viewing the vote as just one form of political participation, we explore which variables influence alternative forms of political activity among the Mexican American population. Finally, we examine selected policy issues to see if there are differences between the attitudes held toward those issues by Mexican American voters and Mexican American nonvoters.

## **Ethnicity and Participation**

The general political behavior of minority groups has been examined by Wolfinger (1965), Parenti (1967), Keech (1968), Matthews and Prothro (1966), Uhlaner, Cain and Kiewiet (1989). Recently, Latino political behavior has received considerable attention from scholars. This development is informed by the emergence of Latinos as a significant force in American society (Grebler, Moore and Guzman, 1970; de la Garza, 1985). De la Garza and DeSipio note that between 1976 and 1988 the Latino share of the national electorate grew from 2.4 to 3.6 percent (1993, 1500). Still, as de la Garza and DeSipio observe, there has been a general paucity of literature on the effects of ethnicity on Latino electoral mobilization (1994, 3).

Among those who have examined the political behavior of Mexican Americans are Welch, Comer, and Steinmen (1973), McCleskey and Merrill (1973), Grebler, Moore, and Guzman (1970), de la Garza, et al. (1982), Wrinkle and Miller (1984), Longoria, Polinard and Wrinkle (1990) and de la Garza (1982), Verba et al. (1993) and DeSipio (1994). This paper adds to this literature.

## **Model Specification**

Cain, Kiewiet and Uhlaner (1991) have suggested two hypotheses concerning the role of ethnicity in politics. One hypothesis, which they refer to as the "minority group status" hypothesis, suggests

that minority group members who have accumulated a series of experiences concerning their minority group status will differ in their partisan support from counterparts who have not accumulated these experiences. They note that the experiences associated with minority group status must be political in nature to help shape partisan affiliation. This hypothesis comports with earlier research concerning ethnic identity, which also suggests that particular life experiences may set one group apart from another (De la Garza and Vaughan, 1985, and Cohen, 1984). Cohen contends that "[e]thnic identities...must be treated as dynamic phenomena, with respect both to their cultural content and to which individuals bear them. Members of ethnic groups claim to be distinguished from the surrounding population fundamentally by certain shared cultural characteristics, be they language, religion, geographical origin, or shared history." (1984: 1031) This also is supported by the group consciousness argument presented by Miller et al. (1981).

A second hypothesis employed by Cain, Kiewiet and Uhlener is the "economic advancement" hypothesis, which suggests that the impact of ethnicity on group partisanship may be softened as the members' material well-being improves (1991: 397). This hypothesis fits with earlier conceptions of ethnicity that saw the political impact of ethnicity diminishing as economic advancement took place (Wolfinger, 1965, Parenti, 1967). Unlike the minority status hypothesis, this hypothesis emphasizes the impact of the traditional socioeconomic status variables.

A third hypothesis, the "mobilization" hypothesis, is suggested by previous research, and as Leighley notes a growing body of research identifies mobilization as a major factor in influencing participation (Leighley, 1995, 181). The mobilization of voters, especially ethnic voters, is one of the most important aspects of electoral success (Wolfinger, 1965; DeSipio, 1994). The importance of mobilization has been accentuated recently by Rosenstone and Hansen (1993). They say, "People participate in electoral politics because someone encourages or inspires them to take part" (1993, 161). Goldstein argues that mobilization, on both the aggregate and individual levels, has a statistically and substantively large influence on turnout (1994, 15). De la Garza and Desipio (1993) argue that lack of mobilization is a primary cause of Latino nonvoting.

In this paper, we examine all three hypotheses in our examination of Mexican American voting and non-voting. Our model includes three types of independent variables: two cultural variables which relate to the "minority status" hypothesis; individual level variables of income and education which relate to the "economic advancement" hypothesis; and two measures of mobilization, relating to the mobilization hypothesis.

The first cultural variable is an overall measure of cultural attachment; this measure is identified by a scale constructed of attitudes and behaviors that constitute measures of "Mexicanness". This scale is derived from the work of de la Garza and his colleagues (1984). "Mexicanness" refers to a hypothesized continuum of attachment to Mexican culture, traditions and holidays. The components that make up the "Mexicanness" scale include: considering it important to maintain Mexican traditions and the Spanish language; and placing importance on such Mexican holidays such as Diez Y Seis de Septiembre and Cinco de Mayo. We summed the responses to the scale, and took the raw scale score in the analysis. Those scoring low on the scale are "more Mexican" than those scoring high. We performed a reliability analysis on this scale and the resultant Alpha was .78. This cultural variable reflects, in various ways, a commitment to the maintenance of the Mexican cultural heritage.

Another measure of the minority status concept is the saliency when a co-ethnic is seeking election or when national origin issues are central to election campaigns or policy discussions (Garcia, Garcia, de la Garza and Falcon, 1992, 17). We operationalize this measure by asking respondents if they are

more likely to vote if a Mexican American is on the ballot.

Much of the research literature dealing with voter turnout focuses on individual level socioeconomic characteristics (See Leighley, 1995 for a good overview). We follow this research and include such variables as education and income as measures of socioeconomic status. We also include age and gender as control variables.

One of the early steps in the mobilization process is getting potential voters registered. Some researchers have focused on the decision to register to vote as the critical decision. (Kelley, Ayres and Bowen, 1967; Erikson, 1981) Kelley, Ayres and Bowen note "Local differences in the turnout for elections are to a large extent related to local differences in rates of registration, ..." (1967, 373). Erikson suggested an answer to the question of why people vote in the title of his article: "Why Do People Vote? Because They Are Registered" (1981, 259). Erikson argues that a major component of the decision to vote is the decision to register to vote (1981, 275). Consequently, we ask our respondents whether someone talked to them about registering to vote, and include this response as one of our measures of mobilization.

Huckfeldt and Sprague have shown that individual vote choice is imbedded in, and influenced by, the social context in which it occurs (1991, 156). A primary social-political context is the neighborhood or location. Huckfeldt and Sprague suggest that the neighborhood serves a major role in setting the context of political life (1988, 475). Leighley (1990) supports the position that context influences individual based participation. Anderson finds that the social environment has strong independent effects on participation (1992, 17). He argues that social environment "...serves as a powerful stimulator for low status individuals" (Anderson, 1992, 17). Cassel (1994) argues that nonpolitical voluntary associations mobilize voters. We include the impact of social environment in our measure of mobilization by asking respondents if they had cooperated with others in the last twelve months to solve a problem in their city or neighborhood. Our expectation is that cooperating with others to solve a problem can serve as a mobilization stimulus. We expect that those respondents who have cooperated are more likely to be voters than nonvoters.

## Methodology

Our data are from a survey conducted in deep South Texas along the Texas-Mexico border. This location ensures an exposure to influences of Mexican culture and traditions. Data from the 1990 Census indicate that 83.8% of the population of the area are Spanish surnamed (almost all of this Latino population is Mexican American). A sample of household telephones in the telephone exchanges of both counties was obtained by a random digit production process. As this border region is one of the poorest areas in the nation, a significant number of poor households may be without telephone service. This is especially true in the *colonias* (small, rural, unincorporated areas). While more than 90% of all households in the nation have telephones, only 83% of the households in the region have telephone service (Backstrom and Hursh-Cesar, 1984; Rush, 1983). Consequently, we supplemented the telephone survey with personal interviews in those areas without any telephone service. The personal interviews were conducted in 14 of the more than 65 *colonias* in the area; 167 personal interviews were completed. Household selection was done by a two-stage cluster sample, utilizing a respondent randomizing device (Backstrom and Hursh-Cesar, 1981, 94). The completed sample included 832 interviews; the overall response rate was almost 80 percent.

Almost 30 percent of the interviews were conducted in Spanish from an authenticated translation

of the survey instrument. Eighty-four percent of the respondents are Mexican Americans; this corresponds almost exactly to the demographics of the region. However, the sample underrepresented males by a considerable margin. Thus, we reweighted the sample to obtain more accurate population estimates. We utilized the WEIGHT command in SPSS. To avoid inflating the statistical significance levels, we used a weight factor which, when summed, is the same as the unweighted number of cases. (SPSS, Inc., 1988, 189). Thus, our analyses are based on the reweighted number of cases equal to that of the original survey.

Our usable sample includes 680 Mexican-origin respondents of which, 52 percent are female, 12 percent hold white collar occupations, 85 percent have incomes of \$25,000 or less. A majority (63%) of the Mexican American population were born in the United States, and the rest, with three exceptions, were born in Mexico. More than 50% of our respondents had one or both parents born in Mexico. Almost half of the Mexican-origin sample have family members living in Mexico. These characteristics are fairly representative of the Mexican American population of the United States.

Our survey instrument included questions concerning voting in general terms and then a question that focused specifically on the 1990 gubernatorial election in Texas.<sup>1</sup> As Patterson and Caldeira note, the election for state governor is a consequential one (1983, 677). However, turnout in gubernatorial elections generally is lower than in presidential years, thus this test is somewhat conservative as the gubernatorial election may exclude voters motivated only during presidential years.<sup>2</sup>

## Findings

Table one reports descriptive information comparing Mexican American voters and nonvoters. As can be seen, there are some similarities as well as differences, especially in the SES variables. Mexican American nonvoters tend to be somewhat younger, have lower incomes and less education than Mexican American voters. In the context of mobilization, fewer Mexican American nonvoters tend to report that someone talked to them about registration than do voters. Not surprisingly, Mexican American voters have been registered to vote for a longer time than have the nonvoters.

It is interesting to note that there is a distinct partisan difference between voters and nonvoters, the latter much more likely to identify with the Republican Party in this predominantly Democratic region. This characteristic may reflect a combination of factors: the nonvoters are young and have come to political maturity under two Republican Presidents and one Republican Governor; and the local media, especially the print media, is conservative and tends to support GOP political positions.

Other than the partisan characteristic, there are few surprises to be found in the descriptive data. These data provide an almost classic description of those persons who are described by Verba, et al., as without "politically relevant resources" (1993). Additionally, as de la Garza and DeSipio (1993) note, many new Latino voters are the children of nonvoters, and thus do not have the socializing experience of living in a family of voters. That is, the decision to vote, as is the case with most acts of political participation, is enhanced by a socialization process. If voting is a norm, as is more likely in the homes of well-educated, upper income families, that norm is recognized by the children in those families. If, on the other hand, there is an absence of a history of voting in the family, or, if, as is the historical case with racial and ethnic minorities, voting might bring such negative consequences as being fired from a job or physical violence, that lesson also is not lost on those not yet of voting age.

The Mexican American population meets both these criteria. Historically, Texas takes a back seat to no state when it comes to racial and ethnic discrimination in the area of voting. Voting among the



Mexican American population often was an act of courage rather than citizenship, often attracting sanctions ranging from loss of employment to violence. In addition, the Mexican American population is an extremely young population with a significant percentage still ineligible to vote because of age restrictions. In the two counties we surveyed, the median age of Mexican Americans in 1990 was under twenty years old. Sigelman and his colleagues, in a multi-election analysis, suggest that there is a tendency of young persons to register and vote only when motivated to vote in a particular election (1985, 764).

Our model allowed us to test the relative impact of cultural, SES, and mobilization variables. The results of the logistic regression appear in Table 2.

As can be seen, one demographic variable, age, and the two mobilization variables are significant in the equation. The importance of the demographic variable supports the findings of Welch and Sigelman (1993). The mobilization variables also predict a higher propensity to vote. Respondents who have discussed registering to vote and respondents who have worked with others to try to solve problems in the community are more likely to vote than those who have done neither.

The lack of education as a significant explanatory variable is surprising. Most research has found it to be important, if not central, to turnout. However, in our analysis it is eclipsed by age. As we referred to above, this region includes a very young population, a significant percentage of which is still in public school. Historically, the drop-out rate of Mexican American students is substantially higher than that of Anglo students. Although the existence of ethnic discrimination and poverty, two factors that contribute to the dropout rates, have not disappeared, certainly a higher percentage of Mexican Americans attend the public school system today than in the past. We anticipate that as this young population continues to increase its graduation rates, and as the cohort of those with more education matures, education as a predictor of voting propensity will manifest itself.

Thus, in the context of voting, we find support for the economic advancement and mobilization hypotheses, but none for minority group status hypothesis.

We also examined the propensity of our respondents to participate in forms of political participation other than voting. As Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992) have noted, voting in an election is only one form of participation. We included the conventional forms of political activity: signing a petition, writing a letter to a public official or about a public activity, attending a public meeting, wearing a campaign button, attending a political rally or speech, working as a political volunteer, and contributing money to a political or public policy campaign.<sup>3</sup> Responses were either zero (did not take part) or one (did take part). We summed the responses to the scale, and took the raw scale score in the analysis. Those scoring low on the scale are "less active" than those scoring high (See Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992).

Table 3 reports our findings. Here, education is a significant variable, as are income, Mexicanness and a mobilization variable. As would be expected, those respondents with more education and higher incomes tend to have higher ranges of political involvement. In addition, scoring more Mexican on our Mexicanness scale tend to increase participation in other forms of political activity. At first blush, this may seem bit surprising; the Mexicanness variable was not significant with respect to propensity to vote. However, we suggest that residents of a community who, for whatever reason, may not be likely to vote, may still participate in local political activities that they perceive to have a more direct impact on the quality of life in their community, and particularly if they define those activities as having a direct impact on them or their families. Respondents who have worked with others to address the problems facing their community, also are more likely to be involved in

alternative forms of political participation other than voting.

These findings fit with the conventional literature. Verba, et al. have noted the disparities between those who vote and those who participate in alternative forms of political activity (1993). Rosenstone and Hansen observe, "People participate in politics because they possess resources sufficient to overcome the demands that involvement places upon them...The resource demands of political participation skew the activist community toward the most advantaged" (1993, 238). Our data suggest that an enhanced cultural identity is an additional resource for political participation.

In the context, then, of political participation in forms other than voting, all three hypotheses receive some support.

Finally, we examined the question of whether Mexican American voters possess different attitudes toward selected policy issues than those of Mexican American nonvoters. We asked respondents whether they favored increased government support for eleven policy areas. Table 4 reports our findings.

With the exception of two policy areas, spending for defense and for welfare, there is little difference between voters and nonvoters. The four policy areas receiving strongest support for increased public spending are identical for both groups. There is remarkable congruity between the respondent percentage of support for most of the policy issues. Only in the areas of defense spending, where a majority of Mexican American voters support increased spending in contrast with a majority of the nonvoting respondents who oppose increased spending, and welfare, where support is reversed, i.e., a majority of nonvoting respondents favor increased public commitment and a majority of the voting respondents do not, do we find disagreement.<sup>4</sup>

These findings parallel research done on Anglo voters and nonvoters, which, in the main, has found that there is little difference between the policy positions held by voters and nonvoters. Mexican American nonvoters, as is the case with Anglo nonvoters, do not differ in policy attitudes from their voting counterparts.

## Conclusions

We find evidence that variables representing the three hypotheses we identified earlier in the paper influence Mexican American political participation. All three hypotheses receive some support when we examine political participation in activities beyond voting, and two of the three hypotheses, the economic advancement and the mobilization hypotheses, are supported by our data with regard to propensity to vote.

In general, our overall analyses suggest that Mexican American voters and nonvoters resemble Anglo voters and nonvoters when it comes to voting, alternative forms of political participation, and public policy attitudes held by voters and nonvoters. That is, SES and mobilization variables predict the propensity to vote for Mexican American just as they do for the non-minority population. Mexican Americans who are older, have participated in discussions concerning voter registration, and have worked with others to solve community or neighborhood problems are more likely to vote than those who do not possess these characteristics. Unlike other studies, however, we do not find education significant as a predictor of propensity to vote.

Our data do not support the importance of cultural variables in explaining voter turnout. Neither Mexicanness nor the likelihood that a respondent would be more likely to vote if a Mexican American candidate is on the ballot predict the propensity to vote. Rather, in voter turnout, Mexican Americans

are influenced by basically the same stimuli concerning voting that influence the general population. In this our work supports De la Garza and DeSipio (1993), who suggest that Latino nonvoting is less a function of being Latino and more a function of an absence of mobilization, what they refer to as "outreach", on the part of candidates and political parties. Our data also are in line with Hackney (1992), whose examination of voter turnout among blacks did not find shared group experiences to be a significant predictor of turnout.

While these data indicate that the variable of Mexicanness may have little to do with our respondents' decision to vote, it is clear that cultural variables do help predict forms of political behavior other than voting, as do income and education, and the mobilization variables. The cultural dimension of Mexicanness adds to our understanding of participation beyond the vote. As Verba and his colleagues note, differences in variables such as education, income and occupation associated with race and ethnicity do not define an ethnic group (1993, 494). Added cultural dimensions of ethnicity such as the Mexicanness measure help to flesh out the content and meaning behind the ethnic label. Stowers (1990) found that class status played an important role as a mediating influence on the impact of ethnicity in contributing to voter turnout among Cuban-Americans. Our data suggest this is so in terms of other forms of political activity.

Finally, we find, as the general literature predicts, that there is little difference in the policy-related attitudes held by voters and nonvoters. Again, the Mexican American population is similar to the non-minority population. As Gant and Lyons suggest for the majority population (1993), we find that the political implications, from the standpoint of attitudes toward support for government involvement in selected policy areas, of voter abstention within the Mexican American population are not significant.

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Table 1

## MEXICAN AMERICAN VOTERS AND NONVOTERS

CHARACTERISTIC	VOTERS	NONVOTERS
AGE	47.6yrs	38.6
INCOME		
\$20,000 or less	50%	78%
more than \$ 20,000	50	22
EDUCATION		
Average number of years	11.4	10.7
GENDER		
Male	49.5%	49%
Female	50.5	51
MEDIAN NUM. OF YEARS REGISTERED	19	5
PARTISANSHIP		
Democratic	58	33
Rep/Indep.	28	47
Other	14	20
MEXICANNESS		
Avg. Score	10	10.6

Table 2  
Regression of Voting on Various Independent Variables

VARIABLE	b	s.e.
AGE	.024*	.009
GENDER	-.313	.311
EDUCATION	.069	.041
INCOME	.449	.332
MEXICANNESS	-.022	.049
ETHNIC VOTE	-.293	.229
MOBILIZED REGISTRANT	.854**	.445
MOBILIZED CONTEXT	1.92*	.507

% of cases correctly classified 73

Model chi Square 36.42  
df 8  
p < .000

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .055

Table 3  
 OLS Regression of Political Participation Scale  
 on Various Independent Variables

VARIABLE	b	s.e.
AGE	.001	.004
GENDER	.0002	.139
EDUCATION	.091**	.017
INCOME	.483**	.145
MEXICANNESS	-.073**	.023
ETHNIC VOTE	-.046	.109
MOBILIZED REGISTRANT	-.218	.214
MOBILIZED CONTEXT	-1.25***	.170
CONSTANT	.415	.525

R<sup>2</sup> (adj) .30

F = 16.4, p < .000

\*\* p < .01

\*\*\* p < .000

Table 4  
 Policy Support Among Mexican American  
 Voters and Nonvoters  
 (in %)

	VOTERS		NONVOTERS	
	<u>Increase</u>	<u>Not Increase</u>	<u>Increase</u>	<u>Not Increase</u>
<b><u>POLICY:</u></b>				
Crime control	92	8	93	7
Drug Prevention	91	9	95	5
Public Ed.	87	13	86	14
Environment	81	19	83	17
Help minorities	80	20	78	22
Child Care	79	21	87	13
Medical	79	21	84	16
Science	67	33	68	32
Defense	51	49	47	53
Welfare	47	53	57	43
Help Legal Immigrants	38	62	47	53

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## Endnotes

1. The first question was taken from the Latino National Political Survey (LNPS): When we talk to people about elections, we find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they weren't old enough, weren't registered, weren't interested, were sick or just didn't have time. How about you? Did you vote in any local, state or national elections during 1990? The second question was: Did you vote in the election for Texas Governor between Ann Richards and

2. When focusing on a single election, the issue of contextual effects must be addressed. The 1990 Governor's election in Texas was between the Republican nominee, Clayton Williams, and the Democratic nominee, and eventual winner, Ann Richards. The primary focus of the campaigns turned less on particular issues, although crime was a continuing theme for both candidates, and more on the rather flamboyant personalities of each candidate. No issues that might be identified as peculiarly, or even primarily, ethnic issues attracted the attention of the candidates. The geographic region of the survey is overwhelmingly Democrat and Richards historically has received strong support from the area.

3. The form of this question was taken from the Latino National Political Survey.

4. To further examine these data, we employed multivariate analyses on the eleven policy areas, examining voters/nonvoters and policy support/nonsupport while controlling for other factors. No significant equation resulted.



Karankawas

by

Marty Lewis

Grandfather's father claimed he killed  
A Tonkawa at the corn crib,  
And might have seen Comanches skulk  
Through the jujubes, but he never,  
From high on the Colorado,  
Saw a Krank, never thought where they  
Came from or tracked where they went

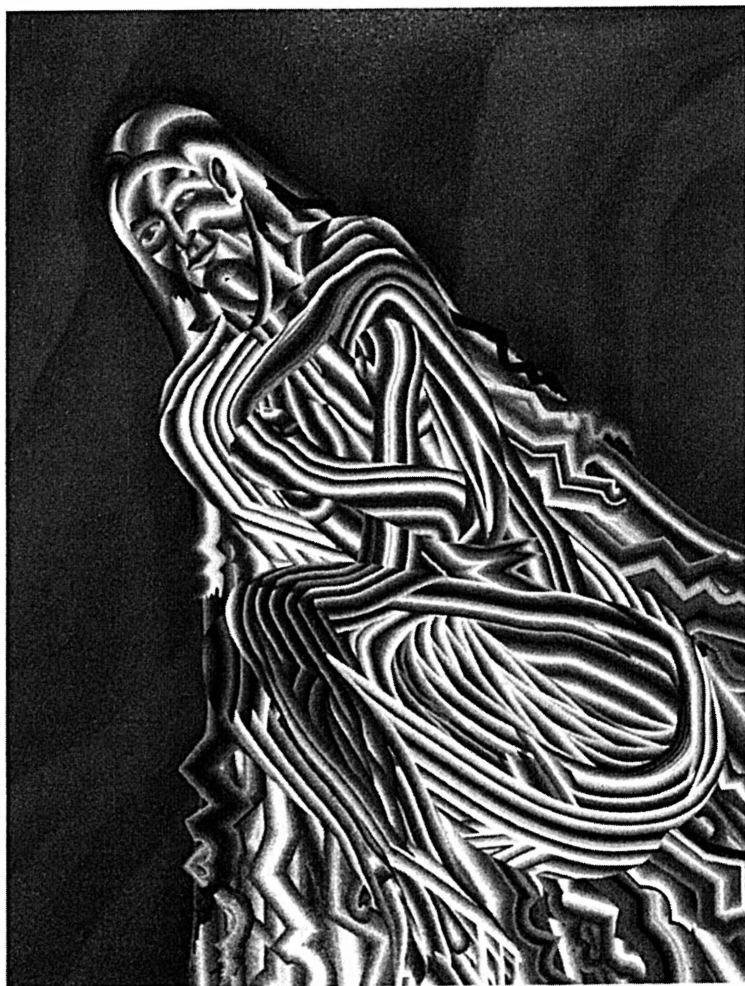
Some say they drifted from Mariscal,  
Or were hounded from Tamaulipas  
From Barbuda, or from Belize.  
Maybe Louisiana, but  
Not likely, since the Kranks' "big river"  
Was only the Brazos. There's nothing  
Of them east of the Sabine, and  
Almost only rumors anywhere else.

When there is history for the Kranks  
There is scandal, oyster shell slag,  
Curses, lost blessings, and small shards.  
They could eat a man's heart while he  
Watched, but would not gamble or save,  
Would not work or trade when they could  
Steal, or pray when they could lie.  
If there wasn't parched corn for tea,  
Mesquite beans boiled with dirt would do.  
They ate carrion and lay with beasts.  
Ritual was weeping for three days.

Some say vaqueros killed the last  
Krankes at Lago Campaguas, or  
That a primitive tribe ate them.  
Some say the last Krankes killed their last  
Women, left their last children crippled  
Behind the dunes, and thus, having  
Solved their history, sat in the drift  
On South Padre to die themselves.  
Some say the end was hopeful, that  
The last family paddled their dugout  
Into the Gulf, chasing dolphins  
Towards another coast to loot.  
Some say the last half dozen Krankes  
Crossed the Rio Grande at Boca Chica,  
Catching crabs and begging their way  
Into oblivion.



## FAMILY HISTORIES AND BIOGRAPHIES





## E. J. Davis: Traitor or Idealist?

by

Sondra Shands with Sherry McCullough

Few figures in Texas history have been the subject of such heated controversy as E. J. (Edmund Jackson) Davis. In the blink of an eye this successful and respected judge, who presided over the twelfth district (which included Cameron, Starr and Webb Counties), became Texas' hated "reconstruction governor." Was Davis an opportunist, a traitor to Texas and the South as was believed? Or was the man an idealist, sworn by his oaths, held by his beliefs, to uphold the laws of a united country?

Research on this subject has been slight, recordings limited. Few historians have broached the political career of E.J. Davis, fewer have written about his private life. Even bare bones statistical facts concerning Davis' life are conflicting. After his death, E. J.'s son, Waters Davis, expressed sadness that he possessed so little knowledge about his father's personal life. Davis himself, obviously a very private man, kept no journals which might have revealed information concerning his heritage or his inner beliefs and motives.

He has been labeled a carpetbagger; in reality he was a scalawag. Carpetbaggers were opportunists who came from the North to the South seeking fortune at the expense of the fallen South. Scalawags were Southerners who chose to remain loyal to the Union during the Civil War. Davis, a native of Florida, was born in 1827 and, depending upon the account one reads, he moved with his parents and siblings from Florida to Galveston, Texas in 1848 (Gray 4) or he came to Galveston with his widowed mother in 1838, (The Southwestern Historical Quarterly 469) or simply "in the 1830s" (The Southwestern Historical Quarterly 25). Physically, all accounts concur, Davis was striking in appearance, tall, over six feet, of fair complexion, with blue eyes that reportedly were translucent. He wore his sandy blond hair long in the fashion of Southern gentlemen of the day. Even contradictory chronicles make mention that Davis carried himself erectly, with an air of quiet dignity and according to Gray, integrity and perceptiveness for detail were intrinsic to his character.

Whatever the date of his arrival in Texas, Davis lived for a disputed interval with his mother (or with his parents and siblings) in Galveston before striking out on his own. Settling in South Texas, E.J. read for the law while working for a mercantile firm in Corpus Christi. After being admitted to the bar in the fall of 1849 (Gray 4), he practiced law in a triangle, traveling from Corpus Christi westward, to Laredo and then south, down to Brownsville. Young attorneys were meagerly paid, so to augment his salary, Davis applied for the position of customs collector in Point Isabel at the Brazos Santiago Department. A civil service appointment was granted for a post which was available in Laredo (Gray 6).

For the next four years Davis served as a federal customs collector for Webb county while continuing to advance his law practice in the above mentioned triangle, which was referred to, at least by the 1850 U.S. Census as being the Rio Grande Valley. He appears to have been a hardworking, trustworthy, well liked young man, whose ambitions were not over looked, for "...in the fall of 1853 the state legislature chose him as district attorney at Brownsville in Cameron County..." (Gray 11).

Davis had many instrumental friends in Brownsville and he quickly became a significant voice in political and local affairs, establishing himself comfortably within the community. During this time frame there were two political factions of primary importance, the Blues, who were Union sympathizers, and supported the Republican cause, and the Reds, who backed the Confederate movement and were Democrats. According to sundry sources, the Blues and the Reds were divided over various disputed land titles as well as the division of loyalties to either the Confederacy or Unionist endorsement.

Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley have customarily been of Democratic persuasion. However, during the early 1860s, narratives reveal that although local leaders such as King, Kenedy and Stillman were members of the Red party, the business community of Brownsville was predominantly Blue in predilection (Kearney and Knopp II6).

Chronicles are again at crossroads, this time concerning Davis' political adherence during the years prior to the Civil War. Some reports list him as being a member of the Whig-Unionist Party, others place his allegiance with the Democrats, still other accounts contend he firmly espoused Republican rhetoric throughout his career. It appears, from studying conflicting evidence, that at the time Davis took up residence in Brownsville he was a member of the Whig-Unionist party. Shortly thereafter, the creation of a new political faction in South Texas, described as the "...secret, anti-foreign, anti-Catholic Know Nothing-Party..."(Gray I2) resulted in the young idealistic district attorney joining the local Democratic party.

The Texas State Gazette states that on August 12, 1855 a delegation of six Democratic men, one of whom was E.J. Davis, met in Corpus Christi to urge a merger of Democrats and Whigs to outnumber and thus overcome the Know-Nothings. Davis' steadfast beliefs for a continuance of a unified nation were clouded by the committee's declaration of issues. For, although it contested an increase in the naturalization period and advocated continued freedom of religion, the council "opposed any interference by Congress with the institution of slavery in the states or the territories and endorsed the Kansas-Nebraska Act and its incorporated doctrine of popular sovereignty" (Gray I2). For an optimist, this was the lesser of evils, perhaps. Regardless of his reasons, the following year this stance resulted in Davis being chosen as a Democratic elector and a county delegate to the Waco Democratic State Convention two years later in 1857.

During the years Davis was active in the Whig-Unionist and Democratic parties, he was also firmly aligned with Brownsville's Blue party which endorsed the preservation of the Union and supported, primarily, the Republican party. Such diverse involvements: was Davis really an idealist or was he merely seeking to advance his career? For a man of ambition, such conflicting involvements would have provided an opportunity to walk both sides of the street. Regardless of his motives, E.J. was well liked and respected and his obvious abilities as a district attorney were noted, facilitating rather than hindering his career, because in 1856 he was appointed as Judge of the Twelfth District Court.

Court met biannually, and mediation of the twelfth district included Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Webb counties. Davis also set on the bench in Kinney and Zapata county, plus he continued to advance his ongoing private law practice. Though constantly traveling, Davis remained a Brownsvillian, maintaining a residence there and ultimately purchasing a home in 1858 on Levee street from Sallie Seeligson (Deed Records Vol. G 162, 163) in what was referred to as Brownsville's Second Ward. There seems to have been no dispute over Davis' effectiveness as a judge or attorney. Cases which come before the state supreme court and are upheld, affirmed, as opposed to cases

which are reversed by the state supreme court, are the standard for evaluating performance. The Clarksville Northern Standard, in 1859, stated that Judge Davis followed only Judge Peter W. Gray for affirmed cases in Texas.

In December of 1860 the South Carolina legislature voted to secede from the Union, creating a watershed of following states, one of which was Texas. Though the vast majority of Texans were staunchly in favor of secession, "...E.J. Davis, who was popular and had 'acquired influence' (Ford 317) with his fellow citizens, ran to represent Brownsville as an anti-secessionist" (Gray 18). Davis sought the delgation on the basis that secession was not constitutional. A nonpartisan assembly which gathered in front of Brownsville's Courthouse on Thursday evening, December 27, 1860 backed him but in the January 1861 election Davis was fourth in line in his bid for delegate (Tri-Weekly Gazette). He had been "edged out for the third delegate seat by John S. ('Rip') Ford, a non-resident" (Gray 19). Without conferring with Ford, some person, knowing Ford to be a strong proponent for secession, had added his name to the ballot as a delegate candidate. Davis, on the grounds that Ford did not live in Brownsville, attempted to have his name removed. However, the chief justice, a secessionist, named Ford as the third delegate. Davis was highly respected in Brownsville and throughout the Rio Grande Valley as well as much of the state. His anti-secessionist beliefs were not.

According to a Corpus Christi newspaper, Daily Ranchero, and an account from a San Antonio paper, Alamo Express, Davis, led by a deep conviction that Texas must not secede, traveled to San Antonio to enlist the aid of a personal friend, Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee. Lee, commander of the Second Cavalry, regarded as the most outstanding officer of the day, was in route northward. Davis appealed to Lee as fellow southerner, giving his legal objections to secession and stating that he held no animosity toward northerners and that the Union must be held together at all costs. Newspaper accounts state that while Lee agreed with Davis that secession would be ruinous for the South, he was not persuaded and soon thereafter resigned his command and returned to his native state of Virginia. The allegorical sword line had been drawn in the dirt and it was now time to step firmly across that line and take a position on one side or the other. The July 31, 1868 edition of the San Antonio Express stated that Davis, like Governor Sam Houston, did not "turn traitor to the old flag" by signing the new oath of allegiance decreed by the Texas Secession Convention.

By May of 1862 Cameron County was under martial law. Risking certain arrest and possible death for leaving the country, E.J. left his home in Brownsville and crossed the Rio Grande river into Matamoros, Mexico, where he boarded the Montgomery, a federal ship bound for New Orleans. Gray states that "Davis journeyed to the North in the late summer of 1862, applied for a commission as an officer in the Union Army, and proposed to the President a scheme to rearm Unionists in Texas" (34). Davis believed that he could, and indeed did, enlist "exiled Texans" (Gray 35), both Anglo and Mexican who, being Union sympathizers, had moved from Brownsville, Texas, across the Rio Grande into Matamoros, Mexico. He formed an army of "Texas Unionists Volunteers and led them as colonel in the fighting in Louisiana" (Kearney and Knopp 118). Before the end of the Civil War Davis would be given the commission of brigadier general of volunteers, a rank which was shared with only one other Texan in the Unionist army, A.J. Hamilton (Gray 64).

Following an honorable discharge in San Antonio after the end of the war, Davis joined his family in Corpus Christi. Well known, relatively young, forty, and "the highest ranking former Federal military officer" (Gray 77) in the area, E.J. was soon involved once again in politics. On January 17, 1870 Davis took the oath of office and became Texas' reconstruction governor. Once again the

heated debate: were his political motives altruistic? Did he seek the governorship to help guide his stricken state? Or was he reaching for political recognition beyond the state? There is no argument that the next four years engraved his character on the newly re-emerging Texas.

For all of his political career, from earliest days as a circuit attorney to physically refusing to surrender the office of governor after his defeat in 1874, Davis was a man cloaked in controversy. Little is available for scrutiny. His character, personal values and private life are seen only as wispy threads woven into his public life. Opportunist? Idealist? Much more research is needed and perhaps even then no absolute, firm consensus will ever be drawn. One conclusion however is inescapable, the shadow of Edmund Jackson Davis fell heavily across the state of Texas during a troubled and formative period.

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## El General Manuel González Flores

por

Clemente Rendón de la Garza

"En la villa de Matamoros a 18 de junio de 1832. Presbitero D. Manuel de la Garza mi teniente, bautizo solemnemente y puso los santos oleos y el sagrado crisma a Jose Manuel del Refugio González Flores de un día de nacido, hijo legítimo de Fernando González y de Eusebia Flores. No dieron razón de los abuelos paternos y maternos. Padrinos, Miguel Rodríguez y Martina Flores a quienes advirtió su obligación y parentesco. Y para constancia lo firmó. Jose Ma.Rodríguez (Rubrica) (Teniente Cura)" Según consta en el acta no. 213 del libro de Registro de Actas de Nacimientos de la parroquia de Nuestra Señora del Refugio de Matamoros

Nació Manuel González Flores el 17 de junio de 1832 en el rancho "El Moquete" a orillas del Arroyo del Tigre, a 25 kilómetros al sur de Matamoros. Era hijo de Don Fernando González de la Serna, español, y de Dona Eusebia Flores de la Garza, mexicana.

La iniciación a la vida de J.Manuel González fue ruda, ya que nació en una humilde choza y apenas tenía un día de nacido cuando fue trasladado, posiblemente en una carreta, del rancho El Moquete a Matamoros, en el cálido clima del mes de junio en Matamoros, en un viaje que duraba 4 o 5 horas.

En la escuela primaria de Matamoros a cargo del Profesor Pedro de Hoyos se distinguió y fue ayudante del director. Huérfano a edad temprana, tuvo que trabajar con el Señor Pablo Campuzano quien era sastre y abarrotero. También trabajó en la tienda "El Cañon ", propiedad de Don Francisco García Mugerza.

Desde muy joven manifestó sus grandes deseos de emprender la carrera de las armas. En 1853 C. designó al General Adrian Woll Comandante Militar de Tamaulipas con sede en Matamoros, donde radicaban los poderes del estado. El 5 de abril de 1853, el joven Manuel González se presentó en el cuartel de la Guardia Nacional de Matamoros, y se dió de alta como soldado de infantería, en el segundo batallón de línea, al mando del oficial Ramón Quintanilla. De allí se trasladó, en una goleta, a Veracruz, permaneciendo varios meses de guarnición en el castillo de San Juan de Ulua.

Ascendió a cabo el 15 de mayo, a sargento el 10 de julio, a sub-teniente el 15 de octubre de 1854, a teniente el 30 de julio de 1855, a capitán el 6 de septiembre de 1858, a comandante el 9 de marzo de 1859, a teniente coronel el 18 de marzo de 1861, a coronel el 22 de septiembre de 1863, a general de brigada el 7 de septiembre de 1867 y a general de división el 13 de marzo de 1877, con antigüedad del 2 de abril de 1876, fecha en que ocuparon Matamoros los revolucionarios que apoyaban el plan de Tuxtepec reformando en Palo Blanco Tamaulipas.

Participó en las guerras de reforma dentro del bando conservador y fue amnistiado por el congreso en 1861. En 1862 se enlistó para combatir la intervención francesa. Fue asignado al ejercito de Oriente y el General Porfirio Diaz lo hizo Jefe de su estado mayor. Participó en la batalla del 5 de mayo de 1862 y el sitio de Puebla de 1863. Fue herido varias veces y fue prisionero de guerra de los franceses dos ocasiones durante la guerra de intervención. Participó en la batalla de Puebla el 2 de abril de 1867 y allí perdió su brazo derecho. Una vez recuperado asistió al sitio de la ciudad de México en junio de 1867.

Al triunfo de la república y la toma de la cd. de México por parte del General Porfirio Díaz, aún convaleciente, asistió a los honores que se realizaron al Presidente Benito Juárez el 18 de julio de 1867 con motivo de la llegada del presidente a recibir la cd. de México. En el desfile militar, el General Porfirio Díaz marchaba junto al carruaje del Presidente Juárez quien después de saludar al General Díaz le dijo: "General, presénteme al Coronel González" . . . cuando enfrentaron a Gonzáález, el Presidente Juárez bajó del carruaje, le estrechó la mano izquierda y lo felicitó por el valor y competencia desplegados en la campaña y al referirse a la pérdida del brazo, el Coronel González le dijo: "lo cedí a los invasores para que se acuerden de mí." El Presidente Juárez designó al Coronel Manuel González gobernador de Palacio Nacional, le dió el ascenso a general de brigada y lo nombró comandante militar del Distrito Federal sucesivamente.

Después del aniquilamiento del imperio de Maximiliano y una vez que Juárez entró a la cd. de Mexico y reestableció completamente la república, convocó a elecciones para el cuatrienio 1867-1871. Los candidatos principales que se postularon para dicha elección fueron el Lic. Benito Juárez y el General Porfirio Díaz. Resultó electo el Lic. Benito Juárez como presidente de la república y en esas mismas elecciones fue electo el presidente de la suprema corte de justicia, que debería ser también vice presidente de la república, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada.

Al acercarse la fecha de renovación de los poderes en 1871, se presentaron 3 candidatos: el Presidente Benito Juárez, quien deseaba ser reelegido; Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, compañero y consejero del presidente y quien pensaba que Juárez dejaría el poder; el joven General Porfirio Díaz a quien se clasificaba como ambicioso e impaciente. Al verificarse los comicios el 25 de junio de 1871, los resultados fueron los siguientes: Juárez obtuvo 5,837 votos; Díaz 3,555 y Lerdo 2,874.

Las elecciones se habían desarrollado en un clima de violencia y fraude. Al no haber obtenido ninguno de los tres candidatos la mayoría absoluta, el congreso eligió a Benito Juárez, quien inició su nuevo periodo de gobierno el 12 de octubre de 1871.

El General González, amigo y partidario de D. Porfirio, una de las tantas mañanas, en el cumplimiento de su deber, esperó al presidente Juárez en su sala de acuerdos y después de saludarlo, le dijo: "Señor Presidente, estoy comprometido con la revolución Porfirista y voy a la cámara a defender los principios que establece el Plan de La Noria y por lo tanto es incompetible que siga desempeñando el cargo de gobernador de palacio que es un puesto de confianza, ya que su principal misión es cuidar con las tropas a sus ordenes, de su persona. Es por eso que presento renuncia de ese puesto para ir a la cámara a cumplir con los deberes que me impone el partido Porfirista al que me hallo afiliado". Juárez le contestó: "General, tengo absoluta confianza en su lealtad, vaya usted a la cámara a cumplir con los compromisos de partido, pero no le admitiré la renuncia de este cargo".

Porfirio Díaz era apoyado por muchos militares importantes como Manuel González, Jerónimo Treviño, Miguel Negrete, Juan N. Méndez, su hermano Félix Díaz, Gobernador de Oaxaca y otros. El 9 de noviembre de 1871 Porfirio Díaz publicó en el diario oficial de Oaxaca el Plan de La Noria. Este plan proclamaba la elección directa y que no pudiera ser electo ningún ciudad no que hubiera ocupado ningún puesto federal en el año anterior.

Trás de una serie de escaramuzas y batallas entre los sublevados y las fuerzas del gobierno, el General Díaz que había salido de México por Veracruz, intentó regresar a México, vía Nueva Orleans, por Camargo, Tamaulipas, pero al no encontrar apoyo en esa población se fue a San Francisco para de allí partir a Manzanillo. Allí se internó en territorio de Manuel Lozada y al no encontrar respuesta en sus partidarios, se trasladó a Chihuahua, en julio de 1872. Allí recibió la

noticia de la muerte del Presidente Juárez el 18 de julio de 1872. Al asumir el poder ejecutivo el Lic. Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, promulgó una amplia amnistía, con lo que perdió fuerza la revuelta de La Noria y terminó sin mayores problemas.

En 1872 Lerdo De Tejada convocó a elecciones y fueron candidatos el propio Lerdo y Porfirio Díaz, Lerdo resultó electo para el cuatrienio 1872-1876. Porfirio Díaz se amnistió y se retiró a vivir como agricultor en su hacienda de la candelaria en Tlacotalpán, Veracruz.

En 1873 Protasio Tagle, Manuel González, Carlos Pacheco y otros partidarios del General Porfirio Díaz, postularon a este como candidato a ocupar la presidencia de la suprema corte de justicia, la elección benefició a la persona del Lic. José Ma. Iglesias.

Debido a la reelección del Presidente Lerdo de Tejada, el General Porfirio Díaz nuevamente se levantó en armas proclamando el plan de Tuxtepec que tuvo eco en muchos estados de la república.

El General Porfirio Díaz partió el 2 de diciembre de 1875 de Veracruz rumbo a Brownsville (vía Nueva Orleans), acompañado de Manuel González. En esa cd. fronteriza Díaz y González reclutaron partidarios, organizaron el movimiento armado y se formó el estado mayor al mando del General Manuel González. Cruzaron la frontera el 20 de marzo de 1876 con 400 hombres.

Mientras Porfirio Díaz se preparaba en Brownsville, el General Fidencio Hernández y el Coronel Hemenegildo Sarmiento proclamaron el plan de Tuxtepec y reconocieron a Porfirio Díaz como jefe del movimiento. Este plan desconocía a Lerdo de Tejada como presidente.

Porfirio Díaz reformó el plan de Tuxtepec en el rancho Palo Blanco (al poniente de Matamoros) el 21 de marzo de 1876. La toma de Matamoros el 2 de abril de 1876, más que una acción militar se debió a arreglos con los defensores de la plaza. En Matamoros estuvieron Díaz y González hasta el 25 de abril, pero al tener noticias que el General Mariano Escobedo, como jefe de la tercera división, se dirigía a combatirlo, Díaz abandonó la plaza y se dirigió a Nuevo León y Coahuila.

Unió sus fuerzas con las de Jerónimo Treviño, Francisco Naranjo e Hipólito Charles y el 20 de mayo presentó en Icamole, Coahuila, combate a las tropas Lerdistas comandadas por el General Fuero, donde fue derrotado. El General Díaz se retiró a Monclova y dejó a los Generales Treviño, Naranjo Y Charles la encomienda de impedir que las tropas de gobierno concurrieran al centro de la República, donde se esperaban las acciones decisivas, al General Manuel González, que estaba en Matamoros, pidió Porfirio Díaz que reuniera todas las fuerzas posibles y se desplazaría hacia el sur, a través de Las Huastecas para concurrir en Tlaxcala el apoyo de las tropas rebeldes de Oaxaca.

Manuel González con las tropas que se le unieron (Miguel Negrete, Francisco Carreón, Rafael Cravioto, Juan C. Bonilla y otros) atacó Pachuca el 22 de septiembre de 1876, pero se retiró ante el avance de las tropas Lerdistas. El General Díaz se fue a Nueva Orleans y de allí a Veracruz para unirse en Oaxaca y Puebla con tropas que apoyaban la revolución de Tuxtepec. El General Manuel González convenció al General Francisco Tolentino que se pasara al bando de Porfirio Díaz. El General González se fingió débil y se retiró a Tlaxco, engañando a los Lerdistas que quedaron a la expectativa en Apizaco.

El 16 de noviembre en la hacienda de Tecocac, Tlaxcala se enfrentaron las tropas Lerdistas que comandaba el General Ignacio Alatorre con las tropas de Porfirio Díaz. Después de mas de ocho horas de continuo combate y gracias a la oportuna y rápida llegada del General Manuel González que arrollaron al enemigo, el ejército Lerdistista quedó destrozado y el General Porfirio Díaz fue dueño de la situación político-militar.

El General Porfirio Díaz entró triunfante a la cd. de México el 23 de noviembre de 1876 y en su

carácter de Jefe de la Revolución nombró como presidente interino al General Juan N. Mendez quien convocó a elecciones, mediante las cuales resultó electo el General Porfirio Díaz para el periodo del 17 de febrero de 1877 al 30 de noviembre de 1880.

Porfirio Díaz nombró al General Manuel González comandante militar y gobernador de Michoacán en 1877, hasta que fué nombrado secretario de guerra y marina del 28 de abril de 1878 al 15 de noviembre de 1879. Siendo el General González ministro de guerra y marina, se formó el cuerpo especial de estado mayor del ejército mexicano. Posteriormente recibió el nombramiento de general en jefe de las fuerzas federales acantonadas en Michoacán, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, Colima, Jalisco, Sinaloa, Tépica y Baja California.

Porfirio Díaz apoyó al General Manuel Gonzalez como candidato a presidente de la República:

Porfirio Díaz no era un maniaco del poder, pero sí lo amaba entrañable, aunque a la vez inteligentemente. Habría resultado escandaloso reelegirse en 1880, fresco aún el recuerdo de sus revoluciones de La Noria y Tuxtepec contra la reelecciones de Juárez y Lerdo, y prudentemente se cuidó de no intentarlo por entonces, de modo que el 30 de noviembre de 1880 entregó el poder al General Manuel González, aunque dispuesto a recuperarlo cuatro años más tarde, muy constitucionalmente. Con este objetivo no se desligó de la vida pública: en el gabinete ocupó el ministerio de fomento, y después, entre 1881 y 1883, desempeñó la gobernatura de su estado natal, Oaxaca. En 1883 volvió a la cd. de México, de nuevo al ministerio de fomento, para frenar las pretensiones autonomistas del presidente y figurar de nuevo como candidato presidencial" (Jose Fuentes Mares-Obra Citada).

El General Manuel González fue presidente de México del 1º de diciembre de 1880 al 30 de noviembre de 1884. Los integrantes de su gabinete fueron: Gobernación, Carlos Díaz Gtz. (dic/1/1880-nov/30/1884); Justicia, Juan N. García (dic/1/1880-jun/08/1881); Ezequiel Montes (jun/09/1881-nov/15/1881); Juan N. García (nov/16/1881-sep/12/1882); Juoquín Baranda (sep/13/1882-nov/30/1884); Fomento, Porfirio Díaz (dic/1/1880-jun/11/1881); Carlos Pacheco (jun/27/1881-nov/30/1884); Relaciones Exteriores, Ignacio Mariscal (dic/1/1880-may/29/1883); Jose Fernandez (jun/02/1883-nov/30/1884); Guerra y Marina, Jerónimo Treviño (dic/1/1880-dic/31/1881); Francisco Naranjo (ene/10/1882-nov/30/1884); Hacienda Francisco de Landero y Cos. (dic/1/1880-nov/19/1881); Jesús Fuentes y Muñiz (sep/13/1882-feb/09/1884); Miguel T. de la Peña (feb/10/1884-nov/30/1884).

El decreto del 28 de junio de 1881 el presidente Manuel González ordenó poner en ejecución, por conducto de la secretaria de guerra y marina, la "organización definitiva del ejército."

En abril de 1881, el alcalde de Matamoros, Don Pedro Torres, organizó una gran recepción en honor del General Porfirio Díaz que visitaba esta ciudad.

El 5 de noviembre de 1881 el General Porfirio Díaz (viudo desde abril de 1880) se casó con Carmelita Romero Rubio y se fueron de luna de miel a Nueva York acompañados por Don Manuel Romero Rubio, padre de Carmelita y ex ministro del gobierno de Lerdo De Tejada.

“Políticamente González no fue más limpio ni más desinteresado que sus antecesores, pues continuó el sistema de fraudes electorales, de imposición de sus candidatos y de intervención descarada en la política estatal, como ocurrió en Jalisco. Porfirio Díaz acusado influir en la administración Gonzalista, retiróse a Oaxaca, en donde fue electo gobernador del estado, cargo que desempeñó a partir del 12 de diciembre de 1881” (historia de México - Salvat).

El gobierno del General Manuel González fue muy efectivo en el campo de las obras materiales: la ampliación de la red de ferroviaria pasó de 1073 km existentes en 1880 a 5,731 km en 1884. También hubo auge de construcción en ferrocarriles urbanos y sub-urbanos. Las líneas telegráficas pasaron a los 30,000 km. Logró importantes reformas al servicio de correos. Dió fin al problema de límites con Guatemala y Chiapas. Fue implantado el sistema métrico decimal en todo México. Reestableció relaciones con Inglaterra. Se organizó el colegio militar. Se introdujó el primer servicio cablegráfico. Se promovió la colonización de amplios territorios del país. Se fundó el banco Nacional de México.

En el campo de la economía, el gobierno del General González tuvo altibajos: al finalizar el primer año de gobierno, la tesorería tenía un superávit nunca visto de un millón de pesos. Para 1883 se había formado una poderosa camarilla Gonzalista a la que la gente atribuía el desastre económico del régimen, debido a su deshonestidad. Cuando el gobierno de González reconoció y prometió pagar la deuda pública contraída con Inglaterra, a fin de abrir la bolsa de Londres para los valores mexicanos y obtener nuevos préstamo a interés razonable, un poderoso movimiento estudiantil acaudillado por el viejo romántico Guillermo Prieto, se opusó al pago de la deuda inglesa y acusó de despilfarro y corrupción al régimen.

Nerviosa y mal informada, la gente comenzó a atesorar monedas como protección contra la crisis que presentía. Faltaba plata para acuñar otras nuevas, y González optó por hacerlas de níquel, un metal que se usaba comunmente en otros países, pero en México no le gustaron tales monedas a la gente, las despreciaba por carecer de valor intrínseco y los comercios las recibían con grandes descuentos. Brotaron los motines populares, y no tardó el día en que el populacho lapidará al carruaje de González con las monedas de níquel. El General González bajó del carruaje y preguntó a los amotinados: “¿Quieren que quite el níquel?” Todos contestaron afirmativamente y al día siguiente se ordenó quitar de la circulación el níquel.

“González, hombre impetuoso, viril, amigo del placer y del dinero, contrastó con sus antecesores, que habían sido austeros, sencillos, de vida particular recatada y digna. Casado con Doña Laura Mantecón, pronto la abandonó. Su intemperancia y amorios con Juana Horn y Julia Espinosa fueron comentados por la sociedad pacata de la época, lo mismo que la pasión que le encendió la francesa o circasiana que tenía en su hacienda de Chapingo, las embozadas que entraban a palacio por las noches, así como sus continuas embriagueces con sus amigos Lalanne, Fernández, Carmona y otros. Sus haciendas “Laureles” en Michoacán, Santa María Tecajete en Hidalgo y las de Tamaulipas; sus amplias propiedades a un lado de Peralvillo y otras colonias de México que crecía; sus especulaciones en torno de la creación de los bancos y la emisión del níquel, todo eso habido en muy poco tiempo, con el ansia de poder y dinero inextinguible que tienen muchos políticos, le valieron la antipatía de la población, quien le criticaba solapada y aún abiertamente.” (Historia de México. Salvat)

Los periódicos seguían atacando ferozmente a González. En un arranque de ira éste hizo aprobar una ley en que se suspendían diversas garantías a la libertad de expresión. Hasta en eso trabajaría González para su compadre Porfirio: pasado el coraje inicial se olvidó de la ley, y en cambio Díaz

basó en ella su implacable persecución posterior a los periodistas. En 1884, en una visita a la hacienda Chapingo, propiedad del General González, el compadre Porfirio le jura que no abriga ambiciones. El 'manco' González abre y cierra los cajones de su escritorio. Porfirio le pregunta: "que esta haciendo compadre?" a lo que González responde: 'buscando al tarugo que se lo crea.'

Romero Rubio era el encargado de organizar la campaña contra González, y mientras esta seguía su curso Díaz se angustiaba pensando que una bala vengadora podía terminar con su vida, en la que por primera vez, al lado de Carmelita, conocía la felicidad. Para hacerse el indispensable, Romero Rubio atizaba sus temores. Después de las elecciones de 1884, en las que Porfirio Díaz resultó electo presidente, llevó el rumor de que González había alquilado pistoleros para que mataran a Díaz, y entonces convenció a este de que se escondiera en su residencia, en un cuarto cuyo interior estaba tapizado de colchones que supuestamente detendrían las balas.

Se afirma que, enterado de lo que pasaba, González dijo a un mensajero: "Dígale por favor a compadre que no lo creía tan cobarde; que me avergüenzo de que un día fuera mi jefe y que no se preocupe: que le entregaré la presidencia en el momento preciso, porque yo soy hombre de palabra". El primero de diciembre de 1884 tuvo lugar el cambio de gobierno. Se cuenta que Porfirio Díaz exclamó, "que angustia se pasa lejos de esta sillita! pero ahora que he vuelto a sentarme en ella, no se la soltaré ni a mi madre". (El Porfirismo -revista contenido.)

Al general Manuel González le tocó buena parte del proceso de pacificación de México que se logró a lo largo de 12 años mediante un régimen de evolución económica, de conciliación y represión despótica de la oposición armada y de la periodística. El general González fecundó y dió auge a las empresas iniciadas por el general Díaz en su primer período y no las estorbó después con nueva lucha civil, aunque provocado a ella.

En el gobierno del General González se tomaron muchas medidas impopulares, sin embargo tuvo grandes aciertos que inclinan el balance de su regimen hacia resultados positivos. Tres medidas tomadas por el regimen del General González, nos dan muestra de su gran visión y representan, por sí solas, la gran obra de su gobierno:

1a.) La fundación del banco Nacional de México con lo cual se logró un mejor control de las finanzas externas e internas del país.

2a.) La acuñación de monedas de níquel que fue una medida muy adelantada para su tiempo por ello la gente no asimiló tal medida. El uso generalizado de dicho metal, en la actualidad, en casi todas las monedas del mundo, da la razón a la medida tomada por el General González.

3a.) La implantación del sistema métrico decimal en México fue una medida tan certera, que nos permite en la actualidad disfrutar de un sistema de pesas y medidas casi perfecto, que en los Estados Unidos quisieran tener y no han logrado implantarlo porque representa un costo muy alto substituir el imperfecto sistema inglés.

Al terminar su período presidencial González fue nombrado Gobernador de Guanajuato en 1884.

Porfirio Díaz, ya en la silla presidencial, consiente o promueve una vasta campaña contra su compadre, azuzado por Manuel Romero Rubio, y se acusa a González de peculado y un sin número de delitos.

Desde el gobierno de Guanajuato, González--chivo expiatorio--sigue la máxima de Séneca: 'soporta y renuncia'. 'Lo hace, pero no renuncia a su dignidad, y en defensa propia pública uno de los diarios mas inteligentes de nuestra historia política: 'el observador de Guanajuato.' Su alejamiento de toda ambición presidencial es ejemplar 'en aras de la paz pública' y sacrificando sus 'convicciones más profundas' rehusa convertirse en Pompeyo frente a Cesar: " No soy más que un buen hombre eternamente inútil para la política". (Biografía del poder - Porfirio Díaz por: Enrique Krauze).

González fue gobernador del estado de Guanajuato hasta su muerte y fue muy querido y popular. En 1893 la salud del valiente soldado fronterizo era muy precaria. Solicitó licencia para retirarse a descansar en su hacienda de Chapingo en el estado de México y ahí falleció el 8 de marzo de 1893. El General González cedió como herencia la hacienda de Chapingo para que se formara una escuela de agricultura y allí funciona una magnífica escuela de agricultura hasta la actualidad.

Su cuerpo fue llevado al salon de embajadores del palacio nacional para ser velado y al llegar a la estación ferrocarril interoceánico, una bateria de canones de batalla hacía tres disparos, continuando estos cada media hora, hasta que se le dió sepultura. Los honores que se le hicieron al General González fueron los prescritos por la ordenanza general del ejército para el Secretario de Guerra. Se formó una división mixta a las órdenes del General Francisco A. Velez, comandante militar de la plaza, quien llevó como jefe de estado mayor al General Coronel Pedro Troncoso y quedo integrada por dos brigadas y una bateria máxima de batalla que proporcionó el segundo batallón del arma. Brigada de infantería: General Coronel Sebastián Villarreal, batallones ingenieros 40 y 21 de infantería. Brigada de caballería: General Coronel Gregorio Ruiz. Cuerpo de gendarmes del ejército y 10º Regimiento. El cuerpo de gendarmeria municipal, proporcionó la descubierta y escoltas.

Este hombre que había servido a Díaz como militar desde la intervención francesa, pieza clave en la toma de Puebla, ariete descisivo en la Batalla de Tecuac, se encuentra sepultado en la rotonda de los hombres ilustres de México, en el panteón civil de Dolores y su lápida tiene el epitafio perfecto:

"Era un brazo no más, pero de hierro; y una mano no más, pero de amigo".

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Colonel Sam A. Robertson and His House  
509 North Sam Houston Street, San Benito, Texas

by

Henry E. Agar and Margaret E. Brown

The land upon which the Sam Robertson house was constructed lies in the 75,000-acre Concepción de Carricitos grant given by the King of Spain in 1781 to Bartolomé and Eugenio Fernández.<sup>1</sup> In the nineteenth century, Colonel Stephen Powers (1814-1882) of Brownsville acquired this part of the Carricitos grant by doing legal work for heirs of the original grantees.

The Cameron County Historical Commission failed to account for the rest of the transfers of ownership. However, the indications are that Colonel Sam A. Robertson must have acquired this land in his purchases that began about 1904, when as a railroad locating and construction engineer he visualized a great future for this particular area. He bought 13,000 acres (which in time he ran up to 68,000 acres) for development. A few years later, with the platting of the town--first called "Bessie" for a young daughter of railroad magnate B. F. Yoakum, the "Díaz" for the well-known leader in the Republic of Mexico, and finally San Benito--there were other ownership transfers. Mrs. Adele Robertson and husband, the aforesaid Sam A. Robertson, purchased the residential lot on January 2, 1911, from W. G. Chunn.<sup>2</sup>

Sam Robertson was known as "The Father of San Benito," and served in 1907 as the town's first postmaster. In his fortieth year he married Adele Wedegartner on March 17, 1907. Four years after the marriage, the couple evidently chose this desirable location for their house, which needed advantageous positioning and the prestige which would be worthy of the town's father and his obligatory entertaining of strangers.

The forceful Samuel Arthur Robertson (July 10, 1867-August 22, 1938) was well on his way to becoming a legend in his own time even when he built this house in 1911. His footprints had already covered goodly portions of the American continent. He was born in DeWitt, Carroll County, Missouri, the son of Frank Selden and Catherine (Lewis) Robertson. His father had been a Confederate officer during the Civil War, and one of his grandfathers had also joined the Confederate army and fought for four years as a private soldier although he was in his seventies.<sup>3</sup> The war impoverished the family. Like their neighbors, the Robertsons found the next decade very difficult, living first in Missouri and then in Nebraska City and in Otoe County, Nebraska, before resettling permanently in Missouri. Frank S. Robertson finally prospered to an extent great enough to justify his taking his young son Sam out of the drudgery that occupied the child from the age of six. When Sam was about twelve, he was sent for a time to a good school in Richmond, Missouri, and there acquired some of the polish which was to stand him in good stead later. About 1880 he was even being nominated for further schooling at the United States Naval Academy when he injured himself fighting a fire in his hometown and thereafter could not pass the Academy's physical examination because of poor eyesight.<sup>4</sup>

His was a generation when the little children helped on the family farm, without wages. When his father began to work in a bank, and the boy was approaching man's estate, Sam Robertson started

working for the public, first at farm work for neighbors and then as a "news butch" on trains running out of St. Louis.<sup>5</sup> Railroading invaded his blood when he was 15 and secured a job with the shops of the Wabash Railway at Moberly, Mo. In 1886 he was the axeman for a locating party working for the Santa Fe in Kansas. Later the Santa Fe employed him as a roadman and track inspector.<sup>6</sup> Then he helped the Union Pacific construct its Colby branch.<sup>7</sup>

Becoming an expert at heavy construction by way of his experience at railroad building, young Robertson went up to Washington Territory as a worker during the late 1880s. In 1889 he was in Butte, Montana, where at age 22 he was in charge of a large crew building railroad yards. He also built railroad yards at Anaconda, Montana, and a pipeline and dam at Elk Mountain, Wyoming, to convey water to mines and railroads. He worked at locating proposed roads for the Portland & Puget Sound Railway, exploring the Cowlitz Valley and the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State.

The national economic depression of 1892-93 found him making his way into various geographic areas, keeping busy at varied types of employment. He investigated mines that other engineers refused to enter on demurrage about safety. He did site locating work in California desert country for proposed irrigation. He made geographic investigations for the city of Denver and for the mines at Creede, Colorado. One reconnaissance job took him to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where he narrowly escaped death while navigating a canyon. In 1893 he found himself successful at locating a proposed railroad across the Continental Divide and down a canyon in Utah, only to find that his employers had gone broke while he was in the wilderness and he had to feed his crew at his own expense until the men could disperse. Railroad locating from Durango, Colorado, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, put him in charge of a crew of Caucasians at the outset but saw him finishing the job with a few Indians and one white man because illness and death or resignations had taken his original helpers. This assignment left Robertson himself ill from drinking alkali water so that his weight fell from 170 or 180 pounds to 115 pounds. He went for a while to the Cherokee Strip in Oklahoma and took up a claim, but soon had to get back into wage-earning. Then he went to the South and for a few years worked on river levees (including some on the Mississippi River) and dams or other construction. He also did locating for enterprise in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and East Texas. He built several rice irrigation systems along the Gulf Coast. Then he became a general contractor of the Orange & Northwestern, a 30-mile logging railroad feeding into Orange, Texas. He went from there with his crews to build 80 miles of the Trinity & Brazos Valley Railroad from Cleburne to Mexia, Texas.<sup>8</sup>

About 1903, Samuel A. Robertson went to the Rio Grande Valley to help build the St. Louis, Brownsville, & Mexico Railway. He was working with B. F. Yoakum, the magnate with whom he had been working for some years on other segments of Yoakum's Gulf Coast lines. In his work on the S. L. B. & M., Robertson fell in love with the Rio Grande Valley. He became acquainted with the rich diversity of population, from Mrs. Henrietta King and her son-in-law, Robert J. Kleberg, down to the workmen and their employers encountered on the construction sites.

Yet it was the terrain itself that particularly intrigued him. Rivers and creeks had dried up and left their rich sediment here in the resacas. Choked with unprofitable varieties of vegetation, and repelling to civilized inhabitants, the Rio Grande Valley at the same time held a promise which Robertson could see. He was especially in tune with the opinions of Lon C. Hill of Rattlesnake Junction (later Harlingen) to the effect that if travel and transportation could be universally possible in the Valley, so that efficient agricultural work could be done and products hauled out of the Valley, then there

would be one huge, productive garden here. Robertson and Hill are said to have sat cross-legged on the ground near where Harlingen flourishes today and mapped out their ideas for future railroad and irrigation installations.<sup>9</sup> Hill had begun to envision some of these things, and found that Robertson was a man after his own heart because Robertson had seen the same future for the Valley. Although they might easily have become competitors, they remained friends and shared the enthusiasms of their visionary days.

It was in May of 1904 that Robertson met Lon Hill encamped on a wilderness site along the S. L. B. & M. line. Robertson was riding ahead of the track terminal, to inspect some work being done by a crew throwing a bridge across the Arroyo Colorado, and smelled the coffee that Hill's cook had brewed in the wilderness where Harlingen was soon to be built. He stopped and sat with Hill to discuss the irrigated farming of the future in these parts.<sup>10</sup>

Robertson had already seen that the Rio Grande riverbed was higher in altitude than the valley land just to its north. He had also noticed that the dry, ancient river and creek channels (now called *resacas*) that roughly paralleled the Rio Grande could become the laterals for an irrigation system that would take water to fields throughout the valley when once that water was brought by gravity flow out of the Rio Grande. A one and one-half mile artificial channel cut from the Rio Grande to the ready-made irrigation system along the *resacas* would start the project. In order to use the *resacas* as canal laterals, the developer would have to clear them of the dense brush that had choked them, but that work would cost only a fraction of what the digging of a complete irrigation system would cost.

Another impromptu encounter brought Robertson the acquaintance of two other men he needed to know in order to start his vast irrigation system. On June 1, 1904, as the tracks approached the spot which would become San Benito, the families of James Landrum and Oliver Hicks were watching the approach of the construction crews and enjoying a picnic lunch under an ash tree on the banks of the dry *resaca*. The men--Hicks and Landrum--accepted a ride from Robertson on his railroad handcar, and while they were riding they struck a bargain related to Robertson's dreams of land development. Carried along by his enthusiasm, Hicks and Landrum agreed to option 13,000 acres of land to Robertson, so that he could start his project.<sup>11</sup>

Robertson completed his railroad-building contract with the S. L. B. & M. in November 1904. Using the money which he had made on that contract, he then went into action and broke the first dirt for the canal and city of San Benito in December 1904. He put mules and men to work clearing the brush and obstructions out of the *resacas*. His dreams grew as he worked, and soon he had constructed 37 miles of main canal and 125 miles of laterals. On the bank of the Rio Grande "he built head gates of huge proportions, . . . then constructed one and one-half miles of drainage ditches for every mile of canal and lateral." By March of 1907 he had "not only exhausted all his funds but had reached his borrowing limit as well, . . . although he had an almost infinite capacity for borrowing money."<sup>12</sup> It was then that he brought in other entrepreneurs: R. L. Batts, E. F. Rowson, W. H. Stenger, and the Heywood brothers. All of these monied men were interesting, but the Heywoods were doubly so. Since Alba Heywood was later to furnish the compilers of *Who's Who in America* with a biography that made him appear to have been the sole founder of the town of San Benito, it is well to notice here the beginning of his actual role.

Alba Heywood (1859-1921) was eight years older than Sam Robertson, and an actor who had made a living entertaining on the stage with impersonators' routines before he teamed with his

brothers to finance some oil wells in the Spindletop field near Beaumont in 1901. Making money there and in similar operations at Jennings, Louisiana, the Heywoods were open to make new investments by 1907, when Sam Robertson brought them into San Benito. On March 19, 1907, when the San Benito Land & Water Company was formed and chartered, Alba, O. W., and W. Scott Heywood--along with Batts, Rowson and Stenger--were investors in the \$500,000.00 capitalization for the firm.<sup>13</sup>

On March 17, 1907, two days before the capitalization and chartering of the San Benito Land & Water Company, Sam Robertson had made a really drastic departure from his past. On that date he had married Adele Wedegartner, a sister of Fred Wedegartner with whom he had worked in setting up irrigation systems for rice growing.<sup>14</sup> Robertson was in his fortieth year. Among the improvements which he built for his town of San Benito in or earlier than 1907 was a hotel for the entertainment of the traveling public and especially for the sojourns of prospective land buyers. Beginning with her marriage in 1907, Mrs. Sam Robertson managed the hotel for her husband,<sup>15</sup> the chief guardian of the destinies of the town. It is said that although Robertson was nominally the post master for San Benito in that year, he "had too many irons in the fire to handle the chores of the post office" and relied on his clerk, L. ("Cap") O'Bryan, to perform the routine duties.<sup>16</sup>

Residents were moving into San Benito regularly by 1908. Prospectors came, were attracted to the balmy winters and productive summers, and behaved as Robertson had predicted: they bought and made garden spots of the land. Amusing stories are told of the competition between Alba Heywood and some of the other land brokers-particularly of how A. J. McCall held a prayer meeting on one of the excursion trains so that his prospective customers would not see Heywood's mammoth sign proclaiming that land could be bought at San Benito for \$50.00 an acre less than in the development of McCall.<sup>17</sup>

By 1911, it was time for Mr. and Mrs. Sam Robertson to build their town house. San Benito was growing, and there was need for a home in keeping with the stature of the city father.

In 1911 there was fear of marauders from across the Rio Grande, so the house was built with defense as one of its good points. Sam Robertson planned the construction and although he also used the help of architects from San Antonio, he contributed many of the ideas for the structure. He threw up a berm supported by a retaining wall, to give the structure commanding height. There is a basement--this was, in fact, the first house in San Benito to have a basement--plus a full ground floor and a large upper room windowed on four sides.

When the house was constructed, it stood on the edge of town. It was built almost like a fortress, being designed to serve as a place of refuge and defense in case of bandit raids. The upstairs room, in addition to its lovely arched windows, also has windows with their sills placed at the proper height to serve as gun rests. The exterior walls are eighteen inches thick. The walls are of brick covered with rough gray cement. Exposed beams support the ceiling of the front porch.

The architecture was influenced greatly by the builders' love of Spanish architecture. The plan is similar to homes seen in Mexico, with a patio for coolness and privacy as the central feature.

Many of the building materials, such as the brick and tile, came from nearby Mexico. Creosoted railroad ties, available from culled timbers in the materials provided for railroad construction, were used in the foundation and in other ways in the structure. There are three fireplaces. One is in the basement, where the original copper port still hangs over it.

The tile roof was especially made for this house; each tile is numbered. A large cistern in the back

yard served for the storage of water. All of the copper drains on the roof conducted the water to the cistern and in the basement there is a pump which could circulate the water into the pipes in the house.

The terra cotta tiles used for the courtyard were brought in from Mexico. Interior wainscot used in most of the rooms reaches a height of five and a half feet, with plaster finish on the rest of the walls. Beautiful pine was used in the wainscot. Beveled glass was used in several French doors featured in the interior.

There is a large open porch across the front and a small one at the back. There is a large living room, a music room, four bedrooms, two and one-half baths, a dining room, kitchen, pantry, utility room, and the large central courtyard. (See attached sketch of floor plan, please.)

The names of the architects and contractors are unknown. They were from San Antonio, but the blueprints have been lost and the identifications were lost with them.

Interviews with two San Benito pioneers verify the year of the construction as 1911. Mrs. John Clark has said that the building was going on during the year in which she moved to San Benito, which was in 1911. Mrs. Seeta Foster, San Benito's first telephone operator, said that the Robertsons' home was one of the first three in town to have a phone. A 1911 panoramic photograph of San Benito shows the structure almost completed. Once it was completed, it was considered a showplace, and was featured on picture post cards.<sup>18</sup>

In 1911, Sam Robertson tried to interest B. F. Yoakum in the building of an efficient network of railroad spurs to feed traffic into Brownsville and the main line of the S. L. B. & M. "This was before the Valley was honeycombed with concrete highways and by-ways. . . . Robertson had found that land more than a few miles from the railroad could not be sold to farmers" because they could not get their people or plows into the back acreage nor their products out for lack of roads.<sup>19</sup> [As late as the 1920s, when automobiles were in daily use for daily errands, families in San Benito would take the train to go the seven or eight miles to Rio Hondo because the dirt roads were almost impossible.]<sup>20</sup> Yet Yoakum was not convinced that the spurs were needed, so Robertson took the sole responsibility and built a spur from Brownsville to San Benito in 1912. First he chartered the Brownsville Street & Interurban Railroad Company, to build electric lines, and then decided to enlarge his plans, so he chartered the San Benito & Rio Grande Valley Interurban Railway Company, enlisting financial help from monied men in Houston. Afterward Yoakum saw the wisdom of the plan, and helped Robertson charter the San Benito & Rio Grande Valley Railway Company, which built more than 200 miles of track in what was known as the "Spider Web" system. With this system settlers could go where they needed and handle their agricultural operations efficiently.<sup>21</sup>

Border banditry did not fail to enliven the scene during the first twenty years of the twentieth century. In 1915 Sam A. Robertson cooperated with the 26th United States Infantry in helping to curb the raids that destroyed or threatened to destroy many of the facilities which hopeful developers were installing in the Rio Grande Valley. Robertson acted as a scout or intelligence officer for Col. Robert Lee Bullard of the 26th, making trips into Mexico on his own business but keeping his eyes and ears attuned to the sociological climate. On some of his forays he was ambushed and had to fight his way out. One of the occasions produced a friend--the shepherd boy Salomon Lerna--who helped him and then had to come to the United States to avoid the death by torture which threatened anyone who ran afoul of the bandits. (Lerna became a mascot for troops, and eventually went to France with the A. E. F. in World War I, where he died of service-associated pneumonia.)

Early in 1917 on one of the scouting trips, Robertson was joined by an old acquaintance, Tom James. In a brush with the bandits, James was killed and Robertson was roped by his neck for the purpose of torture. He was dragged behind a horse through cactus patches until the bandits thought he was dead. When one of the bandits thereupon took out a machete to cut off Robertson's head, but stumbled and fell before he could make his stroke, Robertson stopped playing possum and grabbed the machete. He was soon fighting his way out of the bandit group, even succeeding in commandeering the horse of the leader, and putting mileage between himself and his tormentors.<sup>22</sup>

When a state of war was declared by the United States Congress in April 1917, against the Central Powers of Europe, Robertson still had rope burns on his neck from that episode of bandit torture. Yet he hastened to volunteer for service with the United States Army, and on May 17, 1917, was commissioned a major in the 16th Regiment of Engineers. On August 1, he sailed for Europe with his outfit aboard the Tuscania, and reached France and the fields of battle on August 29 after a short interval at Aldershot, England. His chief duty was to build railroads for the deployment of troops and materiel in the war zone. One of his most remarkable achievements was the construction in four days of sixteen miles of front-line tracks under German fire at St. Mihiel. On September 28, 1918, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the 22nd Engineers and in February 1919 became a full colonel of that outfit. Among his recognitions were the Distinguished Service Medal and the Congressional Medal of Honor.<sup>23</sup>

Back home in Cameron County, his German-born wife, Adele, was scrutinized closely throughout the war, but was found blameless. A zealous American patriot, she worked tirelessly with the Red Cross and in other civilian phases of the war effort.

After the war, Robertson teamed once again with B. F. Yoakum, and as chief engineer built oil refineries in Amarillo, Bossier City, La., Oklahoma City, and Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

In February 1921 he made a scout into Mexico on behalf of British capitalists seeking investments there. Late in that year he lost his wife, Adele. Mrs. Robertson died in November 1921.

San Benito shared the post-World War I growing pains of the whole nation, particularly in connection with law-enforcement and the Volstead Act. Prohibition of liquor, the emergence of a new version of the Ku Klux Klan that applied vigilante tactics to community problems and the plain rascality that plagued the border called for strong law-enforcement measures. Known for his uprightness, Col. Robertson was prevailed upon to run for sheriff in Cameron County in 1922. He ran a no-holds-barred campaign. An insight into his thinking and character may be gathered from reading one of his electioneering announcements:

#### TO THE ENGLISH & SPANISH PRESS OF CAMERON COUNTY, TEXAS

I will make a talk to the American citizens of Spanish decent (sic) in Mexiquito, San Benito, Texas, commencing at 2:30 on Sunday, July 16th. Bootleggers Gamblers, Horse thieves, murderers, and gun-toters especially invited. I have a word to say to them. Ku Klux Klan and good citizens will not be barred from coming, and listening. Ladies are warned that I am unable to speak chaste English, but will speak in my natural railroad Irish and some rough talk will be indulged in. I am, Sam Robertson<sup>24</sup>

Women now had the vote in 1922, but Col. Robertson was not confident that he could employ gentle speech and win their votes. Still the colonel must have pleased the majority of voters, because he did win in the primaries. He was confident enough of winning in the general election in November that he could take a vacation in Europe (perhaps it was also a business trip--there is no full explanation available) prior to his assumption of office. He sailed on October 28 and made a tour of France and Germany. In Vienna he met Fraulein Maria Seidler and was smitten romantically. He wooed, won, and married her (the wedding was on December 3, 1922). His brother had cabled him that he indeed had won the sheriff's office in November, so he hurried home with his bride.

In spite of the availability of railroad service, the Robertsons do not seem to have lived steadily at their home in San Benito in the 1920s. Col. Sam Robertson made a strong and memorable sheriff, and perhaps he lived in Brownsville during his time of office. A family by the name of Wentz is said to have lived in the Robertson house in San Benito during the 1920s.<sup>25</sup>

As sheriff, Col. Robertson improved jail conditions, and took an interest in rehabilitating prisoners. Bootlegging across the Texas-Mexico border was big business, but Sheriff Robertson soon stopped the inflow of illegal booze, even arresting friends if he caught them in the liquor traffic. In spite of his impartial law-enforcement and the troubles which he gave to the criminal element, he continued to be popular enough to be reelected in 1924. He might have won term after term, had he so desired, but he was a creator of improvements before he was a police officer, and he went back to his first love--the creation of positive assets for the betterment of living. He resigned in 1926, after having served for three years as sheriff of Cameron County.

The year 1926 was a cresting time for the "prosperity" of the 1920s--it was three years before the famous stock market crash of 1929 that initiated the waves of financial adversity marking the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

With W. E. Callahan, Col. Sam Robertson built a toll road along the beach of the Gulf of Mexico from the mouth of the Rio Grande to Aransas Pass. The facilities included a toll bridge erected over Boca Chica Pass from Port Aransas to Harbor Island. The total holdings of Robertson and Callahan amounted to 79,000 acres on Padre Island. Once the facilities were operative, they found buyers--the Jones Brothers and Parker, capitalists from Kansas City who had made fortunes in oil.<sup>26</sup>

When the toll road and bridge had been sold, Col. Robertson spent the years 1928-1930 working for a group of British investors seeking information about properties in Canada, Mexico and the American West. This took him from the equatorial zone to the Arctic slopes. In 1931 he had to repossess some of the Padre Island property, including the toll bridge. Staying in one place, operating his property, he saw opportunities for enlargement, and built an ocean resort called Del Mar, on Brazos Island.<sup>27</sup> Again he accepted a rather prosaic duty, and became the first postmaster at the Del Mar station.<sup>28</sup>

With all of the traveling and development, he probably did not have much time to spend at his home in San Benito. He left 1930s notes and telegrams addressed from "Del Mar on Brazos Island." During this period, as he approached the Biblically climactic age of seventy years, he still bristled with independence. He did not care for world politics in that period, and publicly declared that he "would rather get . . . a tine bill and pick dung in the cow corral with the chickens for a living . . . than to prosper financially and lose my liberty." He declared that he was "not a Christian," but admired the ideals of Christianity. . . . Jesus Christ, who is supposed to have lived more than nineteen hundred years ago taught rather a decent code of ethics and sound philosophy on which the American

constitution was founded. . . . The Idealists, Demagogues and Square Hats' main objective is to destroy our American government and all religion. For many years I have observed the work of the so called liberals in Mexico, and the Mexicans are not the people they were before their religion was destroyed. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Age did not mellow Col. Sam Robertson. He remained active and a builder to the last, however. He had an illness in the summer of 1938, was hospitalized in Brownsville, and died there on August 22. His remains were taken to San Antonio for interment in Mission Park Cemetery.<sup>30</sup> He had no children--no direct descendants.

It is impossible to describe all of the activities of Col. Robertson that furnished the rudiments of prosperous development in San Benito and the Rio Grande Valley. Not only did he build the improvements which have been reviewed in this paper, but he also built and operated ice plants so that refrigerated shipping of the Valley's products could be pursued successfully.<sup>31</sup> He performed many other background activities which contributed considerably to the rise of civilization as ensuing generations have known it.

After his death, his widow Maria lived in the Robertson house in San Benito. Finally in 1945 she sold it to one of her late husbands friends, John T. Lomax. Lomax, born in LaClede, Missouri, on October 3, 1877, was ten years younger than Sam Robertson, and had been named an honorary pallbearer at the colonel's funeral in 1938. (Lomax was to live until 1948, and like Robertson, die about age 71.)

John T. Lomax had arrived and settled in San Benito in 1908. He organized and served as president of the Valley Gin Company and of the now-defunct Farmers Guaranty Bank. After an interval with these enterprises he owned and operated the Casa de Palmas Hotel in McAllen until 1945, when he sold out and returned to San Benito to enjoy living in the Robertson house. He had been a member of the Missouri Volunteers during the Spanish-American War. A life member of the San Benito Rotary Club (of which he was a charter member and a president at one time), he was also a member of the Masonic Lodge, and a civic leader in his hometown.

At the death of John T. Lomax in 1948, his son Jack inherited the house; in 1978 it is owned and occupied by Mrs. Jack Lomax.

In its two-thirds of a century of existence as one of the show places of San Benito, the Robertson House has been not only a citadel of refuge when bandit raids threatened, but it has also been a major site for meetings of social and political groups. Many weddings, wedding receptions, and other social functions have been held here.

There have been no drastic changes made to the exterior of the house. A glass covering has been installed over the courtyard, but this in no way changed the appearance or charm of the place. Air conditioning was added in the 1950s, but the ducts were run through the basement, so no alterations were done to the ceilings.

The current condition of the structure is excellent. Mrs. Jack (Charlene) Lomax, the present owner and occupant, is responsible for the upkeep of the property. It has long been a prominent feature of the town, generating interest in the history of San Benito, and is enjoyed by tourists and local citizens as well. Mrs. Lomax has been most gracious in the matter of letting people visit her house, and letting it be opened for tours sponsored by various charitable organizations.

Among the reasons for the nomination of this property for historical marking is the unique position it occupies in the town as the principal home of the founder. Over and above that, it has a stylistic



distinction that is unique in San Benito, and arouses the curiosity of the passer-by because of its very role as a "different" sort of structure.

The Cameron County Historical Commission recognizes the value of this structure as a historical evidence of the career of Col. Sam Robertson and a historical evidence of early days in the Rio Grande Valley's development as one of the great agricultural districts of the modern world. The Cameron County Historical Commission therefore wishes to see the structure marked for its unique place in Texas history.

## Endnotes

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4. R. E. Robertson, "Sam Robertson: My Own Summation of his Career." Manuscript from the collections in the Barker History Center, The University of Texas at Austin.
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24. The Sam A. Robertson File, Barker Texas History Center, as cited. Typewritten copy of the public notice.
25. Betty N. Murray to Staff of Texas Historical Commission, May 23, 1978.
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# Biografía del General de División Lauro Villar Ochoa

por

Gustavo Flores Sánchez

Los personajes sobresalientes de antaño, enmarcados hoy en nuestra historia, fueron a menudo reconocidos quiéranlo o no, por la difusión que se dió a la acción realizada, tanto a nivel nacional como internacional; así como también del momento histórico que se vivía en esos tiempos y de los intereses personales que se movían por parte de los vencedores. El General de División Lauro Villar Ochoa, orgullosamente tamaulipeco, nos mostró el 19 de febrero de 1913 un hermoso gesto durante la Decena Trágica de valentía, lealtad, espíritu de servicio y sacrificio. Su pundonorosa acción es digna de ser reconocida, como ejemplo de un hombre que por sobre todas las cosas, amó a su patria y cuya decisión fundamentada en la realidad nacional fue diferente en su momento a la de sus compañeros de armas.

## Origen y desarrollo de un héroe nacional

Todavía no se mide la grandeza de este gran matamorenses, sus biógrafos aún no se ponen de acuerdo para señalar categóricamente la fecha de su nacimiento ni de su lugar de origen. Mientras que los historiadores Ignacio Pío Villarreal y Concha Villarreal sitúan tal acontecimiento en el año de 1849, existen quienes lo ubican en 1869 como José Raúl Canseco Botello. Empero lo que nos dice la Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales en su Desarrollo de una Ciudad Fronteriza viene a robustecer la primera fecha como la más exacta.

Según documentos de la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, nuestro personaje nació el 6 de agosto de 1849, siendo originario de Soto la Marina, Tamaulipas. Sin embargo, él siempre afirmó ser de Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Sus padres eran Don Francisco Villar y Doña Úrsula Ochoa. Lo de sus padres lo manifiesta también el Diccionario Biográfico Tamaulipeco. El Museo Casamata de Matamoros posee otro documento auténtico que lleva en el extremo izquierdo un sello que dice "Segunda Clase de Oficio para el Bienio de 1870-1871-Cuartel del Batallón 22o" Con el objeto de obtener declaración del Sargento Segundo Estéban Olivo, aprensor del que dice desertor Arcadio Ramírez del Cuerpo Guardia Municipal, después Libres de México, con el Soldado Casimiro Rivera, consignados por el oficial Lauro Villar en virtud de que el mismo Ramírez se quejó de que lo apresaron sin ser desertor y le exigían tres pesos para ponerlo en libertad. Al interrogar el Fiscal Militar al citado oficial Lauro Villar dice llamarse como queda dicho de Matamoros, soltero, de veinte años de edad y firma de su puño y letra dicha declaración.

Otra prueba fehaciente del origen del Gral. Villar es su testamento público otorgado en la Notaría Pública No. 2 en Veracruz, Ver., el día 14 de junio de 1923, ante el Licenciado Salomón Herrera, notario público, encargado temporalmente de la Notaría Num. Dos de aquel distrito judicial. En el que dice, textualmente, "Asistido de los instrumentales que al final se mencionarán, compareció en el sanatorio denominado Doctor Rafael Lavista, ubicado en la casa número setenta y cuatro de la Avenida Bravo, el Señor Lauro Villar, de setenta y cinco años de edad, natural de Matamoros,

Tamaulipas, General de División del Ejército Nacional, retirado de esta vecindad, domiciliado en la casa número diez y nueve de la Calle Zamora de esta ciudad, de mi conocimiento personal, así como del de los testigos, hábil para este otorgamiento, según me aseguró, sin constarme nada en contrario, y dijo: que encontrándose delicado de salud pero en perfecta lucidez de todas sus facultades, y libre de toda ocasión y de toda coacción y violencia, ha deliberado formalizar su testamento público abierto, el cual dictó en altas y claras voces, quedando contenido en las siguientes cláusulas. Primera, declara que es hijo legítimo de Don Francisco Villar y de la Señora Úrsula Ochoa de Villar, ya finados. Segunda, que fue casado con la señora Concepción Avellaneda de Villar también ya finada, no habiendo tenido hijos de su matrimonio ni fuera de él. Tercera, es su voluntad y dispone que los bienes de propiedad que se detallarán a continuación al tiempo de su muerte, se distribuyan en la siguiente forma: (A) A su señorita hermana Concepción Villar, le deja la casa que el exponente posee en la ciudad de Matamoros, Tamaulipas. (B) A su expresada hermana Concepción y a su hermana Señorita Juana Villar, les deja a cada una de ellas, cinco mil pesos "oro nacional., etc., etc." Analizados los documentos anteriores, llegamos a la conclusión de que el Gral. D. Lauro Villar Ochoa fue hijo de este pueblo, siendo así lo expresado por él y por su coterráneos como se verá más tarde en el curso de su vida social y militar.

Lauro Villar Ochoa vio la luz de la vida en la frontera norte del país, en la heroica ciudad de Matamoros, en el estado de Tamaulipas, el 6 de agosto de 1849. Para efecto del presente trabajo consideraremos también dicha fecha, en base más que nada en que la mayor parte de la bibliografía así lo asienta aunque ni el registro civil de la H. Ciudad de Matamoros, ni en la Catedral existen antecedentes de nuestro ilustre personaje. Algunos historiadores sitúan como su lugar del origen la ciudad de Soto la Marina, mas no existen antecedentes en el registro civil ni por parte de la iglesia. El Gral. de División Lauro Villar Ochoa siempre se enorgulleció y marcó como su lugar de origen la ciudad de Matamoros.

En 1849, fecha en que se inicia la urbanización de la población de San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos, hoy Matamoros, fue como todos los inicios un tanto irregular, el lugar donde nació el Gral. Villar se estima que es en las viejas casas que se ubican donde principia la avenida que hoy lleva su nombre. En esta ciudad hizo sus estudios primarios de donde partió a la ciudad de México para estudiar la milicia. Ingresó al Ejército Republicano, y el 8 de enero de 1865 obtuvo el grado de alférez. (Diccionario Biográfico Tamaulipeco) Con respecto a su aplicación en el oficio castrense podemos aseverar que fue sumamente positiva, dado que de alférez pasó a subteniente de infantería. En aquel ambiente de lucha contra el invasor francés, el traidor y el filibústero confederado se formó al principio de la carrera militar de aquel gran soldado tamaulipeco, del ahora subteniente de infantería de la milicia permanente, Lauro Villar.

Concurrió el Subteniente Villar al sitio de Querétaro (Diccionario Biográfico Tamaulipeco) acompañando a su jefe, el Gral. Cortina. En mayo de 1868, tomó parte de la campaña contra los sublevados del Gral. Aureliano Rivera en la Sierra de Ajusco, Milpa Alta y Chalco, ostentando el grado Teniente Práctico Subayudante del Batallón de Zapadores. El 2 de noviembre de 1869, concurrió a la campaña en el estado de San Luis Potosí, tomando parte de las acciones de guerra en el puerto de San José en los días 14 al 18 de enero de 1870, lugar en el que por su arrojo fue hecho prisionero. Reincorporado en el ejército, su pundonor militar lo hizo consignar, como lo asentamos anteriormente, al Sargento Esteban Olivo como presunto reo de soborno al ser acusado por el ciudadano Arcadio Ramírez de haber exigido tres pesos para ponerlo en libertad, después de haberlo

arrestado como desertor el 10 de mayo de 1870. Para dicha fecha ya era teniente de infantería de la milicia permanente.

Desde septiembre de 1871 estuvo presente en la campaña del estado de Guerrero, hasta el mes de noviembre del mismo año en que marchó sobre el estado de Oaxaca. En diciembre de 1871, concurrió a la campaña en el mencionado estado de Oaxaca, combatiendo en forma valerosa en San Mateo Xindihuil el 23 y 24 del propio mes. El 22 de marzo de 1872 participó valerosamente en el combate de Tlajiaco, Oaxaca, lugar donde resultó herido. Recuperada su salud, el 29 de octubre de 1872, se encontró en la fundición de armas de Yucinte, Oaxaca. Ascendió a Capitán de Infantería de la Milicia Permanente el 17 de julio de 1875. Participó en otra acción bélica en Yucinte, Oaxaca, lugar en donde fue hecho prisionero el 27 de enero de 1876.

Se le dio el mote de "Rémington" (Museo Casa Mata) cuando era capitán, en la defensa de Tlajiaco, en 1876, contra los levantados Porfiristas de Tuxtepec que derrocaron al gobierno del Licenciado Don Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada. Los antecedentes de Lauro Villar se remontan a la lucha contra la Intervención Francesa en que figura entre los soldados de la república. Era Tamaulipeco, nativo de Matamoros, y precisamente allí combatió activamente al imperio de Maximiliano.

Del mes de mayo a diciembre de 1876, hizo la campaña en los estados de oriente, encontrándose en la batalla del "Fortín" y en varios combates en la campaña de Ixtapa, San José, Boca del Monte, San Andrés de Arriba y Orizaba. Del mes de diciembre de 1876 hasta el de febrero de 1877, concurrió a la pacificación de los estados de Yucatán, Tabasco, y Campeche, durante cuya campaña, el 23 de octubre de 1876, fue ascendido al grado de Comandante de Batallón de la Milicia Permanente. Sin dejar de desempeñar el empleo antes citado, el 3 de julio de 1877 fue designado Teniente Coronel Suelto de la Guardia Nacional del estado de Yucatán. Del mes de julio de 1877 a julio de 1878, con el mando de la colonia militar del centro de Yucatán, permaneció acampado en la frontera del mismo estado, frente a los indios sublevados. Durante aquel lapso de aproximadamente un año, fue ascendido el 24 de agosto de 1877 a Comandante Mayor de Batallón de la Milicia Permanente.

Fue trasladado a la frontera norte del país, ya con el grado de Teniente Coronel de Infantería de la Milicia Permanente que le fue conferido el 28 de abril de 1885, del mes de febrero de 1886 al de agosto de 1877. Hizo la campaña contra los indios Yaquis y Mayos en el estado de Sonora, encontrándose en la ocupación del Fuerte "Añil" el 5 de mayo de 1886 y el 12 del propio mes y año concurrió al asalto de las fortificaciones en el Buatachive, Sierra del Bacatete. Su infatigable actividad, audacia, valor y reconocida lealtad a los gobiernos constituidos lo llevaban a todos los rincones del país, donde se hacía necesaria la presencia de un militar sereno, valiente y de categoría. Así lo vemos el 5 de marzo de 1888, hacer la larga expedición de Mazatlán a San Cristóbal Las Casas por el puerto de Tonalá, y el 17 de septiembre del mismo año, salir de dicha capital con el mando del séptimo batallón para guarnecer los departamentos de Tonalá y Soconusco, en relevo del Décimo Batallón.

El 3 de enero de 1889 es ascendido a Coronel de Infantería de la Milicia Permanente y nuevamente es enviado al otro extremo del país por disposición del supremo gobierno el 5 de octubre de 1889, mandado a su batallón predilecto, el famoso 24o, reanudando la campaña contra los indios rebeldes de los Ríos Yaqui y Mayo, concurriendo a ella desde el 23 de noviembre del propio año, saliendo en persecución del enemigo en períodos consecutivos cada dos meses, permaneciendo en dichas persecuciones dos y tres meses, logrando ponerlo en completa dispersión en varios combates, el 20

de abril de 1890, les dió un asalto con la columna a su mando en el cerro denominado "Los Bancos" en la Sierra del Bacatete. Por su conducta irreprochable como militar y su valeroso comportamiento en las diversas acciones militares en las que fue protagonista principal, fue ascendido a General Brigadier de la Milicia Permanente el 27 de mayo de 1901, y el 15 de noviembre de 1904 se le otorgó el grado de General de Brigada de la Milicia Permanente.

Tuvo el Gral. Villar la gran satisfacción de volver a su tierra natal de donde saliera en 1866 como alferez y miembro del estado mayor del Gral. D. Juan N. Cortina, donde luchará contra los invasores franceses y sus aliados. Ahora regresa a su pueblo con el grado de General de Brigada y Jefe de la Tercera Zona Militar con asiento en la H. Matamoras, acontecimiento que llenó de júbilo a los Matamorense. Para celebrar dignamente la llegada de tan distinguido hijo del pueblo se organizó un gran recibimiento y un banquete al que asistió lo más granado de la sociedad Matamorense, encargándose de dar la bienvenida al ya para entonces famoso soldado, el Señor D. Francisco Treviño Canales. Presidió todos los actos el C. Presidente Municipal, D. Rafael Solís de la Garza, acompañado de la totalidad de su cabildo integrado por los Señores D. Adolfo de la Garza, Lic. D. Albino Hernández, D. Evaristo Cárdenas, D. José Ma. Argüelles, D. Pedro L. Webber, D. Lorenzo Garibay, D. Gregorio estrada, D. Mariano G. Treviño, el Dr. D. Alfredo Pumarejo, D. Guadalupe Garza Fernández, D. Guadalupe González, y D. Francisco Guerra. El Matamorense, periódico que se editaba entonces en Matamoras, publicó una crónica de tales acontecimientos en su edición del 14 de febrero de 1907.

Disfrutaba entonces nuestro México del largo período de paz impuesta por el Gral. D. Porfirio Díaz. Pero los Matamorense aún no olvidaban el movimiento rebelde de D. Catarino Garza. Muchos eran los que simpatizaban con el Partido Liberal organizado en San Luis Potosí, que trabajaba con el nombre muy significativo de "Ponciano Arriaga" y comentaban con calor el discurso del brillante tribuno Veracruzano D. Diodoro Batalla en el congreso que dicho Partido Liberal celebró el 5 de febrero de 1901. Hacía tres años que habían salido de la cárcel por expresar sus ideas de libertad el Ing. Camilo Arriaga, Juan Sarabia, Librado Rivera, Rosalío Bustamante, José Martínez de la Vega, José Millán, y otros Liberales que luchaban que se realizara un cambio de hombres y de sistemas en el gobierno de nuestra patria.

Sabiendo esto, el viejo dictador distribuía en lugares estratégicos del país a los militares más capaces y respetados por sus virtudes de disciplina y lealtad a la ordenanza militar. Entre estos figuraban prominentemente nuestro coterraneo. De ahí que fuera enviado a su tierra natal donde era muy querido y estimado el Gral. Villar. Pero la efervescencia política era incontenible, y en enero de 1909 se constituyó el Partido Democrático en México, quedando como cabeza de su directiva el Lic. D. Benito Juárez Maza, hijo del Benemérito, formando parte de la misma entre otros el Lic. D. Manuel Calero, José Peón del Valle, el Lic. Jesús Urueta, Diodoro Batalla, Rafael Zubarán Capmany, Carlos Trejo y Lerdo de Tejada, Abraham Castellanos, Carlos Basave y del Castillo, y otros muchos que peleaban por la garantía de la libertad en todos sus términos y la inviolabilidad de la vida humana.

Pronto fue reconcentrado a México el General Villar, donde, fiel a su tradición de lealtad militar, continua prestando sus servicios hasta que, el 20 de noviembre de 1910, D. Francisco I. Madero inició el movimiento revolucionario que pronto dio al traste con la dictadura. Después del interinato de D. Francisco León de la Barra y del triunfo arrollador del Partido Constitucional Progresista, asume la presidencia de la República el 6 de noviembre de 1911 el ilustre idealista, D. Francisco I. Madero, y como Vice-Presidente el Lic. D. José María Pino Suárez. (Breve Historia de la Revolución



## Mexicana)

A escasas siete semanas de haberse hecho cargo de la presidencia, D. Francisco I. Madero, con fecha 27 de diciembre de 1911, es ascendido el Gral. Villar a General de División de la Milicia Permanente. (Diccionario Biográfico Tamaulipeco) Así premiaba el Señor Madero al viejo Chinaco, al patriota que luchaba contra los invasores y traidores, al prototipo del honor militar, al soldado fiel a los gobiernos constituidos, al leal servidor de la patria.

## **Un héroe entre penumbras**

El Sr. Francisco I. Madero, Presidente Constitucional de Los Estados Unidos de México, le otorga una gran responsabilidad, designándolo Comandante militar de la Plaza de México. (Breve Historia de la Revolución Mexicana) Nada menos que le confía la seguridad de las instituciones, la defensa del presidente de la República, del Congreso, y del poder judicial, la paz y tranquilidad de nuestra ciudad capital, la conservación del orden cuando todo presagiaba tormenta, cuando se confabulaban contra el gobierno. Grupos de militares ambiciosos se aliaron con las fuerzas partidarias del retroceso y del Embajador de los Estados Unidos de Norte América, Mr. Henry Lane Wilson, quién, según se supo después, actuó, no por instrucciones de su gobierno, sino por decisiones propias. (Breve Historia de la Revolución Mexicana)

Los principales conjurados contra el gobierno del Señor Madero eran los Generales D. Bernardo Reyes, D. Félix Díaz, D. Manuel Mondragón, y D. Gregorio Ruíz, además de otros civiles, entre los que se encontraban los hijos de D. Bernardo Reyes. Los dos primeros estaban presos por el delito de rebelión, debiéndole sus vidas precisamente a la magnanimidad del Señor Madero, puesto que, condenados a muerte, les había conmutado la pena por la de prisión. Pero, a pesar de todo eso, con la ayuda del Lic. Rodolfo Reyes, de Mondragón, y del General Ruíz, organizaron el cuartelazo que estalló la madrugada del día 9 de febrero de 1913. (Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana) Sufriendo doloroso ataque de gota, encontrábase recluido en sus habitaciones el Gral. Villar, con permiso del Ministro de Guerra. Pudo con toda justificación, dada su condición física, permanecer en su domicilio.

La noche del sábado 8 de febrero de 1913 circularon rumores en la Ciudad de México de que se preparaba una asonada militar. Domingo 9 de febrero, el movimiento infidente que venía preparándose estalla en las primeras horas de la madrugada. De Tlalpan y Tacubaya simultáneamente parten los rebeldes con rumbo a la Ciudad de México. Los alumnos de la escuela militar de aspirantes se apoderan del Palacio Nacional sin resistencia. De Tacubaya salen 300 dragones del 1er. Regimiento, 400 del 2o, y el 5o de artillería, y se dirigen al Cuartel de la Libertad. Se les unen 100 hombres más, y todos juntos se encaminan directamente a la Prisión Militar de Santiago Tlatelolco. El jefe del movimiento Gral. Manuel Mondragón pide y le es concedida la libertad del gral. Bernardo Reyes. Después, se dirigen a la penitenciaría del Distrito Federal, donde es liberado el Gral. Félix Díaz, sobrino de Don Porfirio Díaz.

Al enterarse el Gral. Villar del movimiento efectuado por las tropas rebeldes, sin importarle los dolores que le aquejaban, ni del permiso que gozaba para curarse, se lanza a la calle en busca de tropas fieles al gobierno para recuperar el Palacio Nacional. Otro valiente Tamaulipeco, el después General D. Juan Manuel Torrea, al filo de la media noche del día 8, le había comunicado por teléfono al Gral. Villar que cumpliendo sus órdenes ya estaba acuartelado con su fracción militar en el cuartel

de zapadores y que esperaba órdenes. Contestale el Gral. Villar, "Ya sabe Usted, mucha vigilancia, mucho cuidado, y en caso de alteración del orden, mucha bala, mucha bala, mucha bala."

A las cinco de la mañana de aquel fatídico día, 9 de febrero de 1913, el Gral. Villar y su ayudante, el Mayor Castro Argüello, se dirigen al cuartel del 24o Batallón, encontrando al Mayor Torrea listo para el combate. Con los únicos sesenta hombres de que disponía, avanzó rumbo al Palacio Nacional, forzando la puerta del cuartel de zapadores, penetrando al patio central sin ser sentidos por los aspirantes. El viejo veterano de la intervención francesa, "El Remington" haciendo gala de un valor temerario, distribuyó a sus hombres a ambos lados de la entrada y avanzó resueltamente por el centro, solo en traje de civil y con la pistola en la mano, dando fuertes voces de mando, sorprendió a los rebeldes, desarmando a uno por uno. Cita el ilustre Teniente Coronel y Doctor D. Francisco Vela González en su obra Diario de la Revolución a un testigo ocular de estos hechos, al Señor D. Alfonso Solís, quién relata, "El General Villar logró imponerse y procedió a desarmar a uno por uno. Petrificados, paralizados por el asombro, sin protestar, e hipnotizados por tanta temeridad, fueron poniendo a sus pies todas sus armas, y luego, ayudado por los oficiales y soldados que le seguían, desarmó a las otras guardias, e hizo un montón de fúsiles." Todos estos rebeldes fueron encerrados en una de las cocheras del Palacio.

Tan presto como la situación quedó dominada, fueron puestos en libertad el Ministro de la Guerra Gral. D. Ángel García Peña, ligeramente herido por los rebeldes, y el Señor D. Gustavo Madero, quienes, al llegar al Palacio, momentos antes, habían sido balaceados y después aprehendidos por los insurrectos, siendo encerrados en una de las salas del Palacio. Inmediatamente después, el Gral. Villar ordenó cubrir el frente del Palacio, formando dos columnas en líneas de tiradores, con sus sesenta hombres y los del 20o. Batallón, que poco antes parecía estar con los revoltosos, una pecho en tierra y la otra posterior rodilla en tierra, colocando dos ametralladoras en la parte central. Para estas horas, como ya se mencionó el Gral. Mondragón al frente de algunos contingentes de caballería ya había liberado al General Reyes de su prisión de Tlaltelolco, dirigiéndose ambos a la Penitenciaría del Distrito para excarcelar al General Félix Díaz. Don Eduardo Liceaga, Director del establecimiento, se negó a entregarlo, a pesar de la amenaza de los cañones de los sublevados, ordenando el Gral. Reyes su arresto, libertando a la vez al Gral. Díaz.

Los tres jefes del movimiento rebelde se dirigieron rumbo al Palacio Nacional, pero informados de que se encontraba en poder de los leales al gobierno, enviaron al Gral. Gregorio Ruiz para investigar lo sucedido. Encabezaba el Gral. Ruiz un escuadrón del 2o Regimiento, montando en magníficos caballos. Adelántase el Gral. Ruiz y sale a su encuentro el Gral. Villar acompañado de uno de sus ayudantes, y al encontrarse con este, tuvo lugar una corta escena en la cual el Gral. Ruiz invitó al Gral. Villar a secundar la rebelión, asegurándole que contaban con grandes elementos. Pero el gral. Villar, en otro acto de hombría, exponiéndose audazmente, coge las riendas del caballo de Ruiz y lo hace desmontar apresándolo, internándolo en el Palacio con tal rapidez que sus soldados no se dieron cuenta de lo que pasaba. (Historia de Matamoros)

Relata el entonces estudiante de segundo año de la Escuela Nacional de Medicina Teniente Coronel Don Francisco Vela González, testigo presencial de los hechos que, en aquellos momentos se presentó en la puerta central del Palacio, pidiendo ser llevado ante el Gral. Villar.

"Lo recibió el General con mucha seriedad, y al decirle que iba a ofrecer sus servicios al gobierno, ordenó que se le diera un fúsil de los

que habían sido quitados a los aspirantes rebeldes a cuyo frente iba el Gral. Bernardo Reyes montando brioso caballo. Avanzaba inexorable hacia la puerta central, al mismo tiempo que el bravo General Villar salía solo a su encuentro. Tres veces repitió su temeraria azaña el General Villar aquella mañana, primero frente a los aspirantes rebeldes, después con el Gral. Ruiz, y ahora con el Gral. Reyes. A unos cuantos pasos frente a la banqueta, se entabló entre ellos dos un candente diálogo, del cual ni los que estábamos allí cerca pudimos oír una sola palabra, pues la gritería iba en aumento. El caballo del Gral. Reyes caracoleaba nerviosamente, mientras el Gral. Villar trataba de acercarse por el lado de montar, quizá tratando de cogerlo por las riendas para repetir su hazaña de aprisionar a su adversario, como lo había hecho con el General Ruiz no hacía mucho rato. Ni siquiera un minuto pudo haber durado el fuerte intercambio de amenazas. Era evidente que ninguno de los dos iba a rendirse. La situación se hacía cada vez más peligrosa hasta que el Gral. Villar desesperado y viendo como seguían llegando cada vez más contingentes de sublevados, dió la temeraria orden de disparar, y de inmediato se desató la más descomunal balacera. Las ametralladoras con sus rapidísimos disparos parecían llevar el ritmo del combate sembrando la muerte por doquier, y a veces se interrumpía en cortísimos momentos como buscando nuevas víctimas. Las dos líneas de tiradores situadas frente al edificio también enviaban su mortífero fuego graneado sobre la multitud que, presa de pánico, huía despavorida en busca de cualquier refugio, y en aquellos brevísimos instantes pude ver claramente como el rostro del Gral. Reyes de súbito pareció perder toda su expresión, como si lo hubiera invadido un profundo sueño, y su cuerpo, ya sin vida, se inclinó sobre el pavimento como despedido por su propio corcel, que asustado se alejaba del lugar de los hechos en vertiginosa carrera." (Breve Historia de la Revolución Mexicana)

Al mismo tiempo que muere el Gral. Reyes, el Gral. Villar sufre seria herida en el cuello. (Historia de Matamoros) Pero no pierde la serenidad y con su pañuelo trata de detener la hemorragia, continuando dando órdenes a sus soldados animándolos con su ejemplo, pues los defensores no pasaban de 150 hombres y los atacantes eran varios miles; la hombría y decisión del Gral. Villar y de sus soldados, habían hecho huir a los insurrectos. Pasado el tiroteo, ordenó el Gral. Villar cerar las puertas del Palacio y que los soldados subieran a las azoteas, preparados para un posible segundo ataque.

Mientras tanto, el Presidente D. Francisco I. Madero salía de Chapultepec escoltado por los cadetes del heroico Colegio Militar, que unánimemente acordaron protegerlo y acompañarlo al Palacio Nacional. En el trayecto, se le unieron muchos de sus colaboradores y gran cantidad del pueblo que lo vitoreaba, incorporándose entre otros Victoriano Huerta en traje de civil. En

aquellos momentos, se intensificó el tiroteo, y el Señor Madero y sus acompañantes entraron a la fotografía Daguerre, donde el astuto Indio Huichol Victoriano Huerta, aprovechando la confusión y nerviosismo de aquellos instantes, en palabras zalameras y fingidas, le ofreció sus servicios al Señor Presidente, quién para su desgracia y la de la patria ingenuamente los aceptó, continuando su marcha.

Al llegar el Presidente Madero al Palacio Nacional, se dió cuenta de que el Gral. Villar estaba seriamente herido y le ordenó pasar inmediatamente al hospital militar para ser atendido. Es aquí cuando el Señor Presidente de la República toma una decisión de funestas consecuencias. En el libro Páginas de la Revolución Mexicana, Tomo II de Jorge Sayeg Helu, se encuentra asentado el siguiente diálogo: El General Victoriano Huerta manifiesta, "Me permite Usted, Señor Presidente, que me haga cargo de todas estas fuerzas para disponer lo que se juzque debe hacerse para la defensa de Usted y su gobierno." El C. General Ángel García Peña, Secretario de Guerra, en ese entonces interviene, diciendo, "Voy a nombrar al gral. Victoriano Huerta Comandante Militar de la Plaza." El C. Presidente Francisco I. Madero dice, con aire de disgusto manifiesto, "Está bién; nómbrenlo."

En el libro Breve Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Tomo I de Jesús Silva Herzog se indica que "Porfirio Díaz jamás le tuvo confianza al Gral. Victoriano Huerta." Después de que le fue confiado el mando al Gral. Huerta que no se separaba un solo momento del Señor Presidente, el propio Gral. Villar lo conminó en tono severo a portarse con rectitud. Poco caso hizo Huerta de las recomendaciones del bravo y noble gral. Villar ya que, inmediatamente después de hacerse cargo de la comandancia militar, ordenó el fusilamiento del Gral. D. Gregorio Ruiz, arrestado y desarmado por el Gral. Villar. Es bién conocido el hecho de que estando en acuerdo con el Presidente Madero, se presentó el Sr. D. Juan Sánchez Azcona, su secretario particular para informarle que el Gral. Ruiz solicitaba dos horas más de vida, para hacer ciertas modificaciones a su testamento. Huerta, sin dar lugar a que el Presidente Madero dijera una sola palabra, salió vociferando soezmente y con el reloj en la mano dijo a sus ayudantes que les concedía cinco minutos para que cumplieran sus órdenas de fusilar al prisionero.

La historia de aquellos días trágicos, registra en sus páginas la forma cruel y despiadada en que actuó Huerta; como envió a una muerte segura a todas las fuerzas irregulares maderistas que se aprestaron a defender al gobierno, eliminado mañosamente a todo el que le estorbara en sus negros propósitos. Cuando consideró controlada la situación, seguro del apoyo de sus secuaces, tanto extranjeros como nacionales, cometió el nefasto crimen de ordenar el asesinato de los Señores Madero y Pino Suarez para escalar la ambiciosa presidencia. Primeramente se arrastró como vil reptil, engañando hipocritamente al hombre bondadoso y magnánimo que había confiado en el la defensa de la legalidad. Lo traicionó asesinandolo después, la noche del 22 de febrero de 1913.

Que contraste tan extraordinario entre el traidor Huerta y el bravo Gral. Villar: el primero hipócrita, sanguinario y cruel, falso y traidor y el segundo, paradigma de la lealtad y del honor militar, chinaco de raiz fronteriza con perfiles de Bayardo por el valor y fuerza moral de sus actos. En aquella época pocos eran los generales que, aunando al valor, poseían la modestía, serenidad, espíritu de disciplina y lealtad, de un Gerónimo Treviño o de un Mariano Escobedo, todos ellos soldados surgidos del pueblo, norteros y republicanos. La conducta del Gral. Huerta fue una traición y cobardía que envolviera al "Martir de la democracia", la conducta de Lauro Villar será siempre un luminoso ejemplo digno de imitarse por todos los militares de todos los tiempos.

Consumado el asesinato de los Señores Madero y Pino Suarez, así como la sumisión servil y cobarde de la mayoría del congreso y de los gobernadores de los estados, el usurpador Huerta

consolidó su posición relegando al anonimato al Gral. Villar; Huerta por lo menos no se atrevió a matarlo, le respetó la vida ya que los actos del Gral. Villar siempre fueron de estricto apego a las normas castrenses de fidelidad a los gobiernos constituidos; el de Don Benito Juárez, el del Lic. D. Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada, el del Gral. D. Manuel Gonzalez, el del Gral. D. Porfirio Díaz y el del Don Francisco I. Madero.

Después de la sangrienta lucha iniciada por el Ilustre Varón de Cuatro ciénegas, D. Venustiano Carranza y la derrota definitiva del usurpador Victoriano Huerta por el pueblo Mexicano, encargado provisionalmente del poder ejecutivo, el Lic. D. Francisco S. Carvajal, echa mano del Gral. Villar y de los Licenciados Salvador Urbina y David Gutiérrez Allende para pactar con el primer jefe disolución del antiguo ejército constitucionalista los terminos de paz y la disolución del antiguo ejército federal. A pesar de su delicado estado de salud, cumple con su comisión y con fecha 11 de agosto de 1914, solicita y se le concede su baja en el activo y alta con haber de retiro en la situación que se indica, como general de division.

### **El Tornaviaje de un Militar Insigne.**

Hasta la fecha de su retiro del activo había servido el Gral. Villar al ejército nacional, cuarenta y nueve año de 1879. Casi medio siglo sirvió a la patria nuestro ilustre paisano, sin embargo fueron pocos los premios y recompensas que recibió y que a continuación detallamos. Con fecha 22 de septiembre de 1888, el C. Vice-Gobernador Constitucional del Estado de Sonora, en ejercicio del poder ejecutivo cumpliendo con lo que dispone la Ley Numero 15 de fecha 13 de diciembre de 1887, la cual concedió una condecoración honorífica a los jefes, oficiales, y tropas que tomaron "participación" durante los años de 1886 en la campaña contra los indios sublevados de los ríos Yaqui y Mayo, y habiendo justificado el Teniente Coronel C. Lauro Villar que es acreedor a dicha condecoración se le extendió diploma que lo autoriza a usar las medallas que el gobierno de Sonora le entregó como premio de sus servicios.

El día primero de mayo de 1889, el C. Presidente Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos en nombre de la república y como justo título al mérito y valor del C. Coronel Lauro Villar que en la clase de Alférez combatió contra el ejército Francés y sus aliados, dispuso la expedición del diploma con el que justificó siempre que tuvo la gloria de haber cooperado o salvado la independencia nacional luchando contra la intervención extranjera y haciéndose acreedor por su mérito a la condecoración de segunda clase creada por decreto de 5 de agosto de 1867.

El 28 de septiembre de 1893, por decreto de 25 de junio de 1891 el C. Presidente de la Republica concedió al C. Coronel Lauro Villar el uso de la "Cruz y Placa de Segunda Clase," expidiéndosele diploma que acreditó tan honrosa insignia siendo el distintivo que le concedió la patria por constancia en el servicio militar, por la firmeza con que sufrió las privaciones que ofrece la campaña y que por su irreprochable conducta lo hizo digno del respeto y consideraciones que se le guardaron.

Con fecha 14 de agosto de 1895, recibió diploma de la condecoración de constancia de 3/a clase por más de 25 años de servicios. Y el 11 de abril de 1898, el C. Presidente de la Republica concedió al C. Coronel Lauro Villar, el uso de la "Cruz y Placa de Primera Clase" mandando expedir diploma que le acreditó tan honrosa insignia, siendo el distintivo que le concede la patria por su constancia en el servicio militar, por la firmeza con que sufrió las privaciones que ofrece la campaña y que por su irreprochable conducta lo hizo digno del respeto y consideraciones que le aguardaron.

Finalmente el 18 de febrero de 1914, se le concedió Diploma de la Condecoración de Merito Militar de Primera Clase por su comportamiento que observó en febrero de 1913 al recuperar el Palacio Nacional, defendiéndolo con grave riesgo de su vida, para el gobierno constituido por D. Francisco I. Madero, según consta en su hoja de servicio a folios 916 y 918.

Durante su larga y azarosa vida militar, el Gral. Villar nunca olvidó su patria chica y cuantas veces le permitían sus deberes militares, en forma discreta visitaba a sus hermanas, Concepción y Juanita que residían en la casa propiedad situada en las Calles Morelos Acera Norte entre Cuarta y Quinta de esta ciudad. No existen antecedentes en el registro público de la propiedad. Aún hay personas que lo recuerdan; hombre amable de porte distinguido y caballeroso, estimadísimo por todos sus amigos y coterráneos, llevaba el uniforme del ejército nacional coterráneos, llevaba el uniforme del ejército nacional con marcialidad y gallardía, imponiendo respeto y admiración a sus subordinado, hombre nacido para mandar, de valor rayano en la temeridad como lo demostró en muchas y difíciles circunstancias, en una palabra era un digno soldado del Ejército Mexicano.

Nunca tuvo ambiciones de figurar en la política. Aunque pudo haber sido gobernador de Tamaulipas durante el régimen de Don Porfirio, rechazó esta posibilidad. Siendo General de Division, el Presidente Don Francisco I. Madero le ofreció la Secretaría de Guerra y Marina y tampoco quiso aceptar. Sostenía que el era militar y no político.

Retirado del servicio activo, disfrutando de su pensión de retiro, por motivos de salud cambió de residencia a la ciudad y puerto de la H. Veracruz, Ver., viviendo en la casa número Diez y Nueve de la Calle de Zamora de dicha ciudad hasta que los males que le aquejaban lo obligaron a internarse en el Sanatorio Doctor Rafael Lavista, ubicado en la Avenida Bravo número setenta y cuatro. Estando internado en dicho sanatorio, como lo dijimos anteriormente, el Gral. Villar hizo su testamento con fecha 14 de junio de 1923, al notario público Lic. Salomón Herrera, quién dice que, "encontrándose delicado de salud pero en perfecta lucidez de todas sus facultades y libre de toda coacción y violencia, ha deliberado formalizar su testamento público abierto, el cual dicto en altas y claras voces, etc. etc."

Pocos días después de haber dictado dicho testamento, se agravaron sus males y fue llevado a la Ciudad de México, donde falleció el día 26 de junio de 1923 a la una hora y treinta minutos, en la casa número 26 de la Calle de Serapio Rendón, siendo la causa de su muerte, según el certificado médico expedido por el Dr. Palacios Macedo, una infección urinosa y aguda cancer de las prostata. Su cadaver fue inhumado en el panteón del Tepeyac, en Guadalupe, Hidalgo, D.F. con los honores militares correspondientes a su jerarquía de General de Division del Ejercito Mexicano.

La tumba del Gral. Villar estaba en el Panteon del Tepeyac, lote número 18 y en ella ya se encontraban los restos de su madre, Doña Concepción Avellaneda de Villar, muerta el 11 de enero de 1914. Los Matamorenses considerándolo como uno de los héroes nacionales más limpios de nuestra historia, han honrado su memoria, designando con su nombre: la Escuela Secundaria número 4, la Avenida que, partiendo del Colegio Modelo sale hacia el oriente. Termina precisamente en el balneario que también lleva el nombre de Playa Lauro Villar.

El 26 de junio de 1973, se cumplieron cincuenta años del fallecimiento del tan preclaro ciudadano y fueron trasladados sus restos de México a esta H. Ciudad de Matamoros, Tamaulipas, siendo depositados junto con su ataúd en el Museo de la Casa Mata. Posteriormente y según palabras del C. Director C.P. Victor Manuel Rodríguez Escalera de dicho Museo fueron trasladados sus restos, en el año de 1982, al Parque Mariano Matamoros, frente a la cárcel municipal, en la carretera de salida de esta ciudad a la de Reynosa. Junto a la estatua del Gral. Mariano Matamoros, existe una

base donde en su momento figuró (ya no existe), una placa con el nombre y fechas de, "nacimiento y deceso del Gral. Villar." De: Nacimiento y deceso del Gral. Villar. A manera de epilogo, me atrevería a pensar un epitafio para el Gral. de Division Lauro Villar Ochoa."

"Aqui yace un gran Matamorenses que fue leal y siempre amó a la patria, sobre todo en los momentos difíciles, al cual, el destino trata de recompensarlo con el olvido."

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## Don Luis Emigdio Rendón Farías

por

Elia García Cruz

Fué un ciudadano ejemplar, laborioso, responsable y honrado a toda prueba, cuya vida considero debe ser conocida especialmente por nuestros jóvenes matamorenses; pues él, al igual que otros muchos hombres valiosos, formaron el Matamoros de principios de siglo. Su espíritu emprendedor le llevó a probar fortuna en distintas actividades comerciales contribuyendo con ello al progreso y desarrollo económico de esta ciudad fronteriza. Es además un ejemplo de tenacidad y de pujanza digno de admirar pues aunque en su vida varias veces la suerte le dió la espalda, él volvía a empezar con renovados bríos.

Fué un hombre desprendido que siempre ayudó a los desválidos. Tuve la suerte de conocerle y disfrutar de su buen humor y aprender algunas frases de Francés y de Italiano que solía enseñarme cuando había oportunidad de hacerlo. Don Luis Emigdio Rendón Farías, nació en esta heroica ciudad de Matamoros el 5 de agosto de 1885. Su padre, Don Luis Felipe Rendón Flores originario de Cuba, de donde emigró a Matamoros, vía New Orleans y Galveston. Su madre era Doña Adela Farías. Su esposa, Rosa Barragán, era bisnieta de Vicente Faraoni, origina de Trieste, Italia. Entre los muchos extranjeros que llegaron a Matamoros, especialmente europeos, venía Vicente Faraoni quien está sepultado en el panteón Antiguo de esta ciudad. Sus hijos son María Luisa, Luis Felipe, Adela Alicia, Mario León, y Rosa Blanca.

Don Lucho, como muchos le llamábamos por cariño, fué el 2º de nueve hermanos, cuatro hombres y cinco mujeres: José De la Paz, Ricardo, Luis Emigdio, Oscar, Angélica, Eulalia, Eva, Elisa y Bertha. Se cree que todos nacieron en esta ciudad en la calle González 12 y 13 en lo que hoy es inhumaciones Ramírez. Su padre de oficio relojero, al llegar a Matamoros trabajó en una maderería en el edificio Iturria, ubicado en González 6 y 7. Cursó sus estudios en el antiguo Colegio de San Juan cuando tenía entre 8 y 14 años.

Como todos los jóvenes de esa época, auxiliaba a su padre en el trabajo, primero en la maderería y más tarde en el taller de joyería propiedad de los Desomme, el cual después pasó por herencia a ser propiedad de la Familia Rendón. Desde muy joven demostró iniciativa y deseos de trabajar, pues al morir su padre en 1906, Don Luis abandona sus estudios de leyes para dedicarse a trabajar. Primeramente llegó a Tampico recomendado por un pariente de apellido Mireles, más tarde se fué a Torreón, Coahuila, donde trabajó en los Ferrocarriles Nacionales del Noreste durante cuatro años como empleado de confianza. Don Luis contribuía con su sueldo al sostenimiento de su madre y hermanos en la Ciudad de México, ciudad en la que la familia residió al morir su padre.

Sus hermanos también recibieron ayuda económica de otros familiares, gracias a lo cual pudieron obtener sus títulos de ingeniero civil, José de la Paz, y Oscar, y la carrera de abogado su hermano Ricardo. A su regreso a Matamoros, por el año de 1910, Don Luis se encontraba levantando los bordos para el desarrollo de la irrigación; era dueño de 400 tiros de mulas con escrepas. Pero al llegar los revolucionarios a Matamoros en 1913, éstos le quitaron sus mulas, por lo que no le quedó más remedio que alistarse a la "Bola", es decir, se fue de revolucionario bajo el mando del General

Ricaud, con quien cultivó una gran amistad y alcanzó al grado de Teniente Coronel. En 1914, contrajo matrimonio con la virtuosa señorita Rosa Barragán Reyna, hija del Dr. Miguel Barragán.

Por recomendaciones del General Ricaud, Don Luis mantuvo muy buenas relaciones con los jefes revolucionarios, especialmente con el General Pablo González, por lo que al terminar la revolución, reclamó sus mulas, y le fueron devueltas en talegas de oro, dinero con el que compra varios ranchos, entre ellos El Sabino, que compró a Don Ezequiel Petipein (500 hectáreas), El Corral Quemado y otros más, dedicándose por varios años a la agricultura.

Su suegro, el Dr. Barragán quien fue Presidente Municipal en 1913, a la llegada de los revolucionarios, como pertenía al grupo político contrario, le fueron incautados todos sus bienes. Gracias a la amistad de Don Luis con los jefes revolucionarios, logra que estos al terminar la revolución le regresen todos sus bienes al Dr. Barragán sin costo alguno para la familia Barragán.

En 1923, ocupó la Presidencia Municipal de Matamoros en forma interina, y más tarde por elecciones es nombrado de Presidente de la Junta de Administración Civil de Matamoros. No terminó su período, ya que por diferencias que tenía con el Gobernador del Estado de aquella época, Don Emilio Portes Gil, se vió obligado a renunciar por no contar con el apoyo de éste como autoridad estatal. Causó gran satisfacción a Don Luis, el hecho de que todos los integrantes de Cabildo presentaran también su renuncia, solidarisándose así con este gran Matamorense. Entregó la Presidencia a Don Jesús María Cárdenas el 3 de julio de 1924.

El discurso pronunciado por Don Luis al renunciar a la Presidencia es muy elocuente, digno de ser conocido por la ciudadanía Matamorense ya que es un discurso con mucha fuerza, una verdadera pieza oratoria mediante la cual este hombre recto, con mucha dignidad y a la vez con mucha sutileza, reclama sus derechos, cosa poco común aún en estas fechas.

Por todo lo anterior, considero a este hombre, como un tamaulipeco ejemplar, digno de admirar, por lo que me atrevo a sugerir que su biografía figure en el Diccionario Biográfico Tamaulipeco. Después de su renuncia trabajó como secretario en la Cámara de Comercio de esta ciudad con un sueldo de \$4.00 (cuatro pesos diarios). En 1926 se lo quemó el retaurante-bar que tenía, ubicado éste en 6a. y González, lugar donde hoy se encuentra el Banco Serfin; se cree que fue quemado intencionalmente por un empleado suyo de apellido Santoro. Como en ese tiempo Matamoros no contaba con una estación de bomberos, se llamó a los bomberos de la Ciudad de Brownsville, pero los empleados de emigración no los dejaron pasar por no tener papeles, lo que ocasionó que se quemará todo el negocio, causando una gran pérdida a Don Luis. A juicio de la opinión pública, esto fue como una represalia motivada por su renuncia. Posteriormente vendió El Corral Quemado y en 1928 estableció una casa comercial de Curiosidades en la calle González entre 5a y 6a local propiedad de la Sra. Raquel Barragán Vda. de Izaguirre. En este comercio se vendían muebles y perfumes importados de Europa, así como artesanías mexicanas y europeas, además de joyería muy bien surtida. En este tiempo no había muchos comercios de éste tipo y los que había estaban muy bien equipados con gran variedad de artículos.

Por mala suerte, con el gran huracán que azotó la ciudad en 1933, se cayeron los techos y nuestro hombre perdió gran parte de su capital. Don Luis no se dio por vencido y poco tiempo después reabrió su negocio enseguida de lo que antes era el Oklahoma Bar, edificio que pertenecía al Hotel Moctezuma propiedad de Don Andrés Pacheco. (Chito Pacheco)

Abrió la Farmacia Principal en la esquina de 6a y González, la cual cerró para abrir otro comercio de curiosidades debido al auge que tuvieron esos negocios de curiosidades durante la Segunda Guerra

Mundial. En los años de 1942 y 1943, construyó el Hotel Colonial en 6a. y Matamoros, el cual era considerado como el mejor en la ciudad, (sólo había dos) era de una planta y no fué hasta los 50s cuando el arquitecto Matías Gómez construyó el 2° piso.

Fué Don Luis, un hombre emprendedor, un padre cariñoso, buen esposo y muy responsable como hermano, ya que ayudó a sus hermanas económicamente hasta el día de su muerte el 31 de julio de 1967.

Sabía tocar la flauta y formó parte de la orquesta que estaba dirigida por el autor de la música de nuestro Himno Nacional, Don Jaime Nunó, interpretó por primera vez este Himno en Matamoros, en el histórico Teatro de la Reforma.

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Archivo Municipal de Matamoros.



por

Maria Luisa Meade

Mi trabajo se basa en una entrevista con el Sr. Ladislao Cárdenas M. que fue alcalde de Matamoros durante el periodo que abarca de 1937 a 1938 y 1943 a 1945. Mi entrevista se trata solamente en su gestión administrativa de los años de 1937 y 1938.

El Sr. Ladislao Cárdenas Martínez nació en la Ciudad de Matamoros, Tamaulipas, el 8 de Octubre de 1904. Cursó sus estudios primarios en el Instituto Hussey, Escuela Particular autorizada por e Gobierno Federal. Pasó a cursar los estudios secundarios del primero y segundo año en la Escuela Normal y Preparatoria en Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas. Se vió obligado a suspender por asuntos familiares, ya que no existían escuelas superiores en esta Ciudad. Sin embargo se inscribió en esta Ciudad en la Escuela Superior de Comercio donde terminó sus estudios de teneduría de libros, taquigrafía y mecanografía. Empezó a ejercer sus estudios en un comercio que se denominaba La Zona Libre, propiedad de los señores Andrés Cisneros y Adrián Cisneros. Posteriormente consiguió empleo en la casa comercial de M.J. García Hnos. almacenistas en comercio. Dadas sus inclinaciones hacia el movimiento político fué nominado para la Presidencia Municipal en los años 1937-38 en las elecciones constitucionales que se celebraron en el año de 1936, puesto que vino a ocupar el 10 de enero de 1937. Cabe mencionar que la ciudad de H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas tenía en esa fecha una población de 31,000 habitantes y sus linderos colindaban con los Estados Unidos al norte, por el sur con San Fernando, por el oriente las costas del Golfo de México y al occidente con el municipio de Reynosa--quedando incluido dentro de su territorio lo que ahora es el municipio de Valle Hermoso, Tamaulipas.

Durante su administración desarrolló dentro de las posibilidades económicas los siguientes trabajos. Recibió la Tesorería Municipal con cero pesos cero centavos adeudo hipotecario de \$200,000.00 que le prestó el Banco Hipotecario y obras públicas de la capital de la república para la iniciación de los trabajos que se estaban realizando en los servicios de drenaje de la ciudad y para los servicios de agua potable de los que carecía la ciudad de Matamoros. Los préstamos fueron avalados por el gobierno del estado y dando como garantía la participación municipal de los impuestos en ventas de gasolina, aguas minerales y cerveza que entregaba el gobierno federal al municipio mensualmente, recursos que dejó de percibir el municipio mensualmente, por este concepto mientras no se cubriera al Banco Hipotecario de Obras Públicas el adeudo del préstamo concedido.

El presupuesto anual del H. Ayuntamiento para el año de 1937 aprobado por el H. Congreso del Estado fué de \$280,000.00. Eso era para sostener todos los gastos inherentes a los servicios de limpieza de la ciudad, servicios de luz pública, policía municipal, salarios de los empleados municipales en los diferentes departamentos de la presidencia municipal. Con los que dentro del presupuesto aprobado por el Congreso del Estado incluyendo lo que se refería a Obras Públicas durante el periodo municipal a que se refiere el entrevistado, el presupuesto era insuficiente para todos los gastos municipales y mucho menos para iniciar obras de beneficio público para sus habitantes. Sin embargo se hicieron los siguientes trabajos. Se amplió el embanquetado de la Plaza

Principal en 2 metros en toda su circunferencia revistiéndola de mosaico rojo. Se dotó a este lugar de bancas de cemento a todo su alrededor así como de alumbrado pues las familias de Matamoros solían pasear los domingos en la plaza mencionada. Allí se daban serenatas por la Banda Municipal, cuyos salarios cubría el propio Ayuntamiento por ser este el único lugar a donde concurrían las familias de Matamoros. Se construyó la Escuela Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez por cuenta del propio Ayuntamiento. Se construyó en ese mismo período tres escuelas ejidales de madera en los ejidos de Buena Vista, El Longoreño y La Luz con la ayuda de los campesinos en trabajos de mano de obra.

Al decretar el Gobierno Federal la expropiación de la Región Lagunera en Torreón, Coah., el Sr. Cárdenas acompañado de agricultores de la región, realizó tres viajes a Torreón, Coah., a invitar a los algodoneros propietarios expropiados. Les dijo que nuestra región era una región productora de algodón y los invitó a venir a trabajar en la siembra de algodón. Describió que las regiones de Matamoros, Reynosa, Camargo y parte de San Fernando del Estado de Tamaulipas tenía tierras fértiles propias para este cultivo. Podía asegurarles que eran tierras de monte que podrían adquirir al precio de \$10.00 por hectárea con la garantía del gobierno del estado y que no se afectaría ninguna propiedad que no pasara de 100 hectáreas, garantía que se hizo de acuerdo con el gobierno del estado de Tamaulipas a solicitud del municipio y de conformidad con el Código Agrario en vigor. Logrando que fueran los primeros en iniciar algunas compras de terreno el Sr. Enrique Domene y varios amigos de él quienes adquirieron más de 1,000 hectáreas en la región de la Rosita y con esto crearon confianza en otros agricultores. Ayudado por el Sr. Domene a que vinieran más agricultores de la Laguna a comprar y desenraizar muchas superficies de terreno en esta región. Igualmente recibieron a los mexicanos, que eran repatriados por el Presidente de la república de los Estados Unidos; se les entregó tierra en los terrenos que pertenecían al municipio de Matamoros, y ahora es Valle Hermoso, Tam.. Cabe mencionar que también invitaron a los pobladores de la nueva presa que se construyó en Anahuac, Nuevo León por el gobierno federal. ( La presa construída en este lugar no funcionaba). Vinieron a poblar lo que ahora es la colonia Anahuac Liberato Marquez y otros. Todos estos trabajos los hicieron con el propósito de levantar a la región que más tarde tendría que darle trabajo a los campesinos en las pizcas del algodón y a los obreros en las plantas despepitadoras de algodón, ya que calcularon que se podrían producir más de 500 mil pacas de algodón y que nuestra ciudad era más que un poblado que resurgiera como propia para la agricultura y creciera como una población importante.

Con este motivo se creó y aprobó por el gobierno del estado un impuesto del 10% adicional a los impuestos prediales urbano, rústico y comercio a petición del H. Ayuntamiento. Se creó un patronato de educación para que administrara estos fondos que recaudaría la oficina fiscal del estado dedicados exclusivamente para el servicio educativo y resolviera de inmediato la reconstrucción de los servicios sanitarios, vidrios quebrados, bancos escolares, pizarrones, reparación de techos y dotara a las escuelas de todo lo necesario para que los niños que concurrían a ellas se encontraran cómodos y aprendieran mejor sus clases. Naturalmente este patronato se integró con ciudadanos representantes de los propietarios de fincas urbanas, rústicas, ejidatarios y agricultores incluyendo en este patronato a un representante del gobierno federal, a un representante del gobierno del estado y un representante del H. Ayuntamiento con la obligación de recoger en la oficina fiscal del estado el monto de los ingresos bimestrales que se recaudaran por este concepto y se invirtieran en resolver los problemas educativos y manejados exclusivamente por ese patronato y vigilados por los representantes oficiales.

Igualmente en ese mismo período de dos años se creó la junta pavimentadora de las calles de Matamoros a petición del H. Ayuntamiento y se consiguió el decreto del gobierno del estado para que el pago de la pavimentación de las calles donde esta se realizara se pagaría en la siguiente forma: Una tercera parte del valor de la construcción sería parte de los propietarios de ambos lados y el centro de la que era la tercera parte los cubriría el H. Ayuntamiento junta que con el transcurso del tiempo desapareció y en la actualidad los administra el gobierno del estado. Así mismo al ser nombrado el Gral. Raul Gátare como Gobernador de Tamaulipas, modificó el decreto en lo que se refiere al manejo de los fondos del 10% de impuesto adicional para ser manejado por el estado y con motivo desapareció el patronato de educación. Igualmente sucedió con la desaparición de la junta pavimentadora que los ayuntamientos sucesivos cedieron la cancelación al decreto de la formación de la misma. Los nuevos presidentes modificaron y se encargaban de estos trabajos directamente el Municipio. Al rendir el informe anual del H. Ayuntamiento le quedó al H. Ayuntamiento que le tocó precidir en estas fechas la satisfacción de haber cumplido con su deber durante el tiempo que ejercieron la función que le encomendara el pueblo de Matamoros. Le quedó la satisfacción de que todos los funcionarios fueron cumplidos y honestos en el desempeño de sus funciones, dejando en caja de la tesorería municipal una existencia en efectivo de \$25,000.00 para que la autoridad elegida para regir los destino de Matamoros en 1939 y 1940, tuviera para cubrir los gastos de la primera quincena de enero de 1939 los salarios de los nuevos funcionarios.

Al terminar su periodo de administración el Sr. Cárdenas se despidió de su puesto con las siguientes palabras: Solo nos queda expresar al pueblo de Matamoros nuestros mejores deseos que el último año que hoy termina los trabajos realizados con la ayuda de los ciudadanos de Matamoros haya sido de beneficio para la población y desearles un feliz y prospero año en 1939 haciendo augurios de que las Autoridades elegidas por el Pueblo siga por la senda del progreso para que nuestra ciudad sea en el futuro uno de los puertos fronterizos más importante en esta frontera mexicana. Salud, bienestar y prosperidad son los mejores deseos del ayuntamiento que hoy termina sus funciones.





por

Alma Rodríguez

Don Florentino Cuéllar Martínez fue hombre de gran prestigio en la Sociedad de Matamoros en la cual siempre destacó por su recia personalidad y amplia cultura. Como periodista su labor fue muy importante, ya que sus valiosos comentarios ayudan a entender y valorar los acontecimientos desarrollados en el amplio escenario Tamaulipeco. Sus ideas liberales influyeron a las gentes que tuvieron la suerte de leer sus Efemérides Tamaulipecas. Como funcionario, fue un ciudadano responsable y eficiente. Cumplió con su deber con trabajo y honradez. Fue un hombre íntegro que supo valorar su origen, su país y las gentes que en él se desenvolvían. Don Florentino Cuéllar Martínez, originario del Rancho El Mortero, del municipio de San Fernando, Tamaulipas, nació el 16 de octubre de 1904. Sus padres también originarios del Mortero, fueron Don Máximo Cuéllar Gutiérrez, bisnieto de Don Bernardo Gutiérrez, hijo de una nieta de éste y su madre, Doña María Martínez Hernández. Ella nació en el municipio de San Fernando, de origen muy humilde, (sirvienta huérfana)

Desde niño se distinguió por tener el carácter más fuerte que sus hermanos, lo cual muchas veces le valió grandes reprimendas. Su esposa, Doña Aurora Cuéllar Cortina (su prima hermana), con quien contrajo matrimonio en 1934, era descendiente de Don Juan Nepomuceno Cortina. Sus hijos: Catón Bolívar, médico; Andrés Florentino, maestro; Graciela Guadalupe, maestra; Alfredo Máximo, doctor en educación, Aurora Amelia, bibliotecóloga. Los padres de Don Florentino se casaron en artículo mortis, la madre, Doña María, tenía ya dos hijos cuando se casó con Don Máximo. Don Máximo era el más valiente de la familia, tenía fama de tener en su haber varias muertes, razón por la que era respetado en la comunidad.

Su hermano Andrés, a pesar de ser tercero joven, era considerado como el jefe de la familia por el capital que tenía. Don Florentino fue el tercer de cuatro hermanos de padre y madre: Santos, Julio, Florentino, y Silvestre, aunque también tuvo dos hermanos de madre solamente: José Martínez y Pedro Cuéllar, esto no impidió que se mantuvieran muy buenas relaciones entre los hermanos. Sus primeras ocupaciones fueron las de toda persona de esa región ganadera, cuidar cabras, apacentar el ganado, y demás actividades propias de ese medio. Tenía un tío que era comerciante ambulante, Miguel Martínez; con él se vino a vivir en Matamoros, hospediándose con la familia Gracia y la familia Palmer. (Licha y Malena Palmer). Asistió a sus primeros años de escuela en Matamoros, vendía periódicos. Fue prefecto del Instituto Literario de San Juan, más tarde emigró a los E.U.A., país del que conservaba tristes recuerdos, pero una gran admiración. En 1920, aproximadamente ingresó a la Masonería perteneciendo a la logia Aurora Boreal, a la cual perteneció toda su vida y de la cual considerada haber recibido las mejores enseñanzas de su vida.

En 1930, empezó a trabajar como mecanógrafo en la Cámara de Comercio, llegando más tarde a ser gerente de la misma, durante cinco años. Mientras trabajaba en al Cámara de Comercio, fue corresponsal del Periódico Excelsior y en compañía del Sr. Gallardo, fundó el periódico local "El Liberal" (semanario). También hacía lo que en ese tiempo se llamaba tenedor de libros. En 1940, fue

el vocal ejecutivo de la Junta Pavimentadora, pavimento que todavía existe en algunas calles de Matamoros. En 1937, como consecuencia de un artículo en el que Don Florentino criticaba el funcionamiento de la oficina fiscal; el gobernador del estado, Don Marte R. Gómez, le nombró colector de rentas, puesto que en la actualidad corresponde al de Jefe de la Oficina Fiscal del Estado. Cuando Don Marte R. Gómez fué nombrado gerente general del Banco Agrícola. En 1940-1941, aproximadamente, pasó a desempeñar el puesto de director general de personal, colaborando estrechamente con Don Ernesto P. Uruchurtu quien posteriormente fué regente del Distrito Federal durante quince años, es decir, durante los gobiernos de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Adolfo López Mateos y parte del gobierno de Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

En 1945, regresa a Matamoros y funda la Maderería Tamaulipas y la Sociedad Agrícola "Cerritos". En 1949, cuando nadie quería aceptar la gerencia del sistema de agua y drenaje de Matamoros, que estaba en crisis porque no había agua en la Cd., Don Ernesto Elizondo se la ofreció y él la aceptó fundando la Junta de Aguas y Drenaje de Matamoros siendo uno de los pocos organismos que se construyeron en la ciudad sin la participación del Gobierno Federal o Estatal, para lo cual fué necesario crear un impuesto de \$1.20 por m<sup>2</sup> de propiedad.

Desempeñó ese puesto en cuatro ocasiones más, durante el período presidencial de Don Miguel Treviño Emparan, Isidro González Saldaña, Don Virgilio Garza Ruiz y Óscar Guerra Elizondo. Fué fuertemente criticado por la prensa, por sus principios de no repartir embutes a la prensa (dinero). En la década de 1960, fracasó en la agricultura y la maderería y se dedicó a la ganadería. Fué en este tiempo que empezó a escribir en el periódico El Bravo una columna llamada "Efemérides Tamaulipecas". Escribió esta columna por más de doce años. Esas ediciones lamentablemente no fueron conservadas por el periódico, aunque por fortuna su cuñado, Don Alfonso Hinojosa Aldape los conservó, existiendo así la mayor parte de ellas. En 1961, aspiró a la presidencia municipal, pero no tuvo éxito.

Realizó dos viajes por Europa de los cuales nos dejó una crónica, uno de ellos organizado por su nuera Rosaura Dávila de Cuéllar. Asistió a congresos en varias ciudades del país y fué nombrado miembro de la Academia Nacional de Historia. En 1969, fué fundador de la Sociedad de Historia, Geografía y Estadística de Matamoros, de la cual fué el segundo presidente, Esta sociedad tuvo el mérito de rescatar el archivo municipal de Matamoros y del Museo Casamata. Fue el vocal ejecutivo del monumento a Mariano Matamoros. Murio el 11 de diciembre de 1980, su muerte fué muy sentida por la sociedad Matamorenses ya que con él perdían a un mexicano valioso, nacionalista, que amó a su patria y a su estado. En 1983, la Administración que presidía Don Jesús Roberto Guerra Velazco, inauguró una plaza que lleva su nombre, ubicada en la Avenida de las Américas. Como escritor, su obra fue vasta. Escribió por un espacio de 12 años aproximadamente, produciendo un total de dos a tres mil artículos. Las temas fueron biografías de héroes y personajes ilustres, acontecimientos históricos, temas revolucionarios, especialmente aquellos asuntos que de alguna manera afectaban el desarrollo de su país. También dedicó varios artículos a describir sus viajes en Europa. Además la Universidad Panamericana de Edinburgo publicó sus leyendas de Matamoros y Brownsville.

Su biografía aparece en el Diccionario Biográfico de Tamaulipas. Sus artículos aparecieron en los periódicos El Bravo, El Porvenir de Monterrey, El Mundo de Tampico, El Mercurio de Victoria, La Opinión de Matamoros y otros más. En sus artículos, emite juicios, hace comentarios, censura. En algunos artículos critica como algunos historiadores se concretan a dar una lista de datos aislados, sin ninguna relación de unos acontecimientos con otros, sin hilación alguna, el, en cambio nos dice

que al leer la biografía de Dupin, que él escribió, es suficientemente para valorar al héroe Tamaulipeco Pedro José Méndez.

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## Jose Rangel Cantu: The Conscience of South Texas

by

Carlos Larralde

A famous Hispanic radio broadcaster for KBOR in Brownsville, Texas, Jose Range Cantu hosted a popular weekly Sunday afternoon musical production known as the "Programa Popular" that lasted from 2:30 to 4:00 P.M. in the 1940's and 1950's.<sup>1</sup> In this series, Cantu proved himself a gifted comedian. In time he championed Hispanics' civil rights throughout the Lower Rio Grande.

Cantu was born in Matamoros on February 23, 1912. He was two years old when he came to Brownsville with his mother, Refugia Cantu who was desperate to earn a living. His father, known as Nacho, abandoned them and probably never married his mother. Cantu never forgot his humble origins.<sup>2</sup> To help his mother, Cantu worked as a shoe shine boy and delivered groceries. Later he worked as a house painter. To satisfy his ambition, at night he took some courses in a business school. At home, Refugia inspired him with ideals. She gave him a perception for words and a sense for cadence. She used to say, "People will always judge you on how you speak. When you say or pronounce a word, think twice".<sup>3</sup>

Everyday he practiced his pronunciation in English and Spanish. He stood before a mirror to practice his speaking skills and gestures. Later, still standing straight, he would speak before his mother about a topic. Refugia challenged him to make a dull topic interesting. As a reward, they went to an evening movie or she gave him several comic books. Language thus became Cantu's identity for self-esteem. As an adult, the lean, six-foot Cantu had developed his natural talent as a speaker. He applied this skill as a salesman in a paint store. There he worked with a clerk, Maria de Jesus Solis, known as Jesusita or Chucha.

While working long hours as a housepaint salesman, he fell in love with Chucha who encouraged him to try radio commercials, complimenting his voice and his skill as a comedian. For the moment, Cantu took her remarks only as a kind praise. Chucha, whose father was a carpenter, appeared very ordinary, at least on the surface. She managed to get an education in the local Catholic school in Brownsville. She considered herself lucky, for educational opportunities were few. Chucha always remained a serious reader, a quiet, strong woman. They married on March 19, 1936. Chucha was often described as "just his wife and a sales clerk." Without her, however, there might have never been a dynamic Jose Range Cantu. To him, she was his source of unique dignity and extraordinary strength. She was always supportive of her husband and rarely complained.<sup>4</sup>

Through Chucha's emotional support, Cantu managed to keep an optimistic view of life despite the tragedy with his children. His oldest child, Hector, died at the age of eight from fever. Then his oldest daughter, Aurora died when she was nine months old from an unknown illness. His surviving daughter, Minerva, who looked so much like him, suffered from cancer. Through all these family tragedies, he trained himself to suppress his emotions, to bury his sorrow and frustration, at least from the public.

Chucha quickly discovered that Cantu's strength was to be with his own class, *la gente humilde* (the Hispanic working class). He truly loved them. As he used to say, "Without them, I am nothing."

His work and his life remained inseparable. Cantu never wanted to be alone or isolated. To have solitude was to “create an emotional agony.”<sup>5</sup> Cantu used to tell his wife that he wanted to do something special to relieve his people of their helplessness, oppression and loss of self-esteem. As a salesman, he loved to make the public laugh. “It worked for him. By getting into their wounded psyches, he could get into his. Through them, he was reaching out for help.”<sup>6</sup> It was Chucha who encouraged Cantu to use his talent of ingratiating himself to the public by trying for a job in radio. Besides, he could make more money, and family expenses were slowly mounting with the illness of their daughter Minerva.<sup>7</sup>

Hearing about a job opening, Cantu went to a broadcaster, Primitivo Mendez.<sup>8</sup> He worked for KGBS, the Har-Benito Broadcasting station, affiliate of the Columbia Broadcasting System<sup>9</sup> and under his mentor Mendez, Cantu learned about the radio business. The white, one-story station was north of San Benito, out in the fields with its big radio tower in back of the concrete brick building. While working there, Cantu heard stories of how Mexicans had been murdered years ago by the state police force, the Texas Rangers, such as George Henry, Captain R. W. Aldrich and Captain Frank Hamer. As one of Hamer's aids, Bob Snow remarked, “The Rangers got rough with those people, but they had to.”<sup>10</sup> As Miriam Chatelle noted, “Another incident was the time when the bodies of three Mexicans were discovered in the vicinity of where the radio station KGBS now stands, and when, for sanitary purposes, Scott Brown had sent his teams and carts out there with a couple of Negroes, along with instructions to pile up some mesquite wood, place the bodies thereon and set fire to it.”<sup>11</sup> Cantu used to say, “Our past is everywhere ... It is like a ghost that really hovers over the [Lower Rio Grande] Valley, permeating the dust that we breath.”<sup>12</sup>

Cantu did a variety of commercials when he was offered another radio job by his friend, named Saldivar in Brownsville's KBOR. Because of his unquestioned integrity, Saldivar liked Cantu and felt sorry for him. He knew that Cantu was extremely sensitive and saw that he suffered tremendously.<sup>13</sup> However, Cantu gave the commercials a comical, successful twist. People loved them and they wanted to see more of Cantu who seemed to have cast a spell over them with his endless jokes. He became aware of the niche that he was starting to occupy and when his magic charisma worked. For all his tormented insecurities, Cantu meticulously fashioned a symbol of himself as a major force at KBOR.<sup>14</sup>

His boss, Minor Wilson, the manager of KBOR, contended, “He was a natural. He just went on the air and told it how it was.” His most enduring impressions were personal. “There were no nerves, no profanities and no mistakes when he spoke.”<sup>15</sup> Wilson decided to try Cantu on a Sunday afternoon variety show where one could find local talent and also make regional news engaging. The show, known as the “Programa Popular,” and directed to Spanish-speaking Hispanics, started at first at 1:00 p.m. Then the broadcast was moved to 2:30 p.m. for an hour when families were gathered together for entertainment. The presentation was pleasant with some exceptional talent, major local news bulletins and provocative interviews. It lasted from 1946 to 1952.

Cantu's folksy jokes were popular. He made certain that there was something there for everyone. He kept away from conservative, cautious and traditional concepts that other radio stations cherished. Despite what some critics said, the show worked miraculously.<sup>16</sup> Every day Cantu would go to KBOR control room and monitoring room where he met the individual entertainers and speakers for that particular program. The pageant attracted professional singers from Mexico and other Hispanic musicians. One of them was Lydia Mendoza from Houston who sang “Mal Hombre”, [Bad Man],



as one of her biggest hits. Cantu always encouraged her and her relatives to perform on the radio show and with she formed a musical group with her family. As Mendoza noted, "Mother [Leonor] played guitar, I played violin, one of my sisters [Maria] the mandolin, a brother played the triangle, and father [Francisco] played tambourine. So we got up a musical group, and then we dedicated our lives to music on a full-time basis. We got as far as Detroit, Michigan, always with our music."<sup>17</sup>

They played before a huge audience in the radio station. Before the gray streaked haired, trim and relaxed Cantu knew it, the show included dancing as well as music. Then the comedian Tin-Tan appeared. Other stars appeared in the radio show such as Delia Gutierrez Piñeda, Eugenio Gutierrez and the young Ruben Vela.<sup>18</sup> The windows at Cantu's studio were wide open during the summer afternoons and the music blasted down the streets.

Cantu began to stand as a symbol of reliability to *la gente humilde*.<sup>19</sup> His success was such that he could get local talent from this segment of society and he gave all kinds of Hispanics opportunity. Traditional and conservative Texas stations had a reserved attitude towards Cantu's show that bordered on disapproval. To them, Cantu's music was from the wrong side of the tracks. A majority of radio stations resented this minority music since it was "never an important slice of the market". To these Texas stations, Hispanics did not have much money. As David Halberstam wrote, "Recorded music, in fact, until the fifties bore the label of class. People from the upper middle class and upper class had the money for phonographs on which they listened to classical and pop, the crooners and the big bands ... Technology was democratizing the business of music-phonographs and records alike were becoming much cheaper. It was only a matter of time before the artists began to cross over to the traditionally racially segregated charts."<sup>20</sup> Cantu maintained a magnificent down-to-earth sense of humor. He remained intensely interested in people, particularly in Tejanos [Texans] who lived a marginal existence. The modern, white walled and round cornered radio studio radiated with his enthusiasm. His interests were boundless.<sup>21</sup>

Known for his theatrical touches, Cantu created indelible portraits of politicians who were the oppressors. As he used to say, "There are still feelings of superiority of one people over another. A class distinction prevails here like exotic India. Still our people have a great tenacity that they will survive. Of course they have fear like any one else. I know. I shared it with them. Like a great people anywhere, they are slow to anger. Their courage and their dignity is beyond question."<sup>22</sup>

In time Cantu had a variety of guest speakers. One of his favorite guests was the charismatic Francisca Reyes Esparza. She was interested in the land-grant question. After studying the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that concluded the Mexican-American War in 1848, she was convinced that most Tejanos lost their land through fraud and questionable real-estate contracts. To question and confront these issues, she formed the *Asociación de Reclamantes* [The Association of Land Grants] on May 1925. What drew Cantu to Francisca was the plight of Hispanic society in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

At first, Cantu avoided major political involvements. But after having Esparza in the program, he decided to invite other local famous Hispanics, such as Esparza's cousin, the civil rights Judge J. [Jose] T. [Tomas] Canales, to give the presentation more variety. The unassuming judge appeared fragile. At first the bespectacled and soft-spoken Canales came across to the audience as a staid, humorless and puritanical man. Trying to make small talk, Cantu knew that Canales had been an advocate of trying to reform the Texas Rangers. He decided to open the interview with his recollections of what he discovered about what the Rangers did in the vicinity of KGBS, north of San

Benito. As Cantu spoke, Canales sat by him completely expressionless, as if his body was frozen. Then slowly Canales revealed the abuses of how the legal system in Texas operated. He went into details of how he felt the Rangers were hired by local community leaders like Harlingen's Lon C. Hill and Raymondville's William Harding to persecute Hispanics. It was difficult to argue with Canales, a lifelong scholar of South Texas history and, hearing about the details, Cantu tried at first to keep the interviews superficial and pleasant. Canales detected it. Then he quickly said, "If you are afraid that you and this station are going to get sued by my statements, please do not worry. I will be glad to present evidence to support my statements and I will bear all court costs."<sup>24</sup> Cantu laughed nervously, not knowing how to respond. But Canales said, "The reason that most of these unpleasant facts are ignored is because Tejano people have been living in fear for so long that it follows them like their shadow."<sup>25</sup>

Starting with Cantu, the audience loved Francisca Esparza's honesty and her earthy common sense. She was a bit reckless with her irreverent, acute, bombastic, iconoclastic personality. She also was hilarious at a time when most individuals on radio appeared phony, impersonal, dull, dissembling and hedging. Since she was always an independent woman, some people felt threatened by her. Esparza remembered that Cantu never talked with his guests about political theories, ideas "or heavy intellectual topics." Instead he dwelt on facts, people, and daily human conflict.<sup>26</sup>

Cantu was at first embarrassed about the speakers' exposés, afraid to receive a barrage of negative publicity. But as he said, "I guess we are recording a human story that needs to be told." Minor Wilson told him, "You'll get used to it."<sup>27</sup> As time passed, Cantu did begin to criticize politicians and unscrupulous businessmen. He became the moral conscience of a region that had little concern for civil rights or was indifferent to corruption. He became the unique voice to express the concerns of his people, who were sometimes victims of an unjust political and economic inheritance. Cantu declared that although those who ruled did so with impunity, they were dignified and careful not to flaunt their wealth.

However, this announcer said, their homes were all stately manors in splendid tree-lined neighborhoods or they had country homes with huge acreage, Then he talked about the malnutrition of the region while these politicians protected their homes behind towering compound walls or were heavily guarded by private and state security. Their drive-ways were packed with the latest sedans or sport cars and their children attended the most costly, prestigious private schools.<sup>28</sup> Then he explained while there were many people impoverished, for decades Mexico and South Texas had remained indifferent to investigations by the political opposition. "There had been no real political opposition. There is only a code of silence surrounding money and power of a selected few."<sup>29</sup>

To the common Mexicans, the newscaster Cantu became a saint. Every week, he graciously presented their point of view to the world. They were appreciative. They embraced him. He seemed to appear from the center of their hearts. In the summer of 1947, Cantu recruited Judge Canales and others to examine consumer's fraud and city hall graft in numerous towns. This aroused some opposition, but with the aid of Esparza, Canales and other members of the *Asociacion*, Cantu became the Hispanic spokesmen of South Texas. He told the public that it was discrimination and lack of economic opportunities that threatened Texas instead of Communism. As Esparza declared, "He acknowledged the raw nerves his speeches touched. He refused to get into name-calling themes. He explained that he was already controversial enough with his negative images of corruption. The last thing he wanted was to be repugnant and malicious."<sup>30</sup> When a McAllen merchant came to discuss

about “hook-nosed” Jews, Esparza was there. Cantu affirmed that such remarks only created more hostility and nothing would be solved with demeaning or hateful remarks. “Justice belongs to all, not to a selected few. The conflict here in Texas is that justice is a commodity for those who are in power, especially for those who have the wealth.”<sup>31</sup> Esparza and Cantu talked on the radio series about how Mexican farm workers, the “Wetbacks” were mistreated. In the late 1940's, over a hundred thousand illegal Mexican workers were still needed in Texas as cheap labor to fulfill the demands of agricultural owners.<sup>32</sup>

Farmers detested the radio pageant and refused to be interviewed on the program. As Bruce Meador wrote about the farmers' mentality: “They feel, rightly or wrongly, that their very existence might depend on their opportunity to pay low wages.” Some farmers declared affirmatively, “I hate like the very devil to see these wetbacks live the life they do, but I've got a family to feed and a debt to pay, etc.”<sup>33</sup> On his radio broadcasts, Cantu challenged the agricultural industry for its stand against labor union rights and the growers resented his “unwarranted criticism”. Pressure was put on Minor Wilson to take responsibility of canceling the broadcast show. It came mostly from men like the prominent New York shipper and distributor F. H. Vahlsing, who, with his strong business influence, seemed determined to intimidate Wilson or blackball his radio station.<sup>34</sup>

Vahlsing informed Wilson that he had a regional headquarters and a packing shed in Weslaco and in Elsa, not far from Brownsville which had “the capacity for packing a car of vegetables every 12 minutes”, that he had established his business since 1928 in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and “now owns and operates thousands of acres of rich Valley land and has staggering payrolls for his vegetables and fruit packing plants during the season.”<sup>35</sup> “Each succeeding year,” he told everyone, “he increased his investments in the Rio Grande Valley and there can be no greater proof of the future of the industry in this section than Vahlsing's constant progress.”<sup>36</sup> Vahlsing informed Wilson and others that “the radical mouth” Cantu had nothing to offer to the Valley. As he said, “He is defending Mexicans that could be easily replaced and that are not worth a damn.”<sup>37</sup>

Cantu in his radio broadcast told the public to see the regional public relations commerce year book, 1944, and other issues. “His advertisements show Mexicans picking his vegetables on their knees. Let us hear from Vahlsing how much he pays them, what working requirements he provides for them and how much profit he makes from his business operations. Here is a classic example of abusive labor conditions.”<sup>38</sup> Feeling the edge of Vahlsing's tongue and anger, a nervous Wilson went to Cantu to have him cool it. An argument erupted. Cantu shouted that if he remained silent “it would encourage further labor abuses and more of an environment of decadence and escapism on behalf of the growers, the citrus associations, canneries and packing companies. Somehow the realities of the law escaped them.” As Cantu said, “It was the most serious differences ever really between us.”<sup>39</sup>

Cantu also criticized other radio stations “for dissipating their forceful vehicle of communication on trivia and ignoring the interests of the public. Radio can help us become knowledgeable. Now there is another strange box with different wires and lights called television that people can see images in it. Picture what it can do to increase news, culture and musical programs.”<sup>40</sup> Also Cantu criticized other broadcasters for lacking objectivity, seriousness, follow-through and perspective in serious reporting.

Cantu talked about how “The bulk of the Valley's \$135,000,000 agricultural income is derived from 11,000,000 citrus trees now in bearing.”<sup>41</sup> He explained that the citrus industry, such as

Edinburg's Texas Citrus and Tomatoes Company rested on the Mexican's difficult working conditions. Then he described how Weslaco, "Capital City of Citrus," consisted mostly of poverty-stricken Mexicans working for the growers.

Cantu also did an expose on the Lower Rio Grande Valley canneries, revealing how hundreds of canneries and packing companies hired men and women, mostly Mexicans, who had few benefits. They labored long tedious hours canning and packing citrus fruits, tomatoes, cut green beans, blackeye peas and other vegetables for low pay in a dangerous and unsanitary working environment. Protective legislation was ignored. Cited by Cantu were Elsa Canning Co., Edinburg's Reagan's Fruit and Canning Co., Donna's Knapp-Sherrill Co., Raymondville's Delta Canning Co., among others.

Then Cantu pointed out the issue of insecticides and how undocumented workers were exposed to them. Commenting that the Lower Rio Grande Valley was known as the "Land of Promise" or the "Magic Valley with its golden fruit, flowers and sunshine," he asked, "to whom?"<sup>42</sup>

By the spring of 1948, the Sunday afternoon presentation was extended from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m. It became a major performance. "Jose Cantu had a real instinct as a radio star," said Wilson. "The staff was inspired and encouraged by him. He was excited about the show. It was very important to him."<sup>43</sup> Francisca Esparza remained popular on Cantu's radio pageant with her discussions and speeches. She loved to participate in these productions and teased Cantu. He had a sharp smile with face wrinkles which made him seem venerable.

During these radio shows, she imparted about how the virgin mother of Christ reflected a history of changing stereotypes of the Western woman. She explained how the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe reflected Mexican attitudes toward the female sex. "Just as Mary retains the shadow of guilt projected by Eve, so will the ancient Aztec Tonantzin remain affiliated with Guadalupe. Somehow Guadalupe is associated as the ancient mother of gods and men. She inherited the Christian concept of sin and guilt, haunting the women of Mexico and finally the Virgin of Guadalupe herself."<sup>44</sup> Esparza also spoke about how the Pre-Columbian Doña Marina or Malinche, a defilement of her indigenous name, is associated as the whore of paganism and the mistress of Herman Cortes, making her the symbol of female treachery. She pointed out that no one has given her credit as an extraordinary woman who shaped the conquest of Mexico and led to the rapid fall of Tenochtitlan. Instead she is accused of betraying Mexico. Esparza said that the formulation of the black legend of Malinche was formed in the 19th Century during Mexico's nationalism when she became the embodiment of infidelity and disloyalty.

Although Jose Cantu blocked out what he refused to discuss in the show, he knew when to face reality. Every potential topic came to one essential issue: Is this practical and will something good come out of it? Cantu kept his mind blissfully uncluttered and made decisions quickly.<sup>45</sup> He realized that Esparza touched a raw nerve and encouraged Esparza to participate in the programs because she boosted Hispanic identity which, as he had commented, was undermined by the negative messages by cinema and broadcasters. He wanted to see a multicultural tapestry in America.<sup>46</sup>

Again Esparza in one of these radio shows defined how the legend of the *Llorona* (the Weeper) is associated with the "curse of the Malinche." She too is represented as irresponsible and evil woman who failed to take care of her four children and they accidentally drowned in a river. Now eternally her soul was doomed to wander wailing and howling in agony during the lonely hours of the night seeking for her lost children.<sup>47</sup> The *Llorona*, Esparza related, was the Aztec Cihuacoatl, the serpent

goddess of the sanctuary of Tepeyac who in the words of Fray Bernardino de Sahagun “cries and howls every night into the wind.” Later she became a symbol of disgraceful women who neglected their families. Also she expressed how Malinche and the Llorona became sexist symbols, used to persuade women to stay well within their sex role. To her these accounts embodied the oppressive leverage of the church and its negative doctrines toward women.

Then Cantu spoke about how some men, in the name of *machismo*, sacrificed their families to their work, embracing long hours to get ahead in their chosen jobs. To him men needed to share more in child-rearing and enjoy some of the development years of their children's lives. He believed that men and women needed to adjust their lives to facilitate raising children, noting that employer expectations and job conditions make it nearly impossible for working parents that need to work long hours due to economic necessity. Jobs needed to create an opportunity for a more family stability and parents needed to fight the labor system, instead of each other.<sup>48</sup>

Esparza admired how Cantu tried to be optimistic and cheerful. “You could talk to him and know a lot of his thoughts and impressions. But he rarely talked about himself. His mind ran hard, propelled by determination.” Always trying to tone down the negative side of life, his renowned musical show went on for another hour or two, particularly with one of his favorite comedians.<sup>49</sup> As a jest Cantu exclaimed on the radio to Chucha. “Jesuita, keep the pots warm! I will be there soon for supper.” The radio crew took this as a hint to conclude the show and close the studio for the night. When Cantu needed a coffee break, he called his assistant Ramon Flores. “Ramoncito, mestáa oyendo? Trame café y gotas para los ojos.” [Little Ramon, are you hearing me? Bring me some coffee and eye drops.] A hint to remove a singer or a guest speaker from the stage was “Ramoncito, tu te encargas del programa del Carnation.” [Little Ramon, you take care of this sponsored Carnation Dairy Products program].<sup>50</sup> Cantu's famous radio trademark was “Me estás oyendo, Chucha?” [Are you hearing me, Chucha?].<sup>51</sup>

During this era, in one of his broadcasts, Cantu encouraged the public to fear the polio virus and quickly to get immune shots from those who knew medicine. “It is an old disease that has hunted mankind through the centuries. Yes it can spread to our children if we ignore it. No, it does not spread through the sewers. With sound reason we can conquer it.”<sup>52</sup>

Again and again during the 1950's, Cantu said that the Mexican peso and the dollar were united like a marriage. He declared that “we have to get away from old ways of thinking about foreign policy. It is no longer possible to distinguish what is domestic from what is integrated into a one world economic system. In time, national and international governments will be one.”<sup>53</sup>

As before, Cantu expounded that “We have to drop the Cold War mentality and meet its challenges and stop turning inward. The Cold War is nothing but a product of fear that is demolishing our personal security and moral peace of mind. Instead of pouring all that money into the military, we could pour it into our health and educational system.”<sup>54</sup>

The Korean War also was a source of contention for Cantu. Following the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June, 1950, Cantu declared that American minorities ended up in the battle front and were the first to be denied civil rights for their country that they were fighting for.

Also there was the Mexican migration problem. World War II welcomed Mexican aliens to relieve the shortage of manpower in this country. Then in 1949 an economic recession created resentment against these migrant workers while the Mexican government ignored them. Now the Korean War created an availability of jobs and renewed the flow of undocumented Mexicans into Texas. As Cantu

said, "When nobody needs them they are considered hazardous, malicious and treacherous. Now they are in demand by the farmers ... To please them [the farmers], the border patrol looked the other way."<sup>55</sup>

Between the musical talent and speakers who revealed exposes, Cantu's show became a major success throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Suddenly these kind of interviews were in demand. Listeners could not get enough of it. Another service that Cantu had on his radio program was a customer satisfaction segment having to do with local merchants and products. If someone had paid too much for a product or the products did not do what it was supposed to do, Cantu would fight for the customer over the air. This portion of the program was known as the "Cantu Can Do" series.<sup>56</sup>

At first, sponsors like Carnation Dairy Products, Royal Crown hair products and the elegant businesswoman, Esther Ruenes of the movie-theater enterprises were nervous about the controversial interviews and some of the "Cantu Can Do" episodes.<sup>57</sup> But the publicity for their business was outstanding and now these advertisers wanted to be identified with "Cantu's crusades for justice." In time Cantu's name or image on a product was a guarantee of excellence.<sup>58</sup>

The cautious Wilson was steeped in the values of business and he saw in Cantu a good business investment. Whether Cantu envisioned the performance with a series of talent shows and different speakers or other ideas, Wilson seized on the concepts. Although newspaper critics ignored the show, unwilling to give adequate credit to Cantu for fear of political reprisals and finally giving some lukewarm praise, nothing shocked the undemonstrative Wilson, who could see the financial viewpoint.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of objections to the presentations of political problems and social conflicts on KBOR airways, Wilson needed Cantu and it furthered their friendship. As for Cantu, whose family had struggled as laborers, he was squarely on the side of his people who sometimes felt condemned in Texas by a White Anglo, Protestant society because of their skin, religion and culture.<sup>60</sup>

Then the gracious Esther Ruenes decided to appear on Cantu's radio production. She was a sharp, confident woman who usually changed attire three to four times a day in order to appear fresh.

As always, she appeared with her frosty amiable personality that compelled men to straighten their ties instinctively. This time she came to complain about some Hispanic radicals who were speakers on his show and to promote a new facial cream product.<sup>61</sup> Cantu thought that once she started criticizing his show it was going to be one of the most humiliating moments of his life. Before she opened her mouth, the Mexican actor Pedro Infante appeared on the stage and sang to the audience. The Mexican movie studios had persuaded the annoyed actor and singer to appear in the Lower Rio Grande region to promote himself and the Mexican cinema. When he saw the stylish Ruenes next to Cantu, the dynamic Infante was impressed with her beauty and seemed to idolize her. After singing he sat next to her. Then when Jose Cantu interviewed her, Esther Ruenes was so overwhelmed that she forgot what she was there for. Cantu reminded her that she had said something before about radical Hispanics. Never flirtatious, Ruenes remained speechless for a while. Finally, to retain her dignity, she managed to talk about Infante's movies. Cantu then interviewed Infante, and several musicians played later. After the show Ruenes and Infante went out to dinner, and she remained a steady sponsor of Cantu's radio program.<sup>62</sup>

Minor Wilson was pleased. KBOR was now as lucrative as it was prestigious. Camel Cigarettes and the Pearl Beer company bought several minutes of announcements. They wanted the privilege

of being the first advertised. Wilson was delighted that Cantu was paying for himself with sponsored interview broadcasts. He hired extra talent scouts and other staff to make certain that Cantu's show did not suffer poor time periods and erratic scheduling,<sup>63</sup> but Cantu himself had a sixth sense about keeping his show a success. In news and entertainment, he cared about excellence and about his image. He had the patience for slow, hard, serious work in gathering facts and getting talented people to come again and again to his program.

All this absorbed time and energy. At the peak of his fame, Cantu still suffered from insomnia. He always drank coffee from morning until night. "A lot of anger was writhing him that he could not reveal." For one reason or another, he was never close to individuals. It embarrassed him to show distress or express gloom. He was concerned never to appear awkward. His descriptive powers and his flair radiated hope and confidence.<sup>64</sup>

Only Chucha understood him. When Cantu came from work after a long day into their simple, light green frame house with white trimming and its attractive porch, she noticed a Cantu that no one ever saw. She regularly listened to his gripes, weathered his sullen and sulky private moods. She made certain that his shirts were well ironed, his suits well pressed. Chucha knew that her husband mirrored the changes and feelings of their people, some of the whom looked at Cantu and saw a saintly image.<sup>65</sup> To them, he reflected their bitter experiences and gave them joy and hope. They molded him in their image to fill a necessity for an outstanding, mature leader to speak for them. Jose Cantu became a product of his era. He had no control of this myth and he quickly became trapped by it. Chucha told her husband to perpetuate his mystical role as a saint. To shatter that image was to disappoint and lose the trust of the Hispanic community.<sup>66</sup>

Babies were named after him. Politicians would never directly confront him. When they needed votes, Cantu's name was an asset. Pearl Beer and his major sponsor Carnation Dairy Products used his image to promote business. They also used his witty sayings in their Spanish language advertisements.<sup>67</sup> When Cantu spoke for charities and civic organizations, he had the right touch. He could be dramatic without being phony or exaggerating.

Cantu with his trimmed mustach realized that his glamorous job was in fact a task of long hours that could easily bring ulcers and heart attacks. This alluring position had great rewards and ugly pitfalls. His radio production remained so popular that it devoured his privacy. He became a living idol with a variety of talented cowboy singers. They reflected new meanings of *machismo* [masculinity], adulthood, vigor and potency. Most women liked the lady singers, who appeared like shining, independent, self-fulfilling ladies. They seemed and made them feel free of male domination.<sup>68</sup>

Chucha remembered those days well. "The never-ending-stress of the show was eating him up. It complicated our lives as a couple, creating a few domestic battles that ended up with smashed furniture and broken dishes."<sup>69</sup>

In one of his last broadcasts, Jose Cantu said Mexico and Texas had forgotten what democracy meant. "No individual or group has a monopoly on truth, honesty and rationality. Only God has that privilege. The rest of us are trying to follow His teachings. It requires wisdom and discipline to do that. In the world of business and politics, you need all the wisdom and discipline you can get."<sup>70</sup>

Judge Canales and others warned him that his enemies were urging M. Wilson, now senior manager of KBOR, to ban him from radio work. Cantu persisted in denouncing those "who exploit the community." During this period senator Joseph McCarthy created hysteria about a widespread

Communist menace throughout the country. Political pressure took an uglier turn. Cantu now was accused of Communist leaning by conservative groups in Texas. "Cantu appeared as a dangerous radical who had secret connections with Moscow. There were vicious rumors that he communicated with Moscow in a secret room in his studio that had all kinds of fancy electronic equipment."<sup>71</sup>

Cantu's critics prompted numerous letters of complaints to Cantu's sponsors. Carnation Dairy Products told Cantu to keep his show only as a musical program. Minor Wilson refused to shut down Cantu's show and held his ground. Meanwhile Cantu managed to gather new sponsors. The reality that Cantu's program retained high ratings helped his crusade tremendously. The truth that the star of the show was Cantu helped as well.

For all his wit, Cantu remained a symbol of radicalism and many Texans could not tolerate it. As T.R. Fehrenbach explained, "Education and enterprise were still suffused with the old Protestant frontier ethic; society was as realistic, narrow-minded, and as disciplined as a century before."<sup>72</sup> Historian David Montejano pointed out, "McCarthyism, in fact, swept Texas with the fervor of a religious revival."<sup>73</sup>

Then on June 7, 1952, Cantu was coming from a local broadcaster's seminar in Port Isabel to Brownsville. The conference was excited about a new technological breakthrough that could create small transistorized radios for \$25 to \$50. Bulky, expensive home radios or record players were no longer needed. This invention reaffirmed a wider Hispanic audience and Cantu was excited about the future possibilities. He was also on the verge of playing a role with the new instrument, the black-and-white television. In terms of commercial opportunity, radio was nothing compared to it. Cantu had plans to expound on South Texas, political corruption. As Francisca Esparza explained, "Unlike most people, Jose Cantu understood its true power. As a brilliant man, he had a workable moral compass and understood what his people needed. After all, he himself was one of those hardworking salt-of-the-earth kinsmen."<sup>74</sup>

While speeding along on the route toward Brownsville, his brakes failed. Although he tried to avoid a large mesquite tree near a creek, he crashed into it. He was killed instantly. The front of his favorite four-door Plymouth was totally crushed against the tree. The hood of the vehicle snapped and bent against the tree trunk. A farmer near by who heard the crash dashed to the scene and recognized the body. Later an ambulance came and several newspaper reporters rushed to the place. A report was issued that his car's brakes were tampered with.<sup>75</sup> Many believed this to be a fact.<sup>76</sup>

On June 11, Brownsville was overwhelmed by Cantu's funeral. People came from all over Mexico and Texas. In the dusty, breathless heat, thousands of mourners converged in downtown Brownsville to attend the funeral in the magnificent, gothic Immaculate Conception Church. Crowds were standing outside the front of the church, blocking the streets.<sup>77</sup> Labor Unions stood with their banners of Benito Juarez and patriotic slogans. The "Legion Mexicana" furnished hundreds of baskets and wreaths of flowers. From the hand-carved, ebony wood pulpit, a priest eulogistically spoke about Cantu's dedication to the community. Later a procession of silent mourners went to the cemetery. The swollen-faced Chucha was touched by the size of the crowd. Her head was covered with a dark, laced veil and garbed in black, she walked behind the pallbearers, who were periodically stretching their sore fingers. They set the heavy metal casket slowly down in the grave. The shovels of earth were thrown above the coffin. Honors were bestowed on "a friend of those in poverty" as Esparza delivered an elaborate eulogy.<sup>78</sup>

After the funeral, local J.C. Penny stores issued dresses, ladies' sweaters and men's shirts with Jose



Cantu's picture and his name. Even Carnation Dairy Products promoted a colorful label of their new chocolate milk on their cans with a saintly, smiling Cantu drinking it. On the back side of the can were Cantu's blessings.<sup>79</sup> Minor Wilson decided to sell numerous post cards, booklets and other souvenirs and Brownsville's Springman King Printing Co. published them. One of the most popular post cards showed Cantu dressed as a dashing Mexican Charro with a lavish hat. Wilson told of Minerva, who still suffered from cancer. ( She later died at the age of thirty four).

An angry Chucha realized that business firms like Wilson's radio station and Springman King Printing Co, had no intention of paying her and sued them. Although she never received a cent, she managed to stop the sale of the souvenirs and other merchandise. Then a corrido [epic song] was composed about Cantu and records were going to be made from it. Again she never received a cent from it and legal action put an end to it.<sup>80</sup>

Chucha remained cautious since she had been a victim of several business con schemes to promote her husband's memory. She managed to reconstruct her life in Brownsville amid cherished reminders of her husband. Even after his death, she dearly loved him. She refused to marry again. Even years later, every month she brought fresh flowers to his grave.

The memory of Jose Cantu lived on. The spot he crashed against, the mesquite tree, became a spontaneous shrine. Candles and letters marked the spot. Mourners came to pray and fast by a huge spray of flowers. Candles burned to their stubs and an admirer nailed a small white cross to the tree. One sign was posted in Spanish, "May Justice Be Done." Another sign stated, "We love you."<sup>81</sup> Throughout the years, wreaths and crude white crosses remained at the site. Photos of Jose Cantu were posted on the tree with a simple flower garden bordered with stones. People felt a need to go there. They said that the site had an enduring quality. It became a very powerful place.

"It was very emotional for me. I got angry again. It was almost like going through all the grieving again for this wonderful man. Then by the time I left, I felt very peaceful," declared Felicitas Rodriguez.<sup>82</sup> Ermilo Montemayor, who remained a friend of Cantu to the end, remarked "When I first came to the mesquite tree, I stood by it. After a long hour of meditation. I've had a change of heart about many things in life."<sup>83</sup> Herminia Mendez also said, "If you kneel or stand by the mesquite tree long enough, you can feel Jose Cantu's presence. The tree glows with love and peace."<sup>84</sup>

People came to leave personal momentos like a rosary, a child's shoe, a sweater, car keys, a high school diploma and a marriage certificate. There was talk about building a chapel by the tree. At one time Cameron County officials contemplated chopping the tree down with the intention of healing wounds left by bitter racial politics.

Clara Zepeda said, "The shrines persisted. When the people held on to the shrine it became an indication of unresolved grief. It was an important sign that something was wrong. Eventually it slowly fell into disrepair."<sup>85</sup>

Throughout the 20th Century, Jose Cantu became the patron saint of civil rights along the Lower Rio Grande. As Americo Paredes noted, "Jose Cantu was an early activist; of that there can be no doubt. He used his radio programs to attack political corruption and to aid the needy until death silenced him."<sup>86</sup>

Others tried to copy Jose Cantu's style before a wide audience. No one could capture that magic. People wrote to the radio studios to find another talent like Cantu. Many radio stars came and went. But no one could hold the interest of an audience like Cantu. In time, Jose Rangel Cantu became a cherished legend along the Lower Rio Grande. As Paredes said, "Cantu was one of those rare

legendary figures who was as good as his myth.”<sup>87</sup>

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### Notes

In the process of getting biographical data, organizing and writing about Jose Rangel Cantu, it has taken me years of gathering bits of information on him. For a long time, it was just a curiosity to file away details and anecdotes in my folder on Cantu. One of the most useful items is Album en Memoria de Jose Cantu (Brownsville, Texas: Springman King Co., 1952) [One has to improvise the page numbers] As it said on page 2, "Jose Cantu, a traves de la KBOR llevaba la felicidad y la esperanza a millares, de radio escuchas." It is an illustrated history of his career, the auto accident and his funeral.

There were individuals who helped me on this project. They made it possible to get behind the myth that surrounded Cantu. I conducted numerous interviews. A few of them requested anonymity. All of these individuals insights and memories were valuable.

I would like to thank one individual in particular, Cantu's wife, Maria de Jesus Solís Cantu, known as Jesusita or Chucha. I managed to tape some of the interview. She endured endless questions that opened up painful memories. Her recollections gave me valuable insights into Cantu. Also I owe a special thanks to Herman and Ermilo Montemayor, who are brothers from San Benito.

### Endnotes

1. The Programa Popular was known for its "Chismes, Comentarios y Chistes. A ... Y Musica" This is the slogan that appeared on Jose Cantu's business card.
2. Interview with Marie de Jesus Solis Cantu, April 20, 1978.
3. Interview with Minor Wilson, summer, 1961.
4. Interview with Felicitas Rodriguez, summer 1962.
5. Interview with Ermilo Montemayor, April 16, 1978.
6. Interview with Maria de Jesus Solis Cantu, April 20, 1978.
7. Interview with Maria de Jesus Solis Cantu, April 11, 1978.
8. Born on November 27, 1900, Primitivo Mendez died on March 12, 1947. Regardless of what his death certificate says, some people suspected that he was murdered for exposing some corrupt law enforcement practices in the San Benito Police Department. Interview with his wife, Herminia Mendez, June 18, 1976.
9. Interview with Herminia Mendez, June 18, 1976. For interest, see the advertisement in The Year Book of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Northern Mexico, 1948 Yearbook, p. 73.

10. Quoted with H. Gorden and John H. Jenkins, Frank Hammer. The Life of a Texas Police Officer. ( Austin, Texas: The Pemberton Press, 1968), p. 59.
11. Miriam Chatelle, For We Love Our Valley Home. (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1948), pp.30-31. She was a witness to the deeds of Henry, Mace and Hamer. She shared her reflections with Jose Canales. They used to see each other in the 1950's when she spoke to local historical organizations. She was also active in the San Benito Public Library.
12. Interview with Jose Canales, May 24, 1962.
13. Interview with Ermilo Montemayor, April 16, 1978.
14. Interview with Maria de Jesus Solis Cantu, April 11, 1978. To the end of her life she lived in Brownsville. Interview with Felicitas Rodriguez, summer, 1962. When she heard that Cantu was killed, she gathered a collection in San Benito for funeral expenses. Her name appeared in the contributors' list of Album en Memoria de Jose Cantu.
15. Interview with Minor Wilson, summer 1961.
16. Interview with Herman Montemayor, April 14, 1978. He attended many of Cantu's shows.
17. Lydia Mendoza, "The Lark of the Border," in the U.S. Government Document, Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage (Washington D.C. , U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), pp. 119-120. See also p. 107. For more on Mendoza see also in this citation, James S. Griffith, "Lydia Mendoza: An Enduring Mexican-American Singer," pp. 103-104.
18. For more on these individuals, see Manuel H. Peña, The Texas-Mexican Conunto: History of a Working-Class Music (Austin: University of Texas, 1985), pp.142-143.
19. Most Hispanic working people were cannery workers and field workers, mainly cotton pickers. Also numerous Anglos supported themselves in the same way. One of them was Luther Evans, who became a prominent scholar and the 10th U.S. Librarian of Congress, 1945-1953. See William J. Sittig, "Luther Evans: Man for a New Age", in U.S. Government Document, Library of Congress, Librarians of Congress: 1802-1974 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977), p. 233.
20. David Halberstam, The Fifties. (New York: Villard Books, 1993), pp. 471-472.
21. Interview with Herman Montemayor, April 14, 1978.
22. Interview with Maria de Jesus Solis Cantu, April 11, 1978.
23. For a sample of the activities of the Asociacion, see the Corpus Christi Times. (Corpus Christi, Texas), April 6, 1945; June 7, 1946; South Texas Citizen (Lardeo, Texas), April 6, 1945 and El Norte (Monterrey, Nuevo Leon), May 10, 1954.
24. Interview with Jose Canales, May 12, 1962.
25. Ibid.
26. Interview with Francisca Reyes Esparza, August 24, 1972.
27. Interview with Minor Wilson, Summer, 1961.

28. Cantu seems to have prophesied about Mexico throughout the 20th century. His criticism is still valid. See Mark Fineman, "Zedillo Breaks Down Mexico's Code of Silence," Los Angeles Times, March 8, 1995, p. A 9.

29. Interview with Americo Paredes, April 12, 1977.

30. Interview with Francisca Reyes Esperza, August 23, 1972.

31. Interview with Francisca Reyes Esparza, August 23, 1974.

32. The National Farm Labor Union of the American Federation of Labor, during a conference in Laredo in 1948 that Francisca Reyes Esparza attended, discussed the problems of at least 200,000 people who they believed to be illegally in Texas. See Bruce S. Meador, "Wetback Labor in the Lower Rio Grande Valley," M. A. thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 1951. p. 5.

33. Meador, p.15.

34. Interview with Jose Canales, May 12, 1962.

35. Edited by Mabel Collier Epright and Gladys Collier Hooper, The Year Book of the Lower Valley of Texas and Northern Mexico: 1944 Year Book (Mission, Texas: The Mission Times), pp.24-25. These issues were published yearly from about 1937 to about 1955 as a public relations business promotion on the Lower Rio Grande area. They were sponsored by "advertisers, chamber of commerce, service clubs and the many individuals who have contributed so generously to its success." Unfortunately not many survived and few libraries bothered to keep them.

36. Ibid.

37. Interview with Joe Oliveira, May 12, 1962.

38. Interview with Joe Oliveira, May 12, 1962.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Cantu's figures came from The Year Book of the Lower Rio Valley and Northern Mexico: 1948 Yearbook, p. 21.

42. Interview with Joe Canales, May 12, 1962.

43. Interview with Minor Wilson, summer, 1961.

44. Interview with Francisca Reyes Esparza, August 12, 1972.

45. Interview with Montemayor, April 18, 1978.

46. Ibid.

47. Interview with Francisca Reyes Esperza, August 12, 1972.

48. Interview with Americo Paredes, April 12, 1977. As for keeping Hispanic values, it appears that the Mexican family is in trouble. As Richaard Rodriguez wrote, "Mexico is losing control of her children. The average age of the nation descends into adolescence. Postwar Mexico has left the village with its traditional faith in structures to end up in the anonymous, cold, liberating city - Los Angeles or Mexico City." See Rodriguez, "Disintegrating Family Values,"

Los Angeles Times, March 5, 1995.

49. Interview with Americo Paredes, April 12, 1977.

50. Interview with Maria De Jesus Solis Cantu, April 11, 1978.

51. Letter of Americo Paredes to the author, May 18, 1978.

52. Interview with Jose Oliveira, May 12, 1962. For several years, he was a journalist for the Brownsville Herald. He wrote numerous articles. His favorite articles were on historical topics, such as "General Juan Cortina Continues to Baffle Historians: Was He Bandit or Patriot?" Brownsville Herald, December 31, 1950.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Interview with Herman Montemayor, April 16, 1978.

57. Esther R. Ruenes (June 1, 1893-September 25, 1976) had a talent to make money. She lived in San Benito and there opened her first movie theater. The successful Ruenes eventually expanded to other parts of the Lower Rio Grande Valley with her movie business.

58. I have a Royal Crown Hair Dressing postcard advertisement with Cantu's photo that was given away as a souvenir. It has a greeting from Cantu, "Con todo aprecio, Jose Cantu" or "Con todo cariño, Jose Cantu."

Also on this advertisement it stated, "Con este retrato se paran los pelos depunta, pero con la brilliantia (de Royal Crown) se le bajan y solo cuesta 10 y 25@. Su Amigo, Gracias, Jose Cantu."

59. Interview with Jose Canales, May 12, 1962.

60. Interview with Esther Ruenes, August 14, 1970.

61. Interview with Herman Montemayor, April 16, 1978.

62. Interview with Esther Ruenes, August 14, 1970.

63. Interview with Herman Montemayor, April 16, 1978.

64. Interview with Ermilo Montemayor, April 16, 1978. He used to know Cantu well.

65. Interview with Maria de Jesus Solis Cantu, April 11, 1978.

66. Interview with Herminia R. Mendez (September 2, 1913-December 18, 1992) June 18, 1976. Her husband was the famous radio announcer, Primitivo Mendez. After her husband died on March 12, 1947, she became a close friend of Chucha and Jose Cantu.

67. Some of Cantu's sayings would start with "Fijate ... que suave!" and "Tú que tiene las orejas por los lados ..."

68. Interview with Americo Paredes, April 12, 1977. See also his chapter "The United States, Mexico and *Machismo*". in the book by Americo Paredes, edited and with an introduction by Richard Bauman, Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 215-234.

69. Interview with Maria de Jesus Solis Cantu, August 20, 1972.
70. Interview with Jose Cantu and Francisca Reyes Esparza, May 24, 1962.
71. Interview with Herman Montemayor, April 16, 1978.
72. T. R. Fehrenbach, Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 673.
73. David Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986 (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 275.
74. Interview with Francisca Reyes Esparza, August 23, 1972.
75. The same coincidence happened sometime before the famous assassination of Mexican presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio. It was the notable political death of one of the opposing National Action Party, "who died in a mysterious automobile accident during the 1988 presidential contest. The investigation into the accident quickly unraveled, and nothing came of it. In part, this is because commissions appointed to investigate assassinations or electoral fraud have been selected by the PRI-dominated government," wrote Jorge C. Aguiniga, "Are *Los Dinosaurios* (the dinosaurs) the Driving Force Behind the Assassination of Colosio?" Los Angeles Times, May 29, 1994, p. M2.
76. Interview with Herman Montemayor, April 16, 1978; interview with Jose Canales, May 11, 1952.
77. Brownsville Herald, June 11, 1952.
78. Interview with Jose Canales, May 12, 1962.
79. The product had a free backpack offer. The durable and water resistant red or blue plastic backpack had a picture of Cantu. It included padded, adjustable straps and a zippered top closure.
80. Interview with Maria de Jesus Solis Cantu, April 11, 1978.
81. Interview with Clara Zepeda, February 15, 1995.
82. Interview with Felicitas Rodriguez, summer, 1962.
83. Interview with Ermilo Montemayor, April 16, 1978.
84. Interview with Herminia Mendez, June 18, 1976.
85. Interview with Clara Zepeda, February 15, 1995. "We went to see where Cantu crashed against the mesquite tree. It is still standing by the road."
86. Letter of Americo Paredes to the author, May 18, 1978. He wrote, "I counted Jose Cantu among my friends. The last time I saw him was in 1948 when I was briefly in Brownsville on leave from an editorial job I held in Tokyo, Japan at that time."
87. Interview with Americo Paredes, April 12, 1977.

H.E. 'Gene' McNair

by

Nat Flores

The McNair name is one which is common to Brownsville history. It is a hallmark of the heritage of community involvement through civic, political and business channels in Brownsville, Texas. Harry Eugene 'Gene' McNair's story is one of success through sheer perseverance and a belief that involvement can make a difference. He is known for his business ventures, political service and community devotion that has aided Brownsville in maintaining a key role in the Rio Grande Valley.

Born in Augusta, Georgia to Florin and Vivian Schweers, 'Gene', as he is commonly known, saw his parents' marriage end in divorce at the age of 10. Left with only Gene, Vivian Shweers began a new life again. She married a neighborhood friend whom she had known for years--Malcolm P. McNair in 1935. Malcolm moved his new family to Brownsville to join his brother in the clothing industry. Malcolm's brother had begun McNair Clothing Company, a manufacturer of work clothes and jeans, in 1921 on Fronton Road. Little was the 10-year-old McNair aware that the move would set a stage for a future in business and politics. Much less was he aware of the economical and historical impact he would make in the little town of Brownsville, which would be felt for years to come.<sup>1</sup>

Gene McNair graduated with 120 other classmates from Brownsville High School. That year he entered college at Texas Agriculture and Mechanical University (Texas A & M) with a goal to obtain his Bachelor's of Business Administration degree (B.B.A.). Unfortunately, his endeavor was temporarily delayed as he entered the armed forces to serve his country and the cause of freedom during World War II. McNair served for three and a half years as an Air Force bombardier for B-24 airplanes in the Pacific front. Upon returning, McNair continued his education which culminated when he graduated from Texas Agriculture and Industrial (Texas A & I) with a B.B.A.. That year he became general manager of McNair Clothing Company. It was a career from which he never swerved, but worked with great joy and commitment. Two years later he married Sherry Grider and thus commenced their years of holy matrimony, which entailed the raising of eight children.

The political career of McNair began in the 1950's as he became a member of the Board of City Development, a civic organization geared to enticing new industries to the area. In 1959, McNair took a closer step in involvement by entering the City Commission race with five other men under the auspices of the Better Brownsville Party (BBP). The BBP was a group of citizens that had never served political office, but, nevertheless, was aware of the unique needs and assets that Brownsville possessed. Their leader, Dr. J.C. George, ran for mayor as Tony Gonzalez, Albert A. Besteiro, Fred F. Pilgrim and McNair ran for the Commission. Their efforts were fruitful as each party member won his seat. The "greatest achievement" of this party was the organization of the Public Utilities Board (PUB) for the purpose of solving the "mishandling of funds" of the past. It had a "terrific impact . . . as a stable, electrical service" to compete with Central Power & Light (CP&L), an electrical company in south Texas. PUB brought "big assets moneywise and industry[wisely]", to aid the financial bond woes of Brownsville. In retrospect, it can be concluded that this board was one of

McNair's most outstanding accomplishments as a commissioner.<sup>2</sup>

In line with the motto of the BBP, Dr. J.C. George served only one term. The empty slot gave way to one of the other BBP members to enter the mayoral race. Upon request McNair accepted the nomination and ran against a retired navy captain, C.C. Stuart, in 1961. McNair's race was a success, as he became the "successor of Dr. J.C. George with a 2 to 1 victory majority."<sup>3</sup> On November 13, 1961 at 10:00 a.m., the 37-year-old McNair was sworn into office by Judge H.A. Garcia.<sup>4</sup> His empty commissioner seat was won by Paul Springman. The McNair administration was passed the baton of the work left behind by the George administration.

One of the first pressing matters faced by McNair was the problem of food for the needy. The item was brought into a special city council meeting by Commissioner Albert A. Besteiro on December 19, 1961.<sup>5</sup> Besteiro argued that Brownsville should take advantage of the federal program to disperse free food commodities. McNair sided with the majority choosing to postpone the vote. He emphasized and called for a thorough study to be headed by Guy Bevil, chairman of the Salvation Army, A.J. Carnesi, Commissioner Paul Springman and D.R. Segal prior to voting on the issue.<sup>6</sup> McNair pressed for 'local involvement' and cited that the "foods obtained from the commodity program would not fulfill the need prevalent in Brownsville . . ."<sup>7</sup> That day the Brownsville Herald editor stated:

Let's take a look at the city's voluntary resources. Let's give them a chance aided by every church, civic club, fraternity, sorority and unjoined individual who feels that charity is a Judeo-Christian responsibility of the individual, not the function of the government."<sup>8</sup>

A resolution was finally reached on January 20, 1962 as the commission approved the "use of city funds to feed hungry people [which had been] provided for in the [city] charter." The Commission also established the "Food Welfare Board" (FWB) to oversee the dispersement of federal surplus food commodities. The \$16,000 investment would provide 2,000 needy residents "flour, beans, peanut butter, corn meal and rolled oats," which would be shipped from a center in Corpus Christi.<sup>9</sup>

McNair reached his distinguished accomplishment when he, with the approval of the Commission, passed Ordinance 578 on March 22, 1962 to allow the construction of a 'motor hotel'.<sup>10</sup> The ordinance provided the city the right to sell the Fort Brown Peninsula, which by the most part was surrounded by Horseshoe Lake, also known as Horseshoe Resaca.<sup>11</sup> Many years earlier the area had been the location of a military cemetery, which had since been moved to Alexandria, Louisiana.<sup>12</sup> The city sold the peninsula for \$64,032.02 to the Palmetto Corporation of Houston, whose president was Bert Wheeler, a successful businessman of the Forth Worth area.<sup>13</sup> Wheeler had obtained a bird's-eye view of the area during a flight encirclement of Brownsville, while preparing to do a refueling landing on the Rio Grande Valley International Airport (RGVIA).<sup>14</sup> McNair joyfully commented that the sale "would be a welcome addition to tax rolls of the city of Brownsville and would prove beneficial to the tourist trade".<sup>15</sup> McNair was undoubtedly correct on his prognostication. The sale became one the foremost executions for the progress of Brownsville. McNair gave two reasons why this was such a pertinent feat: "number one--it was Brownsville's first class motel and number two-- the [area afforded the city with an excellent] tax roll".<sup>16</sup> By May 24, the plans to build a \$73,000 bridge to connect the peninsula to Elizabeth Street had been accepted and noted as 'exceed[ing] city



specifications.<sup>17</sup> The June 7 deadline to commence construction was not only reached, but the Palmetto Corporation declared their plans for the "construction of a \$1,000,000 shopping center on Fort Brown . . . bringing total investment of the . . . project to \$3,000,000."<sup>18</sup> The center was comprised of a drug store, barbershop, beauty shop, foreign automobile sales agency, specialty shops and related enterprises.<sup>19</sup> By the end of the year the area was completed.

PUB rose vividly to the public eye during the McNair's administration. McNair served a *ex-officio* member of PUB, as part of his duties as mayor. On May 10, 1962, PUB presented an increase in the electric rate that was, nevertheless, smaller than other valley city rates. The proposal boasted a forecasted 12% decrease in residential, general and industrial expenditures, and thus enticed new industries into the area by such cost incentives. But this was only one matter concerning the PUB.<sup>20</sup>

The other entailed an attempt to debunk the PUB. Represented by Manuel Díaz de León, the anti-PUB group called for the abolishment of the PUB charter in early August. The petition to have a vote on the board's future required 10% of the local electorate. On August 23, their petition was presented before a city meeting. Though 1,422 signers were submitted ". . . a formal report . . . declared that 449 signatures on the petition [did] not appear on the poll tax list and [were] therefore [disqualified]."<sup>21</sup> McNair's decision to have the petition certified for authenticity had been properly handled by the city attorney and city secretary. Nevertheless, De León, who had signed the petition twice, stated that the "mayor's action was highhanded."<sup>22</sup> On August 30 the petition was officially denied.<sup>23</sup>

Two plans to revitalize Brownsville were not as successful for the McNair administration. Though they were splendidly laid out, the measures faced major obstacles. One of them was the "master plan designed to blaze the trail for the next 25 years of Brownsville's growth and development."<sup>24</sup> The ". . . report on.[the] \$50,000 'Master Plan' indicated it.[was] replete with errors and misinformation."<sup>25</sup> The major flaws delayed the plans beyond the McNair administration. The other plan was the improvement of the local airport. The plans called for a 50/50 joint venture with the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) to remove "an obstructing hangar and install . . . more taxiway lighting." Though the FAA "turned down the city's application" twice, the electorate approved a \$246,000 airport bond--only half of what was actually needed.<sup>26</sup>

On November 1963, McNair, in line with his BBP motto, stepped down from office. Tony Gonzalez, a BBP member, took the mayor's oath of office to continue the BBP era. Though McNair retreated from his role as leader of the Brownsville government, he still remains part of today's history. In 1963, after leaving office he became a member of the Chamber of Commerce for a few years. As time progressed McNair lessened his political involvement, focusing instead on his business, historical ventures, church and his family. McNair focused his abilities on his business once again. He switched from the clothing industry and entered the warehousing industry in 1972. He also increased his involvement in his local parish, first at Sacred Heart Catholic Church and then at St. Mary's Catholic Church by becoming president of the Men's Club. He served on advisory boards at St. Joseph Academy and Villa Maria School. In 1984, McNair became chairman of the Historic Brownsville Museum Association (HBMA).<sup>27</sup>

The 69-year-old McNair looks back to his community service as an investment in the future of Brownsville growth. Far from being a pedant, McNair is, nevertheless, is not shy to speak about his achievements as being vital at the time to meet the needs and assets of Brownsville. McNair laid a foundation of progress, a foundation upon which other mayors have worked.

## Endnotes

1. "Interview with H. E. 'Gene' McNair". 9 June 1993.
2. Ibid.
3. "Do-It-Ourselves' Project on Airport Expansion." Brownsville Herald. 23 August, 1963. Vol. 70, No. 44:1.
4. City Minutes. 13 November 1961. Vol. 46:67.
5. City Minutes. 19 December 1961. Vol. 46:113.
6. "Surplus Food Study Asked". Brownsville Herald. 27 December 1961. Vol. 68, No. 118:1.
7. City Minutes. 19 December 1961, Vol. 46: 113; "Surplus Food Study Asked". Brownsville Herald. 27 December 61. Vol. 68, No. 118:1.
8. "We think Brownsville Can Care for Itself". Editorial, Brownsville Herald. 27 December 1961. Vol. 27, No. 31:6.
9. "City Funds To Be Used To Buy Food". Brownsville Herald, 21 January 1962. Vol. 68, No. 143:1.
10. City Minutes. 22 March 1962. Vol. 46:230.
11. Ibid.
12. "Interview with H. E. 'Gene' McNair". 9 June 1993.
13. City Minutes. 22 March 1962. Vol. 46:230; "Interview with Adolph E. Crixell". 4 June, 1993.
14. "Interview with Adolph E. Crixell". 4 June 1993.
15. City Minutes. 22 March 1962. Vol. 46: 230.
16. "Interview with H.E. 'Gene' McNair". 9 January 1993.
17. "Bridge Plans Okayed". Brownsville Herald. 25 May 1962. Vol. 68, No. 250:1.
18. "New Center is Set for Fort Brown". Brownsville Herald. 24 August, 1962, Vol. 69, No. 45:1
19. Ibid.
20. City Minutes. 10 May, 1962. Vol. 46: 287.
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## Jim Mills: From West Texas Farmer to South Texas Mayor

by

James W. Mills, Brent H. Mills, and Susan E. Mills

Born into a farming family, Jim Mills seemed destined to be a farmer. He spent the first thirty years of his life in an agricultural environment. Although he had never planned to become a politician, after moving to Brownsville, he saw a need for grassroots representation for the city. After living in the city for only four years, Jim Mills became city commissioner of Brownsville in 1971. Two years later, he became mayor at the age of thirty-six.

His paternal grandparents were Mr. and Mrs. Thea Newsome and his maternal grandparents Mr. and Mrs. David Childress of Carlsbad, New Mexico. His parents met in the Ft. Worth area. His father, Charles Jefferson (C.J.) Mills of Grandview, Texas, married his mother, Lola Lee Childress, in her hometown of Maypearl, Texas. Jim's two older brothers, Bobby Lee and Charles David, were both born in New Mexico. Looking for work, Jim's father moved to Orange County, California, where he worked at a gas station. On May 10, 1937, Jim Mills was born in Los Alamitos, California.

Two years later, C.J. Mills bought a farm in Spade, Texas, near Lubbock. This farm would serve as the family's base for years and still remains in the family today. The family of five moved into the farm's small country house until they had a larger house moved in and placed up the road. From then on they referred to the original house down the road as "the shack." During these years, they lived without electricity, gas, or running water, heating their home and cooking with kerosene. Their lamps used white gas and burned white light rather than yellow as kerosene lamps do. Despite not having electricity, C.J. bought a refrigerator, but it would not go unused; Jim's mother used it to store clothes. Of course, living without luxuries was inconvenient; however, farming without an irrigation system was almost impossible, so Jim's father soon put in wells. As farming has good times and bad, the Mills family soon experienced the good fortune of a successful cotton crop. In 1949, the crop was so successful that C.J. extensively added on to their farmhouse, bought himself a brand new Chrysler, and bought brand new 1949 convertibles for his two sons who were old enough to drive.

By the time Jim was in the third grade, C. J. had decided to rent out the farm and move to Uvalde, Texas, about eighty miles west of San Antonio, where he bought a ranch, raised cattle and sheep, and farmed a small area of grain sorghum. In three years the family returned to Spade. When Jim was in the eighth grade, the family rented out the Spade farm again, and went to Carlsbad, New Mexico, where C.J. sold real estate. After a year, they moved back to Spade. But soon, they moved again. C.J. bought a cattle farm in Booneville, Arkansas, where Jim lived from the ninth grade until after he graduated from college. In high school he studied agriculture and participated in agricultural clubs such as 4H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) mostly because that was what his "friends were doing." His agricultural interests continued through college where he majored in Animal Husbandry and graduated with enough hours to satisfy an educational degree of Vocational Agricultural, as well. As in high school, his university social life involved agricultural clubs including Alpha Gamma Roe, an agricultural fraternity, and Alpha Zeda Honor Society, made up of exceptional students pursuing a degree in agricultural education. Jim remembers that he thought the Business Administration

majors were “stuck up” but comments that he “should have been studying with them. It would have helped me out more with what I'm doing now”. In his major area of study, his grades were mostly A's and B's. He admits that his other subjects were not as good. He got a D in English and dropped Algebra. His plan being to teach, Jim did some practicing teaching in an agricultural class in Booneville to satisfy a Vocational Agriculture degree. He completed his years at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville in the average four years, returning to Booneville during the summers.

It was at the University of Arkansas that Jim met his wife, Barbara Anne McDonald, who came to college from Charleston, Arkansas, a small town outside Ft. Smith. While at the university, Barbara studied Elementary Education and was the head majorette for the Arkansas Razorbacks. They married in Charleston, Arkansas, a week after Jim's graduation in 1959.

After graduation, the couple moved to Booneville and lived for about two months in a chicken broiler house which had been converted into a four-plex. Jim began his first job out of college, a thirty-mile drive to Ft. Smith to work for a creamery. As a salesman, his job was to go to country stores and pick up the silver cans filled with cream delivered by area farmers. His responsibilities also included setting up more stores to receive the farmer's cream which the Ft. Smith creamery would make into butter. After only two months living at the former broiler house in Booneville, the couple moved to Ft. Smith and lived in a small house in town. Jim remembers that he had to show the landlord that the water would get so hot that it fogged up the house before he fixed the hot water heater. He wasn't very happy with his job at the creamery. One reason was that the only way to determine whether the cream was good or not before buying it was to taste it which “was O.K. as long as the cream was good.”

He decided to move to Olton, Texas and work with his older brother, Charles, and father at a cottonseed delinting plant, which used sulfuric acid to remove the fuzz on cottonseeds, making the seed better for planting. When he found out that the farm in Spade was available for rent in 1960, he asked his father if he could rent it. So again he and now his wife moved to Spade. He borrowed \$13,000 from the Farmers Home Administration, bought used farm equipment, and began farming the same land his father had farmed many times and many years earlier. In this same year, the couple's first baby, James Williams, was born.

In 1963, Barbara was “very pregnant” with their second child, Brent Howard, when, against the advice of Barbara's doctor, they decided to take a vacation to Mexico City. Jim and Barbara got in their car and headed for Mexico. When they arrived in Brownsville, Texas, their car started to act unusual. Afraid to venture into a foreign country unsure of their vehicle, they decided to stay one night in Brownsville at a motel on Central Blvd. The next night they stayed on South Padre Island at the Sea Ranch Motel, which is now the Radisson. At the time few motels and no condominiums existed, so the residents and visitors to the island stayed mostly in beach houses. Jim remembers that the prices of lots on the island were “very low, about \$3,000 each.” While making sure the car was safe to travel to Mexico, they went deep sea fishing and had the Jetties Restaurant, which remains today, cook it for them. After finding out that the low altitude was to blame for the car acting strangely, they continued on their vacation to Mexico City where they stayed at the Ritz Hotel. Jim reflects that at the time it seemed expensive; however, it was only eight dollars a night, the equivalent of 100 pesos. Even though they were only in Mexico a few days, the trip would have a lasting effect.

When their vacation was over, Jim and Barbara returned to Spade and the birth of their second child, Brent Howard. Soon after their return, in 1964, Jim obtained his real estate brokerage license

and to supplement his farming income he opened his own real estate office. In December of 1966, their youngest child, Susan Elizabeth, was born. After they harvested that year's crops and the first semester of school was over, they packed up the back of the truck and returned to Brownsville. While in Brownsville, Jim used his real estate license to get a job at Bob Fowler's office. The intention in moving to Brownsville was to have a working vacation, saving some money. Because they left all their furniture in Spade, they rented a small furnished house on Marquette Street. Four months later the family moved to Little Rock, Arkansas. From here, Jim interviewed with two Production Credit Association offices. At the first interview, when asked what his long term plans were he responded, "I'd like to be a branch manager and eventually work up to manager." Realizing that his response may have threatened the manager who interviewed him, at the next interview, when asked the same question, he replied, "I want to be branch manager." This time he got the job, so the family moved to Blythville, Arkansas.

The family didn't stay in Arkansas long. After only two years in Arkansas, their earlier exposure to South Texas and Mexico called them back. They moved to Brownsville, where Jim opened his own real estate office, Jim Mills Realty, at 10 E. Elizabeth.<sup>1</sup>

After only four years in Brownsville, Jim decided to run for public office. In 1971, he ran for city commissioner on the Brownsville United Citizens ticket. The other members of the party included: George Saenz, principal of Victoria school, who ran for mayor; Mrs. Claire English, a pre-school director; George Samano, Brownsville pharmacist, and Joseph Salas, an auto parts business manager.<sup>2</sup>

The opposition ticket included Dr. Earl B. Griffey, the current mayor of Brownsville who had become mayor when former mayor Tony Gonzales resigned. Running on the Griffey ticket, which was known as the Greater Brownsville Party, were incumbent commissioners, Kieth Cummins and Louis F. Lapeyre. Also seeking City Commissioner positions for the first time were Filemon Vela, attorney, and Ed Manzano, Cummings Jr. High School principal.<sup>3</sup>

While campaigning for city commissioner, Mr. Mills and his party had specific goals in mind for making Brownsville a better community. These goals included more sidewalks around public schools, cleaning up city parks, better street signs and traffic lights in the Southmost area. <sup>4</sup> The Brownsville United Citizens Party was supported financially by the Committee for Grassroots Representation, Bert Whisenant, Chairman.<sup>5</sup>

The results of the 1971 election were as follows: Ed Manzano, of the Greater Brownsville Party, and Jim Mills, a newcomer to politics and a member of the newly formed Brownsville United Citizens Party, both won City Commissioner seats and were sworn into office on Monday November 22, 1971. In a run-off election, the people of Brownsville re-elected Dr. Earl Griffey as mayor and also voted in the remaining two commissioner seats with incumbent Louis Lapeyre and newcomer Filemon Vela.<sup>6</sup> This made Jim the only candidate on the Brownsville United Citizens ticket to win a seat on the city commission.

After becoming City Commissioner, Mr. Mills would participate in many improvements for Brownsville. The members of the mayor's office and city commissioners initiated programs to benefit Brownsville's youth and inaugurated the Commissioners For A Day Program in which local boy scouts were sworn into the public offices of mayor and city commissioners. The members also addressed problems concerning youth, such as the sale of glue to minors.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Mills also participated in numerous ribbon cuttings and ground breaking ceremonies. These included Marks Interior, the Rodeway Motor Inn on Old Alice, and the new Brownsville International Airport Air Terminal

Building dedication, the New Harmony House, a new Leece Neville division, the new Southern Light store, and the new Rio Grande Title Company.

After serving as city commissioner for two years, Jim Mills at the age of 36, next chose to run for the position of mayor of Brownsville in 1973.<sup>8</sup> The election of 1973 for mayor and city commissioners pitted two ideologically opposed parties against each other. Mr. Mills headed the ticket known as the “New Party.” The slate included, Mills for mayor and commissioner hopefuls: Peyton Conway, retired postal worker, Leon Armstrong, businessman, Eddie Treviño, Brownsville furniture retailer, and George Saenz, school principal.<sup>9</sup>

Running against The New Party platform ticket would be Louis Lapeyre, who had become mayor of Brownsville following the resignation of Dr. Earl Griffey. His ticket would be known as the “Greater Brownsville Party.” Lapeyre's running mates included: D.F. “Desi” Rios, of Southmost College, R.A. “Bob” Torres, Realtor, attorney Paul Y. Cunningham Jr., and Dr. Ramiro Barron.

The election of 1973 in Brownsville for mayoral and city commissioner seats was both colorful and competitive. Major concerns addressed by The New Party included a controversial annexation of all the Amigoland Mall area. The New Party opposed this action. Also, they introduced the idea of “staggered terms” of office whereby the entire slate of candidates were not elected all at once.<sup>10</sup> This would allow more new faces on the board and a better representation of the people's vote.

Although much campaigning was done by way of newspaper advertising, the party needed a louder voice to get the winning votes. Therefore, some creative methods were initiated. First, the party's official campaign color was fluorescent orange. This background color, combined with slogans written in black, could be seen on eye-catching bumper stickers on cars and in windows all over town, on the traditional campaign hats, and even painted on a piece of plywood mounted on a bicycle rack attached to Barbara Mills' car. To get more exposure, the candidates and their supporters formed a caravan and drove through various neighborhoods. The Mills family mounted a loud speaker on the roof of their car and led the caravan, announcing their platform and asking for support. Their arrival was met by many people who either showed support by pointing a thumb up or indicated opposition with a thumb down. As for many who didn't hear the message from their yard, they were reached when Mrs. Mills and the children would go door to door to ask for votes.<sup>11</sup> Another great way to swing votes was to have a “pachanga.” So several candidates hosted parties complete with fajitas and mariachis.<sup>12</sup>

The hard work and creativity proved successful. The results of the 1973 election and run-off elections were tallied and the results were: Jim Mills won the position of mayor, while New Party commissioners George Saenz, Peyton Conway, and Leon Armstrong also were victorious. The lone nominee of the Greater Brownsville Party was D.F. “Desi” Rios.<sup>13</sup> To celebrate their success, the New Party of 1973 held an election night party at the Brownsville Civic Center, with music by the Bel Aire Band.

After becoming mayor, Mr. Mills attended many more ribbon cuttings and ground breaking. They included: the opening of the J.C. Penny's store at Amigoland Mall, attended by Mrs. Gladys Porter and J.C. Penney's president Jack B. Jackson of New York.<sup>14</sup> He also attended the opening of the Brownsville Exercise Center, Border Britches, and Century T.V. Center. It was under the term of Mayor Mills that the Aviary at Gladys Porter Zoo was opened. (the ribbon was made of feathers.)<sup>15</sup> Still other ribbon cuttings included the new Lack's Furniture Store and Culter-Hammer, which was attended by then County Treasurer, Eddie Lucio. Also, new businesses opening in the area included,



the Montgomery Wards at Amigoland Mall, the La Quinta in Brownsville and the Holiday Inn in Matamoros. Ground breaking ceremonies included, the new Valley Mart, St. Luke's Church, and the Norton Plant in Brownsville. At the Norton ceremonies, Jim Mills was joined by Texas Governor Dolph Brisco and U.S. Rep. Kika de la Garza.

While Mr. Mills was mayor, staggered terms of elections became reality. Olivera Park and the overpass for children to walk to Canales school were built.<sup>16</sup> New and better street lights were installed, making life in Brownsville safer and more convenient. City planning also included the Brownsville Urban Bus system and bicycle routes throughout the city. New roads were built or improved, including FM 802 and Price road. The Kill-A-Watt program for P.U.B. was established, and Brownsville Historic Week was initiated. During Mr. Mills's term for mayor, he was invited to Washington D.C. by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Mr. Mills was also mayor during the country's Bicentennial and he was named vice chairman of the Mayors' Bicentennial Committee.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Mills currently lives in Brownsville and is in his twenty-ninth year of selling real estate. He played key roles in the history and development of Brownsville as city commissioner and mayor, and has helped to make Brownsville a better place.

#### Endnotes

1. Interview with Jim Mills, June 29, 1996.
2. Brownsville Herald, Sept. 16, 1971.
3. Ibid.
4. Brownsville Herald, Nov. 3, 1971.
5. Brownsville Times Record, Oct. 28, 1971.
6. Ibid.
7. Brownsville Herald, Nov. 22, 1971.
8. Brownsville Times Record, Aug. 11, 1973.
9. Brownsville Times Record, Sept. 19, 1973.
10. Brownsville Times Record, Nov. 2, 1973.
11. Interview with Barbara Frye, 29 June 1996.
12. Brownsville Times Record, Dec. 1, 1973.
13. Brownsville Herald, Jan. 9, 1974.
14. Brownsville Times Record, May 14, 1975.
15. Brownsville Times Record, July 11, 1995.

16. Brownsville Times Record, July 11, 1995.

17. Interview with Jim Mills, June 29, 1996.

## Frank Yturria: Profile of a Citizen

by

Eliana Guerreiro Ramos Bennett

Frank Yturria turned seventy-three on June 29, 1996. His family gathered in Brownsville to celebrate, and when at the end of our recent conversation, he showed me pictures of the gathering, it was with obvious satisfaction. Frank was named after his great-grandfather and his grandfather. I asked him what part of his life, as he looks back, brings him the greatest happiness. He answered "my grandchildren". This answer is especially interesting when placed in the context of all the other achievements in Frank Yturria's life: the quintessential businessman, heir to thousands of acres of Rio Grande Valley land, cattle rancher, chairman of the board of the bank he chartered in 1979, Texas Bank and Trust, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, amateur historian, and, the focus of our exchange, active citizen, concerned with the problems of his community, local and national. A most accomplished man. Yet down-to-earth enough to cite what might be presumed by some to be a traditionally female priority as his fondest achievement--his family.

Yturria's life and the history of the city of Brownsville intersect and meander through each other. On a typical Brownsville morning of blue skies and puffy cotton ball clouds, we sat in his elegant office at Texas Bank and Trust and he recounted for me, with obvious pleasure, the history of his family.

The first Yturria to come to the Brownsville-Matamoros area was Capitán de Fusileros Manuel María Yturria, Aide de Camp and Secretary to General Mier y Terán. General Mier y Terán was ordered to Matamoros to secure the custom house and deter any Anglo-American, French or Spanish incursion into the area. The army arrived in Matamoros on March 7, 1829, and General Mier y Terán assigned Captain Yturria to take charge and oversee the Matamoros Customs House. Captain Yturria was twenty-nine years old and a bachelor. While stationed in Matamoros, he met a young girl by the name of Paula Navarro. Family lore claims that she and her family had come from the village of Palafox, located upriver from Laredo, Texas, from which they had fled Indian raids and depredations. Matamoros at the time was a thriving community of commerce, lumber, farm equipment, medicines, liquors and dry goods coming in, and bones, hides, and tallow going out. Many Yankee, German, and French merchants had established business houses in Matamoros.

Captain Yturria and Paula Navarro married in November, 1829 on his return from the battles against the invading Spanish army which was led by General Isidro Barradas near Tampico. Captain Yturria led the 11th Battalion on the attack against the Altamira fortress. The fighting was fierce, and he was gravely wounded. Captain Yturria and Paula Navarro had four children, three boys and one girl. The oldest child, Francisco Yturria, was Frank's great-grandfather. Francisco Yturria became an apprentice in the Charles Stillman store in Matamoros. Stillman, a Yankee, was the leading merchant of Matamoros.

At the conclusion of the Mexican-American War in 1848, Francisco settled on the American side of the Rio Grande in what was to become Brownsville. He continued working for Stillman, who was now establishing the town site of Brownsville. In 1853, Francisco married Felicitas Treviño, whose

father and grandfather had received land grants from the Spanish Crown and Mexican government. Frank Yturria is in possession of many copies of some of the documents pertaining to these land grants and other early Yturria family history. Francisco Yturria and his wife Felicitas adopted two children, a boy and girl. The boy was Daniel Yturria, Frank's grandfather, and the girl was Isabel Yturria. Isabel married Miguel Garcia, and Daniel married Leonor Espinosa. Isabel had five children, of which four survived, and Daniel had three sons, of which two survived: Fausto and Herminio. Fausto was Frank's father.

Frank Yturria told me that his great-grandfather's "first big break" came at the end of the Mexican-American War, when Stillman, Richard King, and Mifflin Kenedy took him into their business. When the steam-boats which had been used to supply the American army during the Mexican-American War became "war surplus", the United States Army sold them for a very small price to his partners, Charles Stillman, Mifflin Kenedy, and Richard King. Frank recounted that the three partners made "vast fortunes" during the American Civil War, when "Brownsville became the back door of the Confederacy". American ports were blockaded by the Union except for Brownsville-Matamoros, through which Southern cotton was transported into British, French, and German ships waiting at the mouth of the Rio Grande. When the Union threatened to fire upon the steamboats carrying the cotton, the partners simply transferred the registry of the ships to Francisco Yturria, who was a Mexican citizen. The ships' flags were changed from Confederate to Mexican, thus making any attack on them an international matter. The British warned the Union that any attack on the cotton-carrying boats would be seen as a violation of international laws. I asked Frank Yturria if in the written records of his family from this particular time he has found any concern for making profits from the transport of cotton, a slave-labor based industry. He said that "slavery was not an issue at all" and that "these were strictly business matters for Francisco Yturria and his partners".

Another interesting twist in the history of the Yturria family is that Francisco Yturria supported the 1862 French conquest of Mexico. According to family accounts, Francisco Yturria was of the opinion that only a European culture could bring "progress and civilization" to Mexico. He felt that Mexico, with its predominant and diverse Indian population, needed a Western-based set of values and practices to bring to it stability and the possibility of a future as an organized nation, keeping in mind that Mexico at the time had a population that was 80% illiterate. For his support of the French, the Arch-Duke Maximilian, installed by Napoleon III as Emperor of Mexico, rewarded Francisco Yturria by putting him in charge of customs. That meant that all trade passing through Mexico had to be signed off by Yturria. According to Frank Yturria, "rather than give permission for goods to pass through Mexican customs, Francisco Yturria and his partners bought the goods and sold them themselves". In this way, fortunes further increased.

In 1858, Francisco built the Yturria building, which still stands on Elizabeth Street in Brownsville. The building no longer belongs to the Yturria family. Frank Yturria and his sister sold it years ago to a local merchant. Yet he told me that he feels "a lot of nostalgia" when he drives by the building, as he remembers his times there as a boy. And he remembers the fact that he, Frank Yturria, held his grandfather Daniel's hand as he died in the upstairs living quarters of that building in September 1940.

Around 1850-60, Francisco Yturria commenced to buy *derechos* from heirs of the original land grant owners. *Derechos*, in English "rights", were the "right" a person had to occupy a parcel of land, derived from original Spanish land grants by virtue of being an heir to the original grantee. According to Frank Yturria, his great-grandfather would go to these *ranchitos* and ask those who

lived in them if they wanted to sell their *derechos* to him. Many would agree to do so. Francisco Yturria would allow them to continue to live on the property until their death, at which time Yturria would assume ownership. Francisco Yturria's steam-boat company partners, Richard King, Mifflin Kenedy, and Charles Stillman, also bought *derechos* in the Rio Grande Valley. In 1881, King filed a law-suit to obtain clear title to all the separate *ranchitos* they had bought over the years. Yturria was a party to the lawsuit. In 1893, when it was settled, Francisco Yturria held 80,000 acres of land in the San Juan de Carricitos Grant.

I asked Frank Yturria how much land his family has today. He told me they do not like to share this information. During an earlier conversation, I asked him how many cattle he owns. He was appalled at my lack of cattle rancher etiquette and explained to me that one should never ask a rancher how many cattle he/she has because the price of each animal can then be multiplied and it would be easy to figure out how much a rancher "is worth". In my defense, I told Frank Yturria that I am a vegetarian and have no idea how much those beautiful animals are worth to people who eat them.

At the time of Francisco Yturria's death in 1912, he owned approximately 200,000 acres of land in five counties. In 1925, Daniel Yturria and his sister Isabel García divided the Yturria estate. The largest block of land to be divided was in the San Juan Carricitos Grant located north of present day Raymondville, Texas. Fortunately, Francisco Yturria divided this tract in two equal blocks when he gave the railroad a right-of-way in 1904. Isabel García and her children received the land west of the railroad, and Daniel Yturria and his sons Fausto and Herminio received the land east of the railroad. Today, as one drives north out of Raymondville, Texas on the right side, for many miles, one drives along the fenced Yturria Ranch which is owned by Frank, his sister, his brother, and his cousins who are children of Herminio Yturria. On the left side of the road across the railroad track the land is owned by the heirs of Isabel Yturria García.

Fausto Yturria became a lawyer who, according to Frank Yturria, "made a great deal of money" defending bootleggers. In the 1920s, liquor was illegal in the United States, so a lot of it was smuggled into the country through the Brownsville-Matamoros border. According to Frank Yturria, most of the smugglers-bootleggers-were Mexicans. When caught by the law, they needed a Spanish-speaking lawyer to defend them. Fausto Yturria was there to serve them. Fausto Yturria was also the father of Frank Yturria, citizen extraordinaire of this neglected piece of the United States. Frank and his wife, Mary, formerly Mary Altman, of Alabama chose to make their lives in Brownsville in order to contribute to the progress of this community. Frank Yturria's mother was Marion Alexander, who was only seventeen years old when she had Frank, her oldest child.

The Brownsville of Frank Yturria's childhood was quite different from today's, he says. And it is not difficult to catch in Frank's narrative his sense of frustration over what has become of his beloved community. Frank Yturria's world view is complex and above clichés. Clearly, he is extremely proud of his family history and connections to Mexico. On the other hand, as a veteran of two wars, he does not see himself as a "Mexican-American". He says that "you cannot have dual allegiance; you cannot be an American and a Mexican at the same time." He says that he is an American above and beyond all else. He is strongly opposed to what he calls a "semi-open border", through which flow thousands and thousands of "illegal immigrants who become a burden to the United States in general and to Brownsville in particular".

Yturria is opposed to the kind of bilingual education which produces people who cannot speak

English, the language of the United States. "Brownsville was not always a city of immigrants", he says. "We had no open border, and the population was truly bilingual-fluent in both English and Spanish. Not like today, when the Mexicans cross the border and stay to take advantage of the services they can receive in this country : free education for their children, medical care, welfare". Yturria faults "the Mexican government for not offering their people better hope for the future". However, true to his complexity, Frank Yturria also faults those American industries which take advantage of illegal immigrants and pay them wages as low as they can, taking advantage of their illegal status. Also, even though he identifies himself as a Republican, Yturria strongly opposes the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) because, he says, "American industries should pay Mexican workers decent wages and not help perpetuate poverty in Mexico". Alternatively, he says that American industries could simply accept a lower rate of profit and keep their plants in the United States, thus affording American workers an opportunity to enjoy the standard of living working-class people once enjoyed in this country.

Yturria is saddened by the fact that Brownsville continues to deteriorate into one of the poorest cities in the country. When asked what might help to move Brownsville forward, he answered that "until we get a two-party system, nothing will change". Yturria is referring here to the fact that Brownsville traditionally has been a Democratic stronghold. He feels that more competition between Democrats and Republicans would bring in a system of checks and balances to political corruption, as well as to inefficient planning and management. Finally, Frank Yturria feels that Brownsville and the Valley need more people from other parts of the country who will bring with them "American ethics and cultural standards". Tourism is the real future for our area, he says.

In addition to the accomplishments mentioned above, he was appointed by President Eisenhower as Head of United States Customs on the Mexican border from 1956 to 1961. He later made President Reagan's "short list" of possible appointees as ambassador to the Philippines. He says his nomination was defeated by "State Department careerists who opposed President Marcos and did not appreciate my friendship with him (Marcos)." Yturria had met Marcos during the two years he served with the 13th Air Force in the Philippines. In 1982, Reagan appointed Yturria as the U.S. Representative to the South Pacific Commission, serving for four years. In 1992, President George Bush appointed him as Chairman of the Inter-American Foundation. Yturria is especially proud of his work here. The Foundation is a government agency that provides "grass-roots aid to Latin American countries, rather than government-to-government aid, which often is lost through corruption."

Frank Yturria is now enjoying the fruits of his labors and commitments. He and his wife Mary, introduced to him by his father, enjoy their life as prominent citizens of Brownsville, visits with their daughters Dorothy and Mary Eleonor, both of whom live out of Brownsville, and enjoy their three grandchildren, twin girls and a boy who seem to have inherited their grandfather's sense of civic duty and scholarship. Yturria proudly shared with me some of their school projects and grades. I thoroughly enjoyed listening to this man's account of his family's history and am touched by his love of his heritage.\*

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\*All quotations are of Frank Yturria, interviewed on July 2nd, 1996.

# Valle Hermoso

por

Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda

Es Valle Hermoso el más reciente pueblo  
de Tamaulipas que naciera hogaño,  
aunque en llanura su solar asiente  
es valle hermoso.

Es Valle Hermoso como hermoso valle  
aunque se asiente en la llanura vasta,  
símbolo el nombre de preciosa tierra,  
un valle hermoso.

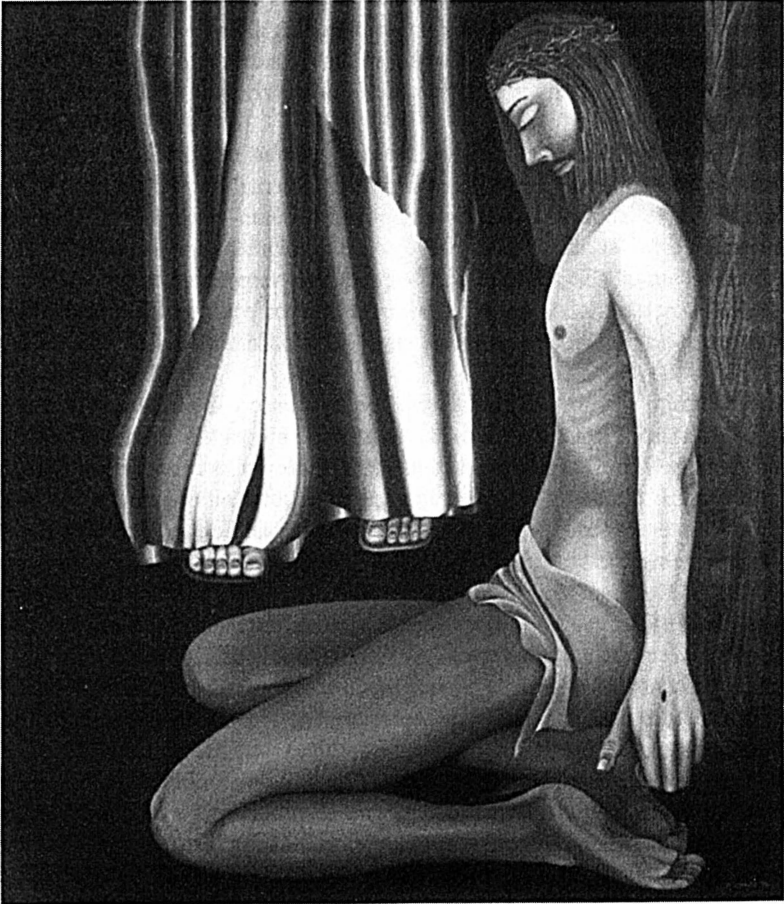
De Matamoros un girón otrora,  
de Matamoros predelicto vástago,  
de Matamoros con filiales ansias  
se independiza.

Se independiza y con esfuerzo propio  
surge con propia y prepotente vida;  
para prestigio y para darle fama  
a Tamaulipas.





## GENERAL HISTORIES





por

Cirila Quintero Ramírez

La historia de la frontera norte pareciera ser muy reciente. Sin embargo, habría que matizar la precisión: las ciudades tamaulipecas o coahuilenses distan mucho de ser tan recientes como Tijuana, surgida en los años treinta. Las dichas localidades tienen un enorme caudal histórico. La historia de la frontera tamaulipeca del siglo XIX y del presente siglo ha comenzado a ser rescatada por la pluma de algunos historiadores; sin embargo aún falta mucho que realizar. Especialmente, en el rescate histórico existen dos aspectos centrales: la necesidad de historiadores, empíricos o profesionales, que se dediquen al rescate de la historia local y la recurrencia a un enfoque binacional en las nuevas explicaciones históricas.

En cuanto al primer punto, han sido los historiadores empíricos, los cronistas, los cuentistas, los intelectuales locales los que más han contribuido al rescate de la historia local tamaulipeca, porque como dice Don Luis González--emérito historiador--"la historia local es obra de aficionados de tiempo parcial. La mueve una intención piadosa: salvar del olvido la parte del pasado propio que ya está fuera de uso. Busca mantener al árbol ligado a sus raíces. Es la que nos cuenta el pretérito de nuestra vida diaria, del hombre común, de nuestra familia y de nuestro terruño. Las historias locales ocupan en la república de la historia un lugar análogo al ocupado por corridos y romances en la república de las letras."

En ese sentido, la función de cronista es por demás loable: primero porque es el encargado de salvar del olvido el trabajo, el ocio, la costumbre, la religión, y las creencias de nuestros mayores; segundo, porque cumple una tarea revolucionaria--señala Don Luis González--pues hace consciente al lugareño de su pasado propio a fin de vigorizar su espíritu y hacerlo resistente al imperialismo metropolitano. La reconstrucción histórica de la frontera tamaulipeca tiene mucho que agradecerle a los cronistas, historiadores e intelectuales locales sobre todo por mantener vivo su pasado y por haber plasmado en sus escritos parte de la historia local.

El complemento al mejor entendimiento de la historia ha sido dada por historiadores profesionales, formados en las universidades. Ellos a diferencia de los historiadores empíricos han sido instruidos de cómo hacer historia; que fuentes utilizar y cómo realizar la interpretación histórica. Sin embargo, el historiador profesional encuentra en el cronista su apoyo, su asidero. Muchos de los que escribimos historia tamaulipeca, no nacimos tamaulipecos aunque lo somos por adopción, y necesitamos que los historiadores empíricos nos contagien su sensibilidad, su amor por el terruño. Por nuestra parte ofrecemos a los estudiosos locales nuestras herramientas metodológicas y teóricas aprendidas en las aulas universitarias. Estamos convencidos de que la actividad del cronista y el análisis histórico del historiador profesional no son actividades excluyentes sino complementarias. Cronistas e historiadores deben avanzar hacia una visión histórica más completa y analítica.

Dentro de los postulados para esta nueva historia, la consideración de la frontera mexicana y norteamericana como un mismo espacio social debe ser central. La reconstrucción de una sola ciudad fronteriza, Reynosa, Matamoros, Brownsville, o Laredo no permite una interpretación completa de

la historia de la localidad, la consideración del "otro lado" resulta esencial. Más aún el trabajo conjunto de cronistas e historiadores de ambos espacios resulta primordial. Por ejemplo, sólo conociendo la prohibición de ventas de licores, la llamada "ley seca," que existió en el lado norteamericano se explica la fortaleza de las organizaciones sindicales en restaurantes y bares de Matamoros y Reynosa.

Finalmente, existe una razón primordial para considerar a la historia de la frontera tamaulipeca y el sur texano como una sola: el compartir un mismo origen, la mayor parte de los habitantes norteamericanos de esta región tiene una ascendencia mexicana, lo que sin duda nos hace compartir, y en menor grado disentir, muchos rasgos sociales, culturales, etc. Pero tales propósitos no pueden ser entendidos si los historiadores y cronistas de ambos lados no aspiramos a una visión histórica conjunta.

El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Matamoros

por

Oscar Rivera Saldaña

Poco hemos hecho los matamorenses por recoger la historia del pueblo y sus enseñanzas, aunque debo reconocer que gracias a los avances de la historiografía mexicana de 1970 a la fecha, se han editado libros que aluden a la historia regional, haciendo evidente la necesidad de la investigación histórica, como es el caso concreto del libro *Frontera e historia económica* de Mario Cerutti y Miguel González Quiroga, editado en 1993 por el Instituto Mora y la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México. Trabajo que es una compilación de investigaciones históricas hechas por norteamericanos (me refiero a Le Roy P. Graf, Frank Lawrence Owsley, William Diamond, Annie Cowling, Robert P. Felgar, Robert W. Delaney, Ronnie C. Tyler y Arthur James Mayer), donde se reproducen extractos referentes a las intensas relaciones económicas de esta frontera a la hora de la guerra civil norteamericana. Dichas investigaciones fueron hechas entre 1926 y 1948, pero las conocimos hasta 1993 en México, cosa que nos reclaman los compiladores en el valioso *Estudio Introductorio* del libro, diciéndonos: “es posible que el mismo futuro de la economía mexicana se encargue de demandar a los historiadores tan inexplicable olvido”.

Cerutti y González Quiroga, quienes desde hace ya rato señalan la necesidad que tenemos los mexicanos de contemplarnos desde la perspectiva histórica de cada región del país, hacen interesantes aportaciones a la historiografía regional, como lo es sin duda su concepto *economía de frontera*. Nos dicen: “Lo que comenzaba a construirse en esos años de la guerra de secesión americana, un *espectro regional binacional* que habría de reforzarse en décadas posteriores (y que urge estudiar -desde un punto de vista metodológico- de *manera conjunta*, por la sencilla razón de que así se estructuraba el movimiento económico)”); otra aportación de *Frontera e historia económica*, además de ser exquisita, es el de llamarle a esta parte de América *mediterráneo tropical*. Dice: “Como los puertos texanos sobre el Golfo quedaron sujetos al bloqueo-se refiere al bloqueo naval que en abril de 1861 impuso el presidente Abraham Lincoln a los puertos confederados-, la verdadera puerta para el tráfico mercantil resultó el noreste de México, desde Piedras Negras hasta la boca del río. El entramado de relaciones mercantiles y la presencia de ese formidable combustible que era la plata mexicana, por otro lado, enlazaron este bloque geográfico con el Golfo de México, auténtico *mediterráneo tropical* en el que sobresalían puertos como La Habana y Nueva Orleans”. Es decir Mediterráneo que se antoja verlo en un libro como el de Fernand Braudel, puerta de entrada de España a América, puerta de América, enlace o llave, entre el norte y el sur de América, rico testigo de la lucha por la independencia, conformación y expansión de los pueblos de América, y seno histórico importante de las culturas de este continente. Aquí, me van a disculpar, es inevitable recordar obras artísticas que versan sobre este tema o época, como las películas *Nacimiento de una Nación*, *Lo que el viento se llevó* y *Quemada* de Gilo Pontecorvo, o novelas como *Palmeras Salvajes* o *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* de Gabriel García Márquez.

Matamoros surge como puerto marítimo a la caída de la dominación española en estas tierras, la Real Orden se dió, sin poderse concretar, el 9 de noviembre de 1820. Estas tierras fueron las últimas

que colonizaron los españoles en la Nueva España, colonización llevada a cabo de 1748 a 1755, que no comprendió la parte norte de la entidad (del río Bravo al río Nueces), la *franja del Nueces*, que fue la porción de tierra que Tamaulipas perdió con la intervención norteamericana de 1846 a 1848, ni tampoco se colonizaron los terrenos de lo que es hoy Matamoros, las tierras en torno a la desembocadura del río Bravo. Matamoros nace gracias a la aplicación, por parte de la corona española, de políticas liberales, las llamadas *reformas borbónicas*, políticas de gobierno que, al privatizar la tenencia de la tierra y estimular el comercio, lograron que particulares poblaran la fértil región del bajo Bravo y se descubriera como el puerto natural del noreste de México. Puerto, cuya área de influencia, claro, es la misma hasta la actualidad, sólo que ahora ubicado en Brownsville. Escuchemos la versión de los mismos españoles del entorno de este puerto del noreste mexicano. “Si este puerto quedase sufragando del abilitado franc-nos dijo Félix María Calleja en 1795-me parece sería del canal de la abundancia Poblacion y prosperidad de las quatro Provincias, de Texas, Coahuila, Nuevo Reino y Colonia”. Desgraciadamente, esto fue posible hasta que los hombres de estas tierras se independizaron y tuvieron la oportunidad de integrarse al comercio naval del Golfo de México, en 1823.

De aparecer a la vida independiente como receptoría del puerto Soto la Marina, pronto se le da la categoría de puerto y adquiere relevancia. Había sido colonizado por miembros de las familias distinguidas de los pueblos asentados por las márgenes del río Bravo (Laredo, Guerrero, Mier, Camargo, y Reynosa, las *villas del norte*); aquí vinieron a dar los principales patriarcas de las *villas del norte*, instalados en 14 ranchos ganaderos, todos colindantes con el río Bravo. Estas 14 propiedades, que determinaron las dimensiones del municipio, siempre estuvieron a nombre de los fundadores de tales predios, hasta que la Revolución Mexicana, 150 años después, modificó la tenencia de la tierra en Matamoros, perdiéndose también esa tradición tan típica en nuestro caso, del patriarca de la familia que siempre hubo en los ranchos de Matamoros.

La ciudad de Matamoros fue originalmente casco del rancho del capitán de los colonos fundadores de estas tierras a orillas de la costa, ubicada a 37 kilómetros del mar, que por su elevado relieve topográfico, de estas tierras bajas, de arroyos, esteros y lagunas, siempre constituyó el lugar de residencia de las familias fundadoras y avecindados, sin dejar de ser propiedad particular. Además de que los vecinos de estas villas fueron, por espacio de 100 años, obligados a vivir juntos, por aquello de los constantes ataques que estas villas desatendidas y lejanas del centro del país, sufrieron por parte de indios, malhechores, luchas intestinas y externas.

Para 1826, que deja de ser la congregación del Refugio para pasar a ser villa de Matamoros, con su ejido y municipio delimitados, tiene una población de 3,933 habitantes; era ya un puerto marítimo y fluvial, conocido como puerto del Refugio. El río (con una profundidad de 1 metro en estío y de 6 en invierno) permitía ser navegado como doscientos kilómetros, generalmente por los barcos de vapor chatos, de fondo plano, descargando la mercancía por los alrededores del vado real de la ciudad, hoy *punto nuevo* y claro, por la desembocadura del río, donde desde 1814 existió un pequeño poblado llamado *Boca del Río*, después puerto *El Refugio*, *Bagdad* y *villa Cortina* finalmente; por el mar, se detenían los barcos a dos o tres kilómetros de la desembocadura por lo poco profundo de sus costas, o en la barra *Brazo de Santiago*, la entrada del mar por el sur de la Laguna Madre en su parte norte, a unos kilómetros al norte de la desembocadura del Bravo, lugar que tiene como atracadero a *Punto Isabel*.

Del comercio de este puerto comentaremos las estadísticas de sus primeros años (1825, 1826,

1827 y 1828), porque además de que las fuentes son documentos desconocidos que desmienten la versión de que el puerto de Matamoros empezó a operar en 1828, nos ofrecen interesantes particularidades de este primer puerto del noreste mexicano. Las estadísticas en las que me apoyo fueron publicadas por el Departamento de Cuenta y Razón de la Secretaría de Hacienda de México, el 7 de junio de 1831. Dicho documento lo localicé en el Fondo Reservado de la Biblioteca Nacional de México, Colección Lafragua, documento 23. En 1825 el *puerto del Refugio* registró el arribo de 24 buques, provenientes 20 de ellos de Nueva Orleans y los demás de Baltimore y Nueva York, que traían aguardiente de uva, agujas finas, bretañas de hilo, cera, paño de primera, perlas falsas, raso de seda, sables, seda torcida, musolina, zaraza angosta, y una imprenta. La importación fue de 435,284 pesos; la exportación se hizo en 8 buques, 6 de ellos con destino a Nueva Orleans, 1 a Nueva York y otro a Baltimore, llevando astas de res, cueros de res al pelo, lana, mulas, plomo en planchas y plata acuñada. Sumando el total de la exportación 338,576 pesos; de los cuales, 334,800 pesos eran de plata acuñada. Ese año, el *puerto del Refugio* ocupó el cuarto lugar nacional en el movimiento portuario, después de Veracruz, Tampico y Campeche.

Al año siguiente, 1826, bajó el comercio, pues con todo y que fueron 25 los buques que arribaron con carga, sólo representó 225,623 pesos la importación; de dichos barcos, 21 venían de Nueva Orleans, 2 de Nueva York y otros tantos de Baltimore. Los artículos predominantes en esa ocasión fueron el aguardiente de uva, bretaña, coquillos de 12 yardas, cacao, estopilla, hilo de algodón, loza, manta ancha y angosta, mahones azules de la India, mercería, platillas de hilo, pañuelos de algodón, paño de lana, punto de tull sencillo, túnicos de musolina, vinos y zarazas angostas; la exportación fue de 174,314 pesos, de productos salidos en 12 buques, 7 para Nueva Orleans, 3 para Nueva York, 2 para Baltimore, y 1 para Hartford; cuyos productos prevalecientes fueron astas de res, cueros al pelo, lana, mulas y plata acuñada. De plata acuñada fueron 161,052 pesos, de un total exportado de 174,314 pesos.

En 1827 llegaron 39 buques; 34 de Nueva Orleans, y los demás de Baltimore y Nueva York. Sumando lo importado la cantidad de 413,897 pesos. Lo exportado, ahora en 38 barcos, sumando la cantidad de 419,069, correspondía a la plata acunada y labrada que por aquí se exportaba.

Y en 1828, año de baja importación y alta exportación de plata, que registra el primer aumento de aranceles, sumaron 33,365 pesos con el antiguo arancel y 161,651 pesos con el nuevo, en la importación, de la que en total fueron 195,016 pesos; las exportaciones sumaron 625,515 pesos. De plata salieron 54 barras de plata pasta, 370 marcos de plata labrada y 547,201 pesos de monedas acuñadas, sumando la cantidad de 616,271 pesos el valor de lo exportado ese año.

Ahora bien, comparativamente, de los 11 puertos que tenía controlados la secretaría de hacienda, en México dos mantuvieron siempre mayor movimiento de carga que Matamoros, Veracruz y Tampico. Veracruz, sumó lo importado en 1825, 10,554,244 pesos; y lo exportado 4,492,068 pesos; de los cuales 3,046,928 pesos fueron de plata exportada. Por su parte, Tampico ese año de 1825 importó 2,042,727 pesos, y exportó 1,617,141 pesos; de los cuales, 1,582,223 fueron de plata exportada.

En 1828 Veracruz importó productos por 9,993,265 pesos, y exportó 7,576,534 pesos; de los cuales 5,637,560 pesos fueron de plata. Tampico, ese 1828 importó 2,283,323 pesos, y exportó productos por la suma de 3,237,280 pesos; de los cuales, 3,171,816 pesos fue el total de la plata exportada.

Estas estadísticas nos ofrecen el siguiente panorama, advirtiendo que los puertos de Tampico y

Matamoros se habilitaron en 1823, compitiendo con el principal puerto del Golfo mexicano, Veracruz, que manejaba el 60% de la carga movida en este país, teniendo ya 300 años de ser el principal puerto de México, el puerto de la Ciudad de México. En nuestro caso, es explicable que Tampico siguiera en importancia comercial a Veracruz, ya que hace eje con la ciudad de San Luis Potosí y comprende a una zona rica, el centro del país; y siguiendo en importancia, Matamoros, que hace eje con Monterrey, y tiene como natural área de influencia los estados de Coahuila-Texas, Nuevo León y Tamaulipas; sin embargo, con todo y lo despoblado y tardíamente colonizado norte de México, no podemos menospreciar que a dos años de funcionar como puerto moviera arriba de mil toneladas de mercancía al año, y se hubiera adscrito a la navegación comercial del Golfo con rutas predominantemente a los Estados Unidos. Llama la atención la tendencia alcista de la exportación, y su fuerte, la plata acuñada mexicana, misma que representaba alrededor del 90% de lo por aquí exportado; aunque, la plata por aquí exportada sólo representará un 5% de la plata exportada por este país (en promedio, Veracruz exportaba el 60% de la plata y Tampico el 30%). El resto de la exportación por este puerto, siempre fue de cueros de res, lana, mulas y caballada, productos propios de la región.

Tomamos 4 observaciones del balance que hacen los autores de estas estadísticas, del movimiento portuario en México de 1825 a 1828:

1) Por los puertos de Soto la Marina (Tamaulipas) y Puerto Viejo (Veracruz), también disminuyó notablemente el comercio en el año de 1828, consistiendo, tal vez, no solo en las causas indicadas en la nota anterior, sino en las ventajas que ofrecen al giro mercantil las posiciones de Matamoros y Tampico especialmente con respecto a Soto la Marina, por su situación topográfica, y por los peligros, gastos y dificultades que acarrearán su barra y la grande distancia que media desde ella hasta el punto en que está situada la aduana marítima.

2) Por los balances formados hasta el año de 1828, se advierte que las mercancías importadas en mayor cantidad y valor han sido generalmente los expresados lienzos de algodón y lana y los de hilo, y algunos abarrotos como fierro, acero, aguardiente, papel, aceite, cacao y vinos, cuyo consumo está generalizado en la república por surtirse de ellos la totalidad de sus habitantes.

3) Desde 1733 en que comenzó la labor de moneda de cuenta del gobierno, hasta fin de diciembre de 1828 se han acuñado en la casa de moneda de México, y las demás establecidas en esta república, 1,460,695,080 monedas.

4) Según los balances de 25, 26, 27 y 28, se advierte que las naciones que mayor comercio tienen con México, son Inglaterra, Francia, Alemania, Estados Unidos y Colombia.



Ahora bien, ubicado como puerto, tuvo a su favor también contar con un cuadro político favorable, el de la Primera República Federal, (1824-1835), con liberales que veían afirmados sus principios ideológicos en el caso de este puerto, producto de medidas liberales y dependiendo su existencia a que se siguieran aplicando tales medidas gubernamentales-Matamoros es un pueblo alejado, que sólo ha tenido vida cuando se ha estimulado su comercio exterior; siendo entonces las restricciones aduanales su peor enemigo- de tal forma que se fundaron grupos políticos liberales, tanto para defender sus principios como para defender los intereses de la región, supeditada a un gobierno nacional centralista, inestable y variante, que a pronto tomó control de las aduanas y los aranceles y entró en contradicción con los intereses locales, los de una burguesía criolla liberal, admiradora del American way of life, de dónde surgió lo que Octavio Herrera Pérez llama *el clan fronterizo*, grupo político de la región, del que su autor nos dice: “entre los años de 1821-1853, una organización de individuos orientada a luchar en un amplio contexto político, en pro de sus intereses y de las reivindicaciones de su región de origen, tratando siempre de ganar espacios de poder, apoyando o contrarrestando a las influencias provenientes del exterior, bien fuera del poder central o de las presiones que ejercían otros grupos actuantes en la arena política de Tamaulipas”. El grupo estaba integrado por el licenciado y general Antonio Canales Rosillo, don Jesús Cárdenas y Juan Nepomuseno Molano, gobernadores de Tamaulipas y presidente municipal de Matamoros éste último. Así los describe Octavio Herrera: “Estos personajes se desplegaron como diligentes protagonistas locales primero (en el norte de la entidad), y más tarde crecientemente en la arena política del gobierno de Tamaulipas, donde entran en contacto con otros grupos políticos -algunas veces en alianza y otras en conflicto-, en particular contra el poderoso grupo liderado por Francisco Vital Fernández, militar y político que encarnó en tamaulipas el arquetipo del cacique durante el segundo tercio del siglo XIX”<sup>1</sup>

El accidentado camino político de México para conformarse como Estado después de la independencia puso en evidencia el orden liberal, toman el poder los conservadores, restringiendo atributos y soberanía a los estados (mismos que dejaron de ser entidades federativas para pasar a ser departamentos), centralizando el poder político. En esa época, 1842, escribió *Historia General de Tamaulipas* Toribio de la Torre, quien nos dice del puerto de Matamoros : “Este puerto fue al principio receptoría de Soto la Marina; pero en tiempo del imperio de Iturbide éste lo fue de aquel, y declarado provincia el Departamento, la diputación puso algunos individuos que la vigilaran sobre las introducciones extranjeras; más frecuentemente eran insultados y burlados, tanto por la gran distancia de la barra, como por la poca fuerza destinada para evitar el comercio clandestino de que se hizo gran tráfico al principio, hasta que el Supremo Gobierno comisionó a don Joaquín Quijano que crió un resguardo, construyó un buen local en el Brazo de Santiago con piezas suficientes para una aduana; estableció una garita, y obtuvo del comandante general del Estado, un destacamento suficiente para hacerse respetar, y exigir los derechos correspondientes al erario nacional”.

Obviamente, los que tienen el poder en México se aferraron al absurdo histórico de todo querer manejarlo por el puerto de Veracruz, con el alza que significaba para el precio de los artículos incluir el costo del transporte del puerto jarocho a cualquier punto de la república mexicana. No se trataba de fomentar el desarrollo propio de cada región; claro, ellos arguían que de lo que se trataba era de defender el comercio y la producción de los productos nacionales de la invasión comercial, lícita e ilícita, del imperio vecino, etc.

Esto hizo posible que hubieran entrado sólo 33 navíos al puerto de Matamoros en 1844, según

Robert W. Delaney en su obra *Matamoros, puerto de Texas durante la guerra de secesión*, y que los liberales, los del *clan fronterizo*, se insurreccionaran en 1851 bajo el *Plan de la Loba*, por el que pedían bajar los aranceles aduanales; e intentaron tomar Matamoros, la sitiaron durante diez días, y el pueblo los rechazó no porque no los apoyara en sus planteamientos, sino por la cantidad de extranjeros que venían en las tropas del general liberal. Grupo político que toma el poder del estado en 1855, modifican la constitución política de Tamaulipas, y en 1858 el congreso del estado expiden la ley de *Zona Libre*, libre de impuestos las importaciones. Esta medida ocasión finalmente se fortaleciera la economía de Laredo a Matamoros.

#### Endnotes

1. Octavio Herrera Pérez, "El clan fronterizo: Génesis y desarrollo de un grupo de poder político en el norte de Tamaulipas, 1821-1852," en *SOCIOTAM*, Vol. IV, Núm. 1 (Cd. Victoria, Tam., Enero-Junio 1994), pp. 25-61.





por

José M. Karlis

Para comprender la historia del noreste de la república mexicana, es necesario conocer la historia de la gran hacienda "La Sauteña". Después de la conquista y el establecimiento de los españoles en el nuevo continente, ante la inmensidad territorial y las dificultades propias de la época se asentó la colonia, llamándose la Nueva España. Se fundaron ciudades y villorios, asentándose al norte de la entonces llamada Costa del Seno Mexicano. Allí, la falta de minerales como oro y plata, resultó en una nueva industria: la captura de "piezas", como dio en llamarse a los nativos pobladores de esas bastas regiones. A éstos, ya capturados, se enviaban como esclavos a las minas de Zacatecas o al los campos del Valle Nacional. Las tribus nómadas que poblaban el Nuevo Reyno de León eran llamadas genéricamente "chichimecas"; así como los que habitaban las regiones mas calientes de la desembocadura del Pánuco, los "huastecos". Estos como es de entenderse, pusieron todo su empeño en repeler a los que así los "cazaban"; mas el mejor armamento ibérico y la organización tan deficiente de las tribus, hacía que se perdieran las batallas. No sucedió lo mismo con una tribu llamada "Janambres" que vivía en las serranías sureñas del territorio. Estos hicieron infructuosas las fundaciones de los más intrépidos como el Padre Olmos y sus míticos indios "olives", que en 1544 fundara en la sierra de las Tamaulipas un asentamiento, 'Los Janambres'. Solo hasta 1617, Mollinedo logra establecer fundos estables, en el extremo sur del territorio y que se conservan hoy en día: Tula, Palmillas y Jaumabe. Solo hasta la navidad de 1748, es cuando el Conde de la Sierra Gorda, Don José de Escandón continuó fundando villorios. Hay que anotarse que la Villa de Nuestra Señora de Reynosa se funda el 14 de marzo de 1749, como vemos, 200 años después de la conquista del Nuevo Mundo, fundo que es muy importante para la historia de la gran hacienda de "La Sauteña".

La hasta entonces llamada Costa del Seno Mexicano era limitada al norte por la desembocadura del río Pánuco, lindando con "Tampico Viejo", al oriente el litoral marino y al poniente los límites territoriales del Nuevo Reino de León. Sin cambiar de límites cambió de nombre por el de Nuevo Santander, en recuerdo del lugar de nacimiento de Escandón en España.

Después de la colonización y una vez dotados los colonos de tierra para su sustento, el virreinato dio curso a las solicitudes de mercedes de tierra realenga. (tierra propiedad del Rey por derecho de conquista). Posterior a los años 1767, 1768, fué atendida la solicitud de Don Antonio de Urizar, Conde de el Sauto. Por favor real, le fueron mercedados 648 sitios de ganado mayor con los siguientes límites: Al norte era el río Grande del Norte, llamado también río Bravo, al sur era el río de las Conchas, también llamado San Fernando, al oriente el litoral marino y al poniente eran los límites del Nuevo Reino de León.

Como se puede apreciar hoy en día, la inmensidad territorial que el rey de España regaló o dió a merced, como se quiera llamarle, comprendía el tercio central del estado de Tamaulipas y no la mitad norte como se ve hoy a causa del doloroso trazo realizado después de la derrota de Santa Anna. Pues bien, 648 sitios de ganado mayor a 1755 hectareas por sitio, dan un total de 1,137, 240 hectareas, área tan grande como la tercera parte de Bélgica.

La enorme hacienda no pudo ser colonizada y en 1774, doce vecinos de Camargo y uno de Reynosa, establecieron tratos con Don Vicente de Urizar, albacea de su difunto hermano Antonio, y compraron 113 sitios de ganado mayor. Se formalizó la venta en la villa de Linares el 18 de octubre de 1784, de los terrenos comprendidos a la margen sur del río Bravo, desde el Potrero de los Tayares hasta la desembocadura del río, instalándose los compradores en el predio de San Juan de los Esteros, dando lugar a la Congregación del Refugio, hoy Matamoros.

La heredad de los del Sauto era llamada "La Sauteña", por estar en el norte de la provincia (era un regionalismo dialéctico ponerle "eñes" a las tierras y familias). Varias veces la Sauteña estuvo sujeta a cédulas reales, que exigían de sus propietarios la población de los terrenos, bajo pena de perderla y muchas veces fue también sujeta de juicio por adeudos de impuestos. Es así que ya declarada la independencia, fue enjuiciada a embargársele por 695. sitios de ganado mayor por Hacienda Nacional, viéndose obligados los herederos a luchar por no perder los ranchos: Charco Escondido, Roble, Piedra Agujereada, Llorona, Borregos, Palo Alto, Chapul, San Fernando, Santa Fe, Mortandad y Huizache, Mogote de Doroteo, Santa Isabel, Palma, Conejo, Charco de Tolentino, Rancherías y Banquita. La superficie que comprendía era de 12,529,687,500 varas cuadradas, que significan 879,890 hectáreas. Los clásicos arreglos hicieron que Don Mariano del Conde, heredero directo de los del Sauto, entregarse solo 35 sitios de ganado mayor en pago de una deuda que sumaba 15,046.08 pesos, habiendo entregado para su liquidación solo 661,425 hectáreas.

En 1881, el gran territorio fué comprado por una sociedad que se llamó "La Sauteña", estando como cabeza visible un español llamado Íñigo Noriega, del que se decía era propietario de 99 haciendas en el país. Los miembros, en esa época anónimos, eran Don Fernando y Don Francisco Pimentel y Fagoaga, presidente y vicepresidente del Banco de Londres y México, Don José Armendariz, Antonio Basagoiti, M. Ibañez Y Cia., Remigio Noriega y hno. Ignacio de Noriega, Demetrio Salazar, Indalecio Sánchez Gavito y el propio Presidente de la República, el Gral. Porfirio Díaz.

Los hermanos del Conde, también quedaron como propietarios de una gran cantidad de tierra en esa sociedad con más de 150 sitios y se respetaron las ventas anteriores. La inmensa tierra, aunque fraccionada, era una superficie exagerada en la que durante los primeros 16 años de existencia de la sociedad, solo se explotó la ganadería ya existente.

En 1904, la propiedad fué visitada por primera vez por su gerente, Íñigo Noriega. Debíó conocerla arribando por Bagdad; quizá viajó en barco fluvial por el río Bravo hasta "Las Cuevas", lugar de salida del algodón sureño estadounidense durante la guerra de secesión. Allí en "Las Cuevas" terminaba el ramal ferroviario que partía de Matamoros, ya que solo hasta 1905 se dá el banderazo de salida inaugural del tren Matamoros-Monterrey. Íñigo vio las enormes posibilidades de que era capaz el predio y decidió irrigar un gran llano utilizando las aguas del río Bravo.

La base fué una de tantas estaciones: "El Ebano", lugar que según leyenda llamabase "Bolsa de Judas" y según las escrituras de cesión de derechos de vía y emplazamiento de la estación, que cede a título gratuito, la Sra. Refugio Treviño de Domínguez, para su instalación en un terreno denominado "Los Olmos".

Íñigo, apoyado en su compadrazgo con el Gral. Díaz, adquirió la totalidad de los derechos de la Sociedad y se quedó con toda la tierra, respetó solo los compromisos por pretender derechos de posesión.

Ante el más común estilo de la época, Íñigo Noriega Lazo, le puso el nombre de su tierra natal a la estación El Ebano; la bautizó "Colombres" como su asturiana tierra en que nació en 1853. Llegó a México en 1867 y muy pronto era propietario de minas, ingenios, jaboneras y fábricas de papel. Llegó a tener su propio ferrocarril en Río Frío y a desecar el lago de Chalco para aprovechar el lecho en la agricultura. Era propietario de muchas haciendas, se dice que de 99, entre ellas la Sauteña que a su visita se aprovechaba solo en la ganadería y una agricultura rudimentaria de los colonos.

Así es que entre 1904-1907, se pone en marcha un plan para desarrollar a gran escala la agricultura y la ganadería. Apoyado con ingenieros y proyectistas, se inicia el embalse de las aguas en "Paso de Bueyes" y "La Llorona" con capacidad de 372 millones de m<sup>3</sup>, además del bombéo de las aguas del río Bravo desde el estero de "Los Alacranes" hacia un canal que irrigaría la parte norte de la hacienda para aprovechar la suave vertiente de planicie de los alrededores de "Colombres". Entre los proyectos estaba la de colonizar con familias estadounidenses la parte norte, vendiéndoles lotes de 12.5 acres, promocionándolas con que contarían con ciudades, ferrocarriles, fábricas de aceite, despepitadoras de algodón, fábricas de jabón, ingenios azucareros, tiendas y bancos.

Contaba la hacienda en esos tiempos con la enorme suma de diez millones de pesos. Íñigo Noriega se apoyó en el Sr. Ignacio de la Torre y Formento, dos españoles activísimos, pero sobre todo en la incondicional ayuda de su gran amigo, el Presidente Díaz.

Desde antes, la comunicación entre los distintos ranchos que conformaban el gran predio, se hacía por teléfono privado, cuyo trazo de alambre y postería era cuidado por rurales a caballo; mas la actividad tenía como asiento el rancho "El Soldadito", uno de los más al sur de la hacienda. Con el ferrocarril la cosa cambió. Así fué como se iniciaron los trabajos de construcción de un canal en Colombres, el desmonte de los llanos que lo rodeaban, el represamiento de las aguas en "La Llorona" y "Paso de Bueyes" y la construcción de lo que sería cabecera de las actividades.

De inmediato se construyeron los hornos para fabricar el ladrillo aprovechado las tierras del lugar, así como las zonas arenícolas y caliza para la mezcla en la construcción de los edificios de ladrillo. Como dato curioso, existe entre los pobladores más antiguos el conocimiento que la mezcla para pegar los ladrillos era hecha con arena, cal, leche de cabra y nopal picado, muy a la costumbre de esos tiempos. Se edificaron así las casas para los trabajadores con ladrillo y para los administradores e ingenieros se construyeron de madera en el más puramente estilo americano, Diose entonces inicio a la edificación del gran edificio de ladrillo de tres plantas, perfectamente orientado y en estilo neoclásico, teniendo el frente hacia la estación del ferrocarril, mirando hacia el norte. No el que vemos actualmente que era entonces la salida a los patios traseros, cercana a la estación se elevaba una construcción ya desaparecida, nominada "El Mirador", que era realmente un observatorio meteorológico que contaba con aparatos de medición climáticos de los mas avanzados de la época y que contaba con una escalera de caracol con barandal de bronce que se dice fué traída desde Francia. Según el decir popular, este mirador se encontraba comunicado con el edificio principal por medio de un túnel, de lo que no existe una confirmación totalmente satisfactoria, pero del que hay continuos testimonios de su existencia.

Estando en su máximo desarrollo contaba ya con un campo agrícola experimental cuando sucedió el estallido revolucionario de 1910. Íñigo Noriega, a nombre del Presidente Díaz, entró en negociaciones con Ernesto Madero, hermano del caudillo, en 1911 a fin de contener la revuelta pero no logró su propósito. Al triunfo de Francisco I. Madero en ese mismo año, renunció Porfirio Díaz a la Presidencia el 23 de mayo, y el 29 de ese mes voluntariamente se exilia, saliendo en el vapor

alemán "Ypiranga" con rumbo a París. Por consiguiente, todos los protegidos del Dictador se apresuraron a ponerse a salvo y retirarse de los negocios. Así "La Sauteña" y sus proyectos fueron cancelados de golpe. Y ésta para 1912 se encontraba en bancarrota, sin recursos y en el mayor de los abandonos. La Compañía Agrícola "El Tlahualilo", de Torreón Coahuila, la compró en su totalidad, cambiándole el nombre por el de "Compañía Agrícola del Río Bravo".

A la muerte de Madero por asesinato y la continuación de la lucha contra el usurpador, el edificio a medio terminado de la Sauteña, es ocupado el 29 de mayo de 1913 por las fuerzas del Gral. Lucio Blanco después de la toma de Reynosa; Lucio Blanco descansó en la Sauteña hasta el 2 de julio, luego se acantonó en el rancho "Las Rucias", propiedad de Porfiristas y se lanzó a la toma de Matamoros el 3 del mismo mes.

Terminadas las batallas, en el rancho "Los Borregos" propiedad de Felix Díaz, sobrino de Don Porfirio, el 30 de agosto de 1913, Lucio Blanco procedió a efectuar el primer reparto agrario post-revolucionario, el hoy llamado Ejido Lucio Blanco. Los devenires de la guerra siguieron sumando el atraso de la región y no fué sino hasta 1925, en que se reparte la tierra que da origen al "Ejido Río Bravo".

Ya para estas fechas Iñigo Noriega Lazo, después de expatriarse en Texas en 1914, había regresado a México y muere en la Capital en 1923 a la edad de 70 años.

La gran tormenta de 1933, hace que el Gral. Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, tome medidas definitivas para evitar las inundaciones y la incomunicación de que era presa Matamoros cuando se presentaban este tipo de meteoros. El Presidente designó al Ing. Eduardo Chávez para que tomase cartas en el asunto y éste dió con la solución que llevó a la región a la prosperidad soñada por el español. El 1° de mayo de 1936, las aguas del Bravo corrieron por primera vez por gravedad en tierras mexicanas por el canal del "Retamal", creando las primeras zonas de riego del "Bajo Río Bravo" y utilizando solo los excedentes de las crecidas del río.

A finales de 1943, la Comición Nacional del Agua y hasta hace poco SARH, da inicios a los trabajos de formación del sistema de riego. Poco después el viejo edificio es ocupado por acuerdo con los ejidatarios para servir como sede de oficinas de la SARH. Lo ocupó hasta 1976, en la que lo regresan al ejido y este por convenio a la Presidencia Municipal, ya que desde 1961, Río Bravo se independiza de Reynosa formando el municipio N° 42. Hoy en día es asiento de la Casa de la Cultura. Cada ocupación dió lugar a cambios, algunos en mejoras sin tomar en cuenta la estructura histórica. Otros francamente en deterioro.

Aún así y sin que llegue a serlo, el gigante de ladrillo fué quizá el motor imaginario de la región. La venta de tierras sauteñas dió origen a Matamoros y los proyectos de irrigación de Iñigo Noriega fueron captados por el Ingeniero Chavez dando origen a esa bonanza de lo que llegó a ser el "oro blanco" en Tamaulipas.

Cronista Municipal, Cd. Río Bravo, Tamaulipas



## Colonia "Diez y Ocho De Marzo"

by

Nora E. Rios McMillan

Most of the studies dealing with the repatriation of half a million Mexicans from the United States during the Great Depression have emphasized the movement in urban areas, while rural areas of the country have been almost totally neglected. The primary focus of this paper is to examine the rural movements in Texas, which after all contributed slightly more than half of the repatriates. Since Texas was also the state where the Mexican government was more fully involved, this paper will also examine one of the major colonization projects which the Mexican government sponsored in order to lure its citizens home. Using the pages of *La Prensa*, a Spanish-language newspaper published in San Antonio (1913-1963), one is able to identify a different viewpoint, that of "*el México de afuera*," the voice of Mexican emigrants living in the United States yet still bonded to the homeland, no matter how long they had lived in the country.

According to the chief researcher of the Texas rural movements, R. Reynolds McKay, the Mexican repatriates came "primarily from five rural areas of Texas..." These repatriates passed through three major border cities: Laredo, Brownsville and El Paso. Four-fifths of the total number were destined for Mexico's northern states.<sup>1</sup>

McKay focused on factors that distinguished the Texas repatriation movement from the movement in other parts of the United States. Most historians, he claimed, have viewed repatriation of Mexicans as a phenomenon which first occurred with the onset of the Great Depression. He argued differently. "Repatriation from Texas ... has been an on-going process which began at least as early as the conclusion of the Mexican War."<sup>2</sup>

McKay's position is supported by earlier eminent historians. Frederick Olmstead, for example, wrote of Mexicans being driven from their homes in Austin, Seguin and San Antonio, the latter being left virtually abandoned during the 1840s. Also, Luis G. Zorilla noted government-sponsored repatriation in 1848 in his *Historia de las relaciones entre México y los Estados Unidos de América 1800-1958*. Other instances involved violence so widespread in the 1870s that many hundreds of Mexicans left the United States. Others were driven from their lands as Anglo-American cattle barons established their large ranches. Even as late as 1915, conflict between Mexicans and local Anglo-American vigilante groups had grown so severe that some 25,000 Mexican South Texas residents had been driven across the Rio Grande into Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

But immigration into the U. S. always outnumbered the returnees. Even though Texas led the way in repatriation numbers, "its percentage of returnees to Mexico was [never] large enough to reduce significantly Texas' Spanish-speaking population."<sup>4</sup> In fact, World War I simply intensified the influx that had begun during the revolutionary upheaval which overwhelmed Mexico in the early 1900s. John R. Martinez suggested: "It is a striking coincidence that the Revolution of 1910 occurred just at the time when tens of thousands of laborers were in demand in the agricultural development of the West in the U. S."<sup>5</sup> With the great need for agricultural labor in the lower Rio Grande Valley and throughout the Southwest, Mexican workers poured in once more, assured by the U. S. government

that they would not be drafted. "Indeed, the Mexican Revolution must be regarded as one of the most significant push forces in accelerating Mexican immigration to Texas."<sup>6</sup> These laborers stayed until the open invitation was withdrawn as the war ended and the economy came to a virtual standstill. This smaller repatriation movement coincided with the postwar depression (1919-1923). The number of Mexican laborers continued to increase from 1924 to 1929 when the bottom fell out of the stock market, and the U.S., accompanied by the rest of the industrial world, found itself in the middle of the Great Depression. The nation could hardly feed and provide for its citizens, much less the hundreds of thousands of illegal aliens who had been residing in the country, some for as many as twenty years. Thus, repatriation (whether forced or voluntary) was added to the deportations that had been a part of Texas history for a long time. It is this long history of a love-hate relationship between the Mexican laborer and American businessman that prompted McKay to question the motivations behind a resurrected deportation campaign that began in Texas in the summer of 1928, two and a half years before similar campaigns in other parts of the United States. While most studies of Mexican deportation activity during the Great Depression suggest that deportation efforts were the result of a desire to reduce employment among aliens, to create jobs for American citizens, and to relieve the burden on local welfare organizations, these were not the same economic considerations that provoked deportations in Texas, McKay asserted. In his opinion, racial or ethnic considerations were foremost.

On May 29, 1928, the San Antonio Express noted that the wholesale deportation of Texas Mexicans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley was creating a general agitation throughout the area; an editorial stated that the supply of agricultural laborers was being jeopardized.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, by January 1929, La Prensa editorialized and reported on deportees having to abandon their little children, of laborers being torn from their daily labors and sent directly to the border, without being permitted to collect salaries due to them. All matter of privations and hardships had been encountered in their sudden deportations.<sup>8</sup>

The American consul in Matamoros, John E. Holler, observed:

The returning repatriates resemble gypsies as they usually return by either wagon or broken down motor car in which children, household furniture, and domestic animals are loaded.<sup>9</sup>

Holler continued his commentary. "The Mexican repatriate appears to be returning to their [sic] country, due to the hard times in the U.S., the difficulty of obtaining employment and the fact that living costs are considerably cheaper in Mexico than in the United States." But in McKay's estimation, Holler ignored the most important fact in repatriates' decision to return home: "the climate of terror and panic resulting from the Immigration Service's deportation campaign."<sup>10</sup>

In this exasperating social climate, Spanish-language newspapers in the United States, such as La Prensa, served several important functions. Serving most of South Texas, extending from Corpus Christi and Laredo to Brownsville, as well as a number of Mexican colonies in several other southwestern, midwestern and northern states, La Prensa's primary function was to inform a people of events and developments that they otherwise would have no knowledge of since English-language newspapers generally made no effort to provide the necessary information. By observing the repatriation as it proceeded, La Prensa was able to provide some measure of protection for its people.

Working with the Mexican Department of Foreign Affairs and the American government, La Prensa played a key role in publishing directives from both governments as well as imparting information about immigration laws that had long been ignored. In one such pamphlet, published in La Prensa, the Department of Foreign Affairs stated that the Mexican government and the Department had seen as foremost the necessity of avoiding, through all possible means, the exodus of its people, which naturally resulted in diminishing the best elements of workers in the homeland. The Mexican government was determined to reduce the number considerably if for no other reason than to avoid exposing its citizens to all kinds of humiliation and suffering.

As the Depression worsened, and Mexico began to put colonization projects into operation, those plans and updates were widely disseminated through the pages of La Prensa and other Spanish-language newspapers throughout south Texas. La Prensa reported on mass meetings held in many Valley locations throughout South Texas. Discussions at these meeting focused on the uncertainty of the economic picture in Texas and "the tenuous situation of Mexican workers." Many expressed concern over the deportation of friends and neighbors, wondering if they would be next. Others had lived in Texas for many years and were reluctant to abandon their homes and friends. There was also a general curiosity about economic opportunities in Mexico.<sup>11</sup>

These mass meeting were held all over South Texas: San Diego (Duval County), Del Rio, Raymondville, Weslaco, Brownsville, Karnes City and Kennedy, San Marcos and San Antonio. One particular evening saw six hundred Mexicans crowded into the Benito Juarez Hall in Brownsville, Texas to hear the young, bilingual Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations, Ramon Beteta, speak of colonization projects which the Mexican government was implementing. Enthusiastically received, Beteta was accompanied by a group of engineers sent by President Lázaro Cárdenas. Their presence was taken as demonstration that Cárdenas' promise of jobs and land were being fulfilled.<sup>12</sup>

Beteta spoke of an agricultural zone of irrigated land that would be made available to Mexican repatriates on long-term government-financed loans. All farm implements, household goods, and \$100.00 in provisions per family would be exempt from import duties. This agricultural project would receive much publicity in comparison to others. It would briefly be known as Colonia "el diez y ocho de marzo," and was located about 25 to 30 miles south of Matamoros. Its original name was significant in that March 18th is a red-letter date in Mexican history, commemorating the date of nationalization of foreign oil holdings by which Mexico proclaimed its economic emancipation from the U.S. and other European countries.

It had earlier been an agricultural development project under private ownership. Extensive irrigation works and drilling of artesian wells had taken place, along with the construction of canals and pumping stations along the Rio Grande. Most were in a bad state of disrepair. New efforts to reestablish the colony were begun in September, 1935 with the appropriation of \$650,000. On August 16, 1938, the Mexican government announced that 250,000 acres of land were open for colonization by repatriates in three specific areas: the Bajo Rio Bravo in northeastern Tamaulipas, the Rio Colorado in northern Baja California, and the Rio Fuerte in northern Sinaloa.<sup>13</sup>

According to La Prensa, thirty-acre lots were distributed to each male over the age of eighteen, twenty-five of them irrigated land, with the remaining five acres for the building of a homestead. If the adult male preferred to raise livestock, the Mexican government distributed two acres of pastureland per each head and one-half an acre per smaller livestock, such as goats. A sum of two hundred pesos was given to each family for the purchase of lumber and corrugated tin to build their

new homes. They were also paid sixty-five pesos for each two and a half acres cleared. The lands were designed for the growing of cotton and fruit trees.<sup>14</sup>

Many repatriates came with a modest fortune, a small cache of American dollars which substantially improved their economic standard of living in Mexico, giving them the required financial resources to purchase seed, tools, as well as other necessities. For a substantial number, a prized possession was their "carrito Ford" and American-made tools and machinery. Many expressed some sort of "satisfaction and contentment arriving in their [own] proper vehicles". Others made the trip to the colony in U.S. Immigration Service trucks.

And it is to be expected that the repatriate brought something of his "adopted" land with him. Perhaps he replaced his rubber *guaraches* (literally made of a discarded car tire) or demonstrated a new assertiveness in taking on a new leadership role in the community in which he settled. As Robert McLean noted in 1931:

A man cannot live in a country thirteen years, share in her social and economic life, beget his children under her flag and send them to her schools, without something happening to him. Will that something fit Chihuahua?<sup>15</sup>

By September of 1929, the first 205 families had arrived in the colony through the efforts of the Mexican consul in Brownsville.<sup>16</sup> However, the majority of new residents at Colonia "diez y ocho de marzo" came from the Karnes County area, along with a sizable number from San Antonio and the Lower Rio Grande Valley and at least two contingents arriving from the Dallas area. On October 6, 1931, *La Prensa* announces the anticipated departure of an auto caravan leaving Karnes City on the 18th of October. It later reported on the 104 vehicles that were to depart soon, which included 48 autos, 16 trucks, and various three-ton and one-ton vehicles with platforms. Apparently many of these were offered to help the repatriates move their belongings but only five of the "donors" actually fulfilled their promises. The number of colonists, mostly from Texas, continued to cross the border through Matamoros, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo.<sup>17</sup> Eventually, the colony's populations numbered over 7500 persons by the end of the summer of 1940.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, the Mexican government was ill-prepared for the enthusiastic response it received and was unable to accommodate all the repatriates. The summer of 1939 saw heavy rains slow down the clearing of the land and the intended construction of homes. One colonist described constructing his home in "*lodazal espantoso*" [unbelievable mud], surrounded by swarms of mosquitoes. The road became impassable and there were reports of food shortages, inadequate medical care, and lack of potable water. In addition, infectious disease ran rampant. Apparently however, the problems were short-lived and 1940 saw bountiful harvests. After all, the area had been identified as a rich agricultural zone.<sup>19</sup>

According to Eduardo Chavez, a Mexican engineer in charge of the project, only about ten percent of the colonists abandoned their land. However, he did acknowledge that many of the American-born children of the *colonos* returned to the U.S. in the 1940s when economic conditions improved.<sup>20</sup> Today, Colonia "diez y ocho de marzo" is known as Valle Hermoso, a name it took in 1943 soon after its founding. Once a part of Matamoros and still an agricultural area, it is a thriving independent municipality. Its population is approximately 50,000 while the entire agricultural

community surrounding it numbers about 100,000. As the cotton industry declined in market value in the 1960s, Valle Hermoso looked to expand its economic base. Today it is the site of several *maquiladoras*. It also supports livestock on its grazing land.<sup>21</sup> Because Matamoros and Brownsville share a common border and an integrated economy for the most part, Valle Hermoso has added significantly to the border economy.

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## Endnotes

1. R. Reynolds McKay, "Texas Mexican Repatriation during the Great Depression" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1982), p. v.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
4. John R. Martinez, "Mexican Emigration to the U.S. 1910-1930" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1957), p. 174.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
6. McKay, p. 71.
7. San Antonio Express, May 19, 1928.
8. La Prensa, January 29, 1929, p.3. Translated by author.
9. McKay, p. 281.
10. McKay, p. 280-281.
11. La Prensa, June 16, 1929, p. 2. See also La Prensa, November 13, 1929, p. 1. Translated by the author.
12. See La Prensa, April 28, 1929, p. 1; June 16, 1929; June 20, 1929.
13. La Prensa, August 18, 1938, p. 1.
14. La Prensa, June 20, 1939. Indigenous fruit grown today includes oranges and grapefruits as well as tangerines and lemons.
15. Robert N. McLean, "Good-bye, Vicente!" Survey, May 1, 1931, p. 182.
16. McKay, p.274.
17. La Prensa, October 6, 1931; October 11, 1931; October 22, 1931.
18. McKay, p. 427.

19. Ibid., See also La Prensa, June 30, 1939.

20. McKay, p. 435.

21. Telephone interviews with Dr. Milo Kearney, University of Texas at Brownsville, and Dr. Carlos Rosas, M.D. February 11, 19, and February 24, 1995.

# A Selected History of Fine Arts in Brownsville, Texas

by

Nancy Escobedo Churchill

## Early Art in Brownsville

There is much to say about the influence of art in Brownsville. Since settlement times, local families have shared their artistic talents and interests in the home environment. At home, children would learn such arts as knitting, cross-stitch, crochet, music, poetry, etc. Also, home-makers would make quilts out of old scraps of cloth. These quilts and other home-made masterpieces may have never been displayed where the public could appreciate and admire the delicate craftsmanship of the art. The value and beauty of some of these works are priceless. Many artistic works by those who worked at home went unnoticed by the public. Generally only family members and friends got to appreciate and admire much of the personal art.

There were, however, other forms of art that attracted the attention of the public. For example, dances, plays and operas were publicized. One open event announcement in Brownsville can be accurately dated back to 1891. It is recorded that in November 26, 1891, a group of five people: F. San Roman, George More, A.A. Brown, Abe Cowen and D. F. Filghman were members of a committee of invitation for an event of the Brownsville Opera. (The Stillman House Museum) On February 7, 1896, it is recorded that a dance which included a variety of waltzes and polkas was held. On December 27, 1899, at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, a sacred concert was given in honor of The Golden Jubilee. This event was given by the Ladies' Altar Society of 1899. In 1911 it is recorded that a scene from "Nevada the Gold King" was given as a benefit performance. The event was directed by Miss Ida McDavitt, for the Fire Department at the Alford Theater, located on Washington Street. (The Stillman House Museum) It is further noted that "the Vivier Opera House was the scene of both musical and societal activities". (The Stillman House Museum)

Clearly, people have been gathering together for the sake of cultural and musical purposes for many years in Brownsville. Different societal institutions have contributed to the organization and sponsorship of this goal. Schools, churches, the Chamber of Commerce, the Mexican Consulate, the Brownsville Herald and other groups of interested citizens have been responsible for the encouragement of the arts.

One of the more successful examples of artistic and cultural celebrations is the Charro Days festival. In 1937, an attorney named Kenneth Faxon developed the idea as a means of getting people to visit Brownsville -- which, at the time, had a reputation of being a "dirty Mexican town". (Aiken) Now Charro Days is one of the most popular and international community events in Brownsville and the lower Rio Grande Valley.

The purpose of this paper is to identify and report the history of some of the artistic groups and identify their efforts to enlighten citizens of the lower Rio Grande Valley in the arts. I suspect that many such organizations have emerged in the history of the community. However, those discussed appear to have had the lasting effect, which is evidenced by their current existence. Specifically

discussed are: The Community Concert Association, Patron of the Arts, Camille Lightner Players and the Brownsville Art League.

### **The Community Concert Association**

Brownsville's Community Concert Association was formed over forty years ago and has contributed to the growth of the arts in Brownsville. Conrad Cloetta was an original founder and the first manager of the association which brought all sorts of entertainment to Brownsville such as dance groups, ballet and a variety of musical presentations. The Jacob Brown auditorium was built to satisfy the needs of the Community Concert Association.

According to Robert Buchanan, the association was created by a group of people who wanted to bring "cultural" entertainment to the city. It has brought many famous musical groups to Brownsville: The San Antonio Symphony, the Boston Pops Orchestra and the famous violinist, Yehuda Menuhin among others. (McNair) In order to raise money to bring these big name groups, it was necessary to sell membership units. Memberships are sold as subscriptions for an entire season, and according to Buchanan, they prefer not to sell tickets for individual performances. The idea worked and is still working today; their management has been responsible for many accomplished artists coming to Brownsville. Ms. Arneson reported that at the first performance, attendees dressed in formal attire. She further suggested that attendance was a major social event -- women wore long gowns.

### **Patron of the Arts**

Another formal organization which has contributed to the growth of art in Brownsville is the Patron of the Arts. Some who were instrumental in forming the Patron of the Arts were Juliet Garcia, Art Brownlow, Terri Tomlin and Lura Davidson, who is also credited with giving the organization its name. (Urbis) The organization has existed for eight years. Performances have been held in the Eidman Hall or the music building of The University of Texas at Brownsville and also in Brownsville churches.

Up until today, the Patron of the Arts does not have a recital hall or a raised stage. There has been and still is a tremendous need for space. The area where the concerts are held requires much work for the preparation of performances. The Patron of the Arts has provided the community of Brownsville with the opportunity to see a combination of performing artists and art exhibits. They have featured Russian pianists, French harpists, Korean violinists, Yugoslavian guitarists, and Metropolitan Opera. (Rio Grande Review) The series has been highly professional and has featured only accomplished artists. Even today, all participants are highly qualified. University students who contribute in the events are closely monitored to insure that they possess the requisite skill level.

The Patron of the Arts represents something of a more serious nature; the organization's purpose is not merely to entertain but rather to expand people's horizons and introduce uncommon knowledge. Thus performances given are as much a class as a concert and may be viewed as extensions of the educational process. (Urbis)

One of the most popular concerts that the Patron of the Arts has given was held in October 1991. The event featured Alexander Sharkman, a Russian pianist who is famous for winning many awards,



including the Van Cliburn International Competition prize. It is reported that people were standing in the halls and doorways to hear Sharkman play. (Rio Grande Review)

Today the Patron of the Arts features more art exhibits than ever before. The organization provides a package opportunity which includes an art event that coincides with a music event. (Urbis)

### **The Camille Lightner Playhouse**

In addition to the Patron of the Arts and the Community Concert Association, the Camille Lightner Playhouse has provided Brownsville with the opportunity to see Broadway musicals, professional concerts, soloists, ensembles, dance groups, dramas and comedies. (Wooldridge) The theater was built in 1965.

In 1963, "a small group of English, Speech and Drama teachers, accompanied by a few interested theater buffs got together and started a Little Theater Group, calling themselves The Brownsville Players". (Pamphlet) This was the beginning of the Camille Lightner Playhouse.

At first, the performances were held in an old vacant cotton sampling warehouse that had no modern conveniences. Additionally, fire protection and adequate air conditioning were not available. The two productions of the first season were "Green Grow the Lilacs" and "Thieves' Carnival". (Pamphlet)

The Sams Foundation recognized the devotion, effort and hard work of The Brownsville Players, along with the contributions to the artistic culture of Brownsville. This recognition stirred the foundation to support a survey of the "needs and desires of the theater and a projection of its potential future contribution to Brownsville". (Pamphlet) As a result of this needs assessment, in the summer of 1964, the Sams Foundation gave a grant to build a theater facility at Dean Porter Park. The city of Brownsville donated the land. On January 31st, 1965, the Camille Lightner Playhouse was dedicated at its current location. The theater was a tribute to the memory of Camille Sams Lightner, who loved the theater. Ms. Lightner, who died in 1962, was a sister of Gladys Porter and daughter of Earl Croder Sams, founded of the Sams Foundation. (Wooldridge) The opening night for the production was on February 1st, 1965, featuring "Under the Yum Yum Tree".

The theater has grown in membership and has expanded to a nine-month season with six productions, five plays and one musical. A junior dramatic workshop for children is held every summer. It runs for six weeks each summer, starting in June and ending in a children's production in the middle of July. There are usually 120 children in the workshops. (Siegler) In August of each year there is an annual Stage Door Sale which coincides with a final membership drive. The organization is totally voluntary, except for the director and a secretary, who are paid.

### **The Brownsville Art League**

Before 1935 art enthusiasts interested in painting did so on their own, without the support of a local organization. In 1935, a small group of women painters saw the need to form an art league. At first they met and painted in each others' homes, and then started going out painting in other locations. They painted local scenes including palms, cactuses, *jacales*, daggers and old houses. The results of these women's idea was the formation of the Brownsville Art League. (Arneson)

Identical twins and artists, Clara Ely and Cala Magiil formed the backbone of the effort to

organize the league. It soon grew into eight members who were: Clara Ely, Cala Magiil, Ruth McGonigle, Francis Ray, Denise Worthington, Hally Kenedy, Thelma Buckley and Octavia Arneson, who, at age 98, is the only surviving founder.

They met every Thursday in each other's homes. The dues for the group was \$6.00 a year, which is very little now, but at the time seemed to be a lot of money, indicative of their degree of interest in the league. Nearly all of the founding members taught each other and new members for a fee. All of the members donated their time and help to the league.

Usually the Brownsville Art League members painted outside. When the weather was bad they met in church basements, homes, schools, or any place they could find. Then, in the early 1940s, they were able to paint in the old Fort Brown morgue. This privilege was granted by Texas Southmost College, owners of the building. Classes were held there every day and one night each week. Some helpful artists significant to the league were Roy Keister, a portrait painter who taught the portrait class and Dale Nickles, an inspirational artist. Roy Keister painted the mural in the Civic Center.

In 1950, Mimi del Valle, a descendant of the Neale family, who used to live in the Neale house, offered to donate the house to the art league. The Neale house was located on 14th Street, near Fort Brown. Stanley Dodds, a husband of one of the league's teachers was a contractor in San Benito. He moved the Neale House and put a foundation under it, because at the time the house was built it had not been placed on a foundation. He was not paid very much for the job; his work was more of a gift to the league. The matting for the house was obtained in Matamoros by George McGonigle, the husband of another art teacher, Ruth McGonigle. The only heat in the house came from the fireplaces, which worked wonderfully. The league did not start off with a whole lot of money but in time they were able to install a big studio with pegboard on the walls and north light on the back.

On Tuesdays there was a portrait class that was given by Mr. Mongrell, an artist from Matamoros, who was originally from Spain. The Art League has had many workshops over the years. Their first teacher for a workshop was Harry Anthony DeYoung. He came once a month for criticism and lecture. The league has had many famous artists attend. Their dream was to have an art league that was like a school and a museum. (Arneson) The second workshop was held with Merline Enabit. Octavia Arneson was in a store one day and saw an art book titled Color with Pallet, by Merline Enabit, "a true color wizard". Ms. Arneson bought the book and took it to the Art League. Francis Ray, an art league member, wrote to Merline and told him how much the league could pay him for coming to Brownsville to do a workshop. The amount was very little, \$600 for two weeks. Merline wrote back that he had never done a workshop and had never been to Texas. He came to Brownsville and had a marvelous time doing the workshop.

Little by little enough money was collected to build a museum. Today, the Brownsville Art League has a lovely little museum which contains a fine art collection. There is no other "strictly art" museum like it in South Texas. (Arneson)

The following is a list of some of the artists they have had in their workshops: Harry Antony DeYoung, Mr. Konice, Clide Clack, Ted Skyler, Mr. Lamb, Benjamin Abramowitz, Dale Nickles, Fred Samualston, Roy Keister, Ben Stal, Harry Worthman, Merline Enabit, James Woodward, Melford Zones, Al Broulet, Gadas Gising, Lucille Reese Kennedy and Ken Hosmer.

Today the Art League has two shows a year. In November they have their Arts and Crafts Show, which is their money-making event that helps support the organization. In March they have their International Art Show for which they try to bring in some international artists. Additionally, many

artists stop by and offer advice for free. They also have some connections with the schools, showing some of the children's work.

## **Conclusion**

The Lower Rio Grande Valley and Brownsville have a long and rich history of interest and dedication to artistic pursuits. Were it not for the dedication of a few people, the present-day citizens would not have the pleasures and opportunities that are offered by the arts. The oldest organized artistic endeavor in Brownsville is the Brownsville Art League. A few women with a common interest were determined to make an artistic/cultural contribution, and were successful. The league has evolved from using each other's homes and churches to a permanent site and museum, a remarkable achievement.

More recently on the scene is the Patron of the Arts. Begun by a few, for the many, it shows great promise in terms of bringing an appreciation for the arts to Brownsville citizens. The Camille Lightner Players enjoys significant popularity in the community, having made a grand leap from their beginning, both in quality and quantity of presentations. The Community Concert Association continues to bring entertainment to the Lower Rio Grande Valley and citizens of Brownsville.

In conclusion, I suggest that all of these organizations have significantly contributed to the current status of artistic and cultural events in Brownsville. Specifically, citizens owe a great debt of gratitude to the Brownsville Art League. Were it not for the dedication and perseverance of those people, we would not be able to experience the joy of fine arts to the degree that we do in this city today. My research suggests that they were responsible for setting in motion the concept of fine arts appreciation.

## **People Interviewed and Works Cited**

### **People Interviewed**

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Ameson, Octavia, founding member of the Brownsville Art League, personal interview, 2 March and 20 May 1993.

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# Hispanic Journalism in Brownsville, Texas

by

Cipriano A. Cárdenas

There have been numerous Spanish-language newspapers published in Brownsville since the latter part of the nineteenth century. These newspapers were chronicles of their locale, informing the Mexican-American community and recording its literary, political, and social history. While many public libraries devotedly kept copies of English-language newspapers, such was not the case for Spanish-language periodicals. Consequently, virtually all records of Mexican-American life in the Rio Grande Valley, as reflected in their Hispanic publications, have been lost.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, in 1975, the library of the University of Texas at Austin had the foresight--and the resources--to undertake a project to salvage Spanish-language newspapers published in Texas. One such newspaper that was salvaged for posterity was *El Puerto de Brownsville*. This weekly paper, founded in 1954 by Gilberto A. Cerda, is the only complete record of Hispanic journalism available to scholars and the general public that chronicles the Mexican-American experience in Brownsville.

## History of Hispanic Journalism in Brownsville

The history of Hispanic journalism in Brownsville goes back to the 1860's. Two short-lived publications appeared immediately after the American Civil War. The first, *El Zaragosa*, apparently written by Mexican exiles, supported the Juárez faction in Mexico during Maximilian's reign; the second, *The Rio Grande Courier*, founded and edited by Emile P. Claudon, was actually a polylingual paper, published in English, French, and Spanish.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the 1880's and 1890's, therefore, that publications owned and written by Hispanic journalists were established to serve Brownsville's mainly Mexican Spanish-speaking population.

By the turn of the century, four of these papers were being published in Brownsville. These were, *El Porvenir*, published by Don Paulino Preciado; *La República*, published by Don Dámaso Lerma; *El Paladín*, published by Don Rumualdo Treviño; and, a morning daily, *El Cronista*, published by Don Arnulfo Correa.<sup>3</sup>

Of these four publications, *El Cronista* was the last and largest of the Spanish-language newspapers established in Brownsville. Founded in the 1890's, it paralleled the growth of the English-language publication, *The Daily Herald*. *El Cronista* had several talented writers who were political refugees of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. By 1920, the paper rivaled the English-language *Brownsville Herald* in importance.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the decade, however, many Mexican nationals began to return home to a more stable Mexico, and this led to the demise of *El Cronista*. In November 1934, *The Brownsville Herald* filled the void left by the defunct *Cronista* with the introduction of its daily Spanish edition, *El Heraldo de Brownsville*, edited by Oscar del Castillo and, more recently, by Marcelino González. Today, *El Heraldo* consists, essentially, of translations into Spanish of stories, articles, and columns that appear in *The Brownsville Herald*, a morning daily owned by Freedom Communications Inc., of Orange county, California. *El Cronista*, then, was the

last Latino-owned, Spanish-language daily published in Brownsville.

The late 1940's and early 1950's saw a resurgence of Hispanic newspapers in the Rio Grande Valley to serve the increasing population of Mexican immigrants and farm workers-- "Braceros"-- who had come to the Valley to work in the agricultural fields. The emergence of these weekly newspapers was also in response to a perception held by some Hispanic businessmen that the Anglo-owned English-language dailies published in the Rio Grande Valley were not serving the needs of the Mexican-American community.<sup>5</sup>

When *El Puerto* began publication in 1954, six Spanish-language weekly newspapers were being published in the Rio Grande Valley. The largest of these newspapers was *El Porvenir* of Mission, Texas. By 1965, five of these newspapers had closed, and the sixth, *El Tiempo*, of Raymondville, had converted to English publication.<sup>6</sup>

When it ceased publication in 1975, *El Puerto* was the last of the remaining Hispanic newspapers published in the Rio Grande Valley.

### History of *El Puerto* Newspaper

The first edition of *El Puerto* appeared on January 30, 1954. In the 15th Anniversary Edition of January 1969, publisher Gilberto Cerda recalled the birth of his newspaper and reflected on its growth and status:

*"El Puerto* was born many years after all the (Spanish) papers that had been published in Brownsville had disappeared. These newspapers had closed for various reasons and, then, your servant Gilberto Cerda and colleague León Ledezma were asked by six persons, led by the late Don Anastacio Treviño, the other persons being Lelo Cisneros, Gustavo Vera, Salvador Davó and Moisés Guerra, to publish a weekly paper to defend the rights of the Latinos in this area, that at the time were not as respected in this region.

The print shop where the newspaper *El Puerto* was born was rickety and the press was quite small, measuring 12 by 18 and without resources. Things being like that, your servant and León Ledezma agreed to work together and we published the first edition of *El Puerto*, precisely on the 30th of January, 1954.

The Group headed by Mr. Anastacio Treviño helped with a little money, so that we could purchase paper and ink and enough material for five editions, and we printed the paper the old-fashioned way, stopping after each line, from first to the last, from 10 and 12 points.

At nine in the morning of the 30th of January of that unforgettable year of 1954, the first edition of *El Puerto* saw the light of day, and our friend, Beto Martínez, "la voz del pueblo," along with his companion hit the streets to distribute it free, along with a few ads.

Four weeks after the first edition, León Ledezma had to leave town, leaving the commitment and responsibility (to publish the paper) with



your servant.

I didn't know whether or not *El Puerto* would continue to be published, because it is very difficult to go on when there are no funds or resources.

Then, it was my good fortune to run into a friend on the street, the Rev. Miguel Guillén, President of the 'Concilio Latinoamericano de Iglesias Cristianas' and I told him of the dire situation in which I found myself, and Dr. Guillén told me not worry, that he would see if somehow he could help me by setting the type in the press of that organization, and he was the savior of this newspaper, and it continued to be published.

Rev. Guillén talked to the person in charge of the (church's) print shop, Mr. Rubén García, and this was how Mr. García set the type for a period of more than 12 years. Similarly, Mr. García also lent a hand in the production of the paper, charging very little for his work.

We are also grateful to Dr. Guillén for his kindness when Hurricane Beulah visited us, for he provided money to buy newsprint, since ours was damaged during the storm.

Speaking of *El Puerto*, we could say that it entered fully into the political arena, and for two or three months we had been helping Vicars so he could remove the yoke imposed on the city administration by Stokley and Rentfro.<sup>7</sup>

Afterwards, our amigo Vicars did not know how to express proper appreciation for the work we had done to carry him into power.

In our journalistic life, we have also been sued for telling the truth, and Reynaldo Garza, Esq., now federal judge,<sup>8</sup> took both cases without charging a single penny, only the court costs, such things for which we are grateful to Judge Garza.

Today, we may not live in opulence, but we might say that we are better off than in years past.

At the present time, in the last five years, *El Puerto* is certified and has a large circulation and everybody watches for it on Saturdays, to see what's news.

We would be remiss if we forgot to also express our appreciation to our friend Mike Gómez,<sup>9</sup> because when we moved from Adams Street, adjacent to Sommer's Furniture, he donated all the expenses for the truck that moved us a few blocks down to 901 Adams Street.

We also have not forgotten all those people who have helped to support *El Puerto* but the majority of those people have passed away.

It's a long history, but everything that has occurred to us in our journalistic life is true and we are still struggling because we need an adequate press to publish a good newspaper...

May these last lines serve to express here our public appreciation to

all our collaborators, subscribers, advertisers, and the general public.”

## **The Life and Times of Don Gilberto Cerda**

The publisher of *El Puerto* was born November 30, 1901 in Brownsville, Texas. His parents were Juan Cerda and Juanita Ilizaliturri, northern Mexicans, vaguely of the lower middle class. They were poor, she a housewife, he a peddler, traveling about town retailing small wares.

Gilberto Cerda had little formal education, reaching only the third grade. He taught himself to read, however, and became an avid reader of poetry, history, and the Holy Scriptures, in both English and Spanish. At the age of twelve he became an apprentice at *The Brownsville Herald* pressroom, where he worked for the next 32 years. He read *The Herald* daily as well as the *San Antonio News*.<sup>10</sup>

His life story cannot be separated in any particular from the tumultuous first half of the twentieth century. He was nine years old when the Mexican Revolution began, resulting in an exodus of Mexican refugees who came to the United States. When he was about fifteen years old, U.S. army General John Joseph Pershing entered Mexico in pursuit of Pancho Villa in a vain attempt to capture the Mexican Revolutionary War hero. The early 1930's saw thousands of Mexican nationals return to Mexico due to the Great Depression in the United States and the Great Repatriation Campaign in Mexico.

The U.S. entered World War II when Cerda was 40 years of age. Too old to serve in the armed forces of the United States, he saw many of his younger Mexican-American friends serve bravely in that war, as well as during the Korean Conflict of 1950 to 1953. Sadly, when many of these soldiers returned home to civilian life, they found that they were still second-class citizens of the United States, facing unequal treatment and encountering discrimination in their daily lives.

The early 1950's witnessed another wave of Mexican immigration to the United States. Thousands of farm workers, called "braceros" were invited to the United States to harvest the agricultural crops throughout the American Southwest. The headlines in the inaugural edition of *El Puerto* in 1954 reflect the problems brought on by Mexican immigration: "Disturbances caused by Braceros; one Dead." Other front page stories describe human rights violations related to the contracting of hundreds of these Mexican farm workers, at the same time that hundreds of others were being deported. Other stories in that edition deal with the house-to-house searches conducted by the Border Patrol in Brownsville to locate illegal aliens.

The 1960's and 1970's saw the involvement of U.S. troops in the Vietnam War, as well as the emergence of the Chicano Civil Rights movement. Gilberto Cerda, not always in agreement with Chicano activists, had plenty to say in his columns about the political, social, and cultural changes during that period.

Human rights violations, discrimination, and Anglo control of the economic and political processes in Brownsville, as well as the Latino community's struggle to gain power are recurring themes of the paper's columns and commentaries during its 21-year publication history, from 1954 to 1975.

## **Features of *El Puerto***

*El Puerto* served the Mexican-American population in Brownsville by sewing the threads of the community into a single fabric. It did so with news and notices of marriages, births, deaths, travels,

as well as recognition of accomplishments, such as announcements of high school or college graduation and promotions in rank of Brownsville men and women serving in the armed forces.

The most important features of *El Puerto*, however, were the front page stories dealing with local politics. The main headlines were provocative, often using colorful Mexican idioms for special humoristic effect:

“Discriminación para el México-Americano en la Ciudad”

“A Ver de Cuál Cuero Salen Más Correas!”

“La Misma Gata, Nomás Que Ahora Está Revolcada”

“Después de Todo, Lo Tumbó la Burra!”

Readers looked forward to the editor's moralistic commentaries regarding various subjects, such as, juvenile delinquency, corruption, and the general decline of manners and morals in the community. Cerda always used satire to criticize corruption and to ridicule what he perceived to be excesses, particularly in the younger generations. These are samplings of headlines that reveal the editor's attitude regarding different topics:

“Se Pelearon Como Viejas Tamaleras”

“Le Jugaron el Dedo en la Boca”

“Hubo Zafarrancho en el Baile del Sol”

“Le Pelotearon \$1,300 Dólares”

“Malas Consecuencias de la Juventud Moderna”

A typical example of a Front Page story criticizing the decline of civility is the following article from the May 23, 1959 edition, with the headline, “The Immorality of Today's Youth at the Movie Theaters”:

“Serious and decent people who look for entertainment and a moment of respite at the movie theaters nearly always have to abandon those places, annoyed and overwhelmed with the degree of disorder and excesses committed while the film is running.

Those who specialize in this sort of disorder that, really, borders on the point of immorality, are the lovesick couples of the type that daringly and with impudence display their affection, and who frequent those entertainment centers solely to give in to their vulgar and bestial instincts, to hug each other, to shamelessly kiss each other, without caring about the presence of decent and honest people in the theater who are seeking good entertainment, not vulgar residue.

The elimination of this bad ambient in our local cinemas depends, in part, on the owners of these amusement centers, who should endeavor to deny admission to corrupt people. The appropriate authorities, also, have the duty to protect and defend public morality.”

A mainstay of the newspaper was a column written by the late Jesse Sloss, a native of Brownsville and a highly respected member of the Mexican-American community who served for many years as City Secretary and, later, as City Manager. His column was called "Confetti y Ladrillazos," translated loosely as, "Thorns and Roses." As may be inferred from the title of his column, the purpose of his commentary was to heap praise and to censure. His topic was, generally, politics—local, state, and national. An astute observer of the local political scene, and a "dyed in the wool Democrat," Sloss was a strong advocate for civil rights and a defender of the weakest members of our society. A typical column is this excerpt from his July 17, 1954 column dealing with the round-up of "Braceros," guest farm workers from Mexico who had remained in the Valley after their work visas had expired:

"The Border Patrol's campaign against the foreigners who are still in the Valley illegally has begun. I have used many words to describe how the Roundhats have already begun to cleanse the Valley of wetbacks. Poor people! It arouses a great deal of pity to see so much suffering in the world, but it is even more painful to see it in our own community! Men, women, children, entire families are in the custody of government agents. One can see in their faces a profound sadness and a deep sense of desperation. They are worthy of our compassion because the crime they have committed is to try to make an honest living doing the work that ours don't want to perform. What do these poor and unfortunate people take away from us? Much to the contrary, instead of taking from us, they give, because they gather the harvest that would be lost, if it weren't for them. Godspeed, little wetbacks, may God fill you with his blessing."

Another mainstay of the newspaper, and one of its most popular features, was another column of commentary by editor Gilberto Cerda called, "Papá y Mamá." The column was addressed to readers who were "Moms and "Dads," appealing to them to adhere to traditional Hispanic family values. This is a typical "Papá y Mamá" commentary from the June 10, 1961 edition:

"Back in those days, once a 'señorita' accepted a proposal of marriage, her betrothed arranged to have a Committee of honorable people go to the home of his sweetheart's parents to ask for her hand in marriage.

To do this, before the Committee presented itself at the 'señorita's' home, they announced their visit and, in this way, they were expected by the parents of the future bride.

Once at the bride's home, after exchanging the accustomed pleasantries, the Committee began to express the purpose of their visit, while the girl hid in the adjoining room, perspiring hot and cold, for she did not know what her parents' response would be.

In those days, the parents never answered either affirmatively or

negatively until a few days had transpired. With much respect and with much prudence, the Committee was told that they, the parents, would consider the proposal with deliberation and once they reached a decision, the Committee would be informed directly.

This thoroughness in considering matters of major importance characterized our forebears.

There was much respect towards all the children, and the children, in turn, highly respected their parents.

But, today, everything is different.

Things have changed, as changing day into night.

Today, some girls inform their moms of their marriage by telephone, that is, if there's a phone in the house; if not, then, when she arrives home, falling with laughter, she gives mom and pop the news.

Instead of feeling embarrassed, the girl informs her parents of the news, as if it were a matter of, 'out of the way, here I go!'

Nowadays, by the time the girl announces her new state of matrimony, it's because she's already carrying the 'pill,' in other words, she's already pregnant with the child they'll have to work to support.

What do you, kind readers, think of these famous modern times?

Daughters do as they please; and with the excuse that they work and know how to earn a living, Mom can't tell them a thing...besides the fact that Mom, too, accepts Modernism.

As far as Dad is concerned, there's no sense in taking him into account.

Dad has neither voice nor vote at home because, under Modernism, Dad has come to be a 'zero to the left,' as they say. Dad, also, is responsible for the place he has because he, too, is in tune with Modernism....

Before, they was more calm and prudence in making Life's decisions; but, today, we live at such a fast pace, that it is difficult to say if we have gone forward or backward, in the matter of knowing how to live.

Many people have asked us why we defend times past, and in response, we say that we are in favor of the 'old days' because, before, there was more order and respect between parents and children, as well as more kindness and more affection in all humanity...."

In addition to the aforementioned columns, *El Puerto* often ran stories on Mexico, or on general news events such as sports, crime, etc., that involved Mexicans in the United States. The paper also commemorated holidays, such as Columbus Day, Mexican Independence Day, and Cinco de Mayo with the publication of patriotic essays or poems. *El Puerto's* regular four-page format doubled to eight pages as customers took out ads to celebrate Mother's Day, Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter, and "Las Calaveras" on All Souls' Day.

## Language and Style of *El Puerto*

The language of *El Puerto* is similar to that of northern Mexican papers of the period. It is, basically, standard Spanish, with a certain elegant flair. The editor mixed this style with the deliberate use of Mexican dialect, where slang and idioms were used for humorous effect. The editor's "Papá y Mamá" column was intentionally humorous, using the satire which is typical to the Hispanic journalistic tradition.

*El Puerto* had relatively few spelling or grammatical errors, as it was carefully proofread by employee Don José Castro. The paper, thus, was characterized by the mixture of literary and flowery language with slang dialect, including a sprinkling of anglicisms, which provides a good reflection of the use of Spanish in Brownsville during the period of its publication from 1954 to 1975.

## Conclusion

*El Puerto de Brownsville* was the last of a long line of Latino-owned Spanish-language newspapers published in Brownsville, dating back to the 1860's. It is the only complete record of Hispanic journalism available to scholars and the general public that chronicles Mexican-American life in Brownsville.

*El Puerto* was born in the 1950's, a tumultuous period in border history that included the deportation of thousands of "Braceros," with the ensuing violations of human rights. The paper recorded these events, as well as the rise of the minority civil rights movement in the United States, along with the Latino community's struggle in Brownsville to wrest political power from historical anglo control. The paper also provides interesting commentary regarding the "generation gap" as it affected Hispanic families, with the profound social and cultural changes of the 1960's and 1970's that challenged traditional values and mores.

This newspaper, then, is the most important document, written by and for Mexican-Americans, that is available to the researcher of the Latino experience in Brownsville during the mid-Twentieth Century.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cortina, Rodolfo J. *El Mutualista: A Facsimile Edition of a Milwaukee Hispanic Newspaper* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1983) p. ix. Cortina asserts that "Midwest public libraries, which so devotedly kept the newspapers of most of the European ethnic groups, were not moved to do so for the Hispanic population that settled in their midst. The Mexicans of the twenties were deported to Mexico in the thirties because of the Depression. Hence, it appeared unlikely that the news of such a community would be worth cataloguing."

<sup>2</sup>Champion, A.A. "Papers and Personalities of Frontier Journalism (1830's to 1890's)," *Studies in Brownsville and Matamoros History* (Brownsville: University of Texas at Brownsville, 1994) p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>Cerda, Gilberto A. "El Puerto de Brownsville", January 30, 1969.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Stokely was mayor of Brownsville in the early 1950's; Rentfro, a Brownsville lawyer, was active in Brownsville politics during the 1950's.

<sup>8</sup>Reynaldo Garza was the first Mexican-American to serve as U.S. District Court Judge. He was appointed to that post by President Kennedy in 1961.

<sup>9</sup>Mike Gómez was a Brownsville politician during the early 1960's.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Dolores Schrock, Perkins Intermediate School, Brownsville, Texas, May 28, 1996.





# The History of the Maquiladora Industry in Matamoros

by

Kathleen E. Owen

## Background of the Maquiladora Industry in Mexico

The International Agreement of Migratory Workers (known as the *Bracero* Program) had allowed Mexicans to temporarily enter the U.S. to work in agriculture during WWII. This caused a large number of the rural poor to migrate and a population explosion along the U.S.-Mexico border. In the early 1960's, aware that the program would soon be canceled, the Mexican government realized who would soon be jobless.

In 1961, the Program Nacional Fronterizo (PRONAF) was created. PRONAF was designed to develop the infrastructure of the northern border, stimulating economic growth and tourism of the area. Under PRONAF, a study by Arthur D. Little was commissioned to explore opportunities in industrial development in Ciudad Juárez. The study's recommendation was that "Mexico make special customs exceptions to take advantage of a new phenomenon in the world economy: production sharing."<sup>1</sup>

Little's recommendations were implemented in 1965, with the Border Industrialization Program (BIP). The purpose of the BIP was to attract American labor-intensive industrial concerns to the border, taking advantage of the abundance of unemployed former *braceros* and their families. So that products of the American factories in Mexico would not compete with Mexican national production, the components were to be produced for export only. The Mexican customs code was modified to provide for maquiladoras. Because maquiladoras utilized foreign machinery and equipment and had access to manufacturing technology that domestic companies did not, maquiladora production was at first limited to exports only. Maquiladoras were separate from the rest of Mexican industry, and initially were only allowed to locate within 20 kilometers of the border. In 1972, this was changed to allow them to locate anywhere in the country and to have limited access to domestic markets.

The new laws and Mexico's proximity to the U.S. got the program off to a slow but successful start. The "twin plant" phenomenon was created; a U.S. company would locate its capital intensive operations on the U.S. side of the border, and labor intensive operations in a twin plant on the Mexican side of the border. U.S. import duties would only be charged on the value added to components.

The Mexican government particularly favored the program because it increased economic dependence of the border towns on the American economy. At the same time, it constituted "a whole new program which purposes to reintegrate the border community into the national economy of Mexico."<sup>2</sup>

# The Maquiladora Industry in Matamoros

## A. The Historical Element

### 1. The Beginning

There was little official Mexican federal or local government promotion of the BIP in Matamoros when it was first introduced in the mid-1960's. The first substantial initiative came in 1970, with the creation of a private industrial park. On the whole, Tamaulipas public and private economic elites were not well informed of the changes in foreign investment laws, and seemed uninterested because their "bases of economic and political power were firmly established without the need for an assembly industry."<sup>3</sup>

The concrete push to create a maquila industry came from this side of the border. When the opportunity for industrial development presented itself, the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce created an industrial development department, and recruited specific individuals to head the department.

Lindsey Rhodes was the person chosen. In the spring of 1966, he was brought in from Airesearch in Los Angeles, a company active in the California maquiladora industry, to design a program that would attract maquila twin plants to the area. Rhodes' selling point for the average U.S. corporation was "the Mexican border is your Japan at the back door".<sup>4</sup> He felt that Far East logistics, rather than cheapness of labor, would be the clinching factor. The fact that many public services in Mexico were subsidized must have also been a consideration. Rhodes sought U.S. companies that were either already producing offshore or might be persuaded to do so. He targeted specific product lines and prepared unit cost and market profiles for each of the products of interest of companies on his list.

"As many as three times a week, Lindsey Rhodes would come to Matamoros with people interested in analyzing business prospects there. Sometimes, he would even show them rental possibilities, he would contact the owners (of the buildings), and set the rent, since the owners didn't even know how much to charge."<sup>5</sup>

In Matamoros, there were also some businessmen who recognized the maquila industry's potential. One was Sergio Martínez, an accountant involved in negotiations with some of the earliest maquilas, including Electronic Control Corporation. But in general, the attitude of the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce contrasted greatly with their Matamoros colleagues, who had very little interest in supporting the maquiladora program, even though they would be the main beneficiaries.

The difficulties of attracting major corporations to a place like Brownsville and Matamoros should not be underestimated. Since there was no tradition of manufacturing, there were few available industrial support services, engineering shops, parts and material suppliers, and above all, skilled workers. The one asset Brownsville had was its deep water port. The Port of Brownsville operates a Foreign Trade Zone in 40,000 acres of industrial park located in the port, and another at a 200-acre site five miles away at the Brownsville/South Padre Island International Airport.

### 2. The Early Years

The first years of the maquiladora industry in Matamoros were rather bleak. Contradictions exist

as to the first maquiladoras in Matamoros. According to Romero and Calvario, in 1960 Mrs. Blanca de Sela started a handicrafts maquila. Although she furnished the materials to her workers to be assembled at home, her headquarters was established in a cotton warehouse in Matamoros, so she was obliged to sign a labor contract with Section 11 of the National Union of the Oil Industry.<sup>6</sup> The second maquila, established in 1964, was Productos Alpha, a shrimp processor. A sister company of Alberti Foods in Harlingen, it was located in a building at Calle Bravo and Seventeenth St. The shrimp was sent to Matamoros to be processed, and then returned to Texas. Curiously enough, there was opposition to the establishment of the maquila from the Mexican Secretariat of Industry and Commerce, who argued that the maquiladora did not consume a large enough percentage of national raw material (as the laws of the time required). Productos Alpha was accused of "selling out" Mexico! Little did the authorities imagine that very shortly the maquila program would be given priority as a "national reconstruction strategy".<sup>7</sup> Productos Alpha was finally authorized when local unions argued that the program would provide jobs, and when word was received from Mexico City headquarters that Tijuana, Baja California borders would soon be opened.

According to the Matamoros Maquiladora Association, however, the first maquila was Varo Mexicana established in 1967. It was followed by ECC de Mexico, and CTS de Matamoros. All assembled electronic components. At the end of 1968, only five manufacturing and two shrimp processing maquilas were operating in Matamoros. However, this modest beginning was sufficient to stimulate interest in Brownsville-Matamoros' potential, and the breakthrough came when Zenith established a plant in 1969-70. Zenith "put its stamp of approval on the valley as a maquila site"; at one time it employed over 5,000 people.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of 1969, there were 11 maquilas in Matamoros employing approximately 1,600 workers. The maquilas were electronic component assemblers, a PVC injection molder, a boot assembler, a paper bag assembler and an automotive horsepower motors assembler. The workforce was 85% female.<sup>9</sup> (Refer to Appendix 1 for yearly breakdown of the maquila industry in Matamoros.)

### 3. The 1970's

On March 17, 1971, a Customs Code Amendment was signed by President Luis Echevarría, detailing the law and regulations which formalized the Border Industrial Program, now being called the National Maquiladora Program. In 1972, specific Mexican legislation was enacted which established guidelines and well-defined outlines for installation permits. In 1972, the Asociación de Maquiladoras de Matamoros, A.C. (herein referred to as the Matamoros Maquiladora Association) was formed. In October, 1972, the Mexican government issued the Second Amendment to the Mexican Customs Code, establishing a more efficient legal framework for the maquila industry.

In the early 1970's, 17 more maquilas signed on, four of them subsidiaries of Fortune 500 companies. All were related in some way to the electronic components industry. In the mid-70's, several more Fortune 500 corporations came in, including Parker Hannifin, Du Pont, ITT, Quaker Oats, Fisher Price, Levi, ITT Thompson, Sunbeam, Ranco, Mitsubishi, Singer, Sheller-Globe, 3 General Motors divisions and Eaton. P.R. Mallory was installed in 1976, but left in 1979. The 1975 U.S. recession, however, impeded maquila growth during the middle 1970's<sup>10</sup>

By 1976, all maquiladoras located in Matamoros had labor contracts with the SJOI branch of the

CTM union. Zenith and Fisher Price had 2 and 3-week strikes in 1974. Matamoros was already known throughout the maquiladora industry as a "Union City".

By 1980 Matamoros had 37 maquilas with 15,300 workers. National average maquila wages rose from \$.60 per hour in 1972 to \$2.00 per hour in 1980.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4. The 1980's**

The most significant events of the 1980's were the 1982 devaluation of the peso and the resulting hyperinflation. Wages in pesos rose from MN \$163 to MN \$10,080 between 1980 and 1990, although the dollar increase was much less, from USD \$2.06 to approximately USD \$2.70.<sup>12</sup>

Mexico enacted the Federal Environment Law on December 31, 1981. However, it was hardly noticed and had little teeth, since no ministry was created to implement and enforce it. The Mexican Federal Environmental Law of 1982 was an indication that Mexico was now becoming concerned about environmental compliance. Presidents Reagan and De la Madrid signed the U.S./Mexico Border Environment Agreement on August 19, 1983.

Until 1983, a prerequisite had stipulated that 51% of the capital of the maquilas must remain in hands of Mexicans, leading to many instances of "name lending". However, the August 15, 1983 Mexican Maquiladora Decree permitted foreign control of 100% of the capital. Also in 1983, a significant event in Matamoros history took place when the maquiladora industry agreed to a 40 hour work week (instead of 48). In 1984, the Matamoros maquila workforce was 74% female.<sup>13</sup>

In December, 1986, the Border Trade Alliance was formed. On January 19, 1987, Mexico issued a decree relating to the import and export of hazardous materials and residues. In 1987, Mexico became a member of GATT. By 1986/1987, Mexico had become increasingly environmentally aware. Subsequent battles in the U.S. Congress (1987 and 1988), which were encouraged and financed by U.S. unions, led to endless attacks on Mexico and its weak environmental program. If it were to have any chance to pass NAFTA, Mexico realized it would have to enforce environmental regulations, and "get tough" on the maquiladora industry. The Mexican Environmental Law was enacted in January, 1988. In November, 1989, SEDUE (Secretariat of Development and Urban Ecology) declared that only 25% of maquila plants were in compliance with environmental laws.<sup>14</sup>

In 1989, maquilas were allowed to sell 50% of their finished product in the domestic market, paying only import taxes on the imported raw materials.

In 1980, Matamoros had 37 maquilas with 15,300 workers; by 1989, there were 92 maquilas and 39, 784 employees. Two General Motors maquilas were installed, the GMC Guide Division (known as Rimir) and GMC Delco Electronics (Deltronicos de Matamoros). Rimir would grow to 3,000 and Deltronicos to 4,000 workers by 1994.<sup>15</sup> Between 1969 and 1987, a total of 18 Fortune 500 firms established operations in Matamoros.<sup>16</sup>

#### **5. The 1990's**

In 1990, Matamoros had 82 companies with 39,105 workers. This number decreased to 63 companies and 34,400 by 1994.<sup>17</sup>

The Matamoros Maquila Association had begun a "strong environmental compliance program" in 1989 which helped the maquila plants to comply with SEDUE regulations. Nevertheless, in 1992

and 1993, the maquila industry was subjected to the most intense scrutiny and ridicule that it had ever encountered. Mexican government environmental agencies responded to NAFTA pressures by closing plants for one day to four week periods, and imposing large dollar fines.

Lindsey Rhodes and the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce were involved in attracting nearly 100 maquilas in all between 1967 and 1983. However, when Rhodes retired in 1983, there were less than 50 maquilas operating in Matamoros. In 1989, Matamoros had an all time high of 92 maquilas employing 39,794 workers. However, this number has decreased to 63 factories and 34,400 workers in 1990.<sup>18</sup> About 50 maquilas in the city did not survive. (Refer to Appendix 2) The explanation for this was failure to control overhead costs and especially, labor costs. To explain the labor factor, one must examine the labor movement in Matamoros.

## **B. The Union Element**

### **1. Agapito González and the SJOI.**

From the very beginning, the maquila industry in Matamoros was almost totally unionized. In the Mexican tradition of government-backed union bosses, the CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos) has been run for as long as anyone can remember by Agapito González Cavazos. "Agapito", as he is commonly known, has had a major influence on the development of the maquila industry in Matamoros. The CTM branch of the Sindicato de Jornaleros y Obreros Industriales/SJOI began organizing the maquilas as soon as they started up, and most incoming U.S. companies felt they had no choice but to accept the union presence.

In the early days of the maquilas in Matamoros, each company would negotiate with the union for its annual contract (pay and conditions). Some of the companies did not like dealing with the union, and some reputedly made difficulties, embarking on a tough campaign for more control of the maquilas, which lasted on and off throughout the 1970's.<sup>19</sup>

The union and the maquila industry eventually reached a compromise in 1983 when an historic agreement was negotiated. In return for guarantees of industrial peace, the maquila workers of Matamoros were the first group in Mexico to have a 40-hour work week without loss of pay.

According to Guerrero-Miller, the 40-hour work week was a direct result of what Agapito considered his personal "charge" from CTM national leader Fidel Velázquez. In a 1981 CTM National Assembly address in Mexico City, Fidel stated, "We don't want to see minimum wages nor 48-hour work weeks in the collective contracts."<sup>20</sup> When Agapito returned to Matamoros, he immediately started his campaign for a 40-hour work week. The local CANACINTRA (National Chamber of Industrial Transformation) predicted disaster, but the maquiladoras decided to collaborate with Agapito to meet the new demands of the workers. It wasn't an easy process, but the final result was that all of the companies signed the 40-hour work week agreement, with a 2-year grace period for implementing it. (Incoming maquilas were permitted to operate a 48-hour work week for their first five years.)

When the grace period was over, some companies threatened to move out. Agapito's response was clear: "We're not against development and progress in the maquiladora industry in this area, but neither can we permit that the interests of the working class be diminished, especially when the working class is confronted with complex and intense economic situations due to the crisis."<sup>21</sup> The

40-hour work week "is the star of labor conquests of the SJOI, the maximum pride of the Matamoros workers movement."<sup>22</sup>

With the blessing of the national CTM and the PRI, Agapito and his local colleagues worked out what might be called a "corporatist" solution to handling the maquila labor situation in Matamoros. The CTM handles much of the personnel work, and has a say in the hiring and firing of workers, as well as some aspects of production organization. In 1986, Roger Kennedy, at the time chairman of the MMA, was quoted as saying "the unions are the employment agency" for the local maquilas.<sup>23</sup> Instead of each maquiladora negotiating its own contract, six of the major companies, always including General Motors, negotiate of behalf of all maquilas in Matamoros.

## 2. Negative Aspects of the CTM/SJOI

Have Agapito González and the CTM/SJOI made unreasonable wage demands? The union has succeeded in obtaining wages and conditions that have contributed considerably to the standard of living of the Matamoros worker. On the other hand, the old controversy has been reborn regarding salaries paid here and the risk that union demands might cause the maquilas to move from Matamoros to other parts of Mexico or to other countries. After the 1990 salary revision, information drawn up by CANACINTRA (on behalf of the maquilas) stated that Matamoros paid the highest salaries of all the border. An article published in *El Economista* on February 27, 1990 accuses Agapito González of being the reason that in 1989 only 5 new companies, creating 500 new jobs, opened in Matamoros. This same article also makes him responsible for the "stagnation of Matamoros maquila industry growth", pointing out that in 1976, Cd. Juárez has 272 while Matamoros has only 82.<sup>24</sup>

In an interview, Lic. Lindo Landeros Santos, President of the Matamoros Delegation of CANACINTRA, states he does not feel that there will be an immediate withdrawal of maquiladoras, since investments can't easily be moved. However, he feels that as production costs rise, the maquilas will evaluate what products can no longer be economically produced here, and will look for other places to manufacture them. Lic. Landeros states that Matamoros has a geographic advantage compared to the rest of the border, but "industrial growth hasn't been up to par with that of other border towns because of labor problems Matamoros has had through the years."<sup>25</sup>

Two examples are cited. Zenith came to Matamoros and in 1977 and employed 5,000 workers. The company was considering the possibility of producing more complex equipment in Matamoros, consolidating their Mexican operations in Matamoros to reduce administrative costs. However, due to labor problems, among them the 40-hour work week and "unreasonable salary and benefit demands", Zenith did not bring in its other operations. Zenith currently has 25,000 workers in Mexico, but only 3,794 employees in Matamoros, down from 5,000. In this case, the maquila didn't leave but merely reduced its operations. According to Landeros, "the worst part of Zenith was an influential industrial consortium, and its actions cast a shadow of doubt in the minds other companies" who might consider moving to Matamoros. In the long run, they will look for cities with "more labor certainty."<sup>26</sup>

Deltronicos is another example. Deltronicos considered adding other plants in Matamoros, but opted to build a plant in Reynosa. The Matamoros plant has 3,178 employees, but another 4,000 jobs have been created in Reynosa.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Positive aspects of the CTM/SJOI

It is a fact that the union has succeeded in obtaining wages and conditions that have considerably increased the standard of living of the Matamoros worker. The collective contract for 1993 stipulates, among other provisions: a 40 hour work week (with hourly pay corresponding to 56 hours); vacation days and vacation bonus of 35%; Christmas bonus of 20 days' salary; payment by company of all workers' taxes and "Seguro Social" quotas; special benefits for marriage and death, health and educational benefits. Additionally, the Matamoros union has gone a step further, assuming responsibilities normally corresponding to government sectors, providing housing, schools and day care centers, sports complexes, a hospital and a market. (Refer to Appendix 3 for a complete listing of salary and fringe benefits.)

## C. The Environmental Element

### 1. Mexican Environmental Regulations

Calculations are made that every day 52 trucks cross the bridge from the U.S. to Matamoros, with an average of 20 tons of raw materials, parts and components each. It is estimated that 73,000 tons annually of industrial wastes remain in or near Matamoros.<sup>28</sup>

Even though the majority of maquilas do assembly work, there is considerable handling of toxic and hazardous substances used in the production process. These include: benzene, toluene, xylene in the plastic and electronics industry; chromium, sulfuric, nitric, phosphoric and hydrochloric acid in the metal industries, and solvents and resins in the autoparts industries.<sup>29</sup>

The maquilas pay someone to get rid of their waste, but where does it go? Mexican law requires that wastes be returned to their country of origin. Several factors point to the fact that apparently the majority of hazardous wastes stay in Mexico:

- At the end of 1987, the EPA only had 20 maquiladoras registered as returning toxic wastes to the U.S.
- Clandestine, unauthorized sites have been found, filled with toxic wastes attributed to maquiladoras.
- The strict control imposed by the U.S. regarding transport, treating and confinement of the wastes, as well as the expense, reduce the likelihood that export actually takes place.
- Mexican lack of strict control and adequate legislation regarding this type of wastes facilitates its clandestine or semi-legal handling. Evidence suggests that many companies dispose of their hazardous wastes in the easiest and least expensive way.<sup>30</sup>

In the late 1980's, U.S. unions, environmentalist, liberal congressmen and women all stepped up their attacks on maquilas in Mexico. The issues were abnormal births, pollution, health and other related subjects. A study entitled The Impact of the Maquiladora Program on Workers' Health and The Environment, commissioned by the AFL-CIO in 1989, contends that "one of the big attractions that the maquiladoras hold for American industry is the Mexican government's hands-off attitude toward environmental protection and worker health and safety laws". It points out that Mexican

environmental regulations exist, but “the development of technical, financial and human resources to make the enforcement of current and future regulations widespread and predictable is difficult to foresee given the current economic and budgetary situation in Mexico.”<sup>31</sup>

The AFL-CIO study points a finger at the maquiladoras, even naming five maquiladoras (NECO, Deltronicos, Zenith, Rimir and Brownsville Rubber Co.), alleging that the workforce, mostly young women and girls, are particularly at risk because of the lack of health and safety protection on the job.

The Matamoros Maquiladora Association's response to the study was: “While the claims were probably significant exaggerations of the actual situations, the fact is that this paper and a multitude of bad publicity along the U.S.-Mexico border has drawn significant changes in regulations on both sides of the border for years to come.”<sup>32</sup> The Maquiladora Environmental and Safety Program, dated June 6, 1989, committed the members of the MMA to “an environmentally safe ecological program, working with SEDUE, EPA, the local communities, and other transborder industries”. The program consisted of three phases: Phase 1 was a “highly confidential evaluation of the operation of each company related to safety and environmental compliance under current U.S. standards”, made by an independent company, Phase 2 consisted of solution options, which “could be as simple as a list of potential solutions to any problem or as complex as an actual design for equipment needed to correct a precise problem”. Phase 3 was consultation for possible elimination, handling or disposal of hazardous wastes.<sup>33</sup>

In 1988, the General Ecology law had been passed. (A summary of the General Ecology Law of 1988 is attached as Appendix 3.) Pressures by environmental groups and anti-NAFTA labor interests put the pressure on the Mexican government to enforce the law. In 1993, Mexico's Attorney General for Environmental Protection, Dr. Santiago Onate, said “inspections have doubled; fines are up, along with public awareness”. Mexico has sent out “platoons of new inspectors” and put long-delayed regulations in force.<sup>34</sup> The general opinion today is that great strides have been made in the enforcement and awareness of environmental regulations in the maquiladora industry and Mexican industry as a whole.

## 2. The “Mallory Kids”

One of the worst cases of poisoning women in the work place in the border region took place at Mallory Electronic. The “Matamoros Syndrome” was discovered by teachers at the Matamoros Special Education School in 1981. It was found that the mothers of a group of brain damaged children enrolled in the school had all worked at Mallory Electronic during their pregnancies. Most of the children are mentally retarded, some were born with cleft palates and webbed fingers, and many of the children had similar facial characteristics: flat noses and large lips.

The Special Education School was able to establish the possibility that the cause of genetic mutation was the solvent PCB, a highly toxic substance whose use was prohibited in the U.S. In all, 23 children, whose average age was 16 years old were found to be affected by the “Matamoros Syndrome”. Some estimates, however, suggest that there may be as many as 120 “Mallory kids”.<sup>35</sup> Some are able to attend rehabilitation classes, but others are so brain damaged that they must be cared for at home. Both Mexican Secretariat of Health and U.S. Department of Public Health officials were involved in the investigation of the Mallory incident, but the use of PCB was never confirmed. The cause of brain damage was never determined. Mallory was absorbed in a corporate takeover after



closing its Matamoros plant, and consequently no responsible party was found, nor was the range of chemicals used at the facility identified. In September, 1991 a lawsuit was filed by 80 families who claimed they were exposed to toxic chemicals while working for Mallory. The suit was settled in January, 1995 for \$15 million.<sup>36</sup>

Romero and Calvario, whose study was published in 1990, cite Prof. Alicia Alonso de la O, director of the Matamoros' Special Education School, as stating that cases of births with genetic or congenital mutations are seen "with alarming frequency" at the IMSS Hospital where children of female workers are born in Matamoros.<sup>37</sup>

It should be mentioned that although many maquilas provide adequate protective equipment, the workers shun its use because it is bothersome, or "looks funny". De la O comments, "We've found workers who don't wear face masks for protection against gases because 'they look ugly' or they don't wear face masks for protection against gases because 'they can't work comfortably.'"<sup>38</sup>

### 3. Neural Tube Defects Births

In April 1991, several health care providers in Brownsville became alarmed when three anencephalic births occurred in a period of 36 hours. Six anencephalic births occurred at one Brownsville hospital between March 27 and May 7, 1991. Based on data from the Center for Disease Control, fewer than two cases of anencephaly a year would be expected. For Cameron County during the peak period of 1990-91, the rate was 27.1 cases per 10,000 births, about three times the national average.<sup>39</sup> In Matamoros, the rate was roughly 40 per 10,000.<sup>40</sup>

Anencephaly and spina bifida are relatively common and serious birth defects collectively referred to as Neural Tube Defects (NTD's). The defect sets in between the 16th and 26th day after conception, the period when the central nervous system begins forming as a tube running from head to buttocks. Neural tube defects manifest themselves in two main ways. If the tube fails to close at the top, it's anencephaly; the baby will have little or no brain, and usually dies immediately. Another variety is spina bifida, which occurs when the tube of the developing fetus remains open at the neck or back. Part of the spinal cord usually bulges out from the baby's back at birth. Babies born with spina bifida can survive but require substantial specialized medical attention.

Soon after the news of the unusually high rate of birth defects, several members of the Brownsville medical community suggested they might be attributed to environmental exposure, since the maquiladora industry had recently experienced strong growth. The cases have been widely publicized nationally and world-wide, and resulted in the March, 1993 filing of a collective lawsuit (styled *Alvear vs. Leonard Electric*) by 28 families against 40 maquiladoras in Matamoros, alleging "plaintiffs suffered injuries arising out of exposure to hazardous chemicals, hazardous wastes, hazardous hydrocarbons, similarly harmful organic or mineral substances and /or other similarly harmful substances placed into the local environment through the negligent acts and omissions" of the defendants.<sup>41</sup> As of this writing, there are only 18 families remaining in the lawsuit; 10 families have been eliminated because they did not have substantive cases. Approximately 10% of the maquiladoras were dismissed from the case for various reasons such as not utilizing the types of chemicals associated with NTD or insignificant emissions. The remaining approximately thirty-five maquiladoras reached an out-of-court settlement of approximately \$17 million in August, 1995.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Is the Maquiladora Industry responsible for NTD's?

Agapito González has been quoted as saying that blaming anencephaly on the maquilas is “pure politics so that maquiladoras don't come to Matamoros, and no attention should be paid to it.”<sup>43</sup>

Dennis Perotta, bureau chief of epidemiology for the Texas Department of Health comments: “I think people in Brownsville have made a link between pollution in Matamoros and the birth defects.”<sup>44</sup> “There's plenty of evidence that there has been gross mishandling of maquila waste along the border, and that is of grave concern to health officials. But it doesn't prove anything.”<sup>45</sup>

Past CDC investigations and study of NTD's have shown that poverty is one of the known risk factors. That caused investigators to seek a “nutritional explanation” for the cause of these birth defects. In the U.S., rates of NTD's are related to time, geography and race. During the period 1981-1986, the rate of anencephaly was greater for children born to Hispanic mothers, about 40 per 10,000 births. The total NTD rate in the U.S. is now less than 10 per 10,000.<sup>46</sup>

A comprehensive study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and the Texas Department of Health was released in July, 1992. The study compared 28 matched pairs of mothers (“case” mothers had given birth to a NTD product; “control” mothers had given birth to a normal child during the same time period). Overall, no statistically significant difference was found between the cases and controls. The study reviewed data available on drinking water, surface water, soil, ambient air monitoring, pesticide use, and aflatoxin contamination. All levels were found to be below or within acceptable ranges for health-based criteria. The report suggested that the numerous anencephalic births might be attributed to lack of folic acid in the diets of pregnant women, and the fact that Hispanic women are more susceptible to giving birth to children with NTD's. The report's conclusion was that “data from the case / control study are consistent with other epidemiological studies and identified no new causes of NTD's”.<sup>47</sup> In other words, pollution from the maquiladora industry apparently was found to have no bearing on the incidence of NTD's.

Epidemiological vigilance studies carried out by the Mexican Secretariat of Health in Matamoros regarding the effects of industrial pollution on unborn children were also inconclusive. Like the Brownsville case and control study, the study attempted to establish a difference in the risk of having an anencephalic product for mothers exposed six months before the pregnancy and during the first trimester of the pregnancy to a series of risk factors, in contrast to those mothers not exposed to investigated factors. However, no statistically significant risk factor was found.<sup>48</sup>

Dr. Perotta, director of Epidemiology for the Texas Department of Health, states: “People want to point to one thing. I say, how can you ignore other possibilities, like pesticide use, water quality and prenatal care?”<sup>49</sup>

An important result of the concern over birth defects is positive developments that are focusing more critically on issues like industrial waste disposal, air and water pollution and public health on both sides of the border. Brownsville lawyer Tony Martínez, who filed the lawsuit *Alvear vs. Leonard Electric* on behalf of the 28 families, was interviewed on the Spanish language television talk program, “Cristina” and said, “...since we filed the lawsuit, there have been 3 water treatment plants installed. I imagine there are a lot of things that are happening since the lawsuit began. It's for the benefit of the entire community if what's going on comes to light”. He believes the maquilas can well afford the environmental safeguards that are needed, and that legal pressure may be what it takes to get unscrupulous companies to clean up their act.<sup>50</sup>

## D. The Social Element

The growth of the maquiladora industry has increased the population of Matamoros (attracting many "economic refugees" from the interior of Mexico) by nearly double from 1970 (186,146) to 1990 (303,293).<sup>51</sup> The problems caused by lack of infrastructure and urban services such as running water, sewage, streets, electricity, schools, housing, transportation, hospitals, and recreational areas have all increased.

Sixty of the new *colonias* in Matamoros do not have running water, sewers, or paved streets. This lack of drinking water has reached the point that at times the maquiladoras have had to import water in tanks to cover their daily needs. In 1990, the water system pipes in the downtown area were in dire need of replacement and leaks were commonplace; already 70 sewage system collapses had occurred.<sup>52</sup>

Downtown traffic is chaotic. During peak hours, bottlenecks are routine at Sixth and First Streets, the only two viable thoroughfares. Apparently, no authority has given any thought to truck routes for the future.

It is difficult to calculate the housing shortage, but Matamoros Municipal Housing Administration administrator, Fernando Montemayor Lozano estimates there is a shortage of 26,000 houses a year.<sup>53</sup> This demand has created an expensive housing market. The appearance of hovels and shacks in *colonias* on the fringes of society is the best gauge of the seriousness of the problem.

Perhaps the biggest demands have been made of health services. The IMSS in Matamoros has 69,000 insured workers, resulting in a total of 150,000 people who have access to IMSS services. Approximately 70% of these are thought to be maquila industry workers. A new IMSS outpatient clinic, capable of handling 60,000 insured, was opened in 1991. However, the real problem is the lack of hospital beds. The IMSS calculates it requires 1 bed for every 1,000 insured, or 150 beds for Matamoros. There are only 98 beds, a shortage which worsens daily. The Pumarejo Hospital, one alternative, is also operating above capacity. No short term increase for either hospital is in the plans for the near future.<sup>54</sup>

Capacity of electric service has also been surpassed. The Federal Electric Commission has enough high energy current, but lacks facilities to transform and distribute it. In the industrial park, an electrical substation was installed and charged to the industry there, to solve the problem. Telephone service has also been insufficient in the wake of maquiladora growth and resulting population boom.

At the same time, problems of family disintegration, drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, and contamination have all increased dramatically. The maquiladora industry brings women into the workforce, which makes them economically active. Women no longer stay home caring for their children and their homes. They no longer depend on the "man of the family" to be the main source of economic support. Traditional roles are changing so quickly that Mexican families have difficulty adapting. Suddenly, the woman may become the sole support of her household. She is no longer home to care for her children, who may be left alone, since there is a severe shortage of day care centers in Mexico. The male may be unemployed, but in the Mexican culture he is not brought up to stay at home. The extended family may no longer be available to help, since many families migrate alone from the interior of Mexico to find work for the woman.

Professor Alicia Alonso de la O, Director of the Matamoros Special Education School, confirms this theory. "Family disintegration brought on by the working woman is reflected in greater incidence

of juvenile delinquency and all kinds of problems". After working 8 or 10 hours a day, mothers are tired, and not interested in listening to their children's problems. There is only one IMSS Day Care Center, filled to capacity, and it operates only during the day. Many women work at night, so their children cannot be cared for. The problem could be greatly alleviated if day care centers were built in each industrial park, de la O suggests.<sup>55</sup>

Young single females in the maquiladora industry represent another change in traditional Mexican roles. Their earnings in maquilas may convert them into the economic mainstay of their families. This economic independence creates a feeling that it is no longer necessary to respect parents' rules. The result of this increased independence has been an increase in single motherhood, abortions, and in female alcoholism.

## E. The Economic Element

The effect of the BIP on Brownsville-Matamoros has been dramatic. Brownsville growth and decline stages have long been directly related to the city's economic interdependence with Matamoros, but with the introduction of BIP, this interdependence turned into a "dependency for mutual survival".<sup>56</sup>

The higher wages paid to maquiladora workers in Matamoros attracted workers from the interior of Mexico to the border. Although in some border areas, the demand for workers exceeded the supply, this was not true in Matamoros. Even though BIP was created to increase male employment, in Matamoros, traditionally around 80% of the workers have been female, as seen by Matamoros Maquiladora Association statistics in [Appendix 1](#). The problem of young adult male illegal immigration to Brownsville has been aggravated, transferring part of Matamoros' unemployment problems to the left bank of the Rio Grande, the city of Brownsville.

Foreign capital investment in Matamoros is multiplied back into the economies of both banks of the river. Some border economists rate the "sectoral multiplier" from maquilas on the U.S. side to be as high as 4. It is calculated that Mexican maquila workers spend from 30-75% of their Mexican-earned income on the U.S. side.<sup>57</sup> Obviously, the BIP has been an "economic windfall" for both communities: in Matamoros, unemployment is alleviated, and in Brownsville, the investment signifies more jobs, increase in sales, cash flow and tax base. Most maquilas have twin plants in Brownsville, and these have created an estimated 10,000 jobs.<sup>58</sup> Mexicans from Matamoros with their maquila-generated dollars, as well as those from the interior of Mexico, come to Brownsville to shop. Amigoland Mall and Sunrise Mall were built to accommodate an increase in business. As the maquila industry increases in Matamoros, retail and service sales increase proportionately in Brownsville.

Romero and Calvario calculate that 30% of maquila salaries is spent on the U.S. side for food, clothing and electronics. The other 70% energizes the Matamoros economy and creates other jobs.<sup>59</sup> Commerce is the biggest beneficiary, followed by the construction industry, restaurants and services. The establishment of branches of Mexican supermarkets like Soriana, Blanco and Gigante point to increased power of acquisition stemming from the maquilas. Even flea markets and *tianguis* have increased their operations.

The maquila industry also generates 40-50% of the construction activity in Matamoros, both in the building of factories and warehouses for the industry itself, and in construction of homes and shopping centers.<sup>60</sup> Besides creating employment, the increase in construction also leads to local

purchase of building materials.

In the services sector, maquiladora activity has greatly increased demand in the trucking business. The city bus service has increased its income enormously, due to the huge volume of passengers served daily and the fact that it charges some of the country's highest bus fares.

The restaurant business has benefited from the economic effects of the maquila industry, too. In the last ten years, the number of fast food, taco stands and *loncherias* has doubled.<sup>61</sup> High income maquila management has also given rise to exclusive recreational centers like "El Saucito" and "Las Brisas".

Record setting wages were paid to maquila employees in 1994. According to the Brownsville Economic Development Council, nearly \$400 million in wages was paid. Maquiladora workers number about 35,000, and an estimated 500 managers and professionals live in Cameron County. Purchases of goods and services supplied by local companies to the maquila industry were approximately \$100 million. About 50 companies with 1,200 employees support the maquilas. Maquilas purchase goods and services from about 700 companies in Brownsville and Matamoros; an estimated 5,000 jobs in Brownsville are a direct result of the maquilas presence in Matamoros. During 1994, the maquilas and their employees contributed more than \$38,000 to Matamoros Maquiladora Association charities, and gave \$200,000 in cash contributions and donations to organizations in the valley and Matamoros.<sup>62</sup>

### III. Conclusions

#### A. The Present

A reflection on the present situation of the Matamoros maquiladora industry can be made by responding to the following question: What would happen if the Matamoros maquiladora industry emigrated? Most experts feel the consequences would be catastrophic, economically and socially. They see few alternatives for an economic base of a city the size of Matamoros along any other line; agriculture has gone by the wayside, ranching isn't flourishing, and tourism hasn't been developed to any extent. Outside of the maquila industry, there is no solid economic base for its existence. Matamorenses would be forced to emigrate to other cities with opportunities for employment, reversing the current trend of immigration from the interior of Mexico.

#### B. The Future

In spite of the problems experienced by the Matamoros maquiladora industry, the future looks promising. Established maquilas in Matamoros will probably not leave because of union demands, although new ones may prefer cities in the interior of Mexico. In spite of the difficulties caused by Agapito González, the government of Tamaulipas has information on 120 prospective industries interested in coming to Matamoros.<sup>63</sup> As labor problems and urban infrastructure problems are resolved, these companies should settle in Matamoros.

In dollar terms, the maquilas are now paying less for labor and services than before. Matamoros pays the highest salaries and benefits of Mexico, but the cost of living is also among the highest. The geographic advantage of Matamoros can compensate in some cases for the salary differences between

Matamoros and competing maquiladora cities. Distance is an important point in inventory cost control, and Just-In-Time policies favor Mexico over other countries. Matamoros' geographic location is privileged. Besides the Port of Brownsville, it is linked by rail and truck directly with huge centers of industry in the midwest and east U.S. This advantage, plus excellent labor, compensates for higher salaries. Although urban infrastructure has been taxed, it hasn't reached the saturation points of Tijuana or Cd. Juárez.

There is also the possibility that Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan, in order to avoid customs barriers erected by the U.S. to protect its domestic market, will prefer to install factories in northern Tamaulipas.<sup>64</sup>

Unless world market situations change, the maquila industry will not only remain in Mexico, it will increase. Whatever problems the maquila industry brings, it has unlimited potential for job creation, foreign exchange capture, increased domestic industrial competitiveness, generation of technology, training for workers and acceleration of regional development.

## APPENDIX 1

### A Summary of the Maquiladora Industry in Matamoros

**Year / Maquilas / Employees / Average Wage / Workforce Composition / Principal Industries**  
**Per Hour (USD) % female/ % male**

Year	Maquilas	Employees	Average Wage Per Hour (USD)	Workforce Composition % female/ % male	Principal Industries
1967	3	400	\$3.12 (day)	92 / 8	Electronic components
1968	5	600	\$3.12 (day)	90 / 10	Electronic components
1969	11	1,600		85 / 15	70% electronics, electric/textile
1970	20	2,700		85 / 15	Electronics, shrimp processors
1971	22	4,500		85 / 15	Electronics
1972	28	5,300	\$0.60		Electronics
1973	33	6,500			Electronics / electric / textiles
1974	34	7,200	\$0.98		70% Electronics / electric/ textiles
1975	33	8,000			
1976	37	11,000			
1977	38	11,357			
1978	37	13,443			
1979	36	16,493	\$1.22		38% Electronics, 33% textile
1980	37	15,300	\$1.64		Processors
1981	33	16,470	\$2.06		
1982	34	14,643	\$2.45/1.10 (devaluation)		
1983	31	17,335	\$1.17		
1984	31	19,258	\$1.19	74 / 26	
1985	37	21,000	\$1.45		
1986	42	25,373	\$1.07	67 / 33	
1987	68	29,134	\$0.86		30% Electronics, 15% textile, 10% automotive, 20% electrical
1988	78	35,695			
1989	92	39,784			
1990	82	39,105			
1991	82	35,977	\$2.73		
1992	66	34,500	\$3.25		
1993	65	35,001	\$3.68		
1994	63	34,400	\$4.04		

**Source: Matamoros Maquiladora Association**

**APPENDIX 2**

Source: Matamoros Maquiladora Association

**COMPANIES INSTALLING OPERATIONS IN MATAMOROS**  
**AND**  
**COMPANIES MOVING OUT OF MATAMOROS**

<b><u>NEW OPERATIONS</u></b>	<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b><u>COMPANIES MOVING</u></b>
	1994	(1) 550 EMPLOYEES
	1993	(7) 934 EMPLOYEES
	1992	(4) 401 EMPLOYEES
3 COMPANIES	1991	(10) 1,064 EMPLOYEES
10 COMPANIES	1990	1
	1989	
Between 1986 and 1989	1988	
41 new companies were	1987	
installed in Matamoros		
5 COMPANIES	1986	3
6 COMPANIES	1985	
1 COMPANY	1984	1
0	1983	3
3 COMPANIES	1982	2
0	1981	4
2 COMPANIES	1980	1
3 COMPANIES	1979	4
4 COMPANIES	1978	4
3 COMPANIES	1977	2
Between 1967 and 1976	1967	Between 1967 and 1976 a
52 companies moved		total of 15 companies
into Matamoros.		moved out.
March 25, 1994		



## APPENDIX 3

### COLLECTIVE CONTRACT, CTM/SJOI, 1993

#### Salary Benefits:

- 40-hour work week, payment for 56 hours
- Periodic review of salary steps
- Actualization of salaries when salary emergencies declared
- Payment of vacation, up to 19 days for 6 years' seniority and 35% vacation bonus; holidays, three more than the Federal Work law allows; sick leave, with 60% payment of non-work related accidents; compensation and profit sharing; Christmas bonus, up to 20 days' salary. All benefits will be paid according to the current salary stipulations.

#### Other Benefits:

- 100% of workers' Social Security quota absorbed by the company
- 100% of workers' taxes paid by the company
- Marriage: a worker has the right to 7 days' leave, with salary paid for 5 days, plus a stipend of \$N400 for those with seniority of less than 2 years; N\$650 for those with more than 2 years on the job.
- Death: regardless of seniority, the company will pay N\$4,000 to the beneficiaries and N\$850, granting 3 days paid leave to a worker whose mother, father, wife or child dies.
- The worker has the right to receive one uniform annually, safety equipment, special shoes, safety glasses, gloves, equipment, tools and necessary implement without salary deductions, and a locker to store the equipment.

#### Health:

- Periodical general medical examination every 6 months, every three months for those exposed to toxic substances. The company is obliged to inform which toxic substances are being used in the production process.
- Collective workers insurance
- Continuity and medical services both pre- and post- natal for temporary workers
- Formation of Safety and Hygiene Committees
- Medical exams for workers ordered by the company will be without charge to the worker. Time necessary to obtain a health card will not be repaid to the company.
- The SJOI worker has the right to two breaks between shifts, one 15-minute break and one 10-minute break.
- When the wife of a worker gives birth, the company will pay N\$50, and give the worker one paid day's time.

#### Education, Training and Sports:

- The company is obligated to provide 6 scholarships for N\$650 each to workers' children
- Creation of Mixed Commission for Training and Instruction
- Training and Instruction by the company
- In addition to the teams it sponsors, the company will provide N\$250 towards the promotion of sports

### COMMUNITY EFFORTS

#### Housing Areas and Workers' Colonias:

- Colonia Section 16 was the first; added to it in 1979 are Uniones and "Los Campestres"

- "Campestre del Rio I" is made up of 103.74 hectares
- "Campestre del Rio II" is made up of 22.71 hectares

**Kindergartens:**

- "Jesus Elias Piña" in Colonia Section 16
- "Lorenzo Méndez Soto" in Campestre del Rio I
- "Nueva Creación" in Campestre del Rio II

**Primary Schools:**

- "Fidel Velázquez in Colonia Section 16
- "Lorenzo Méndez Soto" in Campestre del Rio I
- "Nueva Creación in Campestre del Rio II

**Secondary Schools**

- "Lauro Villar" in Colonia Section 16

(For the construction of schools, the union donated the land and materials, and the secondary school laboratories were equipped by the SJOI.)

**Day Care Centers:**

- "Solidaridad" in Colonia Section 16
- Current project for a new day care center in Campestre del Rio I

**Market Section 16:** This market, located in Colonia Section 16, is 5,170 square meters, and has been in operation since 1958.

**Sports Complex:** Consists of big league "Agapito González Baseball Park", little league "Lorenzo Méndez Soto baseball Park", and basketball, volleyball and soccer fields for youth play. The park is 31,992 square meters.

**PRODEMSA Complex:** The clinic consists of two operating rooms, 10 rooms, a nursery, consulting areas, X-ray room, ultrasound, laboratory, dressing rooms and kitchen. The clinic was acquired in 1990.

**Other Property:** Headquarters building, 3 stories, located in Iturbide and 12th Streets.

(Source: ¡Por Eso...!)

## APPENDIX 4

### SUMMARY OF NEW MEXICAN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW (Effective March 1, 1988)

In a 22 page letter of introduction and summary that accompanied the bill, President De La Madrid recognized that the conflict between environmental protection and economic development in Mexico has now arrived at the point where the best environmental solution is also often the best economic solution.

He noted that the existing Mexican ecology laws are insufficient. They are directed only towards correcting the effects of pollution, instead of identifying socio-economic causes that are the basis of environmental problems. Recent constitutional reforms have made the proposed system of decentralized participation possible.

A second fundamental principal expressed by the President is that protection of the environment is not the sole domain of the government. Society at all levels must be involved to achieve the goals of Th new law.

#### **Summary of the General law for Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection**

- **Title I (Articles 1-43):** Establishes the organization of the ecology law, stating the precepts, objectives and fundamental concepts. The new law will be a framework designed to coexist with and complement existing laws. Title I defines the three tiered system of governmental concurrence (federal, state, and municipal). In addition, it directs the national Commission on Ecology to prepare a biannual report on the state of the environment including successes and failures. Finally, the Secretariat for Urban Development and Ecology (SEDUE) is given the lead agency responsibility for coordination within the federal, state and local governments.

- **Title II (Articles 44-87):** Sets the national policy on ecology reserves. Nine categories of reserves are specified. In addition, community participation in establishment, conservation, administration, development and protection of these reserves is mandated. Title II also addresses the regulation of the import and export of wild flora and fauna, further limiting the existing regulations.

- **Title III (Articles 88-109):** Establishes the new national policy of rational use of natural resources. This includes soil, water, marine ecosystems, forests, jungles, and non-renewable resources. Special programs are authorized to restore ecological equilibrium.

- **Title IV (Articles 110-156):** Covers environmental protection and is specifically authorized by Article 73, Section 29 of the Mexican Constitution. Air, water, soil, hazardous Waste and "dangerous activities" are covered. This title introduces the concept of decentralization of authority to responsibility of promulgating technical standards of levels of contamination for the country and coordination with other federal agencies to achieve these standards.

- **Title V (Articles 157-159):** Introduces the idea of public participation in ecology policy-making in addition to the participation of the seventeen or so federal agencies mentioned in Title IV. Agreements between SEDUE and various groups such as labor, campesinos, businessmen, non-profit, and social are the suggested way of achieving this goal.

- **Title VI (Articles 160-194):** provides for enforcement of the law. SEDUE may process administrative sanctions if the violations are not reserved to other agencies. A weighted scale of penalties is established, recognizing that not all penalties range from jail terms of three months to six years and fines up to 20,000 times the minimum daily salary, depending on the exact violation. Administrative sanctions include fines, temporary or definitive or partial or total closings, and administrative detention.

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##### **Title One: General Dispositions (Articles 1-43)**

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Chapter I	Prevention and Control of Atmospheric Pollution	
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# An Initial Overview of H. Matamoros' Nineteenth-Century Street Names

by

Thomas B. Carroll

The study of a historic city is enriched by paying attention to details that are commonly taken for granted. Street names are such a detail. They have a practical use in helping one find his or her way around a city and a symbolic value in defining what is important in life. Discussions on the practical use of street names are uncommon, unless people are getting lost or confused. However, heated, lengthy debates, both public and private, regularly occur over differences in opinion about the "best" name to give a street. Researchers studying a city can learn much about a society by looking at the names that were selected for that society's streets, plazas, and so forth. This is especially true in historic districts such as that of Matamoros, Tamaulipas.

This report on the street names within the historic district of H. Matamoros deals, at a preliminary level, with the practical question of what, when, and where a street name was used. In addition, an introductory look is taken at categorizing these street names and then considering differences in the frequency of use of these categories within different historic periods. This very cursory overview stems from a broader gathering of data on the historic district of H. Matamoros conducted by the author as a student at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Matamoros and as a member of the Sociedad Tamaulipeca de Historia, Geografía, y Estadística de Matamoros. Hopefully, this overview will serve as an initial guide to this subject and be of some use to researchers interested in furthering studying place names within the historic district.

Over the past few years, three important historic maps of Matamoros have been located and identified. These maps, each with a comprehensive coverage of street names, date from ca. 1832, 1845, and 1854-1864. Such maps provide documentation and allow for analysis of early to mid nineteenth-century street names and for comparative studies spanning much of the nineteenth century. Based on internal evidence, it is likely that the 1854-1864 map uses street names from 1864, although the city alignments of the map are taken from a yet unlocated map dating from 1854. Prior to finding these older maps, the earliest known Matamoros map with street names dated from 1873. In addition to these four maps, this study also includes two maps dating respectively from 1874 and 1890.

The major missing link within the ca. 1832-1890 period is probably the 1854 map. The 1854 map is especially important because it appears to use just one name for a street, unlike the two earlier maps that use multiple names for one street. For example, the 1845 map shows that today's Matamoros street had four different names, each with a "1" and "2." Exactly the same situation exists on the ca. 1832 map with Abasolo street. Streets with two to four names are standard on the ca. 1832 and 1845 maps.

The major gap outside of the ca. 1832-1890 period is the lack of a Colonial-period map, which undoubtedly would have many differences with the later maps that concentrate heavily on Independence-period names. There is a remote possibility that the Reform-period maps' use of names of saints and Conquest-period figures for streets may repeat street names in use in the Colonial-period Matamoros, called el Refugio or the Congregación de Nuestra Señora del Refugio de los Esteros.

In addition to locating other maps, it is also important to undertake archival investigations for references to city street names and to use data systems for recording information. Although a map may have a name recorded for a street, other sources may contain street names that are not reflected in the city maps. Street names not listed on any of the maps known to date are sometimes mentioned in documents on Matamoros. It would be helpful to begin to list these street names and the sources in which they occur. For many reasons, names commonly in use for streets may never show up on formal maps of the city. This is also true for names that were used for only short periods. Colonial-period names of streets and names associated with rapid turnovers in city government are probably the most common sources of names that fail to appear on official maps. Once a sizeable quantity of material is gathered, it may be possible to identify poorly referenced street names with modern streets. Street names should be just one part of a comprehensive data base of place names for the historic district. Use of a geographical information system would also be beneficial. Input from a historian specializing in nineteenth-century Mexican history is essential for properly recording and analyzing the data.

The following list shows the historic street names on all six maps in alphabetical order, with the key word in bold. The historic name of each street is followed by the modern names of streets where the historic name has appeared. The dates of the maps that show the historic street name in the location of the modern street are marked in parentheses. There are instances, such as Iturbide, where one historic name has been in three different locations. The primary benefit of this listing may be to easily locate the modern street where a historic event occurred. For example, if an incident occurred on Iturbide in 1832, this would be on the modern street named Gonzalez, not the modern street named Iturbide. This overview does not deal with the unnamed streets on the maps.

#### LISTING OF HISTORIC STREET NAMES FOLLOWED BY CURRENT NAMES OF STREETS AND DATES OF MAPS

**Calle de Abasolo:** Abasolo (ca.1832, 1854-1864, 1873, 1874 y 1890)  
**Calle de la Agua:** Calle 10 (1845).  
**Calle de Allende:** Allende (1874, 1890).  
**S. Balleza:** Bravo (ca. 1832)  
**Calle de Bayou:** Rayon (1890)  
**Calle de Borbon:** Rayon (1854-1864, 1873)  
**Calle de Borgoña:** Zaragoza (1854-1864, 1873)  
**Calle de Bravo:** Calle 4 (ca. 1832, 1845); Bravo (1854-1864, 1873, 1874, 1890)  
**Calle de Bustamante:** Bustamante (1854-1864, 1873, 1874, 1890)  
**Calle de Caton:** Calle 9 (1873)  
**Calle de Cesar:** Calle 6 (1854-1864, 1873)  
**Calle Chiapas:** Bravo (ca. 1832, 1845)  
**Coahuila y:** Pedernal (1845)  
**Coahuila y Texas:** Pedernal (ca. 1832)  
**Colima:** Matamoros (ca. 1832)  
**Calle de Colon [see Caton]:** Calle 9 (1854-1864)

- Calle de Comercio (Commercial St., 1846): Gonzalez (1846, 1854-1864, 1873, 1874, 1890)
- Calle de la Concepcion: Washington (1854-1864)
- Calle de Herman-Cortes [see "Cortez]: Guatemala (1854-1864)
- Calle de Cortez: Guatemala (1873)
- Calle de Dr. Cos: Morelos (ca. 1832, 1845)
- Calle de Dolores: Lauro Villar (1854-1864, 1873)
- Calle de Donceles: Republica de Cuba (1854-1864)
- Calle Durango: Matamoros (ca. 1832, 1845)
- Calle de Galeana: Calle 7 (ca. 1832); Galeana (1874, 1890).
- Calle de Guadalupe: Panama (1854-1864, 1873)
- Calle de Guanajuato: Calle 7 (ca. 1832, 1845)
- Calle Guerrero: Morelos (ca. 1832, 1845); Guerrero (1854-1864, 1873, 1874, 1890)
- Calle de Herrera: Herrera (1854-1864, 1873, 1874, 1890)
- Calle de Hidalgo: Hidalgo (1874, 1890)
- Calle de la Independencia: Gonzalez (ca. 1832, 1845); Independencia (1854-1864, 1873, 1874, 1890)
- Calle de Iturbide: Gonzalez (ca. 1832, 1845); Calle 7 (1854-1864, 1873); Iturbide (1874, 1890)
- Calle de Jicontencatl: Calle 13 (1854-1864, 1873)
- Calle del Padre de las Casas: Calle 14 (1854-1864, 1873)
- Leon (see Nuevo Leon): Abasolo (ca. 1832)
- Calle de la Libertad: Morelos (ca. 1832, 1845); Calle 2 (1854-1864, 1873)
- Calle de Liceaga (F.M.): Calle 6 (ca. 1832, 1845)
- B. López: Guerrero (ca. 1832)
- Calle Mto. [Maestro?]: Bravo (1845)
- Calle de Matamoros: Matamoros (1854-1864, 1873, 1874, 1890)
- Calle de Maxiscatzin: Calle 12 (1854-1864, 1873?)
- Calle de Mexico: Gonzalez (ca. 1832); Santos Degollado (1854-1864, 1873)
- Michoacan: Calle 8 (ca. 1832)
- Calle del Dr. Mier: Iturbide (1854-1864, 1873)
- Calle de Mina: Calle 5 (ca. 1832); Allende (1854-1864, 1873)
- Calle Miranda: Calle 8 (1845).
- Calle de Moctezuma (Montezuma): Calle 8 (1854-1864, 1873)
- Calle de Morelos: Gonzalez (ca. 1832, 1845); Morelos (1854-1864, 1873, 1874, 1890)
- Calle Nuevo Leon [see Leon]: Abasolo (1845)
- Calle de Oaxaca: Matamoros (1845).
- Obregon: Calle 11 (ca. 1832)
- Opera: Calle 11 (ca. 1832)
- Calle de Puebla: Calle 6 (ca. 1832, 1845); Ocampo (1854-1864)
- Calle de la Purisima: Honduras (1854-1864)
- Calle Queretaro: Matamoros (ca. 1832, 1845); Teran (1854-1864, 1873)
- Calle de Rayon: Calle 11 (1854-1864, 1873); Rayon (1874)
- Calle del Refugio: Victoria (1854-1864, 1873)

**Rosales:** Abasolo (ca. 1832)

**Calle de San Carlos:** Calle 17 (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de San Fernando:** Calle 3 (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de San Francisco:** Calle 15 (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de San Jose:** Guillermo Prieto (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de San Luis:** Calle 16 (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de San Miguel:** Primera (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de San Pablo:** Galeana (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de San Pedro:** Hidalgo (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de Santa Rosa:** Juan Alvarez (1854-1864); Washington (1873)

**Calle de Santo Domingo (San Domingo):** Calle 10 (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de Sonora:** Calle 8 (1845)

**Tamaulipas:** Pedernal (ca. 1832)

**Calle de Teran:** Calle 6 (ca. 1832, 1845); Calle 5 (1854-1864, 1873); Teran (1874, 1890)

**De la Union:** Guerrero (ca. 1832, 1845)

**Calle de Ursulinas:** Juarez (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de Venecia:** Pedernal (1854-1864)

**Calle Victoria:** Calle 4 (1854-1864, 1873); Victoria (1874, 1890)

**Calle de Veracruz:** Calle 9 (1845)

**Villacruz:** Calle 4 (ca. 1832)

**Calle de Villagran:** Calle 7 (ca. 1832, 1845)

**Calle de Washington:** Calle 10 (ca. 1832); Republica del Salvador (1854-1864, 1873)

**Calle de Xalisco:** Matamoros (1845)

**Xaunilla:** Bravo (1845)

**Calle Zacatecas:** Abasolo (ca. 1832, 1845)

**Calle de Zaragoza:** Zaragoza (1874, 1890)

**Calles 1-19:** Calles 1-19 (1874, 1890)

The following charts are designed to provide both an individualized and comparative overview of names, maps, time periods, and approximate themes. What I have designated as the early Republic maps date from ca. 1832 and 1845. The obvious difference with the other periods is the emphasis on Mexican states. This emphasis on Mexican states combines with the heaviest concentration of all of the periods on Independence-period names to the point that the state and Independence names account for a total of 88 to 94 percent of all street names. The Reforma-period maps, 1864 and 1873, focus on street names related to religion and the conquest of Mexico, none of which show up on the early Republic or the later Porfiriato maps. Although Independence names are also high in the Reforma period, the figures are significantly lower than the early Republican period and somewhat lower than in the Porfiriato. The major difference between the Porfiriato-period maps of 1874 and 1890 and the other two periods is the introduction of 19 streets with numbers rather than names. The numbered streets represent just over 50 percent of the street names. The state, religion, and conquest categories have no street names during the Porfiriato.

# THEMATIC PROFILES OF CA. 1832 - 1890 MATAMOROS MAPS

## A. Thematic Focus of Early Republic Maps (ca. 1832 and 1845 maps)

Historic Maps of-----	ca. 1832	1845	(1846)	1854-1864*	1873	1874	1890
<b>STATES OR DEPARTMENTS OF MEXICO:</b>							
Chiapas	X	X					
Coahuila y		X					
Coahuila y Texas	X						
Colima	X						
Durango	X	X					
Guanajuato	X	X					
Leon (Nuevo)	X						
Mexico (and Conquest)	X			X	X		
Nuevo Leon		X					
Oaxaca		X					
Sonora		X					
Tamaulipas	X						
Veracruz		X					
Michoacan	X						
Puebla	X	X		X			
Queretaro	X	X		X	X		
Xalisco		X					
Zacatecas	X	X					

## B. Thematic Focus of Reforma Period Maps (1864 and 1873 maps)

### RELIGION:

Concepcion		X	
Dolores		X	X
Guadalupe		X	X
Purisima		X	
San Carlos		X	X
San Fernando		X	X
San Francisco		X	X
San Jose		X	X
San Luis		X	X
San Miguel		X	X
San Pablo		X	X
San Pedro		X	X
Santa Rosa		X	X
Santo Domingo		X	X
Ursulinas		X	X

Historic Maps of-----ca. 1832	1845	(1846)	1854-1864*	1873	1874	1890
<b>RELATED TO CONQUEST OF MEXICO:</b>						
Cesar			X	X		
Colon			X			
Hernan-Cortes			X			
Cortez				X		
Jicontencatl			X	X		
Las Casas			X	X		
Maxiscatzin			X	X		
Moctezuma (Montezuma)			X	X		

**POTENTIAL REFORMA RELATION:**

Bayou						X
Borbon			X	X		
Borgoña			X	X		
Zaragoza					X	X

**C. Thematic Focus of Porfiriato Period Maps (1874 and 1890 maps)**

**NUMBERED STREETS:**

Calles 1-19					X	X
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**D. Shared Themes of Circa 1832 to 1890 Maps**

**RELATED TO INDEPENDENCE:**

Abasolo	X		X	X	X	X
(Note: Plaza Aldama is on most maps)						
Allende (Note: Plaza Allende on most maps)					X	X
Balleza	X					
Bravo	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bustamante			X	X	X	X
Cos	X	X				
Galeana	X				X	X
Guerrero (State 1849)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Herrera			X	X	X	X
Hidalgo (Note: State 1869; Plaza Hidalgo on most maps)					X	X
Independencia	X	X	X	X	X	X
Iturbide	X	X	X	X	X	X
Xaunilla (Jaujilla?)		X				
Libertad	X	X	X	X		
Liceaga	X	X				
López	X					



Historic Maps of-----ca. 1832 1845 (1846) 1854-1864\* 1873 1874 1890

	ca. 1832	1845	(1846)	1854-1864*	1873	1874	1890
Matamoros				X	X	X	X
Mier				X	X		
Morelos (State 1869)	X	X		X	X	X	X
Mina	X			X	X		
Obregon	X						
Rayon				X	X	X	
Rosales	X						
Teran	X	X		X	X	X	X
De la Union	X	X					
Victoria				X	X	X	X
Villagran	X	X					
Washington	X			X	X		

POTENTIAL LOCAL FOCUS:

(Note: Plaza de los Arrieros is on most maps)

Comercio			X	X	X	X	X
de la Agua		X					
Donceles				X			
Mto. [Maestro?]		X					
Opera	X						
Refugio				X	X		
Venecia				X			
Villacrus	X						

NOT CATEGORIZED:

Caton (previously Colon)					X		
Miranda		X					

## E. Statistical Summary

Numbers by Individual Map in Accordance with Categories (lines separate theme focuses):

Historic Maps of-----ca. 1832 1845 (1846) 1854-1864\* 1873 1874 1890

<b>STATES</b>	12	12	3	2	0	0
<b>RELIGION</b>	0	0	15	13	0	0
<b>CONQUEST</b>	0	0	7	6	0	0
<b>POTENTIAL REFORMA</b>	0	0	2	2	2	1
<b>NUMBERED STREETS</b>	0	0	0	0	19	19
<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>	19	12	16	16	15	14
<b>LOCAL FOCUS</b>	2	2	4	2	1	1
<b>NOT CATEGORIZED</b>	0	1	0	1	0	0
<b>Total:</b>	33	27	47	42	37	35

Percentages by Individual Map in Accordance with Categories (lines separate theme focuses):

<b>STATES</b>	36	44	6	5	0	0
<b>RELIGION</b>	0	0	32	31	0	0
<b>CONQUEST</b>	0	0	15	14	0	0
<b>POTENTIAL REFORMA</b>	0	0	4	5	5	3
<b>NUMBERED STREETS</b>	0	0	0	0	51	54
<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>	58	44	34	38	41	40
<b>LOCAL FOCUS</b>	6	7	9	5	3	3
<b>NOT CATEGORIZED</b>	0	4	0	2	0	0

\*Note on 1854-1864 map: internal data point to names from 1864, rather than 1854.

From the above listing and tables, it is possible to see that the general pattern of street names is beginning to be defined for H. Matamoros from ca. 1832 to 1890, and that major changes in the symbolic focuses of street names do occur though time in the city's historic district. Continuity in the high use of Independence-related names during all three periods is also significant. This initial survey is just one step in the work that needs to be done in identifying and analyzing places names in the Matamoros historic district.

Superintendent, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site

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# LA CIUDAD DE MATAMOROS EN EL SIGLO XIX

por

Jaime Mendoza Martínez

## INTRODUCCION

*En los últimos años del siglo XVIII y durante el siglo XIX, Matamoros pasó de ser un grupo de pequeños ranchos dispersos con unos cuantos habitantes a convertirse en una ciudad que llegó a tener 40,000 habitantes y que incluso fue asiento de los poderes estatales. En este proceso de poco más de 100 años, la ciudad fue centro de múltiples y variados eventos: lugar estratégico en la guerra con los Estados Unidos, sitio de conflicto entre grupos por el poder estatal, puerto para el comercio internacional de mercancías y zona de disputa en la intervención francesa, entre otros acontecimientos.*

## LA CIUDAD DE 1836

*En 1836 la población había crecido 7 veces con respecto a la que existía en 1820. De esta forma mientras que en este último año se contaba con 2320 habitantes, 16 años después se tenía más de 16,000 habitantes. Para ese momento, había pasado más de medio siglo desde que se dieron los primeros asentamientos de pobladores provenientes de Reynosa y Camargo encabezados por el capitán Don Ignacio Anastacio de Ayala, (padre de Calixto de Ayala) y se había fundado San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos.*

*Para ese 1836, Matamoros había tenido distintos nombres: San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos, Congregación de Nuestra Señora del Refugio de los Esteros, Villa de Matamoros y Ciudad de Matamoros. En ella se habían realizado diversas obras: la Plaza de Armas, la Parroquia de Nuestra Señora del Refugio, el Fuerte Paredes, y se dio inicio a la construcción del Fuerte Guerrero. También se autorizó la apertura del Puerto del Refugio.*

*Asimismo, Matamoros, según el antropólogo Antonio Zavaleta, había jugado un papel importante en la guerra de Independencia de Texas, porque aunque no se combatió en este área, las comunidades de Laredo hasta Matamoros fueron lugares de desembarco del ejército mexicano.*

*La ciudad en 1836 llegaba al norte hasta lo que es actualmente la calle de Allende, al poniente hasta la calle 14, al oriente los límites eran los esteros del Bravo y Cuarteles y hacia el sur el punto más alejado estaba en la calle Canales. (En especial al oriente había una pequeña sección de la ciudad que se encontraba al otro lado del Estero del Norte).*

*A partir de la localización de algunas de las construcciones más importantes es posible suponer que las calles más importantes en este periodo fueron al sur la calle Morelos, al norte la calle Matamoros, al este la calle Cuarta, y al oeste la calle Sexta. En esta área se concentraron las principales actividades políticas, religiosas y comerciales de la época. (Actualmente esta área forma parte de otra área un poco más grande donde se presenta la mayor concentración de actividades comerciales y de servicios de toda la ciudad. Por ejemplo: restaurantes, hoteles, radiodifusoras, bancos, etc.)*

*Hay dos características que se identifican en la ciudad de 1836: una es que la ciudad se desarrolló en las partes más altas de la planicie, y otra es que fueron respetados los límites de los esteros. De manera muy clara la forma de la ciudad estuvo determinada por las áreas que correspondían a los esteros.*

*Un lugar especial merece la localización de los esteros. Matamoros era una especie de isla rodeada por diversos cuerpos de agua. El examen y superposición de planos revela que en la parte norte se encontraban tres esteros. Estos eran de izquierda a derecha: el Estero de San Pablo, un estero que corría por la calle Iturbide e Hidalgo (al parecer dichos esteros estuvieron unidos en un periodo anterior), y el Estero del Bravo, también llamado Nuevo o del Norte. Al oriente estaba el Estero de los Cuarteles o Estero de San Juan. Al surponiente, y de acuerdo a un plano elaborado por un soldado norteamericano, existió otro estero en esta parte. Finalmente, al sur se encontraba la laguna de San Francisco, dos esteros de menor tamaño sobre la calle Cuarta, y otro par de esteros en las calles Canales y Av. Universidad.*

### **MATAMOROS 10 AÑOS DESPUES (1846)**

*Para 1840 el puerto del Refugio o Bagdad había alcanzado un gran auge. De acuerdo al historiador Davenport el movimiento portuario sobrepasaba la cantidad de 40 millones de pesos anuales mostrando el desarrollo comercial de la región. En especial Bagdad era un puerto que reunía a personas de distintas nacionalidades y donde se hablaba una infinidad de lenguas, su población era heterogénea y estaba formada por blancos, negros, mulatos e indios.*

*El año 1846 fue decisivo en las relaciones de México y Estados Unidos. Un año antes Texas había aceptado la oferta que se le había hecho para formar parte de la Unión, con lo que Estados Unidos heredó la disputa por los límites de las dos naciones.*

*En el mes de mayo del 46, al norte de lo que ahora es la ciudad de Brownsville, Texas; se dieron las batallas de Palo Alto y de Resaca de la Palma donde las fuerzas estadounidenses vencieron a las tropas mexicanas. Después de estas derrotas, el general Arista, que dirigía al ejército mexicano, evacuó la ciudad de Matamoros, ocupándola posteriormente las tropas norteamericanas del general Taylor. En esta acción los americanos izaron su bandera en algunos de los edificios públicos. (La ocupación en Matamoros duró dos años saliendo el ejército norteamericano hasta el año de 1848).*

*La ciudad de Matamoros en ese 1846 había crecido hacia el norponiente, manteniendo los límites de crecimiento hacia las otras direcciones. Este crecimiento hacia el norponiente de la ciudad se había presentado en una parte de lo que fue el estero ubicado sobre las calles de Iturbide e Hidalgo. (Posiblemente era un estero seco que sólo en tiempo de inundaciones volvía a cubrirse de agua).*

*En el plano de Berlandier se pueden identificar de manera clara algunos elementos distintivos de la ciudad en 1846. Así por ejemplo, había una serie de plazas a lo largo de la ciudad. De norte a sur se encontraban las plazas: Jiménez, Allende, Aldama, Hidalgo y, finalmente, frente a Casa Mata la Plaza Iguala.*

*Otros elementos distintivos eran los dos "pasos" hacia al otro lado del río. Uno era el paso de Anacuita al norte, y el otro era el Paso del Río hacia el oriente, y al cual se llegaba cruzando el Estero Nuevo. Otro hallazgo interesante es la Alameda que estuvo rodeada por el estero de San Juan y a la cual se tenía acceso por lo que actualmente es la calle de Abasolo.*

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ciudad y los primeros fortines que se encontraban en la periferia. Dos de ellos estaban precisamente a la altura de los "pasos" y el otro se ubicaba cerca del ahora panteón viejo.

## **LA CIUDAD ANTES DEL PORFIRIATO (1873)**

*Entre 1846 y 1873 Matamoros vivió una gran variedad de acontecimientos que fueron decisivos para su desarrollo. En la década de los 50 se fue consolidando un periodo de auge económico que continuó en la década de los 60. Junto a este auge, la población se incrementó hasta llegar a ser de 40 mil habitantes en 1858.*

*En el periodo de 1861 a 1865, la frontera se convirtió en una región estratégica que fue espacio de disputa entre republicanos e imperialistas, y objetivo central del gobierno norteamericano. Como lo señala la historiadora Patricia Fernández, además de ser un área crucial desde el aspecto militar, financiero y diplomático, fue decisiva para la sobrevivencia del proyecto nacional.*

*Tanto Matamoros, como la recién nacida Brownsville, resultaron beneficiadas económicamente de la guerra civil norteamericana. Así por ejemplo, gran número de embarcaciones europeas viajaron a estas tierras para negociar con el algodón. Además, el auge de Bagdad, y la creación de la zona del libre comercio (que se había iniciado en 1858) trajeron prosperidad económica a la ciudad.*

*De acuerdo al plano de 1873 la ciudad había continuado su crecimiento hacia el norponiente llegando hasta la calle 16. Con este crecimiento, el único estero que había sido cubierto era el que se encontraba en la calle de Iturbide, mientras que los esteros que se localizaban circundando la ciudad no habían sido aterrados.*

*Para este año estaba claramente definido la línea de fortines que protegía a la ciudad. Partiendo del norponiente en dirección al suroriente se encontraba los siguientes fortines: Paredes, del Bravo, de Monterrey, Iturbide, Hidalgo, San Fernando, Matamoros, Bravo o Puertas Verdes, del Estero, Guerrero; así como la Casa Mata. También al norte se encontraba el Fortín Independencia. (Es interesante señalar que un plano de 1864 aparecía, al lado nororiente de la ciudad, entre el Estero del Bravo y el río, otro fortín que tuvo el nombre de Redondo. Este fortín tenía una forma circular claramente distinta a la forma poligonal del Fortín Paredes).*

*Por otro lado, había una serie de caminos que comunicaban a la ciudad en todas direcciones. Al norte se tenían dos caminos que se dirigían al poblado de Santa Cruz y que se encontraban en la punta de la curva del mismo nombre. Al poniente estaba el camino a Monterrey, al sur el camino a San Fernando y, finalmente, al oriente el camino para Los Tomates.*

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## **MATAMOROS EN EL ULTIMO CUARTO DE SIGLO**

*Después de 1870 la ciudad disminuyó significativamente su población. De acuerdo a las estadísticas manejadas por Zavaleta, mientras que en 1870 se tenían 40,000 habitantes para 1880 se contaba sólo 16,039. Esta caída pudo ser producto de distintos factores como: los huracanes que afectaron significativamente a Bagdad; la terminación de la guerra civil norteamericana; la eliminación de la zona libre; la epidemias como el cólera; y el bandidaje de ganado.*

*Hay dos características que se identifican en la ciudad de 1836: una es que la ciudad se desarrolló en las partes más altas de la planicie, y otra es que fueron respetados los límites de los esteros. De manera muy clara la forma de la ciudad estuvo determinada por las áreas que correspondían a los esteros.*

*Un lugar especial merece la localización de los esteros. Matamoros era una especie de isla rodeada por diversos cuerpos de agua. El examen y superposición de planos revela que en la parte norte se encontraban tres esteros. Estos eran de izquierda a derecha: el Estero de San Pablo, un estero que corría por la calle Iturbide e Hidalgo (al parecer dichos esteros estuvieron unidos en un periodo anterior), y el Estero del Bravo, también llamado Nuevo o del Norte. Al oriente estaba el Estero de los Cuarteles o Estero de San Juan. Al surponiente, y de acuerdo a un plano elaborado por un soldado norteamericano, existió otro estero en esta parte. Finalmente, al sur se encontraba la laguna de San Francisco, dos esteros de menor tamaño sobre la calle Cuarta, y otro par de esteros en las calles Canales y Av. Universidad.*

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*En pleno auge porfiriano, la ciudad de Matamoros a pesar de haber disminuido su población, incrementó su área urbana. De esta forma su crecimiento continuó hacia el norponiente hasta la calle 21. También creció hacia el surponiente y suroriente alcanzando los límites del sistema de defensa. La única parte hacia donde no creció fue el nororiente donde los Esteros del Bravo y Cuarteles fueron una limitante.*

*El proceso de aterración de esteros se continuó en estos años desapareciendo el estero que se localizaba al norte sobre la calle de Iturbide, el del suroriente, y el que estaba entre las calles cuatro y cinco entre Zaragoza y Mier. Los únicos esteros que se conservaron fueron el Estero del Bravo y el de los Cuarteles, teniendo una menor área que la de años anteriores.*

*Por último, en el plano de 1890 se identifica el recorrido que hacía el tranvía de mulitas y que iba del poblado de Santa Cruz al centro de Matamoros. En su ruta pasaba, entre otras calles, por la Av. Alvaro Obregón, la calle Sexta, la calle González y la calle Séptima.*

## CONCLUSION

*A partir de las reflexiones de este ensayo se puede decir que Matamoros fue una región estratégica para el desarrollo nacional y un espacio de disputa entre distintas fuerzas políticas. Asimismo, fue un área crucial para el país en los aspectos militar, financiero, diplomático y comercial.*

*En este contexto, Matamoros debió ser una hermosa ciudad con un centro bien diseñado, rodeada de esteros y lagunas. Se desarrolló de manera concéntrica a partir de un núcleo central que giraba en torno de la plaza principal y donde las otras plazas fueron lugares de reunión para otros sectores de la ciudad.*

*Es importante señalar que en la primera mitad del siglo, la ciudad se desarrolló en las partes más altas de la planicie, y conforme fue creciendo se fueron ocupando los terrenos cada vez más bajos que estaban en su periferia. También en esta primera mitad del siglo XIX los esteros fueron respetados y su aterración se dio hacia fines del siglo. Ligado a lo anterior, los esteros fueron condicionantes del tipo y forma de desarrollo urbano.*

*Ahora bien nos podemos preguntar: ¿qué sucedió con la ciudad del siglo pasado?, ¿qué nos queda de esa bella ciudad?. Lo que podemos señalar es que en Matamoros se dio el mismo proceso que en otras ciudades. Esto es, un proceso de destrucción sistemática de la ciudad donde una serie de viviendas y edificios como lo fueron El Colegio de San Juan, la aduana, el original Teatro de la Reforma y la Casa Municipal, ya no existen actualmente. Muchas de estas construcciones han sido derribadas y en su lugar se han levantado "modernas" ferreterías, bancos, y otros negocios rentables como estacionamientos.*

*La situación se torna más grave si tomamos los datos de la Sociedad Tamaulipeca de Historia, Geografía y Estadística en donde se indica que sólo en los últimos 15 años se han destruido del 5 al 10 por ciento de los inmuebles que aparecían en el Catálogo Nacional de Monumentos Históricos-Inmuebles de Tamaulipas.*

*Ante esto es indispensable que la sociedad matamorenses se cuestione sobre la actitud que debe tener frente a su pasado y definir qué tipo de ciudad desea para el próximo milenio. Por ello, resulta inaplazable el rescate del tesoro urbanístico que nos queda de la ciudad.*

## NOTAS

El presente ensayo pretende dar una visión general de lo que fue Matamoros desde su fundación hasta finales del siglo XIX. Para su elaboración se utilizaron una serie de planos antiguos que se superpusieron en la traza urbana actual. Los planos fueron de los años 1836, 1846, 1873 y 1890 (de acuerdo al historiador Thomas Carroll, el plano fechado en 1836 puede ser 1832, y el de 1846 probablemente sea de 1845). En el trabajo se utilizaron los nombres actuales de las calles, y el plano final se elaboró con el apoyo de la empresa Gateway Ingeniería. La información base fue tomada de los siguientes documentos: "The Twin Cities": A Historical Synthesis of the Socio-Economic Interdependence of the Brownsville-Matamoros Border Community, de Antonio N. Zavaleta; Comercio y Contrabando en la Frontera Noreste, 1861-1865, de Patricia Fernández de Castro; La Casa Mata y Fortificaciones de la Heróica Matamoros, Tamaulipas, de Eliseo Paredes; Historia de H. Matamoros- Tam., de José Raúl Canseco; e Inundaciones en Matamoros. Algunos Factores Explicativos, de Jaime Mendoza.



por

Jaime Mendoza Martínez

"En el sistema republicano, más que en los otros, es de necesidad absoluta proteger y fomentar la educación". (José Ma. Luis Mora).

A mediados del siglo XIX, Matamoros era una especie de isla rodeada por esteros y lagunas. Era una bella ciudad con una alameda y varias plazas, en donde destacaban una serie de viviendas y edificios que le daban realce y sobriedad. La Aduana, El Teatro de la Reforma, la Casa Municipal, la Catedral de Nuestra Señora del Refugio, el edificio Yturria, el edificio Mc Millan, la casa Milmo, el Colegio de San Juan son sólo algunas de las construcciones de este periodo.

En esta ciudad existía una construcción que había pertenecido al coronel insurgente Francisco Lojero y que se localizaba en la esquina noroeste de las calles Morelos (hoy González) y 1a. Bravo (hoy calle cuatro). La casa fue construida en 1828 cuando llegó a Matamoros una comisión encargada de la guarnición de Brazos de Santiago, en la Isla del Padre Ballí. Fue diseñada con dos niveles y tenía una serie de accesos y ventanas con un amplio balcón en el segundo piso. También tenía un extenso patio central con arcos a su alrededor. En el techo se encontraban unas ventanas verticales, llamadas "dormers", que salían del tejado.

Este hermoso edificio de arquitectura europea, tuvo un uso muy rico y variado. Fue casa de los insurgentes Francisco Lojero y Nicolás Bravo; palacio de gobierno con el general Juan N. Cortina; cuartel general con Tomás Mejía y Lucio Blanco; y centro educativo con el Instituto Literario de San Juan. (Posteriormente, con algunas remodelaciones, fue la Secundaria Federal No. 13 y la preparatoria Juan José de la Garza).

De acuerdo a los principios liberales de la época, el Estado tenía la responsabilidad de proporcionar educación y debía extender "su mano protectora sobre la gran familia que había puesto en sus manos el bienestar común". En este contexto, la antigua casa del coronel Lojero, gracias a una donación de sus herederos, se convirtió en asiento de lo que posiblemente fue la primera institución de enseñanza superior en la frontera norte de México.

En 1858, Matamoros, junto con otras poblaciones fronterizas de Tamaulipas, había sido declarada "zona libre", con lo que se estableció la libre importación de bienes destinados al consumo, trayendo como consecuencia un aumento en la población y en la actividad comercial. Asimismo, la ciudad estaba a punto de ingresar a una fase decisiva para el futuro político del país. Y es precisamente en este año cuando el gobernador liberal Juan José de la Garza, que había impulsado una nueva constitución política estatal acorde con la constitución federal de 1857, expidió el decreto para la creación del Instituto Literario de San Juan, comúnmente llamado Colegio de San Juan.

El instituto se inauguró oficialmente el 1 de enero de 1859 incluyéndose una amplia gama de materias que buscaban una sólida formación científico-humanista-social. Así, los alumnos debían aprender cuatro idiomas que eran latín, español, francés e inglés; y tener conocimientos de filosofía (lógica, estética, ideología, teodicea); de ciencias sociales (como historia, geografía, economía,

derecho); y de ciencias exactas (como matemáticas, química y astronomía).

Entre los recursos con los que llegó a contar la escuela estaba un laboratorio muy completo que tenía instrumentos como la máquina neumática, telescopio, microscopios, esferas de Magdemburgo, etc. Asimismo, tuvo una biblioteca que fue generada con el apoyo de la Junta Patriótica de la localidad.

La vida del instituto no estuvo exenta de dificultades. Así por ejemplo, entre 1861 y 1866 tuvieron que suspenderse las clases entre otras razones por los enfrentamientos de distintas fuerzas políticas que luchaban por el control estatal y por la guerra de intervención francesa. Fue en este periodo, y de manera más exacta entre 1863 y 1864, cuando el edificio del instituto se constituyó en asiento de los poderes estatales durante el gobierno del general Cortina.

Otro de los problemas que presentó continuamente el instituto fue de carácter económico. Un ejemplo de lo anterior era el esquema de financiamiento por cooperación municipal. Para ello, el gobierno estatal estableció como una de sus fuentes de recursos un mecanismo por el cual los distintos municipios del estado debían pagar un porcentaje equitativo. Todos los municipios de la ribera del río desde Reynosa hasta Laredo así como también San Fernando, Burgos y otros municipios debían hacer sus aportaciones. Dichas aportaciones les concedía a los municipios el derecho de enviar alumnos que hubieran destacado en sus escuelas primarias y que tuvieran buenas calificaciones.

Sin embargo, este esquema dejó de funcionar debido a que los municipios desistieron poco a poco de cooperar con el porcentaje que les correspondía, siguiendo el ejemplo que puso el municipio de Tampico.

Ya casi para finalizar el siglo XIX, y como una forma de honrar al gobernante que ordenó su fundación, el Instituto Literario de San Juan cambió su nombre por el de Instituto Científico y Literario Juan José de la Garza. Es en ese mismo año de 1898 cuando se incorporaron materias para obtener el título de profesor de primaria, con lo que se instituyó la carrera normalista en esta institución.

Distintos autores vinculan el cierre del instituto al desarrollo de la revolución y a la entrada a Matamoros del general Lucio Blanco en 1913. En esta fecha los revolucionarios utilizaron el colegio como cuartel, arruinando el laboratorio y la biblioteca, perdiéndose irremediamente este equipo. Además de estos hechos, durante su ocupación fueron destruidos pisos y techos, empleándose su madera como combustible.

Después de lo anterior, el instituto desapareció dejando un hueco muy importante en la educación de la frontera norte del país. Tuvieron que pasar 18 años para que se inaugurara una escuela secundaria, y más de 34 para que se reiniciaran en Matamoros los estudios a nivel preparatoria.

En tan sólo medio siglo de existencia, el instituto forjó una generación de jóvenes que destacó en distintos campos de la vida local, estatal y nacional. Cardiólogos, gobernadores, periodistas, alcaldes, poetas, abogados, médicos, profesores, arquitectos, ingenieros y un presidente de la república, fueron alumnos o catedráticos de esta institución. Los nombres son muchos, y entre algunos de los más destacados se encuentran los siguientes: Rodolfo Matas, Francisco León de la Barra, Guadalupe Mainero, Juan B. Tijerina, Celedonio Junco de la Vega, Augusto Petriccioli, Manuel Rodríguez Brayda, José Arrese y José Solernou, entre otros.

Como hemos apuntado, el instituto dejó un espacio sin cubrir en la vida cultural de la región noreste del país. No sólo en cuanto al haber dejado de existir durante muchos años los niveles superiores a la primaria, sino al haber desaparecido una educación con una fuerte esencia humanista,

social y científica. Además es posible pensar que se hubiera podido crear una universidad en la frontera noreste del país que continuara con los esfuerzos del instituto y que diera un perfil diferente a las letras, el arte, la historia, la economía y la política de la región.

De manera análoga, la desaparición del antiguo edificio del colegio nos muestra la misma lógica de destrucción de la ciudad y que ha seguido con otras edificaciones importantes de Matamoros como lo fue el original Teatro de la Reforma. Esta destrucción sistemática también ha dejado un vacío en la identidad de la ciudad.

Para finalizar podemos señalar que la presencia y la huella que han dejado estos hombres forjados con el espíritu de la reforma, nos hace suponer que se requiere que existan centros educativos que preparen a los jóvenes con esa misma intensidad y devoción que mantuvo el instituto. Se requiere no sólo pensar en las necesidades que tiene la industria de la región sino que también se necesita que las escuelas formen jóvenes con una perspectiva más amplia, crítica y universal. Es decir una visión más humana de la vida.<sup>1</sup>

## El Colegio de la Frontera Norte

### Notas

1. La Información base para la elaboración de este ensayo fue tomado de los siguientes documentos: *Pensamientos sueltos sobre la educación pública* de José Ma. Luis Mora; *Algo acerca del Colegio de San Juan y de la Secundaria Federal No. 13* de Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda; *Relación de esteros, lagunas y zonas verdes, casas, edificios, monumentos de valor histórico, plazas y lugares de belleza natural en la H. Matamoros y su jurisdicción* de Eliseo Paredes; *Evolución y dependencia en el noreste: las ciudades fronterizas de Tamaulipas* de Eduardo Alarcón; *Apuntes para la historia de la educación en Tamaulipas* de Raúl García; y *Antiguo Instituto Científico y Literario de San Juan de Edelmiro Villarreal*. Asimismo, las dos citas que aparecen en el trabajo pertenecen al Dr. Mora.





Architecture in Brownsville: The 20th Century  
1904-1970

by

Stephen Fox

The beginning of the 20th century brought dramatic change to the isolated border country of the lower Río Grande. The construction of the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway in 1903-04 integrated Brownsville into the economic and cultural mainstream of Texas and the United States. The cultural order that had prevailed in this region since the end of the Civil War fragmented under the impact of change. The historians Evan Anders in *Boss Rule in South Texas*, David Montejano in *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, and Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp in *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* have described the consequences of fragmentation and change in political, economic, and social terms. Architecture reflected the changes brought about by the introduction of modernization to the lower Río Grande at the turn of the 20th century. In some respects, the changes wrought on Brownsville architecture by modernization were highly visible. The architecture of the south Texas borderland ceased to be dependent on northeastern Mexico. In terms of building type and architectural style, Brownsville's 20th-century architecture reflected prevailing U.S. models. But as the historians demonstrate, modernization did not effect everyone in the same way. Some benefited from change. Many experienced loss. The traditional Mexican culture of the region, which exerted such a strong influence on the architecture of 19th-century Brownsville, was radically reduced in status. It survived in so tenuous a fashion that it was almost invisible, especially to Anglo-Americans newcomers to South Texas. These newcomers replaced the Mexican Creole architecture of the lower Río Grande with a series of modern architectural styles (often incorporating Spanish imagery) that made contradictory claims to being traditional and modern. Thus during the period of Anglo-American cultural hegemony that prevailed from the first decade of the 1900s until the 1970s, the border condition was manifest in the architecture of Brownsville in ways that were indirect and often ambivalent.

The periods into which architecture divides the first three quarters of the 20th century in Brownsville are somewhat at variance with customary schemes of periodization. The railroad era, 1904 to 1925, encompasses the *sedicioso* uprising of 1915-17 and the U.S. involvement in World War I, which brought construction in the Valley to a halt during the middle of this interval. While social and economic circumstances changed during the first half of the 1920s, architecture continued to reflect the trends of the 1910 era until the economic expansion that began at the end of World War I produced a building boom between 1925 and 1930 marked by Spanish-Mediterranean style architecture. New construction continued to be effected by the Spanish-Mediterranean impulse until the mid-1930s although it was greatly reduced in volume because of the onset of the Great Depression. Simplified versions of American "regional" architectural styles were popular from the mid-1930s through the 1940s. These competed with various approaches to modern

architecture, which rejected the use of historically derived ornament. By 1945 modern architecture dominated non-residential construction in south Texas. The 1950s were the golden age of modern architecture in Brownsville and the Río Grande Valley, and modernism remained the dominant trend into the 1970s.

Other factors come into play. One involves the profession of architecture. Although the 19th century was as vulnerable as the 20th century to the boom and bust cycles Kearney and Knopp describe, Brownsville ceased to be the only significant urban center in far south Texas after the early 1900s. Therefore, while the city was able to support an architectural profession during economic boom cycles, the fact that architects from newly-established Valley towns provided increased competition meant that Brownsville architects could no longer rely on the entire region during periods of limited construction activity. As a result, Brownsville and the new Valley towns lost their architectural professionals of the 1910 period before the onset of World War I. A new generation of architects streamed into the Valley after 1919, but so severe were the effects of the Great Depression that only a few architects in practice in the Valley in 1930 remained in 1940. The post-World War II era provided the longest period of economic stability during the 20th century. Yet by the late 1950s, the number of new architectural practices had ceased to expand and the 1960s decade was characterized by the maintenance of practices begun in the late 1940s and 1950s. These observations highlight a circumstance that still applies in far south Texas. Although new construction displayed the production of wealth, the Lower Río Grande Valley was the poorest region of Texas. Its economy for much of the 20th century was based on agriculture and real estate speculation. As such, it was unpredictable and extremely vulnerable to natural and market fluctuations.

A second factor was the role played by architects from outside the Lower Río Grande Valley. Although the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway connected the Valley with Corpus Christi and Houston, neither of these cities had a pronounced effect on Brownsville architecture during the first half of the century. Corpus Christi was too small (Brownsville was the larger city until 1930) and Houston too far away. San Antonio, the largest city in Texas during from 1900 until 1930, dominated far south Texas architecturally until the 1930s and its influence spread into Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Chihuahua. San Antonio displaced New Orleans as Brownsville's proximate style center during the first half of the century. Although occasional architectural exchanges with Matamoros can be noted, these tended to flow from the U.S. side of the Río Grande to the Mexican side after the early 1900s, not both ways, reversing the state of affairs that prevailed for most of the 19th century, when Mexican building practice was the fundamental influence on both sides of the border. Thus, the 20th century brought to Brownsville an economically unstable architectural profession consisting of newcomers from outside the region who had to compete with San Antonio architects, especially for important building projects. These circumstances clarify the shift away from Mexican influences to an architectural mainstream that was exclusively North American.

### **1904-1925: The Railroad Era**

The completion of the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway in 1904 did not immediately precipitate a building boom in Brownsville. Even when this boom occurred, between 1909 until 1914, it appeared more like a gradual transition to changed

circumstances, especially when compared to the new railroad towns of the Valley.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Brownsville remained a "border" town rather than a "valley" town, if these terms can be used to differentiate opposed cultural attitudes. The "valley" towns astride the tracks of the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway reflected a new cultural order that sought to appeal to the imaginations of prospective immigrants and accommodate their cultural predispositions.<sup>2</sup> Brownsville had an established cultural order. New construction in the 1910 era reflected this order as much as the economic changes set into motion by the coming of the railroad.

The old order passed slowly, as symbolized by Immaculate Conception School, built in 1907-08 at 1424 East Jefferson Street (demolished in the 1960s) on the site of Brownsville's first Roman Catholic church.<sup>3</sup> With brick pilasters rhythmically dividing its high walls, Immaculate Conception School represented a continuation of the Creole border brick style. However it displayed a prominent decorative element that remarked its post-1904 construction date, a rounded parapet above the central entrance bay. This was a decorative feature derived from the Spanish Mission style, a romantic architectural style that took shape in California in the 1890s and was especially associated with railroad travel and tourism in California and the American Southwest.<sup>4</sup> Railroad companies built Spanish Mission style passenger stations and hotels to suggest to American travelers that the United States possessed indigenous cultures that were exotic *and* American, different yet not threatening. This is how modernization engaged cultural difference through architecture. Imaginative architectural images were applied to modern building types. Such imagery, by virtue of its romantic associations, appealed to the imagination and was highly useful for purposes of marketing. Spanish Mission style images symbolized indigenous Mexican culture to the American middle class as *their* inheritance from the remote "Spanish" past, suggesting cultural continuity and stability, yet connected to progressive modern institutions rather than local Mexican community institutions.<sup>5</sup> Strained of contemporary Mexican associations, the Spanish Mission style allowed Anglo-Americans to feel that they were demonstrating respect for what was called "local color" in American literature of the late 19th century without actually having to engage it.

The first major Spanish Mission style building in Brownsville was the new façade that the aged don Francisco Yturria added to the Miller Hotel at 1307 East Elizabeth Street in 1909 (demolished in 1967).<sup>6</sup> The architect, Henry T. Phelps of the San Antonio firm of Phelps & Jacobs, organized the hotel's Elizabeth Street façade with a shaped parapet framed between tile-roofed towers. Built on the site of the original wooden Miller Hotel of 1849, Phelps's stucco-surfaced front was attached to the three-story portion of the hotel built in 1867, which remained visible along 13th Street. Aimed at travelers arriving in Brownsville by train, the Miller was a hybrid of old and new that bespoke Brownsville's "border" status.

The Miller's modern façade contrasted with the much more efficient use of Spanish Mission style imagery in the competing "valley" town of San Benito, developed by Sam A. Robertson and his fellow investors. Although a new town, organized in 1907, San Benito had a Spanish name and imposing Spanish style buildings along its main street, Sam Houston Boulevard. Robertson's own house at 591 North Sam Houston (1911) was stucco-faced and tile-roofed, with a round-arched porch and a tile-roofed tower. At the center of town, at South Sam Houston and Sam Robertson, are San Benito's defining buildings, the San Benito Bank & Trust Company Building (1911) and the San Benito Land & Water Company Building (1912, now the Cameron County Water & Improvement District Number 2

Building). Together, they comprised a Spanish Mission style pair worthy of California.<sup>7</sup> They represented the modern use of traditional stylistic imagery to advertise to newcomers a set of tacit, contradictory insinuations. Newcomers symbolically appropriated "Spanish" culture as their own, while they systematically marginalized indigenous Mexican culture.

Throughout the upper Valley, tile roofs (or copings), stucco, and shaped gables provided explicit architectural signs of modernization in the 1910 era. Notable examples were the Hidalgo County Courthouse and Jail in Edinburg (1910, by the San Antonio architects Atlee B. Ayres and Henry T. Phelps; courthouse demolished), the Louisiana-Río Grande Canal Company Pumphouse in Hidalgo (1911), the First National Bank Building at 101 South Cage Boulevard in Pharr (1912; extensively altered), St. Peter's Novitiate at La Lomita (1913, by the San Antonio architect Frederick B. Gaenslen), the big house that Mrs. Richard M. King and her son-in-law Robert J. Kleberg built at the Santa Gertrudis Ranch outside Kingsville (1913, by Adams & Adams of San Antonio), and the Casa de Palmas at 109 North Main Street in McAllen, next to the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway tracks (1918, by the San Antonio architect M. L. Waller; extensively altered).<sup>8</sup>

In comparison to the new towns of the valley, Brownsville stood out for its lack of Spanish Mission style buildings. The alterations and additions that Mayor Benjamin Kowalski's administration made to the City Market House (1912, S. B. Elliott & Company, architect) displayed a small, Mission style shaped gable framed between low towers on the 12th Street entrance front.<sup>9</sup> Two large houses--one for Dr. H. L. D. Kirkham at 542 East Washington Street (c. 1913, subsequently the Harbert Davenport house; demolished about 1972), the other for the undertaker Bert E. Hinkley at 1042 East St. Charles Street (c. 1913, demolished)--were designed in the Mission style.<sup>10</sup>

Less exotic architecture seemed to appeal to Brownsville's elite, suggesting that they did not feel the need to exploit the marketing potential of the Spanish Mission style. Between 1910 and 1912, the Brownsville architect M. E. Tracy designed a number of substantial houses in the West End for members of Brownsville's established families. These included the John J. Young House at 504 East St. Charles Street (1910), the José M. Gómez House at 901 East Washington Street (1910; demolished), the José Celaya House at 441 East Washington Street (1911), the Frank Champion House at 947 East Washington Street (1911; demolished), Dr. Emile P. Combe's house at 842 East Washington Street (1911; demolished), and Mrs. José Fernández's house at 405 East Washington Street (1912).<sup>11</sup> All were in the Colonial Revival style. Colonial Revival style houses were immensely popular with affluent Texans in the 1910 period, as is still evident in San Antonio, Victoria, Houston, and Beaumont. With their giant columns and expansive galleries, such houses represented high status. Brownsville's elite families endorsed contemporary architectural images of affluence and success rather than the Mission style and its associations with advertising and salesmanship. Thus their new houses tended to set Brownsville apart from the Valley towns, which lacked a local gentry capable of building at this scale.

Brownsville also lacked a significant number of bungalow-type houses. Such houses--distinguished by their low-pitched roofs with wide overhangs, generous porches, and domestic appearance--were as widely illustrated in contemporary promotional literature as the Valley's Spanish Mission style buildings. Particularly grand examples included the Shary Lake Club House at Sharyland (1917, subsequently remodeled as John H. Shary's own house) and the W. E. Stewart Land Company Club House outside Weslaco. The bungalow did not connote local color the way that the Spanish Mission style did. Yet it shared with

the Spanish Mission style an indelible association with promoters' images of Southern California as an exotic tropical paradise, a land of leisure and effortless plenty. McAllen and Mission had particularly picturesque bungalows, photographed in settings that emphasized subtropical vegetation and proximity to citrus orchards. North Sam Houston Boulevard in San Benito displays prominent examples of the bungalow.<sup>12</sup> Their lack of prominence in Brownsville reinforces the inference that local house builders and buyers did not identify with the architecture of speculative development that characterized the Valley's new railroad towns.

What Brownsville's building program of the 1910 period reflected was the architectural mainstream of contemporary urban development in Texas. This surge in construction accompanied a significant increase in the availability of public services. A telephone exchange, a water distribution and sewer system, an electrical network, and an electrified streetcar system were installed between 1904 and 1912.<sup>13</sup> Such public utilities had been available in major Texas cities since the 1880s and 1890s. Street paving was begun (not very effectively, to judge from critical observations about the performance of the wooden paving blocks) and the Brownsville & Matamoros Bridge was built in 1909-10 to provide rail and vehicle connections across the Río Grande.<sup>14</sup>

Retail and office building construction changed the appearance of downtown, especially in the 1000 and 1100 blocks of Elizabeth, Washington, and Adams streets. At 1100-1108 East Elizabeth, Pierre J. Vivier built the two-story Vivier Building (subsequently known as the Cromack Building, then Anthony's; destroyed). Up the street at 1223 Elizabeth, Mrs. Pauline Bollack built the three-story Bollack's dry goods store (1910, Cooke & Company of Houston, architects; defaced).<sup>15</sup> The Vivier-Cromack Building was a conservative survivor of Victorian architectural inclinations. By contrast, William A. Cooke's Bollack Building was effusively decorated with high-style ornament. This architectural confrontation between conservatism and contemporaneity was played out in other Texas cities. Its appearance on Elizabeth Street suggests that Brownsville was neither exceptionally behind the times nor incapable of reflecting the state of the art as found in Texas' major urban centers.

The most imposing architectural confrontation downtown involved two of the city's three banks. The First National Bank, Brownsville's oldest, built a \$100,000 neoclassical temple at 1054 East Elizabeth (1911-12; defaced) surfaced with Ionic columns and pilasters of gray terra cotta. Across the street at 1057 East Elizabeth, the Merchants National Bank built a four-story office building of buff brick, the tallest in far south Texas, designed by the San Antonio architect Atlee B. Ayres (1911-12; extensively altered). The classical dignity of the First National Bank Building and the height of the Merchants National Bank Building brought to Brownsville the kind of big-city architecture with which Ayres reshaped lower Broadway in San Antonio.<sup>16</sup> Brownsville's new urban buildings responded to architectural images of modernity broadly shared in the United States at this time. To the extent that they reflected local color, it was the influence of modern San Antonio.

Atlee B. Ayres designed the \$150,000 Cameron County Courthouse and the Cameron County Jail (1911-13), built in the North End slightly beyond the perimeter of downtown. The courthouse's typological conception as a palace block, articulated with classical decoration, adhered to the classical models on which the design of most American public buildings were then based. This association of building type and architectural style also informed the design of the largest new church erected in Brownsville at this time, Sacred

Heart Catholic Church at 602 East Elizabeth Street (1912-13). The San Antonio architect Frederick B. Gaenslen designed Sacred Heart as a twin towered church in the neo-Gothic style.<sup>17</sup>

The courthouse and the parish church bespeak, in ways that are not explicit in their architecture, broader trends effecting far south Texas. Atlee Ayres rejected the winsome Spanish Mission style that he and Henry T. Phelps used for the Hidalgo County Courthouse in Edinburg for a more conventional image of public dignity. Ayres employed the architectural formula of Brownsville's courthouse for the Jim Wells County Courthouse in Alice (1911-12) and the Kleberg County Courthouse in Kingsville (1914),<sup>18</sup> both built by newly-created counties subdivided from Nueces County in response to the political and economic tensions occasioned by development and modernization. Cameron County, which was subdivided in 1911 and again in 1921 to permit the organization of Kenedy and Willacy counties, was effected by this process.<sup>19</sup> Sacred Heart parish was created by subdividing the parish of Immaculate Conception Church. Sacred Heart was for English-speaking Catholics; Immaculate Conception thereafter became the Spanish-speaking parish. Linguistic distinction had socioeconomic implications. Sacred Heart became the elite parish. It was built in the West End, where almost all of Brownsville's elite families lived. Since these included Mexican-American and Spanish-American families, Sacred Heart did not introduce ethnic segregation. But it institutionalized the separation of an elite oriented to the Anglo-American mainstream from the larger part of Brownsville's population, whose cultural orientation was local and Mexican.<sup>20</sup> According to Montejano, this was the same structural purpose served in subdividing south Texas counties: to separate counties where in-coming settlers demanded political and economic changes from counties where the old ways predominated. Ayres and Gaenslen, spatialized--so to speak--these historical trends in buildings endowed with the imprimatur of San Antonio style and expertise.

Most new construction of the 1910 era occurred within Brownsville's original townsite. As early as 1900, James J. Stillman's New York & Brownsville Improvement Company platted a 36-block addition to the west edge of the original townsite, the Stillman Extension. For reasons that are unclear, the plat was re-filed in 1909. The 1909 plat showed the boundary between the original townsite and the Stillman Extension as a 100-foot wide street labeled Boulevard. In 1908, the Brownsville Land & Improvement Company filed a plat for an even larger extension, the West Brownsville Addition, which projected the grid of streets in the Stillman Extension as far to the northwest as West 20th Street.<sup>21</sup> A grid-iron arrangement of streets and city blocks, duplicating that of the original townsite, prevailed in the Stillman Extension and West Brownsville, as it did in all of the new Valley railroad towns. Unlike the new towns, which were bisected by the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway, the original townsite and West Brownsville were skirted by railroad tracks along their southwest and west edges. The incursion of railroad tracks in the new Valley towns spatially separated the "Mexican" and "white" parts of town.<sup>22</sup> In Brownsville, it was Boulevard--renamed Palm Boulevard in the 1920s--that served this function by marking the boundary between the old, mixed neighborhoods and new, socially and ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods.

Because of the decline in in-migration caused by the *sedicioso* uprising and then World War I, the Stillman Extension and West Brownsville were very lightly settled until the 1920s. The construction of a new, modern Brownsville High School (1916, Atlee B. Ayres) at Elizabeth Street and Boulevard in the Stillman Extension forecast the direction prime

development would take when real estate stability was restored. Although it might have made more sense to build the High School in the northeast part of the original townsite, where one of the city's other new public school of this period, Fourth Ward School (1911-12, now Webb Elementary School) at 1351 Polk Street, was constructed, it was built instead on the edge of town closest to the affluent West End. The only other new school, West Brownsville School (1915, now Russell Elementary School), was built near the extreme northwest edge of West Brownsville at 800 Lakeside Boulevard.<sup>23</sup> All three school buildings of the 1910s were modern and rationally planned. It was not any deficiency in design or construction that distinguished Fourth Ward School from the High School and West Brownsville School but the concentration of public improvements in a part of town much more accessible to the affluent minority than the non-affluent majority. Unlike many of the Valley towns, Brownsville did not segregate elementary schools into "Mexican" and "white" institutions.<sup>24</sup> Even so, the affluent minority distanced itself from the non-affluent majority. The writer Genaro González has observed that, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, segregated education did not mean that Anglo-American children never went to school with Mexican-American children, but that many Mexican-American children went to schools where there were no Anglo-American students.<sup>25</sup> In the 1910s, Brownsville's architecture began to describe new patterns of urban spatial organization where lower-income Mexican-American residents had fewer opportunities to make daily contact with more affluent Anglophone residents in such shared institutions as church and school.

The antithesis of the landscape of modernization that Brownsville's new architecture represented is visible in the remarkable novel *George Washington Gómez*, written by the Texas-Mexican border folklorist Américo Paredes in the 1930s when he was a reporter for the *Brownsville Herald*.<sup>26</sup> This is the story of Guálinto Gómez, whose father is murdered by the Texas Rangers in 1915 during the *sedicioso* uprising and whose uncle, Feliciano García, brings him, his widowed mother, and his sisters from the Valley town of San Pedrito, where they are defenseless against violent reprisals, to the relative safety of the border town of Jonesville. In a confrontation with Ranger deputies outside Jonesville, Feliciano García and his charges are rescued by Judge Robert Norris (the Anglicized pun on *norias* is one of the ironies that enlivens Paredes's story), the town's political boss. García's absorption into Judge Norris's paternalistic network of reciprocal protection and obligations becomes Paredes's point of departure for describing Guálinto's life in el Dos Veintidós, the twenty-second precinct of the Second Ward, off 14th Street. There Judge Norris owns a saloon on Polk Street (another one of Paredes's ironies) called El Danubio Azul, patronized by soldiers from Fort Jones.

Paredes adroitly represents Brownsville of the 1910s from a Mexican-American perspective. He describes the Second and Third wards as the Mexican section of Jonesville, a distinction he attributes to the arrival of the railroad in the 20th century, the invasion of modern American business culture, and the consequent proletarianization of Jonesville's Mexican border culture. Residents identify their neighborhoods not only by ward but by precinct, bespeaking the critical importance of knowing where to vote. Norris sells Feliciano García a house on installment, a failed two-room wooden cantina on the only graveled street in the neighborhood (graveled because it led to the judge's cantina). García converts the cantina into a house by subdividing its two long rooms into four rooms, painting it blue (the color of the judge's political party), and eventually planting a garden and adding a front porch with a swing. Although located in the original townsite, the García-Gómez House lies

at the edge of continuous town settlement in Jonesville, within sight of the *monte* when the family moves in. It is therefore a locale where violent crimes occur during Guálinto's childhood because escape is so easy.

As reflected in Feliciano García's experience of becoming an assistant ward boss and Guálinto's of exploring his immediate surroundings, Paredes constructs a spatial representation of el Dos Veintidós. Buildings such as El Danubio Azul are simply organized, yet they expand intricately in added layers where important political business is discreetly conducted. Houses are made out of wooden shed-like buildings by adding a porch and garden. Politics are paramount, whether for distinguishing territorial boundaries or painting a house. It is not always buildings, but elements connected with them, such as the bells of the "old, gray church" (presumably Jonesville's equivalent of Immaculate Conception), through which Guálinto first makes connections with the world outside el Dos Veintidós. Contact with modernized Jonesville seems to be limited, not only for the child Guálinto but for García. Paredes notes the spatial differences between a traditional northeastern Mexican patio house and the freestanding wooden cottages of el Dos Veintidós when he describes García's visit to an old house in the center of Morelos, across the Río Grande from Jonesville. But Paredes does not suggest that García feels a sense of cultural loss or deprivation when he experiences the spatial order represented by the Morelos house. Rather, it is García's pride in the blue house he buys and improves that is emphasized.

Because Brownsville was a border town, its building professionals consisted not only of out-of-town specialists but established locals. Martin Hanson, Jr., who grew up in Brownsville and was trained as a builder in New Orleans, worked until his death in 1916, most often as a contractor it would seem.<sup>27</sup> Baltasar Torres was an architect-builder, like Hanson. His career spanned from the beginning of the 20th century through the late 1920s, but his body of work has yet to be documented. As was true of other architects of the period, he worked regionally. Torres designed and built what is now the oldest business building in downtown Harlingen, the two-story brick Santos Lozano Building at 115 West Jackson Street (1915). He reversed directions on the Brownsville-San Antonio axis by designing and building a Colonial Revival style house in San Antonio that won recognition in a national builder's journal in 1913.<sup>28</sup> Another prominent professional was the Mexican-born contractor and builder Domingo V. Fariás (born c. 1868). Fariás and Tomás Móntez built the alterations and additions to the City Market House of 1912. The Texas State Library in Austin has a small collection of photographs that Fariás must have commissioned to advertise his house-building construction.<sup>29</sup> These show several spacious one-story wood cottages (very much like the houses at 613 East St. Charles and 807 East 7th streets), and a substantial two-story house. Torres and Fariás remain obscure because no historical research has been done to chart their careers and identify their work.

Obscurity was the fate of all the architects who practiced in Brownsville in the 1910-13 period. Contractors' notices and newspapers identify Mason & Bales, M. E. Tracy, and S. B. Elliott & Company as working in Brownsville between 1909 and 1912. William A. Cooke of Houston represented his father, the Houston architect Henry C. Cooke.<sup>30</sup> But by 1913-14, when the first edition of the Brownsville City Directory was published, none of these architects were listed. W. E. Nelson (who practiced briefly in San Angelo before coming to Brownsville), the engineer Alfred Tamm, and Martin Hanson, Jr., were listed in the City Directory as the only architects in Brownsville. Torres was listed as a builder. The Census of 1910 contains minimal information about some of these professionals. H. L.



Mason, age 51, architect, was born in North Carolina. Mason's partners seem to have been G. Bales, age 30, architect, who was married, had two children, and was born in Kansas, and J. R. Bales, age 26, architect, who was married, had three children, and was born in Washington (but whose parents were born in the same states as G. Bales's parents). Amazingly, J. R. Bales is listed as a woman. Her husband is listed as Dekyle Smith, age 41, a hardware merchant. J. R. Bales's youngest child and both of G. Bales's children were born in Colorado as recently as 1908.<sup>31</sup> Mason and the two Bales families lived in separate boarding establishments. M. E. Tracy, age 30, was born in Maine. He and his wife, who was from Maine, also lived in a boarding house. Where these architects worked before they came to Brownsville, what led them to the border, and where they went upon leaving are unanswered questions. None attained any wider degree of professional prominence.

Tracy is the only architect for whom a number of Brownsville buildings can be identified. He seemed to specialize in large houses with curving galleries, bay windows, and columns. He designed the three-story Besteiro Brothers Building at 645 East 11th Street on Market Square (1911) and the clubhouse of the Brownsville Country Club (1911; demolished), although Martin Hanson, Jr., was retained to revise Tracy's plans and supervise construction of the clubhouse to reduce costs.<sup>32</sup> Mason & Bales designed the Dittman motion picture theater at 1124 East Washington Street (1910).<sup>33</sup> The architect of so important a building as the First National Bank Building has yet to be identified.

These Brownsville architects worked in other Valley towns. M. E. Tracy competed unsuccessfully against Atlee B. Ayres in November 1909 for commissions from the Chapin Investment Company, which was developing Edinburg. Tracy also designed the high school in Donna in 1911. W. A. Cooke designed a substantial brick bungalow for E. E. Evans in Mercedes in 1911, and S. B. Elliott & Company designed a brick business building in San Benito in 1911. The only other Valley architect whose name appeared in construction notices of the 1910 era was C. O. Allen Maule of McAllen.<sup>34</sup>

Robert Runyon's photographs of buildings and public spaces in Brownsville, Matamoros, and the Valley can be analyzed to interpret the ways in which modernization and architecture intersected in the first part of the railroad era. Runyon's photographs of Matamoros were centered on the historic core of the city, especially the Plaza Hidalgo and Calle 6a. Although Runyon's wife was from Matamoros, he seemed less interested in the daily life of the city than in certain iconic images that depict Matamoros as old and static. Prominent new buildings, such as the Casa R. Pérez at Calle 6a and Calle Abasolo (1913), did not figure in Runyon's images. By contrast, Runyon's photographs of the new railroad towns of the Valley show modernization in full swing. They demonstrate, however, that modernization occurred in real time rather than in mythic images. One new Spanish Mission style building could not give a raw, incomplete town with wide, unpaved streets the coherence and order of Matamoros. Runyon's photographs of Brownsville emphasize its mixture of modernity and conservatism.<sup>35</sup> He avidly photographed major new buildings (Tracy's grand house for Mrs. Fernández seems to have been a favorite). He also photographed Brownsville's 19th-century border brick style buildings and street scenes in the 1200 block of Elizabeth Street, where an urban row of 19th-century border buildings was punctuated by the ornate front of Bollack's and the Mission style parapet and towers of the Miller Hotel. The architecture of the first decades of the 20th century implies that modernization encountered resistance in Brownsville because Brownsville was a settled community. It had a layered society strongly attached to the border which was ambivalent about the reinvention that modernization

entailed, especially as represented by the railroad towns of the Valley.

The early interwar era, from 1919 to 1925, represented a continuation of architectural trends visible between 1909 and 1916. Brownsville architecture did not change radically in this interval, but the circumstances of its production changed at a rapid pace. Between 1920 and 1930, Brownsville grew from a population of 11,791 to 22,021. It maintained its status as the largest city in the Valley, although it failed to keep pace with the even more dramatic growth of Corpus Christi, which surpassed it in size by 1930. Brownsville's growth stemmed from in-migration, both from outside the Lower Río Grande Valley and from Mexico. This was apparent in the establishment of a new generation of architectural practices, not only in Brownsville but in all the larger Valley towns, by architects who arrived after 1919. The only architects whose Valley practices spanned the 1915-1919 period were San Antonio architects, several of whom opened branch offices in the Valley. Given the accelerated pace of development, it is surprising that new architecture in Brownsville was so conservative. This was not the case in other Valley towns, where, again, Spanish style architecture marked a critical difference. New high schools in Mercedes and Harlingen, built in the early 1920s, incorporated picturesque renditions of Spanish style elements.

In Brownsville, there was a preference for business and institutional buildings faced with dark red or buff brown brick. The San Antonio architect M. L. Waller conformed to this trend with his designs for Brownsville Junior High School (1922) at Palm Boulevard and West Jefferson Street and the two-story Maltby Building (1923) at 1201 East Levee Street, for which Ida Maltby Combe demolished Charles Stillman's brick building, the oldest building in Brownsville. Brownsville Junior High School was sparingly decorated with terra cotta ornament that reflected the influence of the Progressive Chicago architect Louis H. Sullivan. The Maltby Building avoided ornament. Its commercial style made it similar to the downtown business blocks one was likely to encounter in most Texas towns of the period, including the Valley railroad towns. The original three-story block of Mercy Hospital at 1040 West Jefferson Street in West Brownsville (1923; demolished) and Waller's design for First Ward School (1925, now Skinner Elementary School) at 411 West St. Charles Street in West Brownsville were modern institutional buildings, rationally designed and minimally ornamented.<sup>36</sup>

The two major buildings from the end of this period in Brownsville's architectural history were only slightly more distinctive architecturally. The 4-story Travelers Hotel was built in 1919 at 1147 East Levee, much closer than the Miller to the small brick passenger station of the Gulf Coast Lines, to attract visitors and businessmen. In 1924, the hotel was expanded with a 4-story rear wing along 12th Street, designed by the San Antonio architect Herbert S. Green. Green gave the sober, dark red brick addition a San Antonian accent by decorating its upper parts with a checkerboard pattern of yellow brick. Atlee B. & Robert M. Ayres designed the tallest office building built in Brownsville in the 1920s, the five-story State National Bank Building at 1153 East Elizabeth Street (1924-25) behind the Travelers Hotel.<sup>37</sup> It resembled the Travelers in being a slab-shaped building faced with dark red brick. The Ayres firm also imparted a San Antonian touch by rimming the top of the building with decorative cast concrete and tile ornament. These buildings bespoke a concern for economy, efficiency, and a minimum of urban decorum. All were decent. None was architecturally ambitious. In 1925 the attitudes these buildings embodied changed. After 1925, major new buildings in Brownsville stood out if they were not architecturally ambitious. Ambition was expressed stylistically in the use of the Spanish Mediterranean style.

## 1925-1935: The Spanish Mediterranean Style

The building project that ushered in this dramatic change was the most comprehensive urban redevelopment scheme to be undertaken in Brownsville in the 1920s: construction of a new Missouri Pacific Railway passenger station (1925-27; demolished) and an adjacent skyscraper tourist hotel (1925-27) along Levee Street on filled land in what had been the main channel of the Río Grande. The hotel was built by the most enterprising developers in Brownsville, the James-Dickinson Company. Lee B. James and Asa D. Dickinson, Jr., were developers of the Acacia Island and El Jardín Terrace tracts east of Brownsville. The architect for both buildings was the Kelwood Company of San Antonio. Robert B. Kelly, the firm's designer, integrated Spanish architectural details into the design of the passenger station and the 8-story hotel, the tallest in the Valley. Both were modern building types. But both received stucco finishes, tile coping, and elaborate cast stone sculptural ornament drawn from Spanish sources.<sup>38</sup> These were incorporated into the design of the buildings in ways that did not contradict or caricature the historic sources. The effort to combine historic stylistic detail with modern spatial organization and construction, yet without architectural contradiction, set Spanish Mediterranean style architecture of the 1920s and 1930s apart from the earlier Spanish Mission style. Mission style buildings, from the perspective of the 1920s, paid too little attention to integrating modern use and romantic image. They represented fictions that were not credible. American architects of the 1920s who designed Spanish Mediterranean style buildings intended that they be so beautiful that their fictitious nature not provoke objection. When carried out by skillful architects, Spanish Mediterranean style buildings were capable of being beautiful and persuasive, in part because the best architects imaginatively integrated unconventional but historically evocative spaces in them. For example: while Mission style houses might be faced with Mission style front porches, Spanish Mediterranean houses incorporated romantic patios and loggias. Thus they could be represented as more historically accurate while at the same time exchanging old-fashioned spaces like front porches for a novel space such as the patio. A paradox involving the Spanish Mediterranean and other historic genre styles popular in the U.S. in the 1920s was that they were modern (in the sense of being fashionably current rather than old-fashioned and out of date). The logic of the Spanish Mediterranean involved wish projection, as did other historical stylistic genres. Such projections had been critically attacked by progressive American architects in the 1900s and 1910s. But ideological objections were disregarded in the 1920s as American architects engaged the Spanish Mediterranean and other historic genre styles without reservation.<sup>39</sup>

The logic of the Spanish Mediterranean style recommended it as an architecture of entrepreneurship. It was particularly associated with the resort communities of Pasadena, California (as was the Mission style) and Palm Beach, Florida. It therefore had associations with travel, leisure, and high social status in parts of the United States that claimed a Spanish past. It irresistibly spatialized the myth of exotic tropical paradise in far south Texas, especially when exotic is understood as a code word translating the ambivalence newcomers felt about Mexican border culture into the charm of a fictitious Spanish style.<sup>40</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to observe that the style's appeal rarely extended to Mexican-American clients and institutions. In Brownsville from the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s, the Spanish Mediterranean style tended to be most visible where Mexican-American cultural influences were least powerful. Its use complemented patterns of urban spatial

segregation that, because they consistently separated the affluent minority from the non-affluent majority, tended to separate Anglo-Americans and Mexican-Americans.

Lower Levee Street was reshaped in the late 1920s to advertise Brownsville's progressive new image as an exotic tropical paradise. The Brownsville Chamber of Commerce retained the Kelwood Company to design its Spanish Mediterranean style headquarters at 1252 East Levee Street (1926-7; demolished), next to the Missouri Pacific Passenger Station. After the San Antonio developer J. M. Nix became involved in developing what the James-Dickinson Company romantically named the Hotel El Jardín, he had the architect Henry T. Phelps add a ballroom wing, a parking garage, and a "Spanish garden" to the back of the hotel (1927-8; demolished). Nix also built the 1920s movie palace of Brownsville, the Capitol Theater at 1105 East Levee (1927-28, Henry T. Phelps), across from the Hotel El Jardín.<sup>41</sup> Not only were these buildings designed in a unified architectural style, but the Kelwood Company installed civic landscaping in the form of palm trees, an essential icon of the Valley's tropical paradisiacal image, in front of the railroad station. Photographs of the period often foregrounded views of the Hotel El Jardín with the palm trees in front of the James B. McAllen House at 1048 East Levee (demolished).<sup>42</sup> The grounds of the Chamber of Commerce Building were developed as a park with subtropical plantings.

Spanish Mediterranean style architecture was employed at Brownsville's official points of entry. Adjoining the new Gateway Bridge on 14th Street near the foot of Elizabeth Street (1928, demolished) was the Spanish style U.S. Border Service Building (1928-29, W. D. Van Siclén; demolished). Like the Missouri Pacific Passenger Station and the Chamber of Commerce Building, it incorporated a small, park-like green planted with palm trees. The Southern Pacific Lines built its new railroad passenger station (1928-29, R. W. Barnes, chief engineer) at 641 East Madison Street in the Spanish Mediterranean style. And the City of Brownsville built a Spanish Mediterranean airport terminal at the newly instituted Brownsville International Airport (1929, 1930, Ben V. Proctor; demolished).<sup>43</sup>

Spanish Mediterranean architecture was displayed most captivatingly in Brownsville's new suburban neighborhoods. Such Spanish Mediterranean style houses as the Ernest Fernández House at 1447 Lakeside Boulevard (c. 1925), the David J. Young House at 735 Central Boulevard (1927, Page Brothers of Austin, architects), the George Aziz House at 1201 West Elizabeth Street (1927-28, W. D. Van Siclén, architect), and the Tewfik Aziz House at 1091 West Elizabeth Street (1929) stand out in West Brownsville. They were joined by Brownsville's tallest new apartment building, the three-story Casa Alta at 743 West St. Charles Street (1928), the City of Brownsville's Fire Station #2 at 543 West St. Charles Street (1927-28, Page Brothers), the Model Laundry Building at 314 West Elizabeth Street (1927-28, Page Brothers), Congregation Beth El Temple at 145 West 8th Street (1932, W. Frank Godwin), and what is perhaps the finest work of Spanish Mediterranean style architecture in Brownsville, the parish complex of the Church of the Advent at 104 West Elizabeth Street (1926-7, Thomas MacLaren of Colorado Springs, architect, with Stanley W. Bliss of Harlingen). The architect William D. Van Siclén built the Spanish style Argentine Apartments at 1805 West Washington Street (1930) next to his own Spanish style house at 537 West 18th Street.<sup>44</sup>

Developers employed the Spanish Mediterranean style to advertise new residential neighborhoods, examples being Emmette K. Goodrich's tower house at Media Luna (1927, Kelwood Company) and C. W. Dawley's large house at 244 Riverside Boulevard in Riverside Park (1929-30, Ben C. Clark).<sup>45</sup> The most successful example of this phenomenon

was Los Ebanos addition, begun by the James-Dickinson Company in 1926 and opened in 1927. Palm Boulevard, Brownsville's only divided boulevard, functioned as the spatial prelude to Los Ebanos. Lined with Washingtonia palms and bougainvilleas, Palm Boulevard framed an artfully contrived spatial narrative. This encompassed the complex of modern school buildings at Elizabeth Street and Palm Boulevard--completed by the new Brownsville High School and Junior College (1926-28, Phelps & Dewees and Atlee B. & Robert M. Ayres, all of San Antonio)--and the picturesque Valley View Apartments at 1020 Palm Boulevard (1929, W. D. Van Siclen) before crossing Town Resaca and passing between stone gate piers into Los Ebanos.<sup>46</sup> Los Ebanos was the first Brownsville subdivision to embrace resaca frontage. It was the first Brownsville neighborhood to break with Brownsville's grid-iron street plan in favor of a network of curving lanes, named for local vegetation, not for numerals or U.S. presidents.<sup>47</sup>

In Los Ebanos, Spanish Mediterranean style houses spatialized the image of exotic tropical paradise portended by the subdivision's nomenclature. The Austin architects Page Brothers designed one of the first houses in Los Ebanos, for A. K. Black, an official of the James-Dickinson Company, at 1912 Palm Boulevard (1927; altered) in an Italian rendition of the Mediterranean genre. Lee B. James's house at 7 Ebony Avenue (c. 1929), the Harold E. Gray House at 6 Poinsettia Place (c. 1929), the Bernard R. Quarters House at 1918 Palm Boulevard (c. 1929; altered), the Edwin Pitt House at 37 Sunset Drive (c. 1929), the Fay L. Rockwell House at 110 Ebony Avenue (1930, R. Newell Waters, architect), and the W. G. Ferguson House at 17 Acacia Drive (1930, Ben V. Proctor) were notable Spanish Mediterranean examples, as were the Sethman Apartments at 1850-1856 Palm Boulevard (1928-29, W. D. Van Siclen). Near the end of this period, the finest example of Spanish Mediterranean domestic architecture in Brownsville was built in Los Ebanos, the Fausto Yturria House at 2012 Palm Boulevard (1932-33, E. G. Holliday).<sup>48</sup> The James House, the Quarters House, and the Yturria House contained patios that shaped outdoor space architecturally. Unlike the patios of Brownsville's and Matamoros's 19th-century Creole houses, these were not driveways or work yards but spaces for displaying ornamental subtropical vegetation. The writer Mary Lubbock Lasswell, who grew up in Brownsville in the 1910s and 1920s, remarked in a nostalgic chapter in her book *I'll Take Texas* (1958) on the incorporation of indigenous vegetation alongside subtropical exotics: "To my joy I saw that the ebony tree, symbol of durability and strength, that evergreen mass of round, emerald leaves and chocolate-brown twigs, had come into its own. No longer were the trees hacked down and burned; they were treasured and nurtured, their beauty adding to the value of the land. Los Ebanos, an impressive, quietly opulent residential section had taken its name from them."<sup>49</sup>

It is instructive to contrast Lasswell's observations with those of Paredes in *George Washington Gómez*. Paredes uses the local scene to highlight changes in his protagonist's outlook. When George (no longer Guálinto) Gómez returns to Jonesville around 1940 as a college graduate, a lawyer, a husband, and a father-to-be, he and his wife move into the Golden Delta Apartments (which sounds like a conflation of the Casa Alta and the Valley View Apartments) in Jonesville's most elite subdivision, Las Anacuas. Gómez reflects: "Las Anacuas. He wondered who had thought up that name. Some guy who had never seen an *anacua* bush, he was sure."<sup>50</sup>

Paredes associates the most flagrant instance of discrimination and segregation that Guálinto and his friends encounter in the early 1930s with make believe architecture: La

Casa Mexicana, a supper club in the adjoining town of Harlanburg that Paredes describes as a "fancy stucco building made to resemble a Mexican *jacal*." Its themed interiors, costumed employees, and *charro*-suited jazz orchestra make La Casa Mexicana "as Mexican as it could be without having any Mexicans around."<sup>51</sup> Paredes's characterization of what, from Guálinto's perspective, is the other Jonesville—a fictional counterpart of West Brownsville—is equally sardonic. "They caught a *camión* that took them to the edge of the northwestern part of town. They walked again, along a wide, quiet street past rows of solidly built brick houses with spacious porches, wide lawns, and double garages. They squatted on their lawns, these houses, like fat, contented Rotarians sitting on the grass at a picnic, substantial, self-assured, inelegant."<sup>52</sup>

For the characters in *George Washington Gómez* Spanish Mediterranean style architecture did not register, even as a distorted reflection of ethnocultural conflict and anxiety. It is intriguing to note that of the Spanish Mediterranean style houses in Brownsville, the only ones built by members of families with Hispanic connections seem to have been the Young and Fernández houses in West Brownsville and the Yturria House in Los Ebanos.<sup>53</sup> This calls attention to the minimal presence of Spanish-surnamed residents in West Brownsville and Los Ebanos during this period. The 1929-30 City Directory lists only a few Spanish-surnamed residents in West Brownsville and none in Los Ebanos.<sup>54</sup> Some "old family" names appear among the residents of West Brownsville, but in Los Ebanos most residents seem to have been newcomers to Brownsville. Montejano clarifies this phenomenon, noting that Anglo-American newcomers to the Valley in the 1920s were often investors or urban professionals rather than the farmers who arrived in the 1900s and 1910s. They not only chose to live in town, but could afford to live in the best part of town. Montejano states that urban development brought such rapid change that "many newcomers saw themselves as the 'first settlers' of the region." This misapprehension was made possible because spatial segregation limited the opportunities of middle-class Anglo-American newcomers to interact with the Mexican border culture and history of Brownsville, which they associated exclusively with their domestic servants.<sup>55</sup>

Members of Brownsville's Hispanic elite who built new houses in the 1920s tended to remain in the West End. The Mexican-Alsatian dry goods merchant Enrique Manautou built a brick house at 5 East Elizabeth Street and Palm Boulevard (1924, E. G. Holliday) in the Prairie style, which the progressive Chicago architect Frank Lloyd Wright had popularized in the 1900s and 1910s. José Angel Cisneros, a former Matamoros public official, built a substantial, one-story brick house at 451 East Adams Street (1926, José Colunga, builder) that perpetuated the cottage type of the Neale and Stillman houses of the 1850s. The Spanish-born banker, rancher, and farmer C. P. Barrera built a two-story brick house in the Italian villa style at 640 East Washington Street (1928-29, Ben C. Clark), the last large house built in the West End.<sup>56</sup> Each of these houses possessed architectural elements associated with the Spanish Mediterranean style, especially clay roofing tiles. But in none did the owner's ethnicity feature as a stylistic theme. The conservative Cisneros House was more like contemporary Mexican middle class houses than Brownsville's new Spanish Mediterranean houses. In that respect it belongs to a small group of houses, such as the Canseco and Benavides houses in Laredo and the now-demolished Quinta Urrutia in San Antonio, that transposed Mexican domestic architecture of the 1920s to Texas.

This stylistic divergence was also visible downtown. The architectural firm of Page Brothers designed the stucco-surfaced, tile-towered, Spanish Mediterranean style retail

building for Aziz Brothers at 1101 East Elizabeth (1927) at the same time as the commercial style brick retail building for E. Manautou at 1201 East Washington on Market Square (1927). The Harlingen-based architect Stanley W. Bliss designed the commercial style J. L. Calderoni Building at 1136-40 East Washington (1927) and the Spanish Mediterranean style Borderland Hardware Company Building at 1000 East Washington (1926-27) simultaneously. The two-story brick retail building at 629 East 11th Street on Market Square, designed by Baltasar Torres in 1928, and Victor Junco's two-story retail and apartment building at 1149 East Washington on Market Square (1929-30, A. A. Calloway & Company) were straightforward commercial style buildings.<sup>57</sup> Although there were non-Hispanic investors who built commercial style business buildings downtown in the late 1920s, there do not seem to have been Hispanic investors who built Spanish Mediterranean style buildings. It is not possible to impute an aversion to Spanish Mediterranean style architecture on the basis of ethnicity. But it seems reasonable to conclude that Mexican-Americans, Mexicans, and Spanish-Americans in Brownsville did not see this style as a medium for expressing cultural identity, as Anglo-Americans seem to have.

The Spanish Mediterranean style overtly represented tradition, but it also was associated with modernization. The pair of 60-foot high radio transmitting antennas on top of the Hotel El Jardín symbolized this collision of traditionalism and modernization. The Cameron Hotel (1927-28, W. D. Van Siclen), which A. A. Browne, Jr., built on the site of his demolished family home at 912 East Washington, used Spanish Mediterranean style architecture to cloak its interior parking garage.<sup>58</sup> The credibility of historically styled architecture in the 1920s depended upon architects' skill at seamlessly integrating new and old, so that one did not contradict the other. The promotion of the Spanish Mediterranean style as an architecture appropriate to far south Texas because of its Spanish cultural heritage entailed ideological contradictions that were as glaring to those not entranced by this fiction as were the clash of architectural decor and modern communication technology at El Jardín.

Resistance to the appeal of the Spanish Mediterranean style was not restricted to Hispanics. Of the houses of worship built in Brownsville in the 1920s and early 1930s, only the Church of the Advent and Congregation Beth El Temple were designed in the Spanish Mediterranean style. The First Baptist Church at 555 East Elizabeth Street (1925-26, Ferrand & Fitch of Dallas, architects), the First Presbyterian Church at 1 West Elizabeth Street (1927, Kelwood Company), Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church at 1200 Lincoln Boulevard (1927, C. A. Rainwater of McAllen), and the Central Christian Church at 352 East Levee Street (1929-30, F. H. Trimble) were designed in simplified versions of the neo-Gothic style or with minimal classical ornament.<sup>59</sup> School design perpetuated the rational planning and minimal decoration characteristic of Brownsville schools since the 1910s. El Jardín School at 6911 Boca Chica Road (1925, Elwing & Mulhausen of Harlingen, architects), Victoria Ward School at 2801 East 13th Street in Summit Heights (1926, Harvey P. Smith of San Antonio, architect), East Brownsville Ward School (now Longoria Elementary) at 2400 Harrison in Colonia Alta Vista (1929-30, Phelps & Dewees and Ben V. Proctor), Resaca Elementary School at 901 Filmore Street (1931, W. D. Van Siclen), and Los Ebanos Elementary School (now Sharp Elementary) at 1439 Palm Boulevard (1931, F. H. Trimble) followed this straightforward pattern.<sup>60</sup> The partial exceptions were Brownsville High School and Junior College on Palm Boulevard, decorated with twin towers and Italian Romanesque decoration to give it a civic aspect, and the Jeanne de Matel Building of Villa Maria Academy, 700 West Jefferson Street in West Brownsville (1925-26), an arched,

stucco-surfaced, tile-roofed building for which Harvey P. Smith was originally the architect, but which was radically redesigned after the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament encountered financial problems building it.<sup>61</sup>

In Valley towns, it was also rare to find churches designed in the Spanish Mediterranean style, although the style had strong historical associations with religious architecture. Perhaps to non-Roman Catholics it appeared too Catholic, while the Catholic parishes for which new churches were built in Valley towns in the 1920s and early 1930s tended to have predominantly Mexican-American congregations. By contrast, the Spanish Mediterranean style was very popular for public school buildings in Valley towns during this period. San Benito High School at 600 North Dick Dowling Street (1926, Harvey P. Smith) and its larger successor next door at 500 North Dick Dowling (1930-31, Phelps & Dewees with Lloyd E. Mellor), Harlingen's elaborately decorated new High School at 125 South 13th Street (1929-30, DeWitt & Washburn of Dallas, architects), and a new Mercedes High School at 839 South Ohio Street (1931, R. Newell Waters) were especially distinguished examples.<sup>62</sup> For sectarian purposes, the Spanish Mediterranean style seems not to have struck the right note. But it was highly favored as a civic style. In the competitive Valley towns, the public high school, an important symbol of community identity, was architecturally treated as a public monument. It usually occupied a multiblock site in the most respectable Anglo-American residential neighborhood, as on Palm Boulevard in Brownsville. Therefore, like other public and commercial buildings, the high school had its part to play in promoting the exotic tropical paradise myth.

The modern urban building types built in Brownsville from the mid-1920s until the mid-1930s were also built in the Valley towns. Towns competed for attention architecturally not only with ceremonial high school buildings but with downtown tourist hotels, business buildings, movie theaters, railroad passenger stations (especially for the Southern Pacific Railway, which extended its line south from San Antonio through Edinburg to Brownsville between 1926 and 1927), town and country houses, and clubhouses. The Reese-Wil-Mond Hotel at 202 South 1st in Harlingen (1925-26, Harvey P. Smith; defaced), the Stonewall Jackson Hotel at 216 East Stenger in San Benito (1926-27, Harvey P. Smith), the Cortez Hotel at 256 South Texas Avenue in Weslaco (1927-28, P. G. Silber Company of San Antonio), and the Port Isabel Yacht Club (now the Yacht Club Hotel) at 700 Yturria Street in Port Isabel (1927-28, W. D. Van Siclen) were smaller scale counterparts of the Hotel El Jardín in Brownsville.<sup>63</sup> Although the Southern Pacific's engineering office in Houston produced designs for stations that were variations of the one built in Brownsville, those built in Edinburg (1926-27), McAllen (1926-27), and Harlingen (1926-27) reinforced each town's Spanish Mediterranean theme.<sup>64</sup> Harlingen surpassed Brownsville by having the tallest skyscraper in the Valley, the 9-story R. W. Baxter Office Building at 105 South A Street (1926-27, Elwing & Mulhausen).<sup>65</sup> It was a sign of Corpus Christi's ascendancy that it acquired a "skyline" of 10- to 13-story office and hotel buildings during the late 1920s which even Laredo, with its two skyscrapers, the 8-story Robert E. Lee Hotel (1925) and the 12-story Hamilton Hotel (1928), could not rival.

Business buildings in Valley towns conformed to Main Street-oriented patterns of urbanization, as in Brownsville. Retail buildings and movie theaters were prime candidates for Spanish Mediterranean treatment. Banks were more likely to be designed with conservative classical ornament (for example: the Farmers State Bank Building, 182 North Sam Houston, San Benito, 1926-27, Harvey P. Smith, architect; and the Hidalgo County



Bank & Trust Company Building, 301 South Texas Avenue, Mercedes, 1926-27, Ralph H. Cameron and R. Newell Waters, architects) than in the Spanish Mediterranean style, although in Los Fresnos the development company built the Spanish style Los Fresnos State Bank Building (1928, R. Newell Waters).<sup>66</sup> Downtown San Benito obtained the Rivoli Theater at 170 North Sam Houston (1926) and the Hinkly-Sublett Building across the street at 197 North Sam Houston (1926-27), both designed by W. D. Van Siclen in the Spanish Mediterranean style.<sup>67</sup> Upstaging these as San Benito's most exotic commercial building was W. B. Hinkly's three-story Aztec Building at 198 South Fannin and West Sam Robertson, overlooking the Resaca de los Fresnos (1926-28, Elwing & Mulhausen; defaced). Despite its name, the Aztec Building was in the southwestern Pueblo style and featured roof terraces on its tiered upper stories.<sup>68</sup>

In 1926 and 1927, at the height of the real estate boom, new resort communities were announced whose identities were to be thematically conveyed through Spanish Mediterranean architecture: Spanish Acres in Harlingen (1926), the James-Dickinson Company's reinvented Port Isabel (1926, eventually developed by Caspar W. Tyrrell's Port Isabel Townsite Company), the Al Parker Securities Company's Olmito (1926), and F. M. Dicus's Venetian Estates, near San Benito (1927).<sup>69</sup> Preceding Los Ebanos addition in Brownsville as the first residential subdivision to break with the rectilinear street grids of the Valley towns was the Hinkly North Shore Park addition in San Benito (1926).<sup>70</sup> Developed by F. L. Hinkly and Mrs. and Mrs. W. B. Hinkly and designed by W. D. Van Siclen, North Shore Park lay on the bank of the Resaca de los Fresnos and incorporated curvilinear rather than straight streets. Along with Los Ebanos, North Shore Park proved to be an exceptional case. In no other Valley towns were garden subdivisions carried out in the 1920s or 1930s. Through the 1950s, new residential development was accommodated by expanding the town grid, although some variations might occur within this rectilinear framework. The Anglo-American neighborhoods of the Valley towns shared many of the formal characteristics of West Brownsville.

Brownsville's growth during the 1920s stimulated the development of new additions northeast and northwest of the original townsite. As early as 1914, the 36-block Colonia Victoria was platted northeast of Town Resaca by the Brownsville Bank & Trust Company as a grid of streets and blocks, continuing numbered streets from 14th to 18th streets to the northeast of the original townsite, although not directly in alignment with it. Summit Place, to the northwest of Colonia Victoria between 14th and 12th streets, was platted by Mrs. Caroline Dennett in 1921, although the plat was re-filed in 1926 by the banker Adolph Ashheim. Virginia Heights, between 12th Street and McDavitt Boulevard, was developed by the produce broker W. E. McDavitt in 1928. These subdivisions were marketed to middle-income Anglo-American buyers but they seem to have developed slowly. By 1930, Victoria Heights (as Colonia Victoria was re-named) had a respectable number of houses but Summit Heights and Virginia Heights had none.<sup>71</sup> The extent to which new real estate developments outpaced population growth in the 1920s is suggested by the Sanborn fire insurance maps of 1930 for Brownsville. These show that in the original townsite southeast of Town Resaca, whole blocks between 7th Street and 18th Street had only one or two houses on them, and a few had no buildings at all.

Riverside Park, southwest of West Brownsville, was platted in 1923 by W. H. Mason, Jr., but it does not seem to have been developed until after January 1928, when Mason, the banker A. Wayne Wood, C. W. Dawley, and other investors filed an amended plat for the

subdivision. The curvilinear street plan incorporated in the 1928 replatting suggests that the developers intended Riverside Park as West Brownsville's response to Los Ebanos. Where Palm Boulevard crossed Town Resaca, John Comba developed Belvedere Gardens in 1927. Belvedere Gardens was not as prestigious as Los Ebanos. But it offered resaca frontage, curving streets, and stucco-surfaced Spanish bungalows, adapting the landscape imagery and amenities of Los Ebanos for a middle-income clientele. The San Benito civil engineer, A. E. Anderson, designed the street plans of almost all of Brownsville's new middle income subdivisions.<sup>72</sup> City directory listings from the late 1920s and early 1930s indicate that these subdivisions were occupied primarily by Anglo-American families.<sup>73</sup>

New real estate developments were also marketed to lower-income Mexican-American families. The first section of Bella Vista Addition, between Fort Brown and Town Resaca, was filed in 1924 by Mrs. James B. Wells. Mrs. Wells continued platting additional sections as late as 1928. By 1930, the retail merchant Enrique Valentín was identified as developer. Whether he collaborated with Mrs. Wells or bought the subdivisions from her estate after her death in 1928 is not clear.<sup>74</sup> The adjoining subdivisions of Bella Vista, Paredes, and Colonial Alta Vista (the latter platted in 1928 by W. G. Mathes) northeast of Fort Brown and southeast of the original townsite were put on the market at this time. Their street plans continued the grid plan of the original townsite. Residential real estate development brought the border-valley dichotomy to Brownsville in the 1920s. The original townsite, especially the West End, remained the part of Brownsville where ethnically mixed residential occupation was standard. Ethnic, social, and economic separation was most sharply marked at the east boundary of Los Ebanos. This abutted the 8-block Colonia Mexicana, whose grid of streets, named for heroes of Mexican independence, was split by the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railway.

Suburbanization at the edges was linked to demolition at the center. As downtown expanded into what had been neartown neighborhoods by 1925, the rise in real estate values made it possible for the Church of the Advent and the First Presbyterian Church to sell their Victorian buildings and construct new complexes on larger sites in West Brownsville with room for the education and social spaces that their 19th-century churches lacked. The Church of the Advent was replaced by the Borderland Hardware Company, the First Presbyterian Church by the Seabury, George & Taylor Building at 853 East Elizabeth (1928, Page Brothers).<sup>75</sup> The forces of modernization not only pushed out and built up, but tore down. The First Methodist Church, a classically detailed church building at 940 East Washington Street (1923; demolished) was completed two years before the boom in downtown real estate began. Since rising real estate values had not yet made staying put seem uneconomical, the congregation remained on the site of its 1909 church and acquired additional lots to expand its complex. By 1930, the First Methodist Church was surrounded by downtown commercial buildings.

The Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament were compelled to move their high school from the convent on 8th Street to the 35-acre tract in West Brownsville adjacent to Mercy Hospital to comply with new state educational requirements in order to ensure the school's accreditation. The sisters demolished the 1883 annex to the convent to obtain bricks to build the new Villa Maria. In contrast, Brownsville Grammar School next to Washington Square was remodeled in 1923. Wings were added to the rear and sides of the old Public School building and the encircling galleries were demolished, although the mansard-capped entrance tower was retained. The design for the Colegio Modelo in Matamoros (c. 1922),

a model secondary school, was clearly based on Brownsville's modernized Grammar School. The Colegio had a central entrance tower and its side wings were capped by Mission style scalloped parapets like those atop the wings of the Public School. Modernization, in the form of state laws intended to set uniform standards for educational facilities, was expressed spatially in the suburbanization of schools. That such attitudes did not translate to a Mexican context is suggested by the choice of an architectural model for the Colegio Modelo: the old-fashioned (because still urban) Grammar School with its clock tower centered on the line of Jefferson Street.<sup>76</sup>

Américo Paredes put some of these phenomena in perspective in *George Washington Gómez*. One of Guálinto's sisters escapes what is for her the confining life of el Dos Veintidós by becoming an elevator girl at "Jonesville's new hotel, which at eight stories was the tallest building in town."<sup>77</sup> Technology, rather than romantic imagery, is the agent of her ascent in social status. She marries a guest at the hotel, who takes her to California. The social significance of the new high school as a public institution is remarked at the combined graduation ceremonies for high school and junior high school students in the high school auditorium: "The audience, however, was predominantly Mexican. It was an important event for a Mexican family to see a child of theirs graduate from junior high. Mexicans came in large numbers. They brought their near relatives with them, and their distant relatives, their aged and infirm and their tiny children. There were so many of them that some had to stand at the back of the auditorium."<sup>78</sup> Public space rather than architectural display provides the meaningful setting for these families.

What Paredes conveys in the novel is the space of Mexican-American Jonesville: the crowded social club where men congregate to play pool and talk, upstairs above a shoe repair shop; the Rodríguez and Sons neighborhood grocery store, an "old building with its false front and roofed over sidewalk;" dark alleys where fights occur; the *camión* stand downtown "in front of an old two-story building with a wrought-iron balcony," and "Jonesville's all-night restaurant, which was on the first floor of the market place, just below the police station."<sup>79</sup> The house of Guálinto's uncle, Feliciano García, figures in a series of passages that represent the increasingly divergent view points of García and Guálinto. To García, the blue, made-over cantina is a source of pride, the vindication of his quest to recover the social status his great-grandparents forfeited when they lost their land to Anglo-Americans after 1848. It is also the fulfillment of García's promise to Guálinto's father. García is shocked when he realizes that Guálinto is ashamed to have his better-off high school classmates know which house he lives in. Paredes contrasts house types on García's small farm, downriver from Jonesville, to link architectural type, building construction, ethnicity, and social status. He has García reflect on the environmentally superior qualities of the *jacal* in which his farm assistant lives yet acknowledge that, as the farm owner, it is requisite that his house be an Anglo-American wood cottage. Paredes implicitly makes the point that architecture, as an index of status, is based not only on inherent qualities but on distinctions that are socially determined. Therefore Jonesville, despite its small size and relative obscurity, possesses complex layers of social significance embedded in the social distinctions between buildings. These layers include such distinctions as Mexican-Anglo, but compressed into them are hierarchies of distinction predicated on even finer points of difference.

One modernizing phenomenon that Guálinto accepts without reservation is the car. The urban spatial change it introduced to Jonesville is touched on when Guálinto and his friends

go to a drive-in "on the corner where the highway ended and the main street began," the counterpart of Central Boulevard and West Elizabeth Street.<sup>80</sup> By the early 1930s, when this episode occurs in *George Washington Gómez*, such "strips" of car-oriented commercial development were evident along West Elizabeth and Highway 12 (as Central was called in the mid 1920s). A second strip developed along East 14th Street, leading northeast from the center of the city across Town Resaca and through "las lomas" of Victoria Heights and Summit Place. Like the Mexican-American neighborhoods of Brownsville in general, it was smaller, denser, more compact, and less designed than the West Brownsville strip. Fourteenth Street was home to the Victoria Theater at 1244 (1930) and Enrique Valentin's Brownsville Variety Store at 1616 (demolished), as well as numerous gas stations and car repair garages.<sup>81</sup>

Mainstream documentary sources (newspaper real estate reports, contractors journals, the rare mention in a professional architectural magazine) imply that the profession of architecture in Brownsville during this period was exclusively non-Hispanic. This is not accurate. But because adequate research has yet to be done, it is not possible to identify many of the buildings built by Brownsville's Mexican-American construction professionals active from the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s. Baltasar Torres was active at least through 1928, when he designed the building at 629 East 11th Street on Market Square. However, he is not listed in the 1927, 1929-30, or 1931 issues of the Brownsville City Directory. José Colunga, a carpenter and builder, was well known, but he is listed infrequently in contractors journals of the period. Consequently his body of work is not documented. There is a single mention of Elias Villanueva, architect and contractor, as designing a two-story apartment building for Francisco Mendoza in December 1927, although Villanueva is not listed in Brownsville city directories.<sup>82</sup> Mexican-American building professionals seem to have operated outside the networks within which Anglo-American builders and architects worked. Consequently, the standard sources of documentary information do not reflect the contributions that Mexican-American professionals made to the local building scene.

There are numerous mentions in documentary sources of the architects who arrived in Brownsville and the Lower Río Grande Valley after 1919. Not only Brownsville but San Benito, Harlingen, Weslaco, Edinburg, McAllen, and Mission supported architectural practices until the early 1930s. The architects who practiced longest in Brownsville were William D. Van Siclén and Edward Guy Holliday. They were subsequently joined by Ben V. Proctor, A. A. Callaway, Ben C. Clark, and F. H. Trimble. Harlingen also had a number of architectural practices. Birger A. Elwing and Roy W. Mulhausen began practices in the late 1910s and early 1920s. They were joined by Stanley W. Bliss, Lloyd E. Mellor, and Ivan H. Riley. R. Newell Waters established his architectural practice in Weslaco in 1924, Robert L. Vogler established his practice in Edinburg, and Alexander H. Woolridge established his practice in McAllen in 1917. Gerald G. Decker and Carroll Tanner established their architectural practice in Mission in 1927. San Antonio architects maintained a strong presence in the Valley. Harvey P. Smith had a branch office in San Benito and the Kelwood Company, Ralph H. Cameron, and Phelps & Dewees carried out multiple commissions in different Valley towns. The prolific Austin architects Page Brothers briefly operated a branch office in Brownsville under Ben C. Clark's direction.

Another group of building designers who functioned outside the ranks of recognized professional architects were women. The best-known was Ruth Young McGonigle (1902-

1984), an artist and architect from Houston who moved to Brownsville in 1925 after her marriage to the farmer George McGonigle.<sup>83</sup> Rae Startup Dodds, wife of the prominent San Benito engineer Stanley L. Dodds, was a building designer whose major work was the Dodds' country house on Resaca de los Fresnos northeast of San Benito.<sup>84</sup> Newspaper accounts of development at Olmito mention Betty Greene, an architect from Mariana, Ohio, as designing the Spanish style Quaint Quarters apartment court (1926) for Dorothy T. Pritchett, who had come to Olmito from Ohio.<sup>85</sup>

With few exceptions (Waters, Vogler, Mrs. McGonigle), these architects were not Texans. They were part of the migration of newcomers that altered the demography of the Valley after 1919. William D. Van Siclen (1865-1951) had an extensive architectural career by the time he came to Brownsville. Van Siclen was born in Woodlin, Michigan. He began to practice architecture in San José, California, in 1895, when his design for "A Country Hotel" in the Spanish Mission style was published in *California Architect and Building News*. Between 1901 and 1912, Van Siclen practiced in Seattle, where he designed Seattle's tallest skyscraper, the 10-story Northern Securities Trust Building (1906, 1910), and the Sam Remo Apartments (1907). According to his obituary in the *Brownsville Herald*, Van Siclen practiced in Alaska, Canada, and South America before coming to Brownsville in 1919. Another source states that he also practiced in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where his only child lived at the time of his death.<sup>86</sup> Van Siclen's wife in Brownsville seems to have been Ida Maltby Combe. His office was in the Maltby Building on Levee Street. He seems to have retired from practice in the late 1930s. Van Siclen's peripatetic career was not unusual; what was remarkable is that after moving to Brownsville, he stayed.

Van Siclen was identified with the Spanish Mission style from the time and place of its origin. His buildings in south Texas bear evidence of this link, for they retained something of the formulaic character of the Spanish Mission style, although the U.S. Border Service Building at the Gateway Bridge was a formally integrated example of Spanish Mediterranean style design. Van Siclen's major south Texas buildings outside Brownsville include the work that he did for the Port Isabel Development Company (1927-29), Caspar R. Tyrrell's country house at Bayview (1930-31), the U.S. Postoffice at 301 South Main Street in McAllen (1932-36), and "Watsonia," the May Mathis Watson House at 2703 Ocean Drive in Corpus Christi (1937-38). One element of Van Siclen's Spanish Mediterranean architecture, the use of tile-surfaced hoods that project above window openings, appears frequently in Brownsville's Spanish Mediterranean style buildings. Whether this was used exclusively by Van Siclen (and therefore identifies his work) or whether it was a feature used by other architects and builders is not known.

Edward Guy Holliday (1891-1961) was born in Thurston, Ohio. He worked as an architectural draftsman for an engineering firm in Columbus, Ohio, before moving to El Paso, Texas, where he worked as a construction superintendent for Otto P. Kroeger, one of El Paso's major contractors, from 1911 to 1917, and again from 1919 to 1922. Holliday supervised the construction of U.S. Army cantonments from California to the Lower Rio Grande Valley for Weston & Kroeger, which apparently brought him to Brownsville, where he established a practice in 1923. Holliday worked as both an architect and a builder in Brownsville, although he seems to have built only buildings that he designed. One of Holliday's early clients was the developer A. D. Dickinson, Jr., for whom he designed a large country house near Brownsville (1925). Photographs suggest that the Dickinson House, like Holliday's Manautou House, was influenced by the Prairie School architecture of Frank

Lloyd Wright. Although out of style by the 1920s, the Prairie School greatly effected the work of El Paso's leading architect Henry C. Trost, many of whose buildings were built by Otto Kroeger. A brief biographical profile of Holliday published in *Texas Under Many Flags* (1930) stated that the "magnificent buildings and residences" he designed in the Lower Río Grande Valley were "mostly in the Mediterranean, Spanish, and Italian Renaissance style of architecture, so well adapted to this climate."<sup>87</sup> Holliday's earliest known Spanish Mediterranean style building was the Broadfoot Building at 948-956 East Elizabeth Street (1926-27; altered). He designed houses in Los Ebanos for James I. George (1928) and A. A. Hargrove at 130 Ebony Avenue (1930), and a number of buildings in Olmito for the Al Parker Securities Company, as well as Olmito Junior High School (1928). Holliday also remodeled the Simón Celaya House when it was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Rentfro B. Creager. In 1932 Holliday closed his office and moved back to El Paso, where he worked as an architectural engineer for J. E. Morgan & Company. In 1948, he began independent practice again in San Diego, California, where he lived until his death.

The circumstances that caused Holliday to leave Brownsville in the early 1930s effected most of the architects practicing in Brownsville and the Valley in the 1930s. A. A. Calloway went to Corpus Christi, as did Robert L. Vogler of Edinburg (whose best-known Valley building is the First Methodist Church at 121 North Main Street in McAllen, 1927-28) and Gerald G. Decker of Mission. Vogler and Decker became partners in Corpus Christi; their best-known building was the downtown store of M. Lichtenstein & Sons at 401 North Chaparral (1940-41). Birger A. Elwing and Roy W. Mulhausen of Harlingen left for unknown whereabouts in the mid 1930s. Elwing was the most stylistically eccentric architect to practice in the Valley in the 1920s, as his Aztec Building in San Benito suggests. Like Van Siclén, he came to Harlingen in 1919 after extended practice in Los Angeles, where he had worked since 1900. Elwing was a Swede and had been trained as an architect in Sweden before immigrating to the U.S.<sup>88</sup> Mulhausen was born in Nebraska and obtained his earliest professional experience in Oklahoma City, before establishing a practice in Waxahachie, Texas, in 1911.<sup>89</sup> Stanley W. Bliss (1896-1972), the son of a Little Rock, Arkansas, architect, was trained at the University of Illinois. He moved his practice from Dallas to Harlingen in 1926 and remained in Harlingen until 1939, when he moved to Corpus Christi.<sup>90</sup> Alexander H. Woolridge (1893-1978) began practice in McAllen in 1917. By 1936, he had moved his practice to Brownsville.<sup>91</sup> Woolridge, Bliss, Van Siclén, and R. Newell Waters were the only Valley architects in independent practice who maintained their offices through the Depression.

Roscious Newell Waters (1899-1979) was the most successful architect in the Lower Río Grande Valley.<sup>92</sup> Waters was born in San Angelo, Texas. His father was a partner in the Kirgan & Waters Land Company of Edinburg. Waters was a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and worked for the well-known Boston architects Maginnis & Walsh. In 1924, Waters moved to Weslaco to design a house for his parents. Among his notable early works were the Weslaco City Hall and Fire Station (1927-28) and the Llano Grande Country Clubhouse in Mercedes (1928), both in the Spanish Mediterranean style.

One Brownsville architect maintained a practice through the Depression because he was not in independent practice. This was W. Frank Godwin (b. 1899), a native of Valdosta, Georgia, who had worked for architects in Valdosta, Miami, Florida, and Fort Worth before coming to Brownsville in 1930 to work, briefly, for F. H. Trimble.<sup>93</sup> In 1933, Godwin became head of the architectural section in the Engineering Department of Pan American

Airways' Western Division, headquartered in Brownsville after 1932. As the western division's corporate architect, Godwin designed and administered construction of passenger terminals, hangars, and service buildings for the airline in Mexico and Central America.

Pan American Airways was a major contributor to Brownsville's economy during the early 1930s. The terminal at Brownsville International Airport had been doubled in size in 1929 by Ben V. Proctor immediately following its completion. Proctor doubled the building a second time in 1931-32, preserving the Spanish Mediterranean architecture of his one-story building but simplifying it considerably (all demolished). Pan American's one-story Accounting and Engineering Building (1934-35, W. Frank Godwin; demolished) was constructed alongside the passenger terminal facing Minnesota Avenue. As Pan American's operations continued to expand, both the terminal and the Accounting and Engineering Building were added to.<sup>94</sup> The complex's Spanish Mediterranean imagery linked it more strongly to its origins in the 1920s than the 1930s.

Godwin maintained a private practice on the side. In 1935 he designed a house for Royal D. Sundell, Division Engineer for Pan American Airways, at 2013 Palm Boulevard in Los Ebanos that perpetuated the Spanish Mediterranean image with its stucco walls and tile roof.<sup>95</sup> The last major work in the Spanish Mediterranean style in the Valley was a project that brought R. Newell Waters national recognition. In 1936, he remodeled forty-five store fronts along two blocks of South Texas Avenue in downtown Weslaco with stucco facing, tile roof copings, and coordinated graphics, repeating the urban design tactics that the Kelwood Company had applied to lower Levee Street ten years earlier. Palm trees were planted at intervals along the sidewalks and coordinated spot lighting was installed for nighttime illumination. *Architectural Forum* magazine took notice in an article on how a small town used design to beat the Depression.<sup>96</sup> In the Lower Río Grande Valley, the Spanish Mediterranean style outlived its cycle of popularity nationally. As long as it endured in far south Texas, the style was associated with travel, publicity, and the romantic images with which newcomers represented the area's Mexican culture to themselves.

## Regionalism, 1935-1950

The period 1935 to 1950 in Brownsville cannot be represented by a single architectural style. It was marked by a relaxed reliance on historical imagery and a search for architecture that appeared more appropriate for modern life than the theatrical historical styles of the 1920s. It was also marked by a professional regrouping as architects tried to survive the decline in new construction that lasted from 1930 until 1936. In Brownsville, there was a renewal in the construction of what were, by local standards, expensive houses in 1936. This brought an appearance of renewed prosperity to elite neighborhoods, especially Los Ebanos, but masked the lack of new public and commercial building. One locale where commercial building did resume was along the highway, especially along Central Boulevard. Southern California continued to be the most important external source of new architectural images for south Texas.

During the worst years of the Depression, building did not totally stop in Brownsville or the Valley towns. Institutions, corporations, and public bodies were the principal clients for new buildings, rather than retail businesses or developers. Mercy Hospital expanded twice in the early 1930s. E. G. Holliday added to the building in 1930, and in 1935-36 a convent and chapel for the Sisters of Mercy were built behind the hospital, to the design of Birger

Elwing. This was the last job with which Elwing's name is associated in building reports of the period. Elwing also designed St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church at 213 West Magnolia Street in La Feria (1930) and Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church for Harlingen's oldest parish at 412 South C (1930-31).<sup>97</sup> Stanley W. Bliss of Harlingen likewise designed several churches during the 1930s: All Saints Episcopal Church at 483 North Reagan in San Benito (1934-35) and St. Anthony's Catholic Church at 1001 East Harrison in Harlingen (1937).<sup>98</sup>

The Río Grande Valley Telephone Company built new exchange and office buildings in several Valley towns in the early 1930s. Its building at 701 East Washington Street in Brownsville (1930-31; altered), designed by the Dallas architect C. E. Overbeck, is a rare local example of the modernistic Art Deco style of the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>99</sup> The most imposing building erected in downtown Brownsville during the 1930s was the U.S. Courthouse and Postoffice at 1001 East Elizabeth Street (1930-32, James A. Wetmore, Supervising Architect of the Treasury). Designed in the office of the Supervising Architect in Washington, D.C., it was detailed with Italian Renaissance ornament rather than Spanish Mediterranean decoration. The U.S. government built new postoffices in other valley towns, including those at 401 North Sam Houston in San Benito (1931-32), 245 East Van Buren in Harlingen (1931-34, both by the Supervising Architect of the Treasury) and at 101 South 10th in Edinburg (1937, Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect of the Treasury). The postoffice in McAllen was unusual, both for its belated Spanish Mediterranean ornament and the fact that it was designed by Van Siclén, a local architect, rather than in the Supervising Architect's office.<sup>100</sup>

Local governments built new public buildings. Stanley W. Bliss designed Harlingen's Municipal Auditorium at the Valley Mid-Winter Fair Grounds (1935-36) and the Starr County Courthouse in Río Grande City (1937).<sup>101</sup> Both buildings, had they been built only a few years earlier, would have been likely candidates for Spanish Mediterranean architecture. Instead, both were designed in the modernistic style, emphasizing cubic massing, symmetrical composition, and residual, abstract classical detail.

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal contributed materially to American architecture of the 1930s and early 1940s by funding the construction of new buildings through various federal programs. One of the best known was the Public Works Administration, which funded construction of the Brownsville Ship Channel, turning basin, docks, and three large dockside transit sheds (1933-37; Robert J. Cummins of Houston, consulting engineer).<sup>102</sup> The U.S. Housing Authority funded the construction of rental housing for low-income families by local public housing authorities. Two complexes were built in Brownsville before World War II, the 200-unit Buena Vida complex (1938-40, A. H. Woolridge, W. D. Van Siclén, W. Frank Godwin, and Frank E. Torres), occupying six blocks cleared of neighborhood housing on East 14th Street between Tyler and Ringgold streets, and the 50-unit Bougainvillea Courts (1938-40, Woolridge, Van Siclén, Godwin, and Torres) at 755 West Jefferson Street in West Brownsville.<sup>103</sup> Buena Vida and Bougainvillea consisted of one-story row houses, small in size, well planned and constructed, but not architecturally distinctive. Buena Vida was, however, notable for its landscaping. A third public housing complex, Victoria Gardens, was built in the 2000-2100 blocks of what is now International Boulevard (Hedrick & Lindsley of Houston and C. Lyman Ellis, architects, 1942-43).<sup>104</sup> The concentration of public housing on the east side of Brownsville was consistent with the way U.S.H.A. housing was typically distributed in Texas cities. Most complexes were built in



low-income, non-Anglo-American neighborhoods. Those that weren't, such as Bougainvillea, were usually intended for low-income Anglo-American families, and were often ethnically and racially segregated by policy. Public works funding seems to have been used more frequently in Brownsville for public infrastructure improvements than for new public buildings. It is notable that only one new public school building was built in Brownsville after New Deal funds became available. This was Washington Park School (now Annie S. Putegnat) at 730 East 8th, facing Washington Square (1941-42), which replaced the original Brownsville Public School.<sup>105</sup> This reflects the fact that Brownsville experienced almost no population growth during the 1930s decade, so that new public school construction was not an urgent requirement.

One particular program of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal contributed to the direction that American architecture took in the 1930s and 1940s, the Historic American Buildings Survey. This was a national effort, launched in 1934 under the direction of the National Park Service and the Civil Works Administration of the Works Progress Administration, to have unemployed architects and draftsmen photograph, measure, and draw significant, but often little-known, historic buildings in each state. Although 272 Texas buildings were documented between 1934 and 1941, south Texas was not well represented in this effort. Two buildings in Cameron County were documented: the Point Isabel Lighthouse and doña Estéfana Goseascochea de Cortinas's ruined house at Rancho El Carmen upriver from Brownsville, a classic example of the border brick style. No buildings in Brownsville, Laredo, or Roma were documented and only one building in San Ygnacio, two in Río Grande City, and one in Corpus Christi were included.<sup>106</sup>

The Historic American Buildings Survey provided local models that architects might adapt as the authentic regional architecture of various parts of the United States. As early as 1926 two Dallas architects, David R. Williams and O'Neil Ford, began to photograph and draw the Mexican architecture of San Antonio and the Río Grande, especially in San Ygnacio and Roma.<sup>107</sup> Although the houses Ford and Williams designed in and near Dallas in the late 1920s were more influenced by the architecture of Castroville and Fredericksburg, they nonetheless called attention to the fact that Texas possessed not one but multiple regional architectural traditions.

Even so, the recognition of an architectural tradition among what many architects were inclined to see as only old, deteriorating buildings did not develop quickly. In 1938, when a group of Brownsville businessmen organized the first Charro Days carnival, they focused on Mexican culture as its theme, not Spanish or Spanish colonial culture. Yet what these Anglo-American business and civic leaders and their wives interpreted as Mexican culture was eclectic, impressionistic, and traditional. The *charro* of Jalisco and the *china poblana* of Puebla were the carnival's representative personæ, not the Tamaulipecan *ranchero* and *ranchera*. Recognition of modern Mexican culture was as limited as recognition of border culture. While Charro Days was intended as a festive carnival and Depression-era economic stimulus, not an anthropological inquiry, it indicated the difficulties that Anglo-Americans had in recognizing the presence of authentic regional traditions within their midst. The carnival's connection to business development and tourism allied it to the same impulses that had sustained the Spanish Mediterranean style. Such building types as the highway-side tourist court perpetuated the Spanish Mediterranean in a very streamlined form, as the Tropical Tourist Courts at 811 Central Boulevard (c. 1940), Brownsville's most architecturally ambitious tourist court, did.

The regional architecture that most effected the Valley was the Monterey style, named for the town in northern California that developed a hybrid architecture of Mexican and U.S. influences in the 1830s and 1840s. The most persuasive interpreter of this trend was R. Newell Waters. In 1936 Waters designed one of his earliest and most important Monterey style houses for Camille Sams and Larry F. Lightner at 2020 Palm Boulevard in Los Ebanos. Surfaced with pink stucco and turquoise trim, the Lightner House was as romantic as any Spanish Mediterranean house, but more restrained. Four years later, Waters designed a house next door at 2030 Palm Boulevard that was even more restrained (and larger) for Mrs. Lightner's sister and brother-in-law, Gladys Sams and Dean A. Porter. The Porter House was decorated with classical detail. The attenuation of this detail and the manneristic composition of the Porter House reflected the influence of Los Angeles. Waters's houses for Howard E. Butt at 3700 Ocean Drive in Corpus Christi (1936) and for F. E. Knapp and J. A. Knapp on South Texas Avenue in Weslaco (1939) were also in the Monterey style.<sup>108</sup> A number of highly visible Regional style buildings were built in Corpus Christi, beginning with W. D. Van Sicen's idiosyncratic Pueblo style Watson House on Ocean Drive, and two early works by Richard S. Colley (1910-1983), who would become Corpus Christi's most important architect, the Richard H. Hawn House at 3200 Santa Fe Drive (1939) and Sacred Heart Catholic Church at 1302 Comanche Street (1941).<sup>109</sup>

W. Frank Godwin's one-story house for the lawyer C. S. Eidman, Jr., at 2 Sunset Drive (1939) in Los Ebanos is an example of another regional type popularized in southern California, the ranch house. Regional traditions also inspired the house for Dr. James L. Rentfro at 1904 Palm Boulevard (c. 1940), a streamlined rendition of Greek Revival architecture. The Rentfro House was designed by an architect whose Brownsville career was brief but exceptionally distinguished, Frank Edmond Torres.<sup>110</sup> Torres (b. 1904) was born in Matamoros and grew up in Brownsville. He graduated in architecture from the University of Texas in 1930, then tried, unsuccessfully, to practice in the Valley, first on his own in Brownsville, then as an employee of Ivan H. Riley of Harlingen. In 1933 Torres moved to Mexico City, where he worked as an architect until 1938; the last two years of his stay he was in independent practice there. Between 1938 and 1941 Torres practiced in Brownsville, for part of the time in partnership with A. H. Woolridge. In 1941, Torres joined the architectural staff of Pan American Airways. When Pan American closed its Western Division office in Brownsville in 1944, Torres (along with Frank Godwin) moved to Miami, where he continued to work for Pan American until his retirement. In 1938, Torres became the first Mexican-American to be licensed to practice architecture in Texas under a new registration law enacted in 1937. He was also the first Brownsville architect to have substantial professional connections with mainstream Mexican architectural culture.

Torres's Brownsville masterwork is the house for Salomé McAllen and William Scanlan at 1905 Palm Boulevard (1940).<sup>111</sup> It was the first work of architecture in Brownsville to acknowledge the border brick style of the 19th century. Like the Rentfro House across the street, the Scanlan House represented the consolidation of Brownsville's old-family elite with its newcomer elite in Los Ebanos during the late 1930s. The one-story patio house for the lawyer Paul Y. Cunningham, nearby at 1827 Palm Boulevard (c. 1942; altered), appears to be based on border brick style prototypes. As is the case with the Scanlan House, the Cunningham House was an adaptation of regional historical prototypes, not a replica. Ruth Young McGonigle adapted a border brick style building at 501 East Levee as "Mi Casita del Sur" (c. 1942; demolished), a house for Johnnie Griffin, one of a group of friends of Frieda

von Richtofen Lawrence, the widow of D. H. Lawrence, who wintered in Port Isabel between 1944 and 1956. Mrs. McGonigle expanded Mrs. Griffin's house with an enclosed patio and painted tiles that picturesquely evoked vernacular Mexican themes.<sup>112</sup>

Torres designed the largest house in Brownsville, Casa Poinciana, the country house of Mr. and Mrs. Hubert R. Hudson at Paredes Line Road and Coffeepoint Road on Resaca de la Guerra (c. 1940). The Hudson House belonged to a category of country houses built by wealthy newcomers on small estates on the outskirts of Valley towns. Although Brownsville had fewer examples than other towns, the most notable house built in south Texas in this period was the country house of George Kraigher, a Slavic immigrant, aviator, and employee of Pan American Airways, at 525 Paredes Line Road (1937). Kraigher commissioned one of the most famous architects in the U.S., Richard J. Neutra of Los Angeles, to design the compact two-story house. Since the late 1920s Neutra had been one of the foremost advocates of modern movement architecture in the U.S. The Kraigher House was the first building he designed in the U.S. outside California. It was the first modern movement house in Texas. It was also the first building in Brownsville to be published in a national architectural journal.<sup>113</sup>

W. Frank Godwin supervised construction of the Kraigher House; Neutra did not see the house until a chance visit to Brownsville in 1951.<sup>114</sup> Its white painted stucco wall planes, flat roofs, terrace decks, and horizontal bands of windows introduced the formal vocabulary of the modern movement not only to the Valley, but to Texas. The modern movement was preceded by the modernistic style, which employed modern motifs, but in a way that modern purists considered too decorative. In 1936, Godwin designed the first modernistic house in Brownsville, for A. L. McCullough at 19 Sunset Drive in Los Ebanos (1936; defaced). Several notable modern country houses were built in the Valley by young architects from outside the region. The Houston architects MacKie & Kamrath designed the Winston House at La Gloria Ranch near Edinburg (1939) and O'Neil Ford and Arch B. Swank, Jr., of Dallas designed the V. Frank Neuhaus House on Neuhaus Road southwest of McAllen (1942).<sup>115</sup> Although neither Brownsville nor the Valley had a history of vanguard architectural or artistic patronage, the image of sleek modernity that these flat-roofed houses represented may have appealed to newcomers' sense of themselves as "pioneers," especially by employing architectural images associated with southern California.

One other instance of direct involvement by a California designer occurred in the Valley. In 1939, the San Francisco landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, who would become one of the most notable modern landscape architects in the U.S. in the 1940s, designed a community center for migrant workers for the Farm Security Administration, another New Deal agency, near Weslaco.<sup>116</sup> For the first time since the railroad opened the Valley to the rest of the U.S., an extremely inventive landscape architect was called upon to shape space with the abundant indigenous and imported plant materials available in far south Texas. Eckbo's plan called for using a wide variety of tree types to create a series of spatially interlocked outdoor areas on the flat site.

The streamlined historicism that marked architecture of the 1930s and 1940s, especially domestic architecture, dissolved the ideological difference inherent in the Spanish Mediterranean style of the late 1920s and early 1930s. By the early 1940s, stucco-faced, tile-roofed houses, free standing in landscaped gardens, began to be built in the new Matamoros subdivisions of Colonia Moderna and Colonia Jardín.<sup>117</sup> These examples of what in Mexico and much of the rest of Latin America was called the Neo-colonial style were the

Mexican counterparts of the Spanish Mediterranean style suburban houses built a decade earlier in the U.S. Although there were isolated examples of Spanish-Mediterranean style houses designed by Texan architects for Mexican clients (an example is the large house designed by the Laredo-born San Antonio architect J. Fred Buenz for the banker Octaviano Longoria at Calle Victoria 3020 in Nuevo Laredo of 1929),<sup>118</sup> the Neo-colonial style houses built in Matamoros reflected contemporary Mexican models rather than U.S. trends. The spatial organization of these houses, their relationships to their sites and to the street, and their ornamental detail relied on Mexican precedent.

Colonia Jardín, developed in 1940-42 in the Santa Cruz bend of the Río Grande/Río Bravo, invites comparison with Los Ebanos in Brownsville. Both were developed as upper-income garden suburban neighborhoods intended to be exclusively residential. Both broke with the prevailing street plan of their cities. And both featured street names referring to vegetation. In comparison to Los Ebanos, Colonia Jardín was much more urban, however. House sites were smaller and houses, as they were built, occupied much more of their sites than was customary in U.S. subdivisions. Properties tended to be surrounded by fences and walls, even along the street front, in contrast to the spatial openness of Los Ebanos. By traditional Mexican standards, the Colonia Jardín was suburban, but its suburbanity was more like that of the residential neighborhoods of 19th-century U.S. cities than American garden suburbs of the early 20th century. This was also true of Colonia Madero, the Nuevo Laredo counterpart of Colonia Jardín.

No less than in south Texas, recognition that the Tamaulipas border possessed a regional tradition of architecture was slow to develop. In the wake of the severe hurricane of September 4, 1933, Matamoros's Palacio Municipal and the Casa Domingo Martínez on Calle Morelos, both fine examples of Creole architecture from the 1830s (both now demolished), were "restored" with incompatible Neo-colonial decorative detail.<sup>119</sup> Nuevo Laredo's imposing Palacio Municipal (now the Palacio Federal), facing Plaza Hidalgo, was built in 1940 in the Neo-colonial style. True to Mexican tradition--and emphatically differentiating it from the contemporary Spanish style U.S. Border Service Building at the foot of Convent Street in Laredo (1941, Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect of the Treasury)--Nuevo Laredo's Palacio Municipal was organized around a central, open-air patio and surrounded by generous arched *portales* on both the first and second floors.<sup>120</sup> Although architecture on both sides of the border might exhibit similarities, new buildings indicated that each side of the border was more responsive to its own national centers of architectural guidance than to the other side. This was especially true for two new urban parish churches built in the late 1940s, the Templo de la Santísima Señora de Guadalupe, facing the Plaza Hidalgo in Reynosa (1950), and the Templo de la Sagrada Corazón de Jesús, facing the Plaza Allende in Matamoros (1947-52). The design of both churches, with their distinctive parabolic arched roofs, was based on that of the Basílica de la Purísima in Monterrey (1940-46) by Enrique de la Mora of Mexico City.<sup>121</sup> Modernization involved the promulgation of cultural trends nationally. Regionalism in U.S. architecture in the 1930s and 1940s was not a regional phenomenon but a national phenomenon. Although promoted in the 1920s in opposition to modernization, regionalism succeeded as a trend in the 1930s because it was efficiently disseminated through mass media. Therefore, the popularity of the Monterey style in south Texas and the difficulty experienced in discerning the possibility of local cultural traditions.

The Regionalist period extends in Brownsville through the postwar 1940s, when a burst

of new construction signaled the return of prosperity to a degree not experienced since the 1920s. Cotton production in the Lower Río Grande Valley and in northern Tamaulipas swelled, bringing a revival of the "*tiempo de los algodones*" of the 1860s.<sup>122</sup> During the early 1950s, the Port of Brownsville became the biggest cotton shipping port in the U.S. The development of a shrimping industry in the 1940s drew an influx of Louisianans back to the lower Río Grande.<sup>123</sup> Between 1940 and 1950, Brownsville's population grew by fifty percent, from 22,083 (1940) to 36,066 (1950). Between 1950 and 1960 it would grow by another twenty-five percent to 48,040 (1960). Matamoros grew at an astounding rate, from 15,699 (1940) to 45,737 (1950) to 143,043 (1960).

The period was marked by substantial new construction in downtown Brownsville. The largest retail store in downtown Brownsville was built by Sears, Roebuck & Company at 927 East Elizabeth Street (1948). The remainder of the block front was filled out by a group of stores housed in a handsomely designed retail block in the early 1950s. Diagonally across the streets, on the site of Judge James B. Wells's house, the Majestic Theater Building was built at 1000 East Elizabeth Street (1949). Next to the Majestic, the J. C. Penney Company occupied a new building at 1032 East Elizabeth (1948). Portending a change in the organization of retail business that would eventually effect Brownsville architecture, most of these buildings were occupied by state-wide or nationally operated chain businesses rather than locally owned businesses. All conformed to the prevailing spatial organization of downtown Brownsville by being built up to the sidewalks, with entrances and display windows at sidewalk level, and architectural detail reserved for the upper zones of the buildings. All were designed in late versions of the modernistic style, emphasizing vertical alignment (as in the architecturally integrated sign pylons at Sears and the Majestic) contrasted with horizontal linearity (as in the lines bracketing second-floor windows in the Majestic Building).

As evidence of the wave of prosperity and optimism that effected the entire Valley, new architectural practices were established. The San Antonio architect Ellis F. Albaugh, Jr., (1903-1976) seems to have closed his San Antonio office and moved to Brownsville, where he practiced from the late 1940s until about 1957, when he moved back to San Antonio.<sup>124</sup> Albaugh's most important public commission was to expand and remodel the City Market House in Market Square (1949). Albaugh's Texas Mission style front, facing 12th Street, represents a curious reversion to the Spanish Mission style. But he streamlined his historic references with severe massing and modernistic panels of glass block. Albaugh's use of historical detail marked a transition then occurring in American architecture. After 1950, modern architecture (whether in its conservative, modernistic phase, or in more vanguard versions) prevailed. Albaugh's other documented buildings reflected this trend. He designed the Alberto Terrazas House at 1834 Palm Boulevard in Los Ebanos (c. 1949), the Shelby J. Longoria House at Calle Primera 240 in the Colonia Jardín in Matamoros (1950), his own duplex house at 5 and 15 Old Alice Road (c. 1950), Immaculate Conception Parochial School at 1235 East Jefferson (1951), and the W. S. Bartz House at 24 Calle Cenizo (1951-52) in a low-key modern style often described at the time as "contemporary."<sup>125</sup> The Terrazas and Longoria houses were contemporary versions of the California ranch house. In this respect, the Longoria House stood out in Matamoros for its reliance on U.S. architectural models as strikingly as had the Victorian-style Cross House on Calle Séptima of 1885.<sup>126</sup>

Another recently arrived architect, who seems to have divided his practice between

Harlingen and Brownsville before establishing himself permanently in Harlingen, was Charles Lyman Ellis.<sup>127</sup> Ellis was a Midwesterner who had practiced in Grand Forks, North Dakota, in the 1920s, then worked in the 1930s for the Public Works Administration before moving to Harlingen in the 1940s. Apart from his collaboration on Victoria Gardens, Ellis's firm designed the offices and production plant of the Brownsville Herald at 1135 East Van Buren Street (1959). Ellis lived at 1844 Palm Boulevard in 1948; whether he designed this low, one-story, stone-faced ranch type house is not known. Ellis's new Harlingen City Hall at 118 East Tyler Street (1950) and Fire Station at 322 North A (1950) were in the late modernistic style.

Two architects connected with the San Antonio architect Bartlett Cocke, a relation of the 19th-century Brownsville engineer J. J. Cocke, established Valley practices in the 1940s. Walter C. Bowman (1912-1966), who had worked for Cocke since 1939, opened an office in Harlingen in partnership with him in 1945. Bowman ran the office of Cocke & Bowman as an independent operation rather than as a branch of Cocke's San Antonio office.<sup>128</sup> Bowman designed the handsomely proportioned Monterey style house of the Ford dealer J. Lewis Boggus at 505 Lake Drive in Harlingen (1951). Zeb Rike (b. 1912) worked for Cocke at intervals between 1938 and 1947. In 1947 Rike established a practice in McAllen, which continues to exist as Rike Ogden Figueroa/Dickson Wells. Warren C. Suter (b. 1918), who was born and educated in Ohio, began practice in Mission in 1948. In the mid-1930s William C. Baxter (1907-1984) began practice in Weslaco after working in Newell Waters's office. Baxter was unusual in that he had grown up in Weslaco, where his parents moved from Seguin, Texas, in 1921.<sup>129</sup> The Valley architects who began to emerge in the postwar period differed from those of the interwar period by being born in Texas or having lived in the state since childhood.

## **The Golden Age of Modern Architecture, 1950-1960**

Modern architecture in the 1950s constitutes the high point of architectural development in Brownsville and far south Texas. For the only time in the region's history, its architecture attracted national and state-wide recognition. This occurred because a group of unusually talented architects were inspired to spatialize through modern architecture certain conditions specific to the Valley. Therefore there was a strong parallel between modern architecture and the Spanish Mediterranean phenomenon of the 1920s. But whereas Spanish Mediterranean architecture sought to evoke place, modern architecture sought to evoke time. The idea of being true to one's time, rather than stylistically simulating other times, was a guiding principle of modern architecture. Certain attributes were associated with modern design: the expressive use of materials, the candid disclosure of construction, spatial organization based on patterns of use, and architecturally registering responsiveness to site and climate. Historical stylistic decoration, no matter how streamlined, was to be avoided. In the Lower Río Grande Valley around 1950, these prescriptions and proscriptions revived the myth of the valley as an exotic tropical paradise. This was done by architecturally replacing the mytheme "exotic" with "modern." Modern architecture in far south Texas was energized by the modern tropical paradise myth as architects produced modern buildings allied with, but not formally dependent on, modern architecture in southern California. What modern architecture in the Valley spatialized was a nation-wide phenomenon for which Los Angeles served as a model: suburbanization. In the small towns of the Lower Río Grande

Valley, the effect of suburbanization was visible as new bypasses of Highway 83 and Highway 77 circumvented the old main streets of Valley towns to create a regional super strip toward which businesses once tied to downtown main streets and railroad stops gravitated.

Suburbanization abetted the process of territorializing urban space socioeconomically (and, because of the distribution of wealth in south Texas) ethnically. Expressed through the medium of a market economy, suburbanization privileged new development by competitively asserting superiority in terms of newness, orderliness, cleanliness, and the implied social control of space achieved by economic differentiation. Montejano has correlated this terminology with expressions of class and ethnic bias in south Texas in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s to show how such concepts, rather than rooted in individual experiences, were social constructs that legitimized discriminatory attitudes and behavior.<sup>130</sup>

The Valley's brilliant modern architecture of the 1950s, because it was at the forefront of suburbanization, reinforced the status quo despite its formal daring and its rhetoric of liberation from social convention. The Valley's modern architects were Anglo-Americans (with one exception), middle class, and male. They operated in the vanguard of architectural style, but their critiques of spatial conventionality were restricted to the realm of architecture and did not address power relations and communal space. Thus liberating modern design was by and large the province of the same clientele that had built the Valley's Spanish Mediterranean architecture a generation earlier. "Modern tropical paradise" was a mythical construct that allowed the Valley's (predominantly Anglo-American) elite to imagine themselves, as Walter Bowman and David Montejano suggested 25 years apart, as modern pioneers in a new land with no cultural traditions to inhibit modern expression while, in effect, "heightening...class polarization," as Antonio N. Zavaleta observed (in another context) of Brownsville's social landscape in the 1950s.<sup>131</sup>

Modern architects spatialized the myth of modern tropical paradise with a degree of architectural originality that architects of the Spanish Mediterranean style in the 1920s never achieved in south Texas. By not taking Spanish (Mexican) culture as its theme, modern architecture did not make an issue of historical representation. Thus, it posed no barrier to adoption by Mexican-Americans. Brownsville stood out for the number of Mexican-American patrons of modern architecture it possessed, seconded by Mc Allen. The first modern postwar house in Brownsville was built by the cotton broker Gustavo Peña at 37 South Coria Street in East Banker Addition (1950, by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott & Associates of Bryan).<sup>132</sup> The Peña House symbolically reasserted Brownsville's historic character as a border city, in which ethnicity was not necessarily a determinant of cultural expression. This phenomenon was also visible in Mc Allen, where Mexican-American professionals commissioned notable works of modern architecture. It was not visible in other Valley towns however, where modern architecture in the 1950s was associated exclusively with Anglo-American elites. Modern architecture did not signal a revolution in power relations.

Three exemplary works of modern architecture illustrate the appeal that suburbanization made to the imagination of Brownsville's elite in the 1950s by spatializing social and civic institutions in new terms, as did the Brownsville buildings of the Valley's most outstanding modern architects.

El Rancho Grande Hotel at 1225 Central Boulevard (1951; extensively altered) represented the challenge that suburbanization posed to the conventional downtown-centered city. El Rancho Grande aspired to rival the Hotel El Jardín downtown for primacy

as Brownsville's foremost hotel. Rather than height, El Rancho Grande competed with expansiveness, images of stylish leisure legitimized by association with southern California, and an emphasis on nature rarely encountered downtown. The San Antonio hotelman Richard Gill built the hotel on a 10-acre tract at Central and Boca Chica in West Brownsville. The hotel's name, its architect--Frank W. Green of Glendale, California--and its interior designer--Albert Parvin & Company of Los Angeles--reinforced the southern Californian associations of El Rancho Grande's "rambling, ranch style," as the *Brownsville Herald* described the architecture. Most Californian of all was setting the low one-story buildings, shaded by widely overhanging roofs, in a luxuriant subtropical garden. Gill retained the Lambert Landscape Company of Dallas, one of the best-known landscape firms in the state, to demonstrate horticulturally the reciprocal relationship between architecture and nature that modern architecture insisted on. Acknowledging that south Texas was not like southern California in every respect, El Rancho Grande's 66-guest rooms were centrally air-conditioned.<sup>133</sup>

El Rancho Grande appealed to the imaginations of a more-than-local audience through the medium of publicity. American magazines during the late 1940s and early 1950s displayed a special fascination with Texan subjects, from which Brownsville and the Lower Río Grande Valley benefited. El Rancho Grande was illustrated in *Business Week* and *Engineering News-Record* in 1951.<sup>134</sup> Recognition in the national press conferred an aura of distinction on the hotel because of the role the national news media played in legitimizing trends, styles, and reputations. Publicity was an instrument of modernization that had been exploited in the Lower Río Grande Valley since the beginning of the 20th century. Only in the post-World War II period did national magazines broadcast such representations of south Texas without condescension or criticism.

El Rancho Grande's ranch style California contemporary architecture was not of the order of originality of Richard Neutra's modern California architecture. But its theme--the Texas ranch Mexicanized (at least in name) in acknowledgment of its border locale; its concept--the highway-oriented tourist court transformed into a glamorous tropical resort; and the magical associations with southern California ignited competition. By the early 1960s, other Valley towns had built their versions of the resort motel, upstaging their old, railroad-side, Spanish-style downtown hotels in the process. The Sun Valley Motor Hotel at 1900 South 77 Sunshine Strip in Harlingen (1956), the Fairway Motor Hotel at 2105 South 10th Street in McAllen (1957, by John G. York of Harlingen; demolished), the Echo Motor Hotel at 1903 South Closner Boulevard in Edinburg (1959, by J. N. Mac Cammon of Dallas and Carlos B. Schoepl of Miami), and the Seville Motor Hotel at 1800 West Harrison in Harlingen (1961, by Edward J. Romieniec & Associates; defaced) were El Rancho Grande's most prominent competitors. Of these the Fairway was paramount because of its exceptional modern design.

Brownsville also established the civic center as a subject for inter-city competition with the Fort Brown Memorial Center. Built on the parade ground of Fort Brown, which the City of Brownsville acquired from the U.S. Army in 1948, the Fort Brown Memorial Center was the most important modern building complex built in Brownsville. Mayor Herbert L. Stokley organized an architectural competition, open to all registered architects in Texas, to select the design for the civic center in 1951. The Dallas architects Wiltshire & Fisher won with a modern design by Donald E. Jarvis, a recent graduate of the architecture department at Texas A&M College. Jarvis's design was modified considerably by the time the complex was completed in 1954.<sup>135</sup>



The Fort Brown Memorial Center represented the suburbanization of civic space. The center was not organized as a single building but a series of low buildings linked by outdoor walkways and garden courtyards. Except for the Jacob Brown Auditorium, its scale was residential rather than monumental. Thus it spread out like a big ranch house on its broad site facing downtown and International Boulevard. Donald Jarvis's genius was to unify the complex with an implicit (rather than stylistically explicit) mythical-regional theme. The walkways were implicitly *portales*, the numerous courtyards and terraces were *patios*, the pergolas shading south-facing glass were *ramadas*. The Dallas landscape architects, Arthur and Marie Berger, the foremost modern landscape architects in Texas, planted the grounds and courtyards of the civic center.

In 1954 the Fort Brown Memorial Center won a First Honor Award for Design from the American Institute of Architects. It was published in the journal *Architectural Forum* as a model cultural and recreation center for a small city. As late as 1961 the Fort Brown Memorial Center was cited in the magazine *Fortune* as an outstanding example of small city civic design.<sup>136</sup> Modern architecture brought Brownsville a degree of national recognition in the 1950s that the city had never received before. As with the resort motel, such acclaim sparked competitive civic center building Valley-wide. The McAllen Civic Center in the 1500 block of South 10th Street (1958) by Zeb Rike, J. Edwin Byers, and Caudill, Rowlett, Scott & Associates was the most architecturally ambitious contender. The Casa del Sol at 215 East Madison Street in Harlingen (1961) by Taniguchi & Croft, and the Mercedes Civic Center at 530 East 2nd Street (1961) by Gene P. Hobart, although considerably smaller, attracted recognition for their modern design.<sup>137</sup>

High design brought national attention to a third Brownsville building complex, the new campus of St. Joseph's Academy at 101 St. Joseph's Drive (1955-60), designed by the Bryan (subsequently Houston) architects Caudill, Rowlett, Scott & Associates. St. Joseph's was the suburban replacement of the Marist Brothers' historic site in the West End. It was low in scale and spatially dispersed in organization. In a characteristically modern way CRS's designer, Charles E. Lawrence, used roof shapes to differentiate the various functions housed in campus buildings: one of these, the vaulted, glass-walled gymnasium, became St. Joseph's architectural symbol. In 1956, the design for St. Joseph's Academy was cited in the annual awards program sponsored by *Progressive Architecture* magazine. The campus won a design award from the Texas Society of Architects and received the ultimate in publicity accolades in September 1960 when it was illustrated as one of a handful of "schools of tomorrow" in *Time* magazine.<sup>138</sup>

El Rancho Grande Hotel, the Fort Brown Memorial Center, and St. Joseph's Academy proclaimed in spatial terms the new world of American modern architecture. This was, however, a world circumscribed by mythic assumptions. The assumptions upon which modern architecture in the Lower Río Grande Valley drew were embedded in the modern tropical paradise myth. These gave the modern architecture of the 1950s a high degree of coherence. But they tended to limit its liberating potential to the economically privileged.

The most prominent architects from outside the region who designed buildings in the Lower Río Grande Valley in the 1950s were modern architects. O'Neil Ford of San Antonio, Richard S. Colley of Corpus Christi, MacKie & Kamrath of Houston, Cowell & Neuhaus of Houston, and Caudill, Rowlett, Scott & Associates emerged in the 1950s as the leading modernists in Texas. Although Ford was based in San Antonio, San Antonio architects no longer dominated architectural production in the Lower Río Grande Valley as they had

during the first half of the century. Ford and Colley collaborated on additions to McAllen General Hospital at 701 South Main (1954; demolished). Colley designed the King House at 611 Lindberg (1949) and the Stahl House at 329 South McColl (1951) in McAllen; Ford designed the Cook House at 800 East Houston (1958) in McAllen. Mac Kie & Kamrath were responsible for the First National Bank Building at 201 South 15th in McAllen (1956; altered) and Cowell & Neuhaus designed the McAllen State Bank Building at 201 South Broadway (1961; defaced), one of the most important works of modern architecture in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Caudill, Rowlett, Scott & Associates, who established their reputation by designing state-of-the-art school buildings in Texas and Oklahoma, were architects for a school in Pharr (1955-56) and all the public school buildings built in Laredo during the 1950s and 1960s (with A. A. Leyendecker), in addition to their buildings in Brownsville and McAllen.

The great modern architect of the Valley was John G. York of Harlingen (1914-1980). A graduate of the University of Texas, York joined Walter Bowman, his former classmate, and Bartlett Cocke to form Cocke, Bowman & York in 1949. York was extremely inventive. He responded imaginatively to conditions of economic constraint, constructional expression, and climatic necessity, spatializing the myth of a modern tropical paradise in buildings that were rigorous, economical, yet lyrical and exuberant. During the first half of the 1950s York--along with Ford, Colley, MacKie & Kamrath, and Caudill Rowlett Scott--was one of the most publicized modern architects in Texas.<sup>139</sup>

York spatialized the modern tropical paradise myth by correlating regionalism with an architecture of modernization. Modernization (embodied in light, thin construction technologies, small scale, asymmetry, and open interior planning--the latter three connoting democratization, suburbanization, and individual liberation) was reconciled with regionalism, which was reinterpreted to mean the environmental constraints that could expressively shape architecture. An example is the *brise soleil* (literally: sunbreak), the egg-crate grid of fixed louvers that the French modern architect Le Corbusier conceived in the early 1930s. As a result of its use in Brazilian modern architecture of the 1930s and 1940s, the *brise soleil* came to connote the regionalization of modern design in tropical latitudes. Richard Colley made the *brise soleil* the architectural theme of his Corpus Christi City Hall at 302 South Shoreline Drive (1952; demolished), which was followed by the similar Zapata County Courthouse in the new town of Zapata (1953, John Linn Scott of Austin; extensively altered). The Palacio Municipal of Matamoros (1955-57, Jorge O. Elizalde, architect), built on the site of its 1831 predecessor on Calle 6a facing Plaza Hidalgo, and the First National Bank Building at 835 East Levee in Brownsville (1958-60, Phelps & Dewees & Simmons of San Antonio) reiterated the *brise soleil* theme. Cocke, Bowman & York introduced this device to far south Texas at the Clarke & Courts Building at 115 East Harrison in Harlingen (1951). York "liberated" the conventional downtown storefront building by making transparency--the street front of the building is all glass--and sunshading the basis of its architecture.<sup>140</sup>

Cocke, Bowman & York, like Caudill Rowlett Scott, acquired a reputation as specialists in school design. Schools were the building type of the 1950s decade in Texas. Small town and suburban school districts, confronted with the need to accommodate expanding student populations, gave young architects opportunities to produce schools that could be built more rapidly and cheaply than conservative, established architects were accustomed to designing. Cocke, Bowman & York excelled at doing more with less. Their most famous school was

one of a pair they designed in Brownsville in 1953, Ebony Heights Elementary School at 1900 Stanford Avenue.<sup>141</sup> Together with its east side twin, Cromack Elementary School at 3000 Southmost Road, Ebony Heights reduced architecture to a light steel frame of thin pipe columns and roof-supporting bar joists, surfaced with thin structural-insulated wall panels and insulated, single-width roof decks. Classrooms were organized in a "finger plan" of parallel rows along canopy-covered sidewalk corridors, with window openings on the north and south arranged to maximize ventilation and light diffusion while minimizing direct sun penetration. York's buildings had a diminutive scale that complemented their anti-monumental composition. York ardently embraced suburbanism in his architecture. As Ebony Heights demonstrated, the need to produce new buildings quickly and cheaply stimulated, rather than inhibited, York's design ingenuity.

By virtue of their skillfully articulated surfaces, York's buildings were not disruptive when built in older neighborhoods. Cocke, Bowman & York's clinic building for Dr. Pierre P. Poole at 44 East Levee Street (1954) respected the scale and setbacks of surrounding buildings and did not inject such spatially discordant features as surface parking lots.<sup>142</sup>

York dissolved his partnership with Cocke and Bowman at the end of 1954, while working on the design of Sammy's drive-in restaurant at 1004 Central Boulevard for Mr. and Mrs. Otto Reichert (1955, extensively altered).<sup>143</sup> York designed for the car at Sammy's by producing a cable-hung canopy above the drive-in stalls (demolished). He integrated the dining room and its landscaped, resaca-side garden with the same enthusiasm that he made the car part of the design. Yet Sammy's figured less prominently on its open, parking lot-dominated site than the Poole Clinic in its more conventional setting. Sammy's appeared insignificant when seen from Central Boulevard because of its diminutive scale. This illustrated the paradox modern architecture encountered as it sought to spatialize a suburban alternative to the old-fashioned world of conventional downtown urban space. York's modern architecture tended to shape exterior space weakly because of its emphasis on small scale, lightness, and asymmetry. In this respect, it contrasted with Spanish Mediterranean architecture, which tended to be spatially strong, even when built in suburban settings.

York designed two houses in Brownsville in 1955, one at 544 Calle Retama for the pawn shop owner Bernard Whitman, and one at 244 Calle Jacaranda for the service station owner Antonio Cisneros, Jr. The Whitman House, with its low-pitched roof, which peaked above a glass-filled central gable, was an example of York's most characteristic modern house type. The Cisneros House was a flat roofed house that expanded into the landscape with an open carport supported on compound wooden beams and slender steel pipe columns. York ingeniously composed both houses to shape suburban space. The Cisneros House is stepped in plan so that as Calle Jacaranda turns the corner, so does the house. The Whitman House is set at an angle on its lot, rather than parallel to the street. This enabled York to preserve a grove of ebony trees on the property and to make the Whitman House a spatial exception to the uniform row of house fronts lining Calle Retama. York displayed his fondness for provocative color combinations at both houses, the one design element that has been altered in each.<sup>144</sup>

York's Brownsville buildings were indicative of the articulate, economical, exuberant modern architecture that he produced throughout the Valley. Cocke, Bowman & York designed the First Presbyterian Church at 300 West Cano in Edinburg (1949-53, 1961), the Casey Clinic at 400 West Highway 77 in San Benito (1950), Ed Downs Elementary School at 1302 North Dick Dowling in San Benito (1951), and the Klee Square shopping and

professional center at 502 South Water in Corpus Christi (1952-53). York designed the Fairway Motor Hotel in Mc Allen, and houses there for Dr. George Narro at 211 Jackson Avenue (1957) and Dr. Rafael Garza at 201 Jackson Avenue (1958). In Harlingen, Cocke, Bowman & York designed the First National Bank Building at 202 East Van Buren (1951, defaced), the Lon C. Hill Memorial Library at 504 East Tyler (1951, altered), the Clarke & Courts Building at 115 East Harrison (1951), and James Bonham Elementary School at 2400 East Jefferson (1953). York designed the KGBT-TV Studio in the 1500 block of West Tyler (1958) and, between 1949 and 1960, fourteen houses in Harlingen's first garden-suburban neighborhood, Laurel Park, which Cocke, Bowman & York laid out between 1949 and 1951 for John W. McKelvey along the Arroyo Colorado. For McKelvey, York designed the Laurel Park Shopping Center (1952; demolished), the Laurel Park Service Station (1952; demolished), and Sammy's Drive-In (c. 1952; demolished) in the 1100-1300 blocks of South 15th, the Highway 77 Sunshine Strip bypass around downtown Harlingen. These buildings reproduced the troubling phenomenon of scale diminution as they sought to suburbanize space in a modern way.<sup>145</sup>

The enthusiasm with which York took on such commissions as service stations, motels, and shopping centers--the building types of the new suburban landscape--as well as school buildings carried out under rigorous economic constraints stimulated other modern architects in the Valley in the 1950s. In 1949 R. Newell Waters hired a young architectural graduate from Iowa, Merle A. Simpson (1919-1993), as his designer. For Waters, Simpson designed one of the first modern county courthouses built in Texas, the new Hidalgo County Courthouse (1950-54), which replaced the Ayres and Phelps Spanish Mission style courthouse. Waters and Simpson were responsible for the Texas State Tuberculosis Hospital at 592 Rangerville Road in Harlingen (1955), a new Weslaco High School (1955), and La Joya Junior High School, La Joya (1955), all designed in what Simpson humorously described as the modern "stick style," after the thin steel pipe columns that were the icons of modern architecture in the Valley. Waters and Simpson dissolved their association in 1956. Waters collaborated with James Ingraham Clark of Corpus Christi on his last major project before retiring in 1962, the Knapp Memorial Methodist Hospital at 1331 East 6th Street in Weslaco (1957-62).<sup>146</sup>

Another young Harlingen architect who gained recognition for his modern design was Alan Y. Taniguchi (b. 1922), the Valley's only non-Anglo-American architect in independent practice in the 1950s. Born in California, Taniguchi attended the University of California, Berkeley, then worked for several well-known modern architects in San Francisco before moving to Harlingen in 1952. Taniguchi came to the Valley because his parents, who were farmers, had settled in Los Indios after being released from a concentration camp for Japanese-Americans in Crystal City at the end of World War II. Taniguchi's first job in Texas was a small modern house for his parents, built of concrete block, on Highway 281 in Los Indios. It was followed by houses in Harlingen for Walter Clore at 1717 Little Creek, John T. Hartman at 1023 Ferguson Drive, and Lewis Levine at 1627 Sam Houston. Taniguchi designed the Panzer Clinic at 704 South Texas in Weslaco (c. 1957), the Neil T. Madeley House at 1465 North Shore Drive in San Benito, and the House of Mo-Rose Packing Plant at Rancho Viejo (1959; altered). He collaborated with Sam B. Zisman of San Antonio on the Flato Memorial Livestock Pavilion outside Kingsville (1959) and with O'Neil Ford and Max Burkhart, Jr., of Pharr on Pharr-San Juan-Alamo High School (1960). Taniguchi's best-known Valley buildings were designed while he was in partnership with

Charles B. Croft (b. 1927), who moved to Harlingen in 1959 to work with John York. Taniguchi & Croft designed a series of buildings with distinctively-shaped, thin-shell, concrete roofs, including the Casa del Sol and Ben Milam Elementary School at 1215 Rangerville Road (both 1961) in Harlingen.<sup>147</sup>

The thin-shell concrete shapes that were the hallmark of Taniguchi & Croft's most publicized buildings indirectly reflected the influence of contemporary Mexican architecture on U.S. architectural production. Among the engineers and architects who gained international prominence in the 1950s for their work with thin-shell concrete construction was the Spanish émigré engineer Félix Candela of Mexico City. Between 1955 and 1960, Candela collaborated with O'Neil Ford and Richard Colley on two building complexes near Dallas that incorporated dramatically shaped thin-shell roof structures. Candela's influence became visible in the work of Valley architects not because of the Valley's proximity to Mexico, but because the U.S. architectural press published, and thereby legitimized, his work. Valley architects, like other American architects, looked for direction to U.S. centers of cultural production, even when it came to the acknowledgement of Mexican modern architecture.

Alan Taniguchi was the architect of two buildings in Brownsville, a house at 35 Sunset Drive in Los Ebanos (1958) for Buell O'Connor, an official of the Union Carbide Chemical Company, and a house at 414 Calle Retama for the retail merchant Harry Katz (1960; extensively altered). The Katz House was designed by William H. Lambeth, Jr., a former employee of John York's then working for Taniguchi. Located on an elevated site at an important intersection, the Katz House was designed to stand out as a dramatic work of modern architecture.<sup>148</sup>

Río Viejo, the subdivision where the Katz, Whitman, and Cisneros houses were built, represented the suburban utopia of 1950s modern American architecture. Cultivated nature was dominant, house sites were generous, and many had frontage on Town Resaca. The J. Gilbert Philen House at 424 Calle Cenizo (1952), designed by Page, Southerland & Page of Austin, with its low, spreading shape, prominent car-oriented porte-cochère, and sleek contemporary rusticity, spatialized the modern tropical paradise myth that Río Viejo (as its nomenclature implies) sought to evoke.<sup>149</sup> Río Viejo challenged Los Ebanos for social standing. It differed from Los Ebanos in that, from its inception, it was home to Mexican-American families as well as Anglo-Americans, although the latter constituted a definite majority. Its development in 1950 by W. Vernon Walsh's Río Viejo Corporation was politically controversial because the wooded tract that the subdivision occupied, encircled by Town Resaca, had been intended as public parkland.<sup>150</sup>

The dominance of one-story ranch type houses in Río Viejo and their bland architecture denied the subdivision the strong sense of place characteristic of Los Ebanos. Whereas architecturally distinctive houses in Los Ebanos of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s represented the most accomplished expressions of prevailing styles, the architecturally distinctive houses of Río Viejo were exceptions to the prevailing styles. This was also true of Laurel Park, despite the number of houses that John York designed there. Brownsville builders did produce modern houses. The Henry J. Fruhling House at 55 Calle Cenizo (1954) was the builder Frank Persons's version of the Peña House.<sup>151</sup> Even more of an exception was the one-story house for Mr. and Mrs. Herminio Yturria at 164 Calle Cenizo (1954, William C. Baxter with A. H. Woolridge). Its architectural decoration evoked the border brick style.<sup>152</sup> The spatial blandness of Río Viejo complemented its unexceptional architecture. A sense

of amorphousness characterized suburban space, which was weakly formed because the small-scale, one-story buildings of the 1950s did not shape communal space as did more conventional two-story buildings with street-oriented façades. Moreover, buildings of the 1950s were frequently pushed into the background by residential carports or commercial and institutional parking lots. This was true of Brownsville's first architecturally designed shopping center, Palm Village, built by the jeweler Isadore Dorfman at 1552-1556 Palm Boulevard on the site of Snake King's Snakeville (1952-54, A. H. Woolridge). The identification of modern architecture with suburbanization diminished the importance of architecture as a means of shaping space, and making place culturally.<sup>153</sup>

New buildings began to suburbanize downtown Brownsville not because of their modern design but their use of adjacent spaces. Both of Brownsville's banks constructed new downtown buildings in the 1950s. The Pan American Bank built a two-story building at 1034 East Levee (1957, by Walter Wisznia of Corpus Christi; defaced). Although modern in terms of design, the Pan American Bank "modernized" downtown space with the paved surface parking lot that replaced James B. McAllen's house and gardens at the corner of Levee and 11th streets. The First National Bank did the same when it vacated its home in the State National Bank Building and moved to a 7-story building at 835 East Levee in the West End. By providing a surface parking lot at Levee and 8th adjacent to its building, the First National Bank began to chip away at the spatial solidity of old Brownsville, just as the Pan American Bank's parking lot did. Neither bank building was as ambitious architecturally as the Fort Brown Memorial Center or St. Joseph's Academy. Although many Valley banks built new buildings in the 1950s, the only one to achieve exceptional architectural distinction was Cowell & Neuhaus's McAllen State Bank Building.<sup>154</sup>

School complexes were especially effected by the suburbanizing trend. No longer were school buildings conceived as neighborhood public monuments. Beginning in the 1950s, they tended to be built on large open tracts of land where they could spread out in one-story configurations to ensure optimal passive environmental performance. Three junior high schools--Cummings Junior High School at 1800 Cummings Place (1951, Page, Southerland & Page) and twin designs for Stell Junior High School at 1105 Los Ebanos Boulevard and Faulk Junior High School at 2200 Roosevelt Street (both 1956, Walter C. Bowman with Page, Southerland & Page)--conformed to this trend, as did new classroom wings at Villa Maria Academy (1956, Wade, Gibson & Martin of Corpus Christi). Although the first purpose-built classroom building at Texas Southmost College, the Cleve Tandy Liberal Arts Building (1958, Phelps & Dewees & Simmons; extensively altered), was two-stories high, it was one-room deep, served by open-air balcony corridors, and oriented for proper air circulation and daylight diffusion.<sup>155</sup>

Public housing in Brownsville stood out because of its unimaginative modern design. This was due, in part, to regulations governing site planning and unit planning that the U. S. Public Housing Authority enforced on local public housing authorities. It was also due to the Brownsville housing authority's use of the Fort Worth architects Boese & Harkrider, who designed the large Poinsettia (1949-51) and Citrus Gardens (1959-61) complexes.<sup>156</sup> Boese & Harkrider specialized in the design of project style public housing. One-story, flat-roofed row houses faced with glazed masonry blocks marked their contributions to public housing throughout Texas in the 1950s. Only when other architects were employed, as at Los Vecinos at 702 South M Street in Harlingen (1951-53, Cocke, Bowman & York) or the D. N. Leathers Center II in Corpus Christi (1952, Richard S. Colley), did public housing in

south Texas elicit architecture that was distinctive.<sup>157</sup>

Concern for public reaction to modern design did provoke one notable crisis. John York withdrew from the Cocke, Bowman & York partnership after Bartlett Cocke took charge of the firm's job for Valley Baptist Hospital in 1954. York designed the hospital with an all-glass curtain wall, which resulted in contractors' construction bids coming in substantially higher than anticipated. As built, the contemporary style Valley Baptist Hospital and Sams Memorial Children's Center (1952-56; extensively altered) was the work of Walter Bowman. It was comparable architecturally to Page, Southerland & Page's additions to Mercy Hospital in Brownsville (1949-51) and to Wade, Gibson & Martin's Mercy Hospital in Laredo (1954-56). O'Neil Ford and Richard Colley's additions to Mc Allen General Hospital and, ironically, the hospital work of R. Newell Waters's firm--the State Tuberculosis Hospital in Harlingen and Knapp Memorial Methodist Hospital in Weslaco--were much closer in spirit to York's modern style.<sup>158</sup>

Architectural modernism in the 1950s was predicated in part on a rejection of history. Mayor Herbert Stokley, in writing the competition brief for the Fort Brown Memorial Center, enjoined competitors to take account of the border brick style architecture of Brownsville. The competition jurors commended Wiltshire & Fisher's winning design because "...the outstanding characteristic of early Brownsville architecture was direct and straightforward simplicity...In placing this design first, the jury felt that it was following the footsteps of the early Brownsville builders." Such sentiments contrast with John York's statement of architectural principles: "I am not at all in accord with [the] monumentality of stylized period work for any reason whatsoever...Thus our society need not be burdened with heavy, ornate buildings which it cannot afford to destroy."<sup>159</sup>

For Mayor Stokley and the competition jury, a connection to regional architectural tradition could legitimize the use of modern architecture. This sentiment was indicative of a counter-current in Brownsville to the aggressive modernism represented by York. Ruth Young McGonigle, who served on the Fort Brown civic center competition jury, was especially identified with this counter-current. She never sought registration as an architect and was therefore not recognized as one by her male colleagues. Mrs. McGonigle chose to be involved with art rather than the architectural profession. She was a co-founder of the Brownsville Art League and supervised the reconstruction and remodeling of the historic William Neale House when it was relocated to Fort Brown to serve as the league's headquarters (1950). Historic preservation and rehabilitation further distanced Mrs. McGonigle from her modernist colleagues. She was involved in remodeling and decorating Brownsville's best-known restaurant of the 1950s, Landrum's, located in a 19th-century building at 1325 East Elizabeth (demolished), for Earle Brown, Jr.<sup>160</sup>

A building that resembles Mrs. McGonigle's work of the 1950s, but that cannot be securely attributed to her, is All Souls Unitarian Church at 124 Paredes Line Road (c. 1951). It is small and austere. The use of untrimmed logs for supporting columns and the inclusion of an inner patio suggest a romantic regionalist outlook characteristic of Mrs. McGonigle. The church is as unpretentious and non-historical as any of the Valley's celebrated modern buildings, but emphasizes material texture and depth rather than technological bravado. Mrs. McGonigle's design of small country houses for her family at 500 Billy Mitchell Boulevard (1951) and for Josephine Sabrina and Kathyne Cherry on Old Port Isabel Road, and of St. Paul's Episcopal Church at 1626 Taft Street in Victoria Heights (1959-60) used textured Mexican block, as did the Unitarian church. For the Episcopal Day School at 34 North

Coria Street (1959-60), Mrs. McGonigle and A. H. Woolridge employed the finger plan used at Ebony Heights and supported the canopies of the school's sidewalk corridors with steel pipe columns in an unassertive version of the modern "stick" style.<sup>161</sup>

The restoration of the Field-Treviño House at 1305 East Washington as the Stillman House Museum (1959-61, A. H. Woolridge) bracketed the 1950s decade with a second significant act of historic preservation.<sup>162</sup> Herbert L. Stokley, a co-founder of the Brownsville Historical Association, which operated the museum, was instrumental in securing the support of Charles Stillman's descendants, especially his great-grandson Chauncey D. Stillman, to buy the house, rehabilitate it, and install Stillman family furniture and artifacts as its primary objects of display. This regard for the past (even one as creatively mythologized as Stokley's figure of Charles Stillman as father of the city) set Brownsville apart from the Valley towns. Brownsville could not claim an architectural personality as charismatic as John York, but it had a visible past to weigh against the force of modernization, which tended to dismiss history as a culturally formative force.

During the 1950s downtown Brownsville remained the operative center of the city despite the fact that it was not literally at the center of Brownsville but at the south corner of the city. Elizabeth Street and Levee Street were where retail trade, professional offices, financial institutions, and places of entertainment catering to a middle-income clientele were located. Washington Street, Adams Street, and Market Square were where businesses catering to the lower-income trade were located. Businesses on the former streets advertised in English; those on the latter in Spanish.<sup>163</sup> Middle-income businesses extended up Elizabeth Street, out West Elizabeth, and on to Central Boulevard. Boca Chica Boulevard became Brownsville's principal suburban retail street, with trade centers forming where Boca Chica intersected Central, Palm Boulevard, Paredes Line Road, and 14th Street. In the mid-1950s, a major new street, International Boulevard, was cut through the east side of town to connect the Gateway Bridge with Boca Chica Boulevard (and the airport and Port of Brownsville) and relieve congestion on 14th Street. Although it became the major route of entry into Brownsville from Mexico, International Boulevard exhibited no vestige of the civic planning that had guided the improvement of Palm Boulevard in the 1920s.

Two new layers of residential expansion developed. Both were outgrowths of the zones of suburban expansion that occurred in the 1920s. Southmost Road, leading from 14th Street in Victoria Heights, became the axis of new subdivision growth on the east. East Brownsville addition was the largest of these subdivisions. Between it and the colonias of the 1920s were the Lincoln Park and Roosevelt additions and the Citrus Gardens public housing complex. The other zone was a band between Boca Chica Boulevard and Los Ebanos Boulevard, which accommodated the outgrowth from West Brownsville and Los Ebanos. Southmost Road was the axis of Hispanophone suburban growth; Boca Chica was the base line of Anglophone suburban growth. At both ends of Boca Chica were lower-income, predominantly Mexican-American communities: Garden Park and associated subdivisions on the west and the Poinsettia public housing complex on the east, near Old Port Isabel Road. Crestview, developed just north of Boca Chica in 1954 by the homebuilder W. E. Heaner, was Brownsville's representative 1950s brick veneer ranch house subdivision.



During the decade of the 1960s, Brownsville grew far less rapidly than in the 1940s and 1950s. Brownsville's population in 1970 was 52,522, an increase of less than ten percent over 1960. The decline of the cotton growing and shipping market, beginning in the late 1950s, slowed the rate of growth in other Valley towns. The closing of Harlingen Air Base in 1962 had a dramatic impact. Between 1960 and 1970 Harlingen experienced a twenty-three percent loss in population. As a result, it forfeited its standing as the Valley's second most populous town and financial center to McAllen. Technological change effected Brownsville's role as a regional transportation gateway. The Missouri-Pacific Railway discontinued passenger service in 1966, leading to the demolition of the Spanish Mediterranean passenger station on Levee Street. Brownsville, which in 1954 was served by five airlines, was served by one airline in 1970. The only time the city was the subject of a story in a national magazine in the 1960s was an article in *Time* magazine that sarcastically described Brownsville as "a hot, sleepy Mexican border city with almost no hinterland. As near to Panama City as to New York, it is visited each day by one train, two planes, and practically no tourists."<sup>164</sup>

Having begun so expansively, the decade of the 1950s ended on an anticlimactic note for the Valley's modern architects. In 1960, John York left Texas to go to Norman, Oklahoma, where he would teach at the University of Oklahoma until his death. In 1961 Alan Taniguchi left Harlingen to take a position in the school of architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. Taniguchi was quoted in *Fortune* magazine as saying that an architect in south Texas could expect to "live on beans."<sup>165</sup> His observation reflected changes in the building economy that narrowed the client base of Valley architects. As such building types as drive-in restaurants, service stations, convenience stores, and motels increasingly came to be built by national or regional chains rather than local entrepreneurs (or by local entrepreneurs under franchise from chains), local architects lost the opportunity to design these establishments, which were often built to uniform designs to enhance corporate identity. Public agencies (city and county governments, public school boards, housing authorities), locally-owned businesses and financial institutions, and local institutions (clubs and churches) generated most Valley architectural commissions in the 1960s. Rising labor costs meant that the labor-intensive detail that went into making John York's carefully articulated buildings, with their exposed structural members, became increasingly expensive. One result was that architects in most Valley towns ceased to obtain commissions for single-family houses (although McAllen seems to have been an exception).<sup>166</sup>

With the departure of York and Taniguchi, and the retirement of such veteran architects as Newell Waters and A. H. Woolridge, the architectural profession in the Valley came to be dominated by new firms. Walter Bowman and his young partners E. Lester Swanson (b. 1927) and J. W. Hiester (b. 1929) succeeded to York's standing as the Valley's foremost modern architects. Swanson and Hiester had come to the Valley in late 1954 hoping to work with York. Finding that the firm of Cocke, Bowman & York had been dissolved, both went to work for Bowman. In 1958, he made them partners in the firm of Bowman Swanson Hiester and opened a branch office in Brownsville under Hiester's direction. After Walter Bowman's death in 1966, the firm was reorganized as Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland. David M. Wilson (b. 1929), a former employee of York's, opened the firm's branch office in Corpus Christi, while Marvin Boland took over the Brownsville office in 1969 when

Hiester moved to Dallas to open a branch of Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland there. During the 1970s, SHWB opened a branch office in Houston. Territorial expansion outside the Lower Río Grande Valley and professional specialization in the design of schools were ways in which Bowman's firm sought to deal with reduced architectural opportunities in the Valley.<sup>167</sup>

Brownsville's two other architectural practices of the 1960s began in the late 1950s. Gayle D. Wilhite (b. 1922), like the partners in SHWB, was a Texan. He worked in El Paso before coming to Brownsville in 1957. In the early 1960s, Wilhite entered partnership with the structural engineer Lee B. Winans. Robert E. Velten (b. 1929), a former employee of A. H. Woolridge's, began practice in 1959. Velten was a Brownsville native and the son of the general contractor William A. Velten.<sup>168</sup> During the 1950s, J. Edwin Byers in McAllen joined the Valley architecture fraternity. In 1956 Julio Rafael Guerra (b. 1927), a native of McAllen and a graduate of the University of Texas, became the first Mexican-American architect to be registered in the Valley since Frank E. Torres. Guerra worked for, and became the partner of, William C. Baxter of Weslaco. B. McIntosh Summers (b. 1928), a native of Mission, opened his office in McAllen in 1959. David P. Ashcroft (1934-1993), another former employee of John York's, began practice in McAllen with his wife Darlene in 1960. Max Edwin Burkhardt, Jr., (b. 1924 in Anita, Iowa) opened his office in Pharr in the late 1950s. Gene P. Hobart (b. 1928), a native of Los Angeles who had been educated at the University of Oregon and the University of Texas, began practice in Mercedes in 1958, although in the early 1960s he moved his office to Weslaco. Charles B. Croft remained in Harlingen in independent practice after the dissolution of Taniguchi & Croft in 1962 until he returned to Austin in 1966.<sup>169</sup> With two exceptions these architects were native Texans, and all were educated in Texas. Several were born in the Valley. All were nearly the same age and male. They comprised a very homogeneous group, pursuing small-town architectural practices just as the diversified architectural commissions that had sustained such practices began to diminish.

Suburbanization dominated patterns of urban growth and development, as Bowman Swanson Hiester's Brownsville buildings indicate. Early in the decade the firm produced four compact modern houses for Lindhorn-Keith, Inc.'s Sherwood subdivision at 55, 56, 67, and 99 Allan-a-Dale, off Old Port Isabel Road. These houses reflected the influence of John York, not only formally but in the extent to which they made it seem possible to discipline the forces of suburbanization through good design. Along with Jim Hiester's house for his family at 105 Old Alice Road (altered), the Lindhorn-Keith represented an optimism that soon confronted the reality of the residential real estate development industry, which efficiently eliminated the independent professional architect as a costly nonessential, as was happening in other sectors of the consumer-oriented building economy. Bowman Swanson Hiester's house for Dr. Earle B. Griffey at 1144 Belthair was the only other house they designed in Brownsville in the 1960s. Two Catholic schools--Our Lady of Guadalupe School at 1244 Lincoln Boulevard (c. 1962) and Incarnate Word School (1965), which left the Convent of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament for Villa Maria--were handsome examples of the use of sun-shading elements as architecture. Our Lady of Guadalupe School displayed the most refined treatment of the *brise soleil* of any Valley building.

Bowman Swanson Hiester's Hospital Shopping Center at 780 Central Boulevard (1960), across from Mercy Hospital, and the Charles Ferguson Motor Company at 2101 Central Boulevard sought, like the Lindhorn-Keith houses, to redeem suburbanization through good

design. A similar goal was implicit in the firm's professional buildings, such as the Bowman Swanson Hiester studio at 1801 Central Boulevard (1958) and the Corrigan Dispatch Company Building at 735 International Boulevard. Yet the deftly articulated surfaces of these buildings could not compete with the scale of their settings, adjacent to parking lots or facing arterial thoroughfares, although it was still possible to do so in downtown storefront buildings, such as Bowman Swanson Hiester's design for the façade of The Popular at 1240 East Elizabeth. Bowman Swanson Hiester's new building for the Brownsville Savings & Loan Association at East Levee and Seventh streets (1962) stood out by virtue of its formal assertiveness. Its flared columns supported a flat roof plate that extended outward to shade walls of glass. The Brownsville Savings & Loan Building exemplified the pavilion building type, which sought to reclaim some of the spatial authority that modern architects had sacrificed in the 1950s. It did so by being free-standing, so that even when built downtown (or near downtown, as the Brownsville Savings & Loan Building was), it suburbanized urban space architecturally by standing free of the rows of continuous storefront buildings and asserting individuality. This formula worked more successfully at Bowman Swanson Hiester's National Bank of Commerce Building, built on an open site surrounded by parking at 2300 Boca Chica Boulevard (1965).

The pavilion building type was gracefully essayed in the Texas Southmost College Library and Student Center (1966, 1968; defaced), on May Road across from the Fort Brown Memorial Center. Bowman Swanson Hiester collaborated with Wilhite & Winans on this pair of buildings and a shared courtyard. The scalloped roof shapes, slender, closely-spaced columns, and symmetrical composition of these buildings gave them a weightier presence and more decorative appearance than would have seemed appropriate in the 1950s. By using the same material and color combination visible in the library and student center for the Rusteberg Applied Arts Building (1968) and Eidman Hall for Sciences and Mathematics (1971), Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland and Wilhite & Winans sought to establish an identifiable campus architecture. But because Texas Southmost College lacked a campus plan, these buildings tended to float in a suburbanized field of vacant space (and parking lots) rather than cohere to shape a distinct place.

Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland collaborated with Wilhite & Winans and Robert E. Velten on the design of a new Brownsville High School at 2615 Price Road (1965-67, now Homer Hanna High School). Brownsville High School was ingeniously organized in a hierarchical cluster of 12-sided classroom pavilions, geometrically interlocked with a central entrance foyer, cafeteria, and gymnasium. Brownsville Associated Architects (as the collaboration was known) used symmetrically arrayed interior "malls" to order the large complex spatially, abandoning the thin finger plans of the 1950s for a thicker, more compact organization that could be efficiently air-conditioned. As was the case with its predecessors--the Public School in Washington Square and the two high schools on Palm Boulevard--the 1967 high school was built on the extreme north edge of town, close to new, upper-middle-income residential neighborhoods. It challenged other new Valley high schools in the sort of architectural competition that had occurred since the 1910s. Harlingen's new High School (1958, by Smythe & Smythe of Corpus Christi with Walter C. Bowman) was upstaged by Zeb Rike's McAllen High School (1960), the first centrally air-conditioned public school in the Valley. Both of these schools were built on large, open, edge-of-town sites near the "good" north-side subdivisions. Brownsville's minimally-windowed, centrally air-conditioned high school rose to the challenge of this inter-city rivalry. Yet though the application of

modern environmental technology led to thick shapes and symmetrical organization, Brownsville High School was not a civic monument like its predecessors on Palm Boulevard. With its one-story configuration, huge site, and multiple surface parking lots, it proclaimed the triumph of suburbanization.

The work of Robert E. Velten and Wilhite & Winans shared similarities with Bowman Swanson Hiester's modern architecture. Velten's Darling-Mouser Funeral Home at 945 Palm Boulevard (1964) exhibited the serrated roof profiles that animated new Valley buildings in the early and mid-1960s. His Camille Playhouse in Ringgold Park (1965), built by the Sams Foundation in memory of Camille Sams Lightner, was a modest, economical, but conscientiously designed cultural building. Its construction of concrete masonry units complemented Bowman Swanson Hiester's park buildings. Gayle Wilhite was the foremost church architect in Brownsville in the 1960s. Wilhite & Winans designed Faith Presbyterian Church at 1154 Los Ebanos Road, Holy Family Catholic Church at 2355 East Tyler Street (1961), Trinity Lutheran Church at 900 Boca Chica Boulevard (1965), the Bishop Adolph Marx Newman Center at Texas Southmost College (1966), and the school and parish hall of St. Mary's Catholic Church at 1914 Barnard Road (1970). Of these, Holy Family Church stands out because it is located in Bella Vista addition. Although it was similar architecturally to Faith Presbyterian and Trinity Lutheran, it appeared much more urban because it was built in a densely occupied neighborhood rather than a green field site along a suburban arterial street, separated from its neighbors by open lawns and parking lots.

Wilhite & Winans frequently employed the pavilion building type, with flat roofs, thick fascias, and brick-faced walls divided rhythmically by vertical seams. The Elks Lodge complex on Coffeepoint Road, a new Brownsville Chamber of Commerce Building at 1600 Elizabeth Street (1966), North Towne Plaza Professional Center at 1301 Los Ebanos Boulevard (1969), and the circular, domed International Friendship Pavilion at 121 Taylor Drive (1970; demolished), across Elizabeth Street from the Chamber of Commerce Building, were examples. Wilhite & Winans designed two major public buildings, the 14-story Villa del Sol apartment building for the Housing Authority of the City of Brownsville at 700 East St. Charles Street (1971) and the new Río Grande Valley International Airport terminal (1971).<sup>170</sup> Both consisted of an exposed frame of reinforced concrete infilled with panels of brick or glass. The airport terminal superseded the much-modified 1929 Spanish Mediterranean terminal. The Villa del Sol was built on the site of the demolished Incarnate Word Convent in the West End. It surpassed the Hotel El Jardín as Brownsville's tallest building.

Brownsville's modern buildings of the 1960s bespeak the narrowing of professional opportunities that architects confronted. They tended to be built on open sites along major streets, often adjacent to surface parking lots. Through the 1960s, buildings became more internalized, especially as complete reliance on central air-conditioning made it feasible to substitute fixed glass for operable windows in non-residential buildings. After the early 1960s modern architects turned to such devices as shaped openings to animate the exteriors of free-standing, flat-roofed, box-like buildings. The high-profile, thin shell concrete roofs of the early and mid-1960s (which succumbed to the rising cost of labor necessary to construct the formwork for casting the concrete) had overcome modernist inhibitions about formal exuberance, because their shapes could be justified as structural. This freed modern architects to take the next step and incorporate decorative, nonstructural shapes into the designs of their buildings. In the Valley, arch configurations summoned associations with

"Spanish" architecture, providing a circuitous path for reintroducing historical imagery to modern architecture. The Mission-born Houston architect Kenneth E. Bentsen (b. 1926) revived memories of the border brick style in the R. Dan Winn House at 1500 Iris in McAllen (1965), in which arched openings in a planar brick wall led into a central patio.<sup>171</sup> Merle A. Simpson reiterated this modern adaptation of the border brick style in the flat-roofed pavilion-like house he designed for Bentsen's cousin, Calvin R. Bentsen (1969), at 500 East Jackson Avenue in McAllen. Wilhite & Winans's parish complex for St. Mary's Catholic Church employed arched openings as did Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland's Social Security Building at 405 East Levee Street (1969), which incorporated brick pilasters in a modern paraphrase of the border brick style. The small office building also incorporated a parking lot on what had been the site of Joseph Lucius and Robert Stillman's house.

A restive attitude toward the suburbanized blandness of contemporary design was especially evident in Brownsville's residential architecture. Ruth Young McGonigle designed houses at 225 Sunset Drive in Los Ebanos for Earle Brown, Jr., and A. E. Young (c. 1960) and at 244 Calle Cenizo in Río Viejo for Mr. and Mrs. J. Kendall Hert (c. 1963), the two most important works of her career, in homage to the border brick style. Although the Brown-Young House could be interpreted as a modern paraphrase of the border brick style, Mrs. McGonigle adapted not only the architectural decor but the typology of the *casa terrada* for the Hert House, even though it was a freestanding house on a landscaped suburban lot. The J. Antonio Ortiz House at 344 Calle Cenizo (1965, Bill Burns of Harlingen, designer) was a ranch type house encrusted with stone and dark-stained wood trim, and faced with textured adobe brick to give it an archaic rather than up-to-date appearance. Other expensive houses employed historic imagery. The Martín E. García House at 155 Calle Anacua in Río Viejo (c. 1960, Edward J. Romieniec & Associates of Harlingen, architects) was a two-story Southern plantation type house incorporating architectural artifacts from the house of García's great-grandfather, don Francisco Yturria. Mr. and Mrs. Frank D. Yturria built another of the few two-story houses in Río Viejo at 54 Calle Cenizo (c. 1960). Mary Altman Yturria worked with the Harlingen designer Homer Elizondo to produce a house with overtones of New Orleans, especially its cast iron decoration. Like Ruth McGonigle, Elizondo was not a licensed architect. But as a professional house designer who worked extensively for the Gloor Lumber & Supply Company in Harlingen and Brownsville, he exerted much more impact on house design in Harlingen and Brownsville in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s than any registered architect. Jimmie Villegas, Jr., an architect who worked for Wilhite & Winans, designed one of the few modern houses built in Brownsville after the early 1960s at 308 Lindale Road for his family. The flat roofs and paneled wall construction of the Villegas House were reminiscent of William H. Lambeth's and J. W. Hiester's work.<sup>172</sup>

One of the last major non-corporate motels built in Brownsville, the Fort Brown Motor Hotel and Apartments at 1900 East Elizabeth Street on the island in Fort Brown Resaca (1962, William F. Wortham, Jr., & Associates of Houston, architects), did not reject modernism so much as it stressed the exotic—embodied in an extensive use of black volcanic rock veneer—over the modern. The Fort Brown represented a tendency that modern purists labeled "kitsch" (a term connoting grotesqueness, exaggeration, and bad taste) because it symbolized the modern tropical paradise myth with styling themes theatrically presented in a scenographic manner rather than by integrating environmentally responsive, articulately detailed modern buildings with a subtropical landscape. Predating the Fort Brown as an

example of this styling approach was La Posada Motor Hotel, facing Plaza San Agustín in downtown Laredo (1961, Wallace B. Thomas). La Posada incorporated an old building, the former Laredo High School (1917), but wrapped it in new, neo-Mission style construction to establish its Mexican-convent-turned-into-a-luxury-motel theme.<sup>173</sup>

Stylistic kitsch was adopted as an architectural antidote to blandness, which was blamed on modern architecture. A number of significant modern buildings constructed in Matamoros in the 1960s suggest that the suburbanization of urban space (which the stylistically themed American buildings accepted uncritically) played a more significant role in creating a sense of blandness and placelessness than modern architecture. During the administration of President Adolfo López Mateos, the Mexican government undertook the Programa Nacional Fronterizo to reshape the image of its northern border cities and improve public services and utilities. Matamoros was chosen as the demonstration city in Tamaulipas and one of the most outstanding modern architects in Mexico, Mario Pani of Mexico City, was retained to prepare a master plan for the city of Matamoros and design specific PRONAF buildings in Matamoros, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. What distinguished Pani's Matamoros buildings from Brownsville's modern architecture of the 1960s was their confident urbanity.<sup>174</sup>

Pani's designed the Puerta México customs and immigration complex (1961-63) at the Gateway Bridge, a provocatively shaped building that attracted recognition not only in the U.S. architectural press but in Europe. Pani based the design of the customs building on the 1928 Gateway Bridge (replaced in 1970), spatializing the process of arrival and departure with a modern automotive gateway that drew its architectural imagery from bridge engineering. Although he designed for the car in a spatially dramatic way, Pani integrated the complex with Avenida Alvaro Obregón and the Colonia Jardín, providing a ceremonial entrance plaza for those walking across the bridge as well as green space and a retail and restaurant building that served as an elevated platform for viewing the complex. Modern imagery based on a local landmark (the Gateway Bridge), integration into the urban context, and the provision of generous, designed, public pedestrian spaces enabled Pani to produce a dramatic modern building that reinforced its urban setting. Pani shaped architecture to heighten the experience of movement by car. Yet the Puerta México was fundamentally urban rather than suburban.<sup>175</sup>

The Puerta México also illustrates contrasting national attitudes toward ceremonial architecture and public space. The U.S. Border Station at the Gateway Bridge (1958-60; altered) was one of the last Valley works of John G. York (with Olin Boese of Fort Worth). York's initial design was for a building that would have spanned the lanes of traffic, as Pani's did. Ramps were to bring pedestrians from bridge level up through the complex. The General Services Administration rejected the design as too expensive. York and Boese's Border Station, as built, was crisply detailed but perfunctory, spatializing bureaucratic regimen rather than national pride and welcome.<sup>176</sup>

Pani's firm designed the series of retail shops with parking underneath at the bend of Alvaro Obregón and planned the civic center at the adjacent Estero Cuarteles site. The Centro Artesanal (1965, now the Centro Cultural Matamoros), the first component of the civic center complex to be built, was quite different in design from Pani's buildings, as was the Holiday Inn at Alvaro Obregón 249 (1969, now the Gran Hotel Residencial). Both reaffirmed through their orientation to the street (and in the public spaces of the Centro Artesanal that open to the street) the urban nature of their architecture. This was visible in

the Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social medical complex at Calle 6a between Juárez and Mina (1962), with its lively *brise soleil*, and in the most spectacular modern house in the Colonia Jardín, built by Sergio Treviño García at Alvaro Obregón 58 (c. 1965).<sup>177</sup> In Mexico, modern architecture did not function as an instrument of spatial suburbanization in the 1950s and 1960s, as it did in the U.S. Mexican modern architecture was urban architecture.

Historic preservation, rather than architecture, emerged at the end of the 1960s as a means of arresting the suburbanization of the city. In Brownsville, the destruction of 19th-century landmarks, which had occurred regularly since the 1920s, finally encountered resistance. The demolition of the Convent of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament by the Housing Authority of the City of Brownsville led to the formation of an ad-hoc preservation organization in 1968 by Anatole Senkevitch, Jr., an intern architect working for Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland whose parents, Russian immigrants, had settled in Brownsville. Although the group, initially called the Committee to Preserve the Convent and then the South Texas Heritage Foundation, was unable to prevent demolition by the Housing Authority in 1969, it marked the beginning of citizen action to identify and preserve Brownsville's architectural-historical patrimony.<sup>178</sup>

Despite slow population growth in the 1960s, Brownsville expanded to the north and southeast. By 1970, subdivision development had leap-frogged north of Los Ebanos Boulevard to Coffeeport Road. Palo Verde, near the intersection of Paredes Line and Coffeeport Road, and the *casitas* that Ruth Young McGonigle designed for the Valley Inn and Country Club, after it bought the Brownsville Country Club, projected new elite housing  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -miles north of downtown. The completion of the U.S. 83-77 Expressway in the mid 1960s stimulated suburban commercial development in this area, as well as residential real estate development. The downtown retail district remained intact, but its future as a shopping district exclusively for Mexican cross-over clientele became clearer as the first generation of freeway-side businesses began to open along the Expressway. The Expressway challenged not only the downtown business district but Central Boulevard as well. The transformation of El Rancho Grande Hotel into an apartment complex in 1971 occurred because changing patterns of inner-city transportation led to the construction of newer, chain motels on the Expressway.

By the late 1960s, large scale new development in Brownsville internalized the suburban model. E. E. Isaac and A. J. Carnesi's 638-acre Amigoland, located on the former flood plain southeast of the original townsite, was not conceived as an extension of downtown Brownsville, but as its suburban replacement. Amigoland was subdivided into large-acreage tracts intended to accommodate spatially discreet uses and extensive surface parking. These tracts were served by wide, multilaned thoroughfares. Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland designed a number of distinctive buildings for the development corporation, but only the administration building on Mexico Street was built (1972). Properties were developed instead with buildings designed by each owner's architect. Rather than projecting a design theme (as anticipated by SHWB's administration building), the widely dispersed buildings in Amigoland projected themes of corporate identity, or none at all.<sup>179</sup>

Although built in the center of the city, rather than its suburban outskirts, the Gladys Porter Zoo (1971) suburbanized urban space by focusing on its thematically conceived internal environment and turning a blank side to its surroundings, especially along East 6th Street. The image of the Gladys Porter Zoo was conveyed by subtropical vegetation rather

than by architecture, which was designed to suggest natural habitat settings. The Gladys Porter Zoo was built by Gladys Sams Porter and the Earl C. Sams Foundation adjacent to Ringgold Park (which was re-named Dean Porter Park in memory of Mrs. Porter's husband). The City of Brownsville used its power of eminent domain to clear a 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-block, low-income Mexican-American neighborhood to provide a 26-acre site for the zoo.<sup>180</sup>

Replacing the city, as Amigoland sought to do, or displacing and ignoring it, as the Gladys Porter Zoo did, were spatial strategies for suburbanizing Brownsville. Asserting spatial control through isolation and insulation complemented the creation of internalized environments, a phenomenon that the enclosed, centrally air-conditioned shopping mall came to stand for in the 1970s. Architecture was reduced to providing neutral, environmentally engineered containers. The symbolic role of architecture, not only of traditional architecture but of modern architecture, was taken over by landscape installations and kitsch styling themes, which could be more economically changed to reflect succeeding trends. Brownsville garden apartment complexes of the 1960s especially reflected the tendency to decorate neutral containers with stereotypical thematic components, of which the mansard roof was a period favorite.

The Gladys Porter Zoo was promoted as a magnet for attracting tourists (as Amigoland might have been had its centerpiece, an 83-acre recreational theme park with 73 acres of parking, been built). The economics of tourism had been linked with development and building in the Lower Río Grande Valley since 1904. At the end of the 1960s, a new landscape of tourism began to emerge on South Padre Island that reproduced the suburbanizing model of late 20th-century American urban development to an exceptional degree. The Queen Isabella Causeway (1954) opened South Padre Island to easy access by car. Yet until the late 1960s South Padre Island was lightly developed with small houses and beach-front motels, amid which Gayle D. Wilhite's Cameron County Park Pavilion (c. 1960) stood out as a work of modern architecture.<sup>181</sup> The impact of Hurricane Beulah in 1967, dedication of the Padre Island National Seashore in 1968, and completion of a new, multilaned causeway in 1974 set the stage for development that transformed the south end of the island after 1970. Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland designed some of the early apartment and hotel complexes involved in this transformation, such as La Playa Apartments and the eight-story Padre South. Several of the partners in the architecture firm invested in the ambitious 500-acre Bahía Mar development, which stretched from the Gulf to the Laguna Madre.<sup>182</sup>

South Padre Island, incorporated as a city in 1973, is the purest expression of the suburban condition--and the landscape of tourism--in far south Texas. It is accessible primarily by a vehicular bridge that does not accommodate pedestrians and therefore functions as a social filter. Its scale was totally determined by the automobile. Although the Gulf beach is public and a pedestrian precinct, public access is limited because of restricted parking and because real estate facing the beach is in private ownership. South Padre Island spatializes the sub-urban utopia of American city development of the second half of the 20th century. Its attractiveness as a resort for wealthy Mexicans and as a place of year-round residence stems as much from the sense of security its layers of natural and artificial insularity impose as from its environmental character. Other real estate developments of the 1970s, notably Rancho Viejo outside Olmito and Palm Valley adjacent to Harlingen, successfully reproduced the insular enclave model of South Padre Island to achieve landscapes of socially filtered and controlled affluence.



The types of buildings and the architectural trends visible in Brownsville effected other Valley cities in the 1960s. Schools remained important building types. Bowman Swanson Hiester exhibited thin shell concrete vaults at Coakley Junior High School at 1406 South 6th Street in Harlingen (1962) and hyperbolic paraboloid "umbrellas" at Los Fresnos High School in Los Fresnos (c. 1962).<sup>183</sup> The design for Brownsville High School became a prototype for the firm, as could be seen at Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland's West Oso High School in Corpus Christi (1969) and Alice High School in Alice (1970). David Ashcroft moved from shaped building components to shaped buildings. His design for the slope-walled Dunlap Memorial Library in La Feria brought him the commission to design the similar Whipple Memorial Library in Los Fresnos.<sup>184</sup>

Valley banks abandoned their architectural conservatism in the 1960s in favor of pavilion type buildings, often incorporating extensive use of glass. Banking rivalry encouraged distinctive design as the McAllen banker V. Frank Neuhaus and his competitors, Lloyd M. Bentsen and Elmer Bentsen, retained their relatives to design new bank buildings. Neuhaus's cousins were the Houston architects Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr., and J. Victor Neuhaus III. In addition to the McAllen State Bank Building, Hugo Neuhaus designed the First State Bank & Trust Company Building at 900 Conway Avenue in Mission (1964). J. V. Neuhaus's firm, Neuhaus & Taylor, was responsible for the glass-walled Citizens State Bank Building in Donna (1961). Lloyd Bentsen's son, Kenneth Bentsen, designed the First National Bank Building at 1101 Conway Avenue in Mission (1964) and--his most publicized Valley building--the First National Bank Building at 100 West Cano Avenue in Edinburg (1964).<sup>185</sup>

Harlingen's economic recovery after the middle 1960s was signaled by the construction of a new Harlingen National Bank Building at 115 East Van Buren Street (1966), a bulky pavilion decorated with elongated arch shapes designed by the St. Louis-based Bank Building Corporation of America, and by Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland's Harlingen International Airport terminal (1970; extensively altered). Multistory housing for specialized clients also appeared. William C. Baxter and Julio R. Guerra's major project of the 1960s was John Knox Village at 1300 South Border Avenue in Weslaco, a four-story apartment building for the elderly. Merle A. Simpson designed the three-story Fairway Apartments at 600 East Wichita Avenue for William A. Wilson, who earlier had built the Fairway Motor Hotel. At the end of the 1960s, Pan American University initiated a major program of campus construction. Neuhaus & Taylor's multistory dormitory (1970) was one of the first buildings completed. Kenneth Bentsen Associates established the campus's architectural identity in a series of new buildings. Angled wall planes of brick and liberal use of arch shapes were hallmarks of Bentsen's Science Building (1970) and Fine Arts Building (1971).<sup>186</sup> Bentsen drew on the formal vocabulary of buildings then being designed in India and Bangladesh by the Philadelphia architect Louis I. Kahn to reintroduce the arch as a component of modern building complexes. In this instance, it was the East Coast of the U.S., rather than California, that supplied the architectural imagery for a renewed evocation of the exotic tropical paradise mytheme.

Stylistic oscillation in American architecture in the 1960s represented a search for ways to relate modern architecture more securely to the places where it was built. Because architects failed to comprehend that the sub-urban conditions most new buildings involved were the cause of urban spatial lassitude, their substitutions of one formal approach for another did not reverse this process. Traffic planning and zoning codes tended to rigidly institutionalize suburban spatiality in the form of building setback requirements, off-street

parking requirements, and wide thoroughfare streets supporting enclave-type developments that broke with the continuous urban street grid, so that urban alternatives to sub-urbanity became illegal. Matamoros, Reynosa, Camargo, Mier, and Nuevo Laredo were cities where modern buildings contributed to strongly shaped city form. Modern architects in the Lower Río Grande Valley seem not to have grasped the possibility that their neighboring cities represented urban alternatives, in part because to most Valley architects they were probably seen as "foreign" and therefore not applicable. The models to which Valley architects responded were those legitimized by the American architectural press, as was true of most American architects. Although the Texas Society of Architects sponsored cross-border conferences with Mexican architects and planning officials in the 1960s, it was rarely the sense of these efforts that (Anglo-) Americans had anything to learn from Mexico.<sup>187</sup> Modern architecture, because it did not engage ethnocultural issues stylistically, masked the extent to which professionally-designed architecture, irrespective of style, spatially expressed the priorities of the dominant cultural order.

## Conclusion

Buildings spatially embody and preserve the historical cycles of Brownsville and the Lower Río Grande Valley in the 20th century. Professionally designed architecture from the 1900s through the 1970s was, almost exclusively, the province of the Valley's Anglo-American minority. Therefore, the Valley's 20th-century architecture proclaims by omission the marginalization of Mexican border culture during the seven decades of Anglo-American hegemony. The cultural legacy of this architecture is inseparable from issues of conflict and exclusion. Architecture relates much more strongly to the mainstream of U.S. architectural culture during the 20th century than to local cultural awareness, even when it appropriated images--whether Spanish, or regional, or modern--intended to have local significance.

Yet, as the historian and critic Mike Davis observed of Spanish Mediterranean style architecture in southern California, it was "ersatz history which, through its comprehensive incorporation into landscape and consumption, became an actual historical stratum in the culture of Los Angeles."<sup>188</sup> Brownsville, and the other towns and cities of the Valley, derive considerable cultural significance from their 20th-century architectural legacies. These legacies deserve much fuller study, and preservation. That a landmark of national significance such as Richard Neutra's Kraigher House in Brownsville is in near ruinous condition,<sup>189</sup> that two of McAllen's three greatest works of modern architecture have been either remodeled beyond recognition (the McAllen State Bank Building) or demolished (the Fairway Motor Hotel), that such regionally important architects as John G. York, R. Newell Waters, and Frank E. Torres are virtually unknown in their own communities bespeak a critical failure of mainstream Valley culture: its amnesia-like inability to comprehend the significance of and hold onto its own history, even when, as in the 1950s, this resulted in the production of modern architecture of such inventiveness that, for the only time in the Valley's history, it became the subject of national attention.<sup>190</sup>

Brownsville, in the 1960s and 1970s, slowly came to terms with its 19th-century architectural legacy and made successful efforts to preserve it. At the end of the 20th century, it is time for Brownsville and the cities of the Lower Río Grande Valley to recognize that architecture has been the most important 20th-century art form through which local culture was expressed. The folklore research of Américo Paredes, his long-unpublished

novel *George Washington Gómez*, the moving novel *Rainbow's End* by Genaro González of McAllen (1988), and Carmen Lomas Garza's paintings of the rituals of domestic life in Kingsville in the 1950s and 1960s bring into focus the 20th-century Mexican border culture that Anglo-Americans could not, or would not, acknowledge and respect. This culture is complemented by architecture that consistently achieved levels of more-than-provincial interest, in part because it was engaged in a complicated dialectical relationship with its conflicted cultural setting.

## Anchorage Foundation of Texas

### Endnotes

1. A surge in new construction occurred in Texas' major cities in the years 1909 to 1914.
2. David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987, pp. 114, 131, 159.
3. "New School at Brownsville," *Southern Messenger*, 12 September 1907; "School Blessed at Brownsville," *Southern Messenger*, 1 October 1908.
4. Karen J. Weitze, *California's Mission Revival*, Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1984.
5. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, London and New York: Verso, 1990, pp. 26-27. The ethnocentric substitution of "Spanish" for Mexican by Anglo-Americans was well established by the time of the Mexican War of 1846-48. Américo Paredes comments on this distinction in *George Washington Gómez*, Houston: Arte Público Press, 1990, p. 45.
6. "Construction and Building," *Commercial Recorder* (hereafter *CR*), 3 February 1909.
7. *CR*, 7 March 1911, 21 March 1911; Mario L. Sánchez, editor, *A Shared Experience: The History, Architecture, and Historic Designations of the Lower Río Grande Heritage Corridor*, Austin: Los Caminos del Río Heritage Project and the Texas Historical Commission, 1991, pp. 108-109; "Opening the Last Frontier: An Autobiography of Sam Robertson (1867-1938)," in Don Clifford and Rita Krausse, editors, *A Blast From the Past!*, Brownsville: Brownsville Historical Association, 1996, volume 1, pp. 91-95. Robertson and his co-developers balanced Spanish architecture and nomenclature with assertions of Anglo-Texan cultural identity. North-south streets were named for Anglo-American heroes of the Texas Revolution; east-west streets for the developers themselves.
8. *CR*, 10 March 1909, 3 June 1909, 20 November 1909, 29 September 1911, 26 June 1912, 23 April 1912. "Santa Gertrudis Ranch--The Home of Mrs. H. M. King," *Architectural Record*, 49(July 1916), pp. 76-83.
9. *CR*, 8 February 1912, 7 March 1912; "Municipal Building Completed," *Galveston Daily News*, 6 October 1912.
10. There are photographs of both houses in the Robert Runyon Collection at the Barker Texas History Center, the University of Texas at Austin. The *Commercial Recorder* carried a notice on 9 April 1910 that Martin Hanson, Jr., had been awarded a construction contract on a two-story brick business building designed by M. E. Tracy for Burt E. Hinkley. It is not clear whether this was the house on St. Charles Street or another building.

11. CR, 17 September 1910, 6 October 1910, 2 March 1912.

12. "Well Paved Streets and Modern Bungalows Tell Significant Story of San Benito's Faith in Future," *Houston Post*, 1 March 1922; and the Industrial and Business Edition of the *Mission Times*, 27 May 1921, vertical file of Texas and Local History Department, Houston Public Library, which contains photographs of the J. G. Decker and Fred Guesin houses. The Robert Runyon Collection at the University of Texas at Austin contains a photograph of a spacious (unidentified) bungalow in Mc Allen. Eleanor Mortensen, *Weslaco, Texas, Fifty Years of Growth and Progress, 1919-1969*, Weslaco: privately printed, 1969, p. 18.

13. Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, Austin: Eakin Press, 1991, pp. 192-193; "New Street Car System," *Galveston Daily News*, 31 December 1911; "Brownsville is Prosperous," *Galveston Daily News*, 12 May 1912.

14. "International Bridge Finished" and "Bridge Open for General Traffic," in Clifford and Krausse, *A Blast From the Past!*, volume 2, pp. 79-80.

15. CR, 9 April 1910, 28 October 1910, 31 October 1910; "The Largest Building in Brownsville, Texas, Owned by Mrs. Bollack," *Houston Daily Post*, 17 October 1910.

16. "Brownsville Works on a New Bank Building," *Galveston Daily News*, 8 October 1911; "Brownsville Improvements," *Galveston Daily News*, 26 November 1911; "Brownsville Improvements," *Galveston Daily News*, 14 April 1912; "Brownsville is Prosperous," *Galveston Daily News*, 12 May 1912; CR, 6 July 1910, 15 March 1911, 25 July 1911, 2 November 1911.

17. "The New Courthouse to be Built in Brownsville," *Houston Daily Post*, 14 January 1912; "Activity at Brownsville," *Houston Daily Post*, 8 June 1912; CR, 26 October 1911, 14 May 1912, 31 July 1912; "New Catholic Church," *Galveston Daily News*, 14 April 1912; "Brownsville's New Church," *Galveston Daily News*, 2 February 1913; CR, 20 April 1912.

18. "A New Courthouse for Kleberg County," *Houston Daily Post*, 5 July 1914; CR, 26 October 1911; 10 January 1912; 5 April 1912; 12 January 1914.

19. Montejano, pp. 140-142.

20. St. Peter's Catholic Church in Laredo, dedicated in 1898, was the first English-language parish erected in one of the border towns.

21. Map Records of Cameron County.

22. Montejano, p. 167.

23. Frank C. Pierce, *A Brief History of the Lower Río Grande Valley*, Cleveland: The Arthur A. Clark Company, 1917, p. 142; CR, 17 June 1911.

24. Montejano, p. 160.

25. Genaro González, lecture to The Houston Seminar, 1 May 1992.

26. Rolando Hinojosa Smith, "Introduction," in Paredes, *George Washington Gómez*, p. 5.

27. Frank W. Johnson and Eugene C. Barker, editors, *A History of Texas and Texans*, Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1914, volume 5, pp. 2394-95.

28. Sánchez, *A Shared Experience*, p. 108; "Third Prize Class A--For Large Residence Planned by a Reader of the 'A.C.&B.': Magnificent House at San Antonio, Texas, Designed by B. Torres, Contractor and Builder, Brownsville, Texas," *American Carpenter and Builder*, 14(March 1913), pp. 48-49.

29. Texas State Library, Austin.

30. The *Commercial Recorder* was a San Antonio publication that regularly carried contractors' bid notices between 1909 and 1914.

31. *Census of 1910*, Cameron County, Texas. According to the city records of Pharr, John Robert Bales of McAllen was engineer in charge of the First National Bank Building, subsequently Pharr's city hall (Pete Sepúlveda, Jr., City Manager, to author, 25 August 1992). There is a Bales Road in south McAllen. Whether J. R. Bales was a man or a woman (or whether there were two Baleses with the same initials) remains to be determined.

32. CR, 15 February 1911, 24 March 1911, 21 April 1911, 28 April 1911. "Country Club to be Erected at Brownsville," *Houston Daily Post*, 27 March 1911; "Brownsville Country Club," *Galveston Daily News*, 12 November 1911.

33. CR, 23 April 1910.

34. CR, 23 July 1909, 20 November 1909, 25 April 1911, 10 May 1911, 24 November 1911, 14 December 1911, 20 May 1912.

35. Robert Runyon Collection. Written descriptions of Brownsville from this period emphasize the mixture of old and new that Runyon's photographs depict. The Brownsville Historical Association reprinted excerpts from the memoirs of Edward Leuffer Nevin Glass, who was stationed at Fort Brown in 1914-15. Glass wrote that "Elizabeth Street was the main avenue...[Brownsville] had the usual small town emporia, hunch rooms, saddle shops, one movie house, and at least two saloons...The residential district was all round about, but growing on Elizabeth Street way on the road to the Country Club. All two-storied houses were old-fashioned, of brick with French windows, grill work, and tightly shuttered per the Mexican custom." "The Brownsville Historical Association Newsletter," January-February 1990.

36. Cornerstones on Brownsville Junior High School and the Maltby Building identify Waller as architect. Waller was an obscure but prolific architect who worked extensively in the Lower Río Grande Valley after moving to San Antonio from Fort Worth. He was active in McAllen, where he designed McAllen High School (1917; demolished) and the First State Bank Building (1918; demolished). Waller was not only the architect but the developer of the Casa de Palmas, according to an undated clipping (c. 1978) from the *McAllen Monitor*, "Historic McAllen Hotel Dates Back to Valley Pioneer Days," supplied by Brad H. Smith and Dr. Robert Norton, 17 May 1993. *Texas General Contractors Association Monthly Bulletin* (hereafter *TGCAMB*), May 1925, p. 14.

37. "Begin Remodeling Big Valley Hotel," *Houston Post*, 24 February 1924; *TGCAMB*, January 1924, p. 20; "Building is Picking Up in the Valley," *Houston Post*, 29 June 1924; *TGCAMB*, June 1924, p. 18.

38. "Brownsville to Get New Station," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 25 November 1925; "Brownsville's Historic Boardwalk Will Soon Be Only a Memory to People," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 24 January 1926; "Boardwalk in Brownsville is Dismantled," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 21 July 1926; "Opening Celebration for New Hotel, Chamber of Commerce Building, and Railway Station is Being Planned," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 31 July 1926; "Hotel El Jardín at Brownsville," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 1 August 1926; "New Brownsville Chamber of Commerce," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 10 October 1926; "Row of Buildings Nearing completion," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 26 November 1926; "Border Cities Join Hands in Festival," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 24 April 1927; *TGCAMB*, March 1925, p. 21; July 1925, p. 20; September 1925, p. 15; October 1925, p. 30; May 1926, p. 13; June 1926, p. 21; August 1926, p. 13. The Kelwood Company was an architecture, construction, and financing firm active in San Antonio in the mid and late 1920s. It designed the Aztec Theater Building (1926), the Bushnell Apartments (1926), and the San Antonio Casino Club Building (1927) in San Antonio.

39. Stephen Fox, "(Tall) Tales from the Borderland: Brownsville and the Spanish Colonial Revival," *Texas Architect*, 31(July-August 1981), pp. 59-65, and Fox, *Spanish-Mediterranean Houses in Houston*, Houston: Rice Design Alliance, 1992, pp. 6-12, 14-15.
40. The cover of a tourist brochure, "Brownsville in Texas on the Lower Río Grande, Where Mexico Meets Uncle Sam," drawn by C. C. Cole, iconographically represents the exotic tropical paradise theme. Vertical files, Texas and Local History Department, Houston Public Library.
41. "Brownsville Chamber of Commerce," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 10 October 1926; "Local Interest Centers Upon Vast Amount of New Building," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 30 January 1927; "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 24 July 1927, 7 August 1927, 28 August 1927; *TGCAMB*, June 1926, p. 21; August 1926, p. 13; January 1927, p. 13; August 1927, p. 13; April 1928, p. 14.
42. Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Grobe, editors, *The New Encyclopedia of Texas*, Dallas: Texas Development Bureau, undated, volume 1, p. 130.
43. "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 24 July 1927, 18 September 1927; *TGCAMB*, June 1927, p. 21; September 1927, p. 22; April 1928, p. 27; June 1928, p. 20; August 1928, p. 27; April 1929, p. 22; May 1929, p. 13; *The Aircraft Yearbook for 1930*, New York: Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1930, pp. 213 and 218.
44. "Local Interest Centers Upon Vast Amount of New Building," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 30 January 1927; "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 30 October 1927; *TGCAMB*, January 1927, p. 31; July 1927, pp. 22 and 29; September 1927, p. 15; December 1927, p. 31; January 1928, p. 29; March 1929, p. 26; April 1930, p. 21; May 1930, p. 23; June 1930, p. 29; June 1931, p. 19; November 1931, p. 19.
45. "Media Luna Property to be Developed," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 17 November 1926; "Valley News Bureau," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 9 January 1927; "New Building Work in Valley is Announced," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 6 March 1927; *TGCAMB*, March 1927, p. 29; March 1929, p. 20; August 1929, p. 28.
46. "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 12 June 1927, 7 August 1927; *TGCAMB*, September 1927, p. 13; July 1928, p. 20; August 1928, p. 27; February 1929, p. 28.
47. "Paving Planned in New Addition," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 21 November 1926; "Improvements to Start in Addition," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 7 December 1926.
48. "Local Interest Centers Upon Vast Amount of New Building," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 30 January 1927; "New Building Work in Valley is Announced," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 6 March 1927. *TGCAMB*, March 1927, p. 29; September 1928, p. 29; February 1929, p. 28; November 1929, p. 21; January 1930, p. 15; May 1930, p. 29; October 1930, p. 25. Frank D. Yturria to author, 19 May 1993.
49. Mary Lasswell with Bob Pool, *I'll Take Texas*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958, p. 51.
50. Paredes, p. 287.
51. Paredes, p. 171.
52. Paredes, p. 228.
53. The Manuel Samano House at 625 West Elizabeth Street might also be described as Spanish style.
54. The street directory section of the 1929-30 edition of the Brownsville city directory lists two Spanish-surnamed residents among the sixty-two residential listings on West Elizabeth, nine among the fifty-eight listings on West Levee, four among the fifty-eight listings on West St. Charles, four among the twenty on West St. Francis, and eight among the seventeen listings on West Frontón.

55. Montejano, pp. 163, 159.
56. Juan E. Richer to author, 1 July 1981; "Beautiful Homes Built," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 11 April 1926; "Brownsville Historical Association Newsletter," November-December 1992; *TGCAMB*, October 1928, pp. 13-14, 27.
57. "New Buildings Announced for Brownsville," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 16 November 1926; "Local Interest Centers Upon Vast Amount of New Building," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 30 January 1927; "New Building Work in Valley is Announced," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 6 March 1927; "Valley Building Operations for Week Total \$1,000,000," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 20 March 1927; "Velten Awarded Brick Building," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 29 May 1927; "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 5 June 1927; *TGCAMB*, April 1927, p. 20; May 1927, pp. 13 and 30; October 1929, pp. 13 and 29. The building at 629 East 11th Street is marked with a plaque on its lower left face that identifies B. Torres as architect and gives the date of construction as 1928.
58. "Big Plans Made for Radio Station," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 18 November 1926; *TGCAMB*, October 1927, p. 20; December 1927, p. 22. The article "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 18 December 1927, names Stanley W. Bliss as architect of the Cameron Hotel rather than W. D. Van Siclen.
59. *TGCAMB*, October 1925, p. 20; September 1926, p. 20; March 1927, pp. 14 and 29; September 1929, p. 20; January 1930, p. 21; February 1930, p. 29; "Beautiful Homes Built," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 11 April 1926; "Valley Building Program Continues at Rapid Pace," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 20 February 1927; "New Building Work in Valley is Announced," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 6 March 1927; "Valley Building Operations for Week Total \$1,000,000," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 20 March 1927. Ferrand & Fitch, the Dallas architects who designed the First Baptist Church, designed stylistically similar First Baptist churches in Weslaco (1926-27) and Harlingen (1926-27).
60. "Plans Made for School Building," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 8 May 1926; *TGCAMB*, April 1929, p. 22; May 1929, p. 13; July 1931, pp. 19 and 24; August 1931, p. 10; "Brownsville to Build Four New School Buildings," *Houston Post*, 5 July 1931.
61. "30 Acres Bought for Girls School," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 31 May 1925; "Texas Construction News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 17 January 1926; "Main Academy Building at Brownsville Opened," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 14 March 1926; *TGCAMB*, June 1925, p. 26; Mother M. Patricia Gunning, *To Texas With Love: A History of the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament*, Austin: Von Boekmann-Jones Company, 1971, pp. 111-112.
62. *TGCAMB*, March 1926, p. 24; April 1930, p. 24; November 1930, p. 16. Harlingen High School and Mercedes High School were illustrated in product advertising in nationally circulated architectural journals, Harlingen High School in *Architectural Record*, 70(September 1931), p. 63, and Mercedes High School in *Pencil Points*, 20(February 1939), p. 37.
63. *TGCAMB*, July 1925, p. 22; August 1925, p. 32; September 1925, p. 32; March 1926, p. 24; August 1926, p. 33; July 1927, p. 24; September 1927, pp. 15 and 26; December 1927, p. 33; "Architect Selected," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 7 March 1926; "San Benito Hotel Contract Awarded," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 8 August 1926; "Style Show Will Feature Hotel Opening," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 2 September 1926; "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 14 August 1927, 28 August 1927, 2 October 1927, 4 December 1927, 25 December 1927.
64. "Unprecedented Jump in Development Expected to be Result of Extension of Southern Pacific Lines in Valley," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 21 July 1926.
65. "Harlingen to Get 10-Story Office Edifice," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 29 September 1926.

66. "Estimated Value of New Building About \$75,000,000," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 13 June 1926; "San Benito to Get Attractive New Buildings," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 19 June 1926; "Plans Being Drawn for Bank's Home," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 30 July 1926; "Valley Cities to Get Two New Bank Buildings," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 3 October 1926; "Contract Let for Mercedes Bank," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 7 November 1926; "New Hidalgo County Bank," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 3 April 1927; "San Benito Bank is in New Building," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 15 May 1927; *TGCAMB*, October 1925, p. 23; July 1926, p. 23; August 1926, p. 23; January 1928, p. 17.

67. "Old Building Raised in Preparation for New," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 3 May 1926; "San Benito to Get Attractive New Building," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 19 June 1926; "Rivoli Theater to Open December 14," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 4 December 1926; "Last of Frame Landmarks on Main Street Removed," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 30 December 1926; "Valley Building Operations for Week Total \$1,000,000," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 20 March 1927; "Valley Construction Work During Week Was Valued Near \$645,000," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 29 March 1927; "\$100,000 Building Nears Completion," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 15 May 1927.

68. "Spanish Type Building Now Being Completed," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 20 June 1926; "Rfo Grande Valley News Briefs," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 12 September 1926; "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 2 October 1927; *TGCAMB*, September 1927, p. 33.

69. "Spanish Acres Gains Favor in Harlingen," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 2 October 1926; "Quaint Little City of Point Isabel to be Aroused from its Sleepy Existence by its New Owners," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 6 April 1926; "Valley Village to be Converted into Texas Coral Gables," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 18 April 1926; "Olmito's Building Program Started," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 1 August 1926; "New Building Work in Valley is Announced," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 6 March 1927; "Entrance to Venetian Estates," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 3 April 1927.

70. Map Records of Cameron County.

71. An article in the *Galveston Daily News* of 19 October 1913, "Brownsville Building Fast," noted that three new additions were being developed in Brownsville "to be occupied principally by Mexicans." The article does not name these additions. The lots in Colonia Victoria were half as wide as those in the original townsite, which suggests that it was intended for a lower-income market. As developed in the 1920s, lots in Victoria Heights were typically combined to produce larger home sites. Map Records of Cameron County.

72. Map Records of Cameron County.

73. Examination of the street directory of the 1929-30 Brownsville city directory indicates that no Spanish-surnamed families were listed as living in Victoria Heights, although its residents included Mr. and Mrs. John B. Egly at 1725 Lincoln Boulevard. John Egly was descended from a Brownsville Franco-Mexican family.

74. Map Records of Cameron County.

75. *TGCAMB*, February 1928, p. 22.

76. Mother M. Patricia Gunning, pp. 111-112; Bruce Aiken, "Free Public Schools Began Here in 1875," *Brownsville Herald*, 7 November 1979. The Brownsville and Matamoros school buildings are illustrated in the tourist brochure "Brownsville in Texas on the Lower Rfo Grande," c. 1925. José Raúl Canseco Botello *Historia de H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas*, Matamoros: Talleres Tipográfico de Litografía Jardín, 1981, p. 230. Canseco Botello indicates that planning for the Colegio Modelo was begun in 1922, although it is not clear if the building was built in that year.

77. Paredes, p. 290.



78. Paredes, p. 272.
79. Paredes, pp. 201, 188, 258.
80. Paredes, p. 174.
81. Sanborn fire insurance maps of Brownsville, 1930.
82. "Valley Building News," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 25 December 1927.
83. "Mc Gonigle, Ruth Eugenia Young," *New Handbook of Texas*, Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996, vol. 4, pp. 405-406.
84. Information from Carolyn Dodds, granddaughter of Ray S. Dodds.
85. "Olmito Building Program Started," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 1 August 1926; "Rio Grande Valley Briefs," *Houston Post Dispatch*, 30 September 1926.
86. Weitze, *California's Mission Revival*, p. 68; Caroline Tobin, *Downtown Seattle Walking Tours*, Seattle: City of Seattle Department of Community Development, 1985, p. 68; Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, editor, *Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994, p. 353; "Retired Local Architect Dies at Home," *Brownsville Herald*, 15 July 1951; "Certificate of Death," 16 July 1951; "Application for Registration," Texas Board of Architectural Examiners, 20 November 1937.
87. Clarence R. Wharton, editor, *Texas Under Many Flags*, Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1930, vol. 5, pp. 2127-218; George S. Koyl, editor, *American Architects Directory*, New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1955, p. 253; George S. Koyl, editor, *American Architects Directory*, New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1962, p. 894.
88. Wharton, *Texas Under Many Flags*, volume 4, p. 100; Jean P. Clore to author, 25 September 1993.
89. Wharton, volume 4, pp. 192-193.
90. Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1955, p. 48; the Rev. Barbara Bliss to author, 3 November 1993; Frances Bliss Norman to author, 8 April 1994.
91. Sam H. Acheson, Herbert P. Gambrell, Mary Carter Toomey, and Alex M. Acheson, Jr., editors, *Texian Who's Who*, Dallas: The Texian Company, 1937, p. 517. According to this brief profile, A. H. Woolridge was born in Appamattox, Virginia, and studied architecture through the International Correspondence School. He worked for four years for Vide, Blackwell & Buck in New York. The fact that Woolridge came to Mc Allen in 1917 suggests that he may have been in military service at the time. Woolridge apparently moved to Brownsville around 1936, following the dissolution of his first marriage. Robert E. Velten to author, 8 August 1996.
92. "Waters, Roscius Newell," *The New Handbook of Texas*, volume 6, pp. 1124-1125; Mrs. R. Newell Waters to author, 2 February 1990.
93. Copies of documents on file with the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners, Austin. This information does not contain a date of death for W. Frank Godwin, since he left Texas in 1944.
94. K. G. Buckley, "Brownsville's Role in the Early Development of the Pan American Airways System," in Clifford and Krausse, *A Blast from the Past!*, volume 2, pp. 111-115. *TGCAMB*, August 1931, p. 20; August 1933, p. 9; January 1935, p. 5.
95. *TGCAMB*, February 1935, p. 2; May 1935, p. 11. The H. R. McKay House at 125 Sunset Drive (1936) was also designed in the Spanish Mediterranean style, but it represented a streamlined version of this genre.

96. "Two Downtown Blocks in Weslaco, Texas, 45 Buildings Big, Get Their Faces Lifted with \$12,000," *Architectural Forum*, 66(March 1937), pp. 60 and 62.
97. *TGCAMB*, May 1930, p. 29; August 1930, p. 22; October 1930, p. 21; April 1935, p. 10; July 1935, p. 13; September 1935, p. 13.
98. *TGCAMB*, January 1934, p. 11; June 1934, p. 10; September 1934, p. 5; Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1955, p. 48. Bliss also designed the Church of the Advent (1935) and St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church (1938) in Alice.
99. *TGCAMB*, February 1930, p. 21; September 1930, p. 13. Overbeck also designed the Rfo Grande Valley Telephone Company Building in San Benito (1931).
100. *TGCAMB*, February 1931, pp. 18-19; August 1931, p. 10; November 1931, p. 9; March 1932, p. 8; October 1932, p. 6; July 1933, p. 8; October 1933, p. 6; January 1934, p. 11; June 1935, p. 8; September 1935, p. 16; August 1936, p. 7; March 1937, p. 8.
101. *TGCAMB*, September 1933, pp. 11 and 16; October 1933, p. 12; July 1934, p. 11; June 1935, p. 15; Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1955, p. 48.
102. Henry N. Ferguson, *The Port of Brownsville: A Maritime History of the Rfo Grande Valley*, Brownsville: Springman-King Press, 1976, p. 262; *TGCAMB*, July 12933, p. 13; March 1934, p. 13; February 1935, p. 12; March 1935, p. 16; June 1935, p. 11; September 1935, p. 17; C. W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown. *Public Buildings*, Washington: D.C.: Public Works Administration, 1939, p. 426.
103. *Engineering News-Record*, 28 July 1938; Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, p. 563.
104. Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, p. 156.
105. Américo Paredes, "Old School Influenced Brownsville's Life," in Clifford and Krausse, *A Blast From the Past!*, volume 2, pp. 75-78.
106. Paul Goeldner, Lucy Pope Wheeler, and S. Allen Chambers, compiler and editors, *Texas Catalog, Historic American Buildings Survey*, San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974, pp. 65-66, 80, 167-170, 215-216. HABS photographs of El Carmen Ranch House were reproduced in "American Colonies Under Flag of Mexico," *The Magazine Antiques*, 53(June 1948), p. 439, and Rex Z. Howard, *Texas Guidebook, Grand Prairie: The Lo-Ray Company*, 1954, p. 195. Howard illustrates the Carmen house as "the finest example" of what he called "Laredo or Rfo Grande architecture"--the border brick style. Notations on Homer Lansberry and Donald Weichlein's drawings of the Carmen house indicate that it had suffered damage and was partially buried in silt resulting from the hurricane of 1933.
107. David Dillon, "Historic Landmarks: O'Neil Ford and His Portraits of an Older Texas," *Arts & Architecture*, 1(Winter 1981), pp. 59-61. As early as 1919, the architectural critic I. T. Frary wrote an illustrated article, "Picturesque Towns of the Border Land," *Architectural Record*, 45(April 1919), pp. 382-384 about San Ygnacio.
108. *TGCAMB*, June 1936, p. 12; Mrs. Waters to author, 19 February 1990; "House in Texas: Home of Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Knapp, Weslaco, Texas," *California Arts & Architecture*, 57(September 1940), pp. 24-25.
109. "Colley, Richard Stewart," in *The New Handbook of Texas*, volume 2, pp. 212-213.
110. John William Black III to author, 17 November 1992. The source of information about Torres's authorship of the Rentfro House is the architect's niece, Rosalee Torres-Valent.

111. Information on file about Frank E. Torres, Texas Board of Architectural Examiners; Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1955, p. 563; John William Black III to author, 17 December 1987. A. H. Woolridge added a one-story wing to the Scanlan House. Ruth Young McGonigle added the swimming pool, bath house, and a brick wall.
112. Greg Fieg, "Hanna House Becomes a Parking Lot," *Brownsville Herald*, 13 September 1981; Janet Byrne, *A Genius for Living: The Life of Frieda Lawrence*, New York: Harper Collins/Publishers, 1995, p. 390.
113. Thomas S. Hines, *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 150-151; "Open-Planned, Window-Walled House in the Southwest," *Architectural Record*, 85(May 1939), p. 111; *TGCAMB*, February 1937, pp. 7 and 11. After the Magnolia Pavilion at the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas of 1936, the Kraigher House was the second modern movement building--and the first house--built in Texas.
114. George S. Wright, "Re:Cite," *Cite 31, the Architecture and Design Review of Houston*, Winter-Spring 1994, p. 2.
115. *TGCAMB*, April 1936, p. 9; May 1936, p. 11; "Winston Valley Home Distinctive," *Houston Post*, 18 December 1938; Mary Carolyn Hollers George, *O'Neil Ford, Architect*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992, p. 77.
116. Dorothee Imbert, "Of Gardens and Houses as Places to Live: Thomas Church and William Wurster," in Marc Treib, editor, *An Everyday Modernism: The Houses of William Wilson Wurster*, Berkeley: University of California Press and the San Francisco Museum of Art, 1995, pp. 120-121.
117. Canseco Botello, pp. 272-274. Canseco Botello discusses the development of the Colonia Jardín in 1940-1942 but does not mention the Colonia Moderna, which seems to have been developed in the late 1920s.
118. *TGCAMB*, November 1928, p. 24; Charles Daniel Dillman, "The Functions of Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas: Twin Cities of the Lower Río Grande," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1968, pp. 159-160.
119. Canseco Botello, p. 111.
120. Sánchez, *A Shared Experience*, p. 128.
121. Canseco Botello, pp. 100, 105; Louise Noelle, *Arquitectos contemporáneos de México*, México: Editorial Trillas, 1989, p. 46. De la Mora won a much publicized competition for the design of the Basílica de la Purísima, the first example of modern ecclesiastical architecture in Mexico. "Church of la Purísima, Monterrey, Mexico, Enrique de la Mora, Architect," *Architectural Record*, 102(September 1947), pp. 104-105. Ruth Duenes kindly called my attention to the parish church in Valle Hermoso, Tamaulipas, a smaller-scaled version of Sagrada Corazón in Matamoros. All three churches seem to have been designed by the same architect.
122. Canseco Botello, pp. 314-316; "Busy Gateway," *Business Week*, (31 July 1948), pp. 28-29; Ruby A. Wooldridge and Robert B. Vezzetti, *Brownsville, A Pictorial History*, Norfolk/Virginia Beach: The Donning Company, Publishers, 1982, p. 176; Dillman, pp. 81-83.
123. "Shrimpers Fill Town Tills," *Business Week*, (8 July 1950), pp. 66-67.
124. Information on Ellis F. Albaugh, Texas Board of Architectural Examiners. Unfortunately, the TBAE records do not indicate the years Albaugh practiced in Brownsville or whether he maintained an office in San Antonio. He is not listed in the 1946 Brownsville city directory but is listed in the 1948 directory.

125. Plaques identify Albaugh as architect and additions to the City Market House and Immaculate Conception Parochial School. Mary C. Simmons to author; William M. Peña to author; Larry Holtzman to author, 28 March 1994.

126. At the same time that Shelby Longoria built his house in Matamoros, his elder brother, don Octaviano L. Longoria, built a Monterrey-style suburban house on Paseo Colón in the Colonia Madero in Nuevo Laredo, designed by the Monterrey architect Guillermo Belden, a great-grandson of the one-time Matamoros merchant Santiago Belden Rogers (who seems to have been the brother of Samuel A. Belden). In contrast to the Longoria House in Matamoros, the O. L. Longoria House was designed in what the Regiomontano architectural historian Juan Ignacio Barragán Villarreal describes as the "lo que el viento se llevó" style. Another brother, Eduardo Longoria, built a house in Nuevo Laredo at Paseo Colón 2132, similar to the Shelby Longoria House, designed by the San Antonio architect Roger Rasbach. Juan Ignacio Barragán Villarreal and Enrique Díaz Díaz, "Arquitectos del Noreste," *Del Noreste de México* 10, 11, 12, 1992, pp. 25, 26, 30-31; George O. Jackson, Jr., to author; Roger Rasbach to author, 30 March 1993. In Brownsville, Rasbach designed the Lindsay House in Palo Verde in the 1960s and the Esteve House on Pipkin Drive in the 1970s.

127. Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1955, p. 156. Ellis practiced in association with his son, C. Lyman Ellis, Jr.

128. Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1955, p. 56, and 1962, p. 71. R. Newell Waters of Weslaco was so displeased that Cocke, a classmate at the University of Texas and at MIT and close friend, was encroaching on Waters's territory that he did not speak to Cocke again until Waters retired. Suzanne Waters Harris to author, 13 April 1996.

129. Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1955, pp. 462 and 564; 1962, pp. 587 and 687; John F. Gane, editor, *American Architects Directory*, New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1970, p. 895. Julio R. Guerra to author, 6 August 1993; "Prominent Valley Architect William C. Baxter Dies at 76," undated newspaper clipping supplied by Julio R. Guerra.

130. Montejano, pp. 225-228.

131. Antonio N. Zavaleta, "'The Twin Cities': An Historical Synthesis of the Socio-Economic Interdependence of the Brownsville-Matamoros Community," in Milo Kearney, editor, *Studies in Brownsville History*, Brownsville: Pan American University at Brownsville, 1986, p. 155.

132. William M. Peña to author, 5 April 1993. Gustavo Peña's brother, William M. Peña, was a partner in Caudill, Rowlett, Scott & Associates. The Peña brothers, who were from Laredo, were the great-grandsons of Frederick R. Meriwether, a builder who settled in Río Grande City in the 1860s. Lucila Farfás and Gustavo Peña are the parents of Federico Peña, who became Mayor of Denver and then Secretary of Transportation during the administration of President Bill Clinton.

133. "Now Open: America's Finest Hotel, Completely Air-Conditioned," and "El Rancho Grande Hotel Sets Grand Opening This Week," *Brownsville Herald*, 13 July 1951.

134. "Room Service on Wheels at 10-Acre Hotel in Texas," *Business Week*, (9 June 1951), pp. 90-91, and "Border Hotel," *Engineering News-Record*, 146(28 June 1951), p. 26. The publicity began in 1939 with McFall Kerbey's "The Texas Delta of an American Nile," *The National Geographic*, 75(February 1939), pp. 51-96. It included Caspar Hunt, "Texas Creates a Modern Eden," *Travel*, 92(December 1948), pp. 24-26, and Irving Wallace, "Magic Valley of Texas," *Travel*, 100(November 1953), pp. 13-16. More measured in tone were two articles by the Brownsville journalist and writer Hart Stilwell, "Portrait of the Magic Valley," *New Republic*, 116(7 April 1947), pp. 14-17, and "Magic Valley," *Holiday*, 4(November 1948), pp. 100-103.

135. "Fort Brown Civic Center," *Texas Architect*, 2(August 1951), pp. 6-7; H. L. Stokely, "Brownsville's Combination Civic Center," *The American City*, 66(November 1951), p. 173; "Governor Shivers Dedicates Brownsville Center," *Texas Architect*, 4(February 1954), p. 5.

136. "Design Competition Helps Brownsville Build Six-in-One Civic Center, Suggests Pattern for Other Communities," *Architectural Forum*, 35(August 1954), pp. 144-149; "1954 National Honor Awards Program--First Honor Award: Fort Brown Memorial Center, Brownsville, Texas," *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, 22(November 1954), p. 217; "Building: The New Face of Texas," *Fortune*, 64(October 1961), p. 131.
137. "Valley Tourist Center," *Texas Architect*, 11(August 1961), p. 9; "The Coastal Bend Revolution," *Texas Architect*, 13(September 1963), p. 13; *Texas Architect*, 14(January 1964), front cover.
138. "Awards Citation: St. Joseph's Academy," *Progressive Architecture*, 37(January 1956), pp. 108-109; "St. Joseph's Academy," *Progressive Architecture*, 41(December 1960), pp. 114-121; "Schools of Tomorrow," *Time*, 76(12 September 1960), pp. 74-75.
139. "York, John Garth," *The New Handbook of Texas*, volume 6, pp. 1124-1125.
140. "Civic Buildings: City Hall, Exhibition Hall, Chamber of Commerce," *Progressive Architecture*, 34(February 1953), pp. 83-92; Canseco Botello, p. 326; "Bell Awarded Bank Building in Brownsville," *AGC News*, 8 July 1958, p. 7; "Clarke & Courts Building, Harlingen, Texas," *Architectural Record*, 113(May 1953), pp. 76-77.
141. "The Architect and His Community--Cocke, Bowman & York: Harlingen, Texas," *Progressive Architecture*, 36(June 1955), pp. 114-115.
142. Dr. Pierre P. Poole to author, 24 October 1992.
143. Architectural drawings for Sammy's are deposited in the John G. York Collection, Architectural Drawings Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.
144. Bernard Whitman to author, 14 January 1982. York designed a series of Rocket service stations for Antonio Cisneros, Jr., in the middle and late 1950s. These all seem to have been demolished. David P. Ashcroft to author, 1984.
145. Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1955, p. 625; 1962, p. 786; Application for National Council Certificate, 25 July 1958, Texas Board of Architectural Examiners.
146. "Merle A. Simpson to author, 25 July 1985; "Construction News," *Engineering News-Record*, 15 August 1957, p. 160; "Plans Underway for \$1,350,000 Hospital Building," *AGC News*, 8 December 1951, p. 1; Eleanor Mortenson, p. 72.
147. Thomas K. Walls, *The Japanese-Texans*, San Antonio: University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, 1987, pp. 211-212; Gane, *American Architects Directory*, 1970, p. 902; Alan Y. Taniguchi to author, 27 April 1984 and 3 December 1992.
148. Taniguchi to author, 27 April 1984.
149. George S. Page to author, 19 June 1984; Nancy Philen Thompson to author.
150. Map Records of Cameron County; Kearney and Knopp, p. 240.
151. An extenuating circumstance in the case of Laurel Park is the damage that most of York's houses sustained in the flooding of the Arroyo Colorado in the aftermath of Hurricane Beulah in 1967. As a result, almost all of York's houses on South Parkwood Drive have been altered, some quite radically. "Valley Flood Waters Rise in 200 Harlingen Homes," *Houston Chronicle*, 26 September 1967; Stan Redding, "Rich and Poor Alike in Flood Devastated Valley," *Houston Chronicle*, 1 October 1967; Stan

Redding, "Harlingen Digging out of Sand," *Houston Chronicle*, 2 October 1967. Mildred D. Fruhling to author, 10 August 1993.

152. Lydia Y. Butler to author, 7 June 1993. Other architect-designed houses in Río Viejo included the Arthur C. Hipp House at 5 Calle Jacaranda and the J. T. Canales House at 25 Calle Jacaranda, both by A. H. Woolridge, and the William M. Velten House at 425 Calle Retama by Robert E. Velten.

153. "Construction Reports," *Engineering News-Record*, 19 June 1952, p. 150.

154. C. Gale Cook to author; *AGC News*, 8 July 1958, p. 7; "What in the World is Happening to Banks?" *Architectural Forum*, 115(October 1961), pp. 102-103; "Mc Allen State Bank," *Texas Architect*, 12(June 1962), pp. 8-13.

155. "Brownsville Job Due on August 16," *AGC News*, 1 August 1950, p.1; "Ferguson Gets Brownsville Job," *AGC News*, 22 August 1950, p. 3; E. Lester Swanson to author, 4 June 1993; Gunning, pp. 120 and 190; "TSC Campus Is Historic Site," *Brownsville Herald*, 7 November 1979. A. H. Woolridge designed Sams Stadium and the adjoining Brownsville High School Gymnasium on West 1st Street (1954). He also designed the Manuel Guerra B. Gymnasium at Texas Southmost College (1959). Robert E. Velten to author, 8 August 1996.

156. "Boese & Harkrider to Draw Plans for 1200 Housing Units," *AGC News*, 14 October 1949; "Housing Job is Awarded," *AGC News*, 5 January 1951; "Brownsville Housing Out," *AGC News*, 9 March 1951; "Construction Reports," *Engineering News-Record*, 18 February 1960, p. 118. At the same time the Poinsettia complex was designed, Boese & Harkrider designed public housing complexes in San Benito, Mercedes, and Mc Allen.

157. "Drawing Final Plans on Harlingen Housing," *AGC News*, 19 October 1951; "Harlingen Housing Bids are Announced," *AGC News*, 8 February 1952; "Trinity University," *Architectural Forum*, 95(September 1951), pp. 184-186; "Raising the Roof—Lowering the Cost," *The Journal of Housing*, 8(October 1951), pp. 354-357.

158. Cyrus Wagner to author, 19 November 1985; E. Lester Swanson to author, 4 January 1993; "Representative Selection, Lower Río Grande Valley Chapter, AIA," *Texas Architect*, 6(September 1956), pp. 4-5; "Brownsville Hospital Plans on File," *AGC News*, 23 December 1949, p. 1; Large Hospital With Imaginative Plan," *Architectural Record*, 118(November 1955), pp. 202-205.

159. "Design Competition Helps Brownsville Build Six-in-One Civic Center," *Architectural Forum*, p. 144; "The Architect and His Community," *Progressive Architecture*, p. 103.

160. Betty McGonigle Capshaw to author. Paralleling the preservation of the Neale House was the restoration of the Point Isabel Lighthouse (1951-52). In 1950, the lighthouse was given to the Texas State Park Board by Mr. and Mrs. Lon C. Hill, Jr. Verna Jackson McKenna notes that one of the advocates of the lighthouse's preservation was Mrs. John H. Shary, whose son-in-law was Governor Allen Shivers. Verna Jackson McKenna, *Old Point Isabel Lighthouse, Beacon for Brazos Santiago*, Harlingen: privately printed, 1956, p. 3.

161. Ruth Young McGonigle Papers, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University. Accounting for the modernity of Episcopal High School was Robert E. Velten's involvement in the design as an employee of A. H. Woolridge. Robert E. Velten to author, 8 August 1996.

162. Virginia George, "Sidewalk Superintendent," *Texas Architect*, 19(December 1960), p. 11.

163. Stilwell, "Magic Valley," *Holiday*, p. 103. "In this Valley there are now about 250,000 people. Each town except Brownsville is actually two towns, an Anglo-American town and a Latin-American town, usually with a railroad dividing them. In Brownsville, where the predominantly Latin American population predominates, there are two main streets, running parallel and only a block apart. On one Spanish is the

dominant language, and on the other, English."

164. "Oil: El Loophole," *Time*, 81(25 January 1963), p. 80.

165. "An Overlooked Bargain: Bright Young Men With Designs on the Future," *Fortune*, 74(1 July 1966), p. 126.

166. J. W. Hiester recalls that Valley architects in the 1960s sought to stabilize their practices economically by concentrating on larger, and therefore more profitable, commissions than house design. He also recalls that labor costs in the 1950s were exceptionally low, which ceased to be true in the 1960s. J. W. Hiester to author, 3 December 1992. Julio R. Guerra recalls that the economy in the Valley was stagnant in the 1960s, unlike the 1950s, and this reduced the kinds of commissions available to architects. Julio R. Guerra to author, 6 August 1993.

167. Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1962, pp. 311 and 689; Gane, *American Architects Directory*, 1970, pp. 404, 897, and 999; Hiester to author, 3 December 1992; Swanson to author, 4 January 1993 and 7 January 1993; David M. Wilson to author, 7 January 1993.

168. Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1962, pp. 725, 761-762; Gane, *American Architects Directory*, 1970, p. 946.

169. Guerra to author, 6 August 1993; Koyl, *American Architects Directory*, 1962, pp. 22, 94, 317, 686; Gane, *American Architects Directory*, 1970, pp. 190, 411, 894; Ashcroft to author, 4 August 1993; Charles B. Croft to author, 20 February 1993.

170. "Brownsville Building Projects Estimated to Top \$20 Million," *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, 22 August 1970.

171. "Winn Residence," *Texas Architect*, 16(January 1966), pp. 8-13; Merle A. Simpson to author, 15 December 1992.

172. Mary C. Simmons to author, 22 September 1987; J. Antonio Ortiz to author, 27 October 1992; Gordon Landreth to author; Frank D. Yturria to author, 19 May 1993.

173. Martin Dreyer, "Houston Man Opens Swank Border Hotel," *Houston Chronicle*, 2 December 1962; "Construction Reports," *Engineering News-Record*, 13 October 1960, p. 121.

174. Manuel Larrosa, *Mario Pani, arquitecto de su época*, México: Universitaria Nacional Autónoma de México Imprenta Universitaria, 1985, pp. 99-106. Pani served as chief architect for PRONAF's urbanistic and architectural projects. Pani's involvement with the program seems to have ended in 1964 at the end of López Mateos's term. This may be why he did not design the Centro Artesanal or the Holiday Inn.

175. "Office Straddles Mexican Highway," *Engineering News-Record*, 170(11 April 1963), p. 46; "Programme Nationale des Villes Frontières--Planification, Urbanisme, et Architecture: Mario Pani et Associés, Architectes," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 109, (September 1963), pp. 18-21.

176. David P. Ashcroft to author, 8 April 1993; John G. York Collection, Architectural Drawings Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

177. Canseco Botello, p. 329. Canseco Botello illustrates the Puerta México, the Centro Artesanal, and the Holiday Inn but never mentions PRONAF. In Charles David Dillman's dissertation and in contemporary reports in the *Brownsville Herald*, the architect Carlos Reyes Escobar is mentioned. Dillman identifies Reyes Escobar as the "chief architect and representative of PRONAF in Matamoros." It is not clear whether Reyes Escobar was the architect of the Centro Artesanal and the Holiday Inn or simply worked for PRONAF in an administrative capacity. Dillman, p. 195.

178. Stephen Fox, "Requiem for a Convent," in Clifford and Krause, *A Blast From the Past!*, volume 1, pp. 40-41. Anatole Senkevitch, Jr., teaches at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. He is the foremost English-language historian of Russian architecture.

179. "Valley Playland Park Viewed as Aid to Economy," *Houston Chronicle*, 26 October 1969; "Here Comes Amigoland," *Texas Parade*, 32(January 1972), p. 55.

180. Jack Graeme, "Zoo at Brownsville May Save Species Facing Extinction," *Houston Chronicle*, 23 September 1970; Gary Garrison, "Valley Zoo Places Exotic Animals in Native Settings," *Houston Chronicle*, 22 August 1971; Henry N. Ferguson, "Brownsville's Noah's Ark," *Texas Parade*, 32(January 1972), pp. 64-68; Grant Lively, "Refuge for the Rare," *Texas Highways*, 21(August 1974), pp. 14-19; David Langworthy, "Welcome to the Gladys Porter Zoo," *Houston Chronicle*, 3 January 1979; "Gladys Porter Zoo," *The New Handbook of Texas*, volume 3, p. 179.

181. Karl Kohrs, "This Texas Playground is the Newest of Them All...Padre Island," *Houston Chronicle*, 26 May 1957; "Padre Building Boom Continues," *Houston Chronicle*, 3 September 1959; Mary Lasswell, "What Can Padre Mean to the Public?" *Houston Chronicle*, 30 September 1962; "Coastal Bend Revolution," *Texas Architect*, 13(September 1963), p. 13. According to a typewritten press release in the clipping files of the *Houston Chronicle*, there were only five motels on South Padre Island by early 1964.

182. Tommie Pinkard, "South to Padre," *Texas Highways*, 22(January 1975), pp. 16-23; "Beautiful South Padre" and "There's Always Room for One More," *Texas Parade*, 36(March 1976), pp. 50-51, 54; Swanson to author, 4 January 1993.

183. "Coastal Bend Revolution," *Texas Architect*, 13(September 1963), pp. 5-6.

184. David P. Ashcroft to author, 8 April 1993.

185. "Honor Award: Citizens State Bank, Donna," *Texas Architect*, 12(September 1962), p. 12; "First National Bank, Edinburg," *Texas Architect*, 15(December 1965), pp. 8-14; "Small Banks: Edinburg," *Progressive Architecture*, 45(July 1964), pp. 122-127.

186. "Pan American Science Building," *Texas Architect*, 21(September 1971), pp. 3-6; "Fine Arts Building, Pan American University," *Texas Architect*, 22(January 1972), pp. 3-5.

187. "Border Planning," *Texas Architect*, 12(October 1962), p. 10; "The Texas National Border," *Texas Architect*, 16(March 1966), pp. 8-19; "Development of Our National Border with Mexico," *Texas Architect*, 16(August 1966), pp. 10-18. One exception was the article "El Paso-Ciudad Juárez," *Texas Architect*, 15(October 1965), pp. 4-13, which illustrated the Convention Center by Enrique Molinar and Mario Pani y Asociados and the Museum of Art and History by Pedro Ramirez Vásquez and Mario Pani y Asociados that PRONAF built in Ciudad Juárez.

188. Davis, p. 32.

189. Roberto C. González, "Neglected Treasure," *Brownsville Herald*, 14 June 1992; Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, "Neutra-Designed House in Texas Threatened by Neglect and Decay," *Historic Preservation News*, November 1992, pp. 4-5; "Endangered Modern Landmarks: Kraigher House, 1937, Brownsville, Texas," *Architecture*, 81(November 1992), p. 26; Phil Parisi, "Can This Building Be Saved? Early International Style Residence Crumbling in Brownsville," *The Medallion*, September/October 1993, p. 6

190. The Fort Brown Memorial Center was threatened with radical alteration, which would have destroyed its historic integrity, in 1992. Roberto C. González, "Jacob Brown Envisioned as Civic Center Site," *Brownsville Herald*, 5 June 1992.



# Historic Folk Sainthood along the Texas-Mexico Border

by

Joseph Spielberg and Antonio Zavaleta

## The Prelude

As the nineteenth century dawned in celebration, Mexico could not imagine that the events of the first decades of the new century would change her forever. In fact, the first three decades of the nineteenth century wrought with tremendous political crisis and massive social upheaval, produced such irrevocable changes within the fabric of Mexican society that they thrust the country into two centuries of continuous instability.<sup>1</sup> In this environment of crisis and alienation, revolutionaries like Padre Hidalgo, Benito Juarez, and later Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata<sup>2</sup> emerged as folk-heroes. Within this same environment, Pedro Rojas, "Tatita," and José Fidencio Constantino, "El Niño Fidencio," rose from obscurity to miracle workers status and, in death, to folk sainthood.<sup>3</sup>

The Spanish conquest in 1519 was followed by centuries of revolutions and wars which exacted a tremendous psychic toll on the Mexican people. By the 1820's, Mexico's underclass had endured more than three hundred years of suffering and was ready for a Mexican messiah. Mexico has had a long history of charismatic folk-religious leaders who burst upon the scene during times of crisis. In the early nineteenth century a period of anti-clericalism descended upon Mexico which eventually brought about a virtual cessation of organized religion. This paralysis of organized Catholicism further prepared Mexico for the appearance of a series of charismatic thaumaturges. Mexico is a Catholic country and during the nineteenth century a confused and desperate Mexican people unable to avail themselves of sanctuary in the Church longed for a sign from God. Catholicism had been seriously attacked in Mexico and it was in this socio-political environment that the miracle workers, Tatita and El Niño Fidencio, appeared in the deserts of the north near the Texas border.<sup>4</sup>

Mexico has always been a land of mystery and paradox. Invading sixteenth century Spanish explorers seeking adventure and wealth brought with them a strange mixture of medieval chivalry and religious devotion which meshed with and enhanced the superstitious world they encountered in Mexico.<sup>5</sup> Together the two belief systems produced a powerful and intoxicating magic. Many of the Spanish officers who came to the new world were members of lay religious orders and hoped to

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<sup>1</sup>Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy: A History of the Mexican People* (New York: W.W. Norton Co. 1992).

<sup>2</sup>Ruth Behar, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1993).

<sup>3</sup>Octavio Romano, *Charismatic Medicine, Folk Healing, and Folk Sainthood*. *American Anthropologist*, 67: 1965, p.1151-1173.

<sup>4</sup>Fernando Garza Quiros, *El Niño Fidencio y el Fidencismo* (Monterrey, Mexico: Editorial Font, S.A., 5th ed., 1991).

<sup>5</sup>Elizabeth H. Boone, *Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural: The Image of Huitzilopochtli in Mexico and Europe*, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1989).

recreate the crusades in this new and mysterious land, while the religious orders who accompanied them hoped to establish a utopia and to prepare for the second coming of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

The mendicant Orders of St. Francis, St. Dominic and St. Augustine accompanying the adventurers were zealous in their desire to spread a superstition-laden Catholicism. In the sixteenth century, Spanish Catholicism was a stronghold of medieval practices. The faithful believed in the active intervention of Saints in the lives of the living. Petitioners were willing to perform penances in return for miracles granted and to make difficult pilgrimages to the Saint's holy sites.<sup>7</sup> In Mexico medieval beliefs refused to give way to the Protestant reform spreading throughout Europe at the time of the conquest. European society had become intoxicated with saints and their cults and the Protestant Reformation required its adherents to abruptly abandon saint worship while it continued its fascination with witchcraft and demonology.<sup>8</sup> In Mexico, medieval Catholicism came face to face with a religious belief system equal in spiritual energy. Mexican native cultures practiced religions which seemed bizarre and at the same time disconcertingly familiar to the Europeans. This unlikely encounter resulted in the creation of a completely new form of worship which thrives throughout Latin America and the Caribbean today. Often called Folk-Catholicism, this new faith was produced as a syncretic blend of native beliefs with traditional sixteenth century Spanish Roman Catholicism.<sup>9</sup> In many instances native beliefs and rituals were literally incorporated into the Roman Catholic belief system.

There were many fundamental similarities between sixteenth century Catholicism and Mexican native religions which facilitated their syncretism. In fact, in critical aspects the two religious systems were indistinguishable. For example, fundamental to Mexican native belief is the concept of the incarnation of god, including god's appearance on earth, his life and teachings while incarnate, followed by his departure and promise of return, and the dream of a messianic millenarian utopian society.<sup>10</sup>

Latin America in general and Mexico in particular, are fertile ground for the periodic resurgence of millenarianism, the eschatological belief in the return of god to earth followed by the establishment of a perfect society in which all human suffering disappears.<sup>11</sup> Mexico's native peoples have prayed for the return of their gods to power since the time of the conquest and throughout Mexico's stormy political history religion has always generated culture heroes who have mixed religious salvation with the politics of poverty and of a promised land.<sup>12</sup>

The virgin goddess is another concept which is essential to both belief systems, as is the belief in a pantheon of lesser gods or saints who are physically capable of affecting the lives of the living.

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<sup>6</sup>Alex M. Darley, *The Passionists of the Southwest*, (Glorieta New Mexico: The Rio Grande Press, 1968).

<sup>7</sup>Richard Nebel, *Santa Maria Tonantzin Virgin de Guadalupe: Continuidad y transformacion religiosa en Mexico* (Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1995).

<sup>8</sup>Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

<sup>9</sup>William Madsen, *Religious Syncretism, In Handbook of Middle American Indians*, Robert Wauchope, editor, Vol. 6, (Austin, The University of Texas Press, 1967).

<sup>10</sup>N. Ross Crumrine and Alan Morinis, editors, *Pilgrimage in Latin America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup>David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, (Berkeley, The University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup>David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1990).

Central to both traditions are sacred sites that are dedicated to the honor of saints. The faithful are required to propitiate their saints and to make penitential pilgrimages to the sacred sites at regular intervals.<sup>13</sup>

In order to fully appreciate Mexico, one must understand the role that Mexico City plays in the country. Society, economy and politics have always been focused in the central plateau, also home of the Mexican Catholic Church.<sup>14</sup> Wealth and power have always been concentrated in central Mexico, while the inhabitants of outlying areas have been thought of as uncultured provincials. Mexico City was, and is, the heart and soul of Mexico, and thus the upper-classes reside in the Capital controlling huge provincial land holdings as absentee landlords. This is also true for the Catholic Church. In colonial Mexico there was little or no interaction between the landed aristocracy and the Indians who existed at the opposite extreme of a rigid caste system. This fact further served to polarize the two Mexican religious systems, Catholicism and Folk-Catholicism. An emerging group of persons of mixed Spanish and Indian blood, called Mestizos, made up the middle of Mexican society, quickly becoming the majority. Mestizos also formed the middle ground where Indian beliefs mingled with Catholicism creating a Mexican mysticism. In spite of the rapid emergence of Mestizos, there was little or no social mobility allowed in the system.<sup>15</sup> The absence of social mobility in Mexico guaranteed the perpetuation of folk religious practices within the lower classes and Indians. Upper socio-economic class Mexicans were never particularly concerned with the quaint practices and beliefs of their workers and from time to time even called upon them for magical assistance in financial and family matters. The Mestizos and the Indians on the other hand, thrived with the magical systems of the old ways and paid lip service to the highly bureaucratic Catholic church. Polite but cautious, the Mestizos and Indians attended Catholic church services while maintaining an active involvement with witches and healers, saints and spirits.

The provincial Catholic Church was charged with the salvation and the pacification of the native population, which was essential for the economic productivity of the land. Land in turn supported the elite style of life maintained by the landlords in Mexico City and in a handful of major colonial and regional capitals like Queretero and Guanajuato. However, unlike colonial Anglo-America, which sought to push aside or eliminate the native American cultures it encountered, Latin American Catholicism sought the incorporation and salvation of its native peoples. From the time of their arrival in Mexico, the Spanish lived among the native populations mixing with them and learning their beliefs.

The Catholic priests quickly recognized that the salvation and pacification of the native population necessitated tolerance and acceptance and, at times, even required the support of the native beliefs and practices that were thinly veiled by a mantle of orthodoxy and by a tolerant atavistic Catholicism. This was especially true the further one was away from the oversight of Mexico City. Thus, native Mexican cultures were brought into the church both symbolically and physically and were permitted to continue many of their beliefs and allowed to perform their rituals in the church and on the church grounds. This pattern of unofficial Catholic tolerance of native belief led to their syncretism and produced the dual systems which exist today, official and unofficial religions which are remarkably

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<sup>13</sup>Richard Nebel, 1995.

<sup>14</sup>Francis C. Kelley, *Blood Drenched Altars*, (Rockford: TAN, 1987).

<sup>15</sup>Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1982).

consistent in structure and function throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>16</sup> Rather than being eliminated, the native belief systems were meshed with Catholicism to further forge the emerging Mexican Catholicism. The Catholic priests formed an indelible bond with the common people whom they believed to be a chosen people of God. Already major adherents of mysticism, the priests simply incorporated native mysticism into Mexican Catholicism.

The mixture of Catholicism with the native belief systems of Meso-America produced a hybrid that reflected the characteristics of its two progenitor religions while maintaining the unique characteristics of the progeny. Many of the Franciscans who came to Mexico were followers of the teachings of the Calabrian monk Gioachino di Fiore. The Franciscans, for example, believed explicitly that they were preparing Mexico and Mexicans for the appearance of the messiah and the new millennium. Throughout the Mexican countryside, far removed from the watchful eyes of their more mainstream superiors, the mission priests planted a seed of apocalyptic mysticism. The Indians of Mexico, they believed, were perfect candidates to receive the message of the return of God. They would establish in Mexico the first perfect society, a society devoid of the evils of the old world.<sup>17</sup>

Nearly five hundred years of syncretic melding has produced a rich diversity in the practice of Catholicism and its alter ego, Folk-Catholicism. Today, Mexican Catholicism exists in many and highly varied forms, as evidenced in the difference between the official and unofficial church beliefs and rituals as they are practiced from the highland villages of the southern Mexican State of Chiapas to the central State of Guanajuato or to the native Tarahumara and Yaqui villages of the northern states of Chihuahua and Sonora.<sup>18</sup>

Mexican folk-Catholicism produced a parade of prophets and miracle workers who had emerged over the centuries all claiming to be the messiah. All appeared during critical periods. In the 1700's, Tzantzen, a miraculous Indian healer emerged from the north central state of Zacatecas. During the Mexican War of Independence, in 1810, a Mexican nun, Sor Encarnación, was famed as a healer and miracle worker. The middle nineteenth century produced "Tata Naz," the Yucatecan figure behind the cult of the Talking Cross.<sup>19</sup> In the mountains of the northwestern Mexican state of Chihuahua, Teresa Urrea of Carbola appeared as the miraculous folk-saint of the Tarahumara rebellion of the 1890's.<sup>20</sup> Rutila, a folk-healer or, curandera, from Guadalajara, was a notable cult figure who claimed to raise the dead. Maria Auxiliadora was a peasant from the State of San Luis Potosi in north central Mexico, and Erasmo Mata was a prophet healer. During the French occupation of the 1860's, "Tatita Santo," a long-haired, bearded holy man appeared in the northern states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon and was influential on the Texas side of the U.S-Mexico border.

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<sup>16</sup>William Madsen, *Religious Syncretism* (In Handbook of Middle American Indians, Edited by Robert Wauchope, Austin: The University of Texas Press, vol.6, 1967).

<sup>17</sup>Weckmann, 1992.

<sup>18</sup>Fernando Benitez, *Los Indios de Mexico* (Mexico City: Biblioteca ERA, Vol. 1-5, Sixth Edition, 1994).

<sup>19</sup>Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>20</sup>William Curry Holden, *Teresita*, (Owings Mills, Maryland: Stemmer House, 1978).

## CASE: TATITA SANTO (1860's)

"It occurred in 1860." So begins Father Pierre Fourtier Parisot's reminiscences of his encounter with a mysterious folk healer and saint in Mier, Tamaulipas. Father Parisot was a French Oblate Missionary in Brownsville for a number of years between the tumultuous years of 1857 and 1870. His account appears in the recollection of his adventures during those years in South Texas.<sup>21</sup> "The rumor had been current for some time," he states, "that a saint had appeared in the mountains of Nuevo Leon, Mexico, and that he was working astounding miracles, healing all kinds of diseases which man is heir to, and foretelling future events. Men, women, and children were seen on the roads leaving their homes and occupations, in order to pay their respects to the saint, or to be cured of some disease." The "saint" whom he eventually meets and confronts as an "impostor," hypocrite" and "heretic" was a man named Padre Rojas and commonly referred to as "Tatita" by his followers and detractors alike.

The purpose of this section of our article is intended to amplify on the details of Fr. Parisot's encounter with this mysterious personage via information found in other historical documents. I believe such an amplification would help understand: something of the mind-set of Fr. Parisot and, by extension the perspective of the Oblate missionaries on Mexican Catholicism along the Border, in contrast to the perspective of Mexican priests and laity.

### THE ENCOUNTER: TWO VERSIONS

Father Parisot's account of his encounter with Tatita at Mier is the first published description of the incident and it contains many details as to how the event unfolded, the physical features of the saint, his "creed" and the nature of his followers. Several decades later, (1938) Santiago Roel published the first of twelve editions of his *Apuntes Historicos* of Nuevo Leon.<sup>22</sup> In the chapter containing isolated details concerning Santiago Vidurri, the "caudillo" governor of Nuevo Leon and Coahuila during the War of the Reform and shortly thereafter, Roel included a short sketch of "Tatita" and the manner of his death. As a footnote, Roel appended a transcription of a letter he found in the Vidaurri Archives from the Capellán of Sabinas Hidalgo to the Priest of Mier wherein the former describes what would appear to be the same encounter or incident described by Father Parisot. We say "would seem to be" because one can infer from the Capellán's letter that the incident occurred in Sabinas Hidalgo and not Mier, located some thirteen kilometers directly east. Nevertheless, the details of the Capellán's account are so similar to those provided by Fr. Parisot including the mention of a priest from Brownsville being present that it is hard to conclude that these were two separate events. Given that Fr. Parisot's account was written at least three decades after the event, and assuming that Roel's account of the letter originating with the Capellán from Sabinas Hidalgo (dated the first of February 1861) is correct then we can conclude the event took place in Sabinas Hidalgo. On the other hand, a review of the documents contained in the "Tatita File" at the State Archives of Nuevo Leon revealed no account of Tatita having been, at this time, in Sabinas

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<sup>21</sup> Fr. Pierre Fourtier Parisot, *Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary*, Johnson Brothers, San Antonio, 1899, p.43-50.

<sup>22</sup> Santiago Roel, *Apuntes Historicos par La Historia de Nuevo Leon*, Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, 1938.

Hidalgo.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, his activity in Mier (and nearby Guerrero) is well documented by these and still other sources. Therefore, we are inclined to think that the specific incident I will describe and contrast took place in Mier around the latter part of January or the first week of February 1861.

Fr. Parisot's encounter with Tatita, from his account, appears to have been somewhat fortuitous. While at Brownsville he had heard of Tatita, and possibly have read a report of his activities in the Corpus Christi Ranchero, his interest in Tatita seems not to have been aroused.<sup>24</sup> To those of his parishioners who came to consult him before starting their journey to see the "saint" he seems to have given them his blessing. "My answer was, The hand of God is not shortened. What has been seen so often may be repeated for the edification of the faithful and the conversion of sinners." When at the request of the Bishop of Monterrey he was sent to Reynosa (which at the time had no Pastor), his interest in "Tatita" sharpened. First of all, attendance at Mass in Reynosa was minimal since many of the faithful had already departed for Mier where the saint was reported to be working his miracles. When the Mayor and the Aldermen of Reynosa asked him for confession and communion before they too departed for Mier, he advised them to postpone their journey until, "I had seen the man myself...After Mass I also set out to see him, with sole intention of investigating his claim and pretensions. Was the man a saint or an impostor?" If Fr. Parisot had doubts as to the nature of this man, they seem to have been removed by the accounts he heard from the Priest at Camargo where he spent the night before arriving in Mier. Of what he heard, he says. "...if true, would clearly prove that he was simply a hypocrite and an impostor."

Arriving in Mier the following night he observed the spectacle of the masses reciting the Rosary with the saint in the main plaza and heard the saint preach his doctrine. According to Fr. Parisot, these were his words: "My brethren! The new religion which I am sent to deliver to you, was revealed to me by Almighty God Himself for the Mexican nation. It consists exclusively in three things: To adore the Eternal Father and the Holy Cross and to say the Rosary, Confession, Mass, and all other religious practices are abolished. Follow me, adore the Cross and you shall be saved." Father Parisot's reaction, in his own words, is both curious and revealing. He states, "This nonsense did not surprise me very much, but I was pained to see such a multitude paying the most respectful attention to his false declarations. Oh, I said to myself for the honor of religion, this man's scheme must be frustrated." Why was Fr. Parisot not surprised by this "nonsense"? The answer, I believe, rests on the experiences of the Oblate missionaries with the rural folk in South Texas ranchos. The missionary apostolate undertaken by the Oblates along the Rio Grande, beginning in 1849, was beset with numerous problems chief among these was the "ignorance" of the rural poor concerning the basic tenets of Catholicism although all were nominal Catholics and their indifference to the reception of the sacraments. Many of the letters of these Oblates to their superiors registered their complaints and concerns over these characteristics.<sup>25</sup> As Doyon puts it, "The missionaries had to wage long and secret battles to evangelize, the poor as their Oblate rule prescribed, and to make practical Catholics out of this forsaken people." Citing a report from Fr. Gaudet to his superior some would state that to be baptized and to be married well was enough Mass. "Easter and the rest are good for

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<sup>23</sup> Tatita Santo File, *State Archives*, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, Monterrey.

<sup>24</sup> "New Saint in Mexico", in *Corpus Christi Ranchero*, January 12, 1861, and "That Saint" January 19, 1861.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard, Doyon, OMI, *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grand*. Milwaukee, Blake Press, 1956.

pious people who like them.”<sup>26</sup> For some of the priests, Fr. Doyon, said, “it was an ungenial task to repeat over and over the ABC’s of religion” That Fr. Parisot has heard (and seen) such “nonsense” before there can be no doubt. He himself relates how he struggled with such indifference or resistance to the sacraments. When he was assigned to prepare three condemned men for eternity he tells us: “For fifteen days I worked in vain endeavoring to bring them to repentance” The point here is that while he understood the circumstances which had created the unorthodox folk Catholicism of the people of the ranchos, to hear it being preached and respectfully listened to as a “creed” was a blemish on the “honor” of his faith and more than the good missionary could abide. This was now “heresy.” He resolves to confront and publicly “unmask” this false messenger from God the next day, despite dire warnings from the frightened and secluded pastor of the city of Mier with whom he consulted that night: “Don’t go, for if they suspect your intention, you will not return to my house alive... The impostor has 300 *Hermanos* (Brothers) armed to the teeth, who draw their share of the profits.”

The next morning after mass, Fr. Parisot marches to where the saint is lodged (“...a large room. situated on a platform, from which a perfect view could be had of the plaza”). As he enters he sees in the crowd .... “two of my acquaintances, who offered to accompany me, for said they, You may need our assistance.” Tatita invites Fr. Parisot to say rosary with him. Father Parisot refuses, “unceremoniously” blows out the sacred candles and for an hour “lectures” the man attempting to make him see the “evil consequences of his false doctrine.” In response, Tatita ...lifted up his eyes and exclaimed: “The Holy Cross is my Protection.” At one point, Fr. Parisot warns Tatita that the hand of God will someday “smite him...that he would die unshriven and be dragged to hell.” To which Tatita responds, “Oh, but I am going to change my life...I am going to build a hermitage and lead the life of a recluse in the future and do penance.” Fr Parisot remains unmoved by this seeming recanting, “Oh! the hypocrite” he adds, Fr. Parisot, still on the platform, then turns to the multitude and “Commanding silence and attention, I said, ‘Brethren and Catholic Mexicans listen to me...Keep away from this man, he is not a saint but a hypocrite and an impostor.’ Here arose a tumult of angry disapproval—But I continued...” After a few more denunciations of Tatita and admonitions to the crowd to reject the impostor Fr. Parisot’s two companions sensing the good priest was in danger of being physically attacked by the crowd seek help from the authorities and are told to escort Fr. Parisot to the municipal palace, which they do ...“one on each side of me and each carrying a loaded carbine.” At the palace, the mayor admonishes Fr. Parisot for being “a disturber of the public peace,” and that by law he could have him arrested and jailed. It should be noted here that at this time public activities by the clergy had been severely proscribed by the Constitution of 1857 and its reform law. In short, Fr. Parisot had indeed broken the law. The mayor rejects Fr. Parisot suggestion to get 100 soldiers for protection.... and instead confronts the angry crowd himself and quells the tumult with the threat of military force and legal prosecution if they persist in seeking revenge on the priest, called for by Tatita himself after Fr. Parisot departure from the scene. The mayor orders Fr. Parisot to leave Mier, with an escort of fifty soldiers. The frightened Pastor of Mier also leaves with Fr. Parisot and both arrive safely at Camargo. The next day Fr. Parisot is back in Reynosa. The foregoing passages are the essential details of Fr. Parisot’s description of his encounter with Tatita. Let us now review what we believe to be the same incident from the perspective of the Capellán of

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<sup>26</sup> Fr. Gaudet was the superior for the Brownsville “rancho” missionaries.

## THE CAPELLÁN'S VERSION OF THE ENCOUNTER

The Capellán's first meeting with Tatita also seems to have been a fortuitous one. On the seventh of January, while on his way to a spiritual retreat in Saltillo, The *Capellán* "...had the pleasure (el gusto) of knowing the old man, "Tatita," at the Rancho de la Laja (in the state of Tamaulipas). According to the Capellán, Tatita was actually fleeing the state of Coahuila because he had been exiled from Coahuila. But upon seeing him enter that ranch, he states, "...*me escandalice de verlo venir cargado en una silla, echando bendiciones episcopales dejándose besar los pies y manos; aclamado por aquella multitude como enviado de Dios o el mismo Dios.*" (I was scandalized seeing him being carried on a chair, casting bishop's blessing, letting himself be kissed on his feet and hands; acclaimed by that multitude as an envoy of God or God himself). Unable to stand such an "ignominious scandal," and with the courage infused by his priestly office ("y con la valentía que infunde mi character sacerdotal"), he confronts Tatita with the following questions: Who are you? Why are you here, and why that "*pompa*" (procession of splendor and ostentation: our translation) that is solely owed to God himself, and I was astounded to hear the voice of a Mexican Indian who said, "I am a man who brings a holy wooden cross (*Santo Madero*) and my eternal father and I with him, at his side...I warned him not to cast blessings nor bless santos; but he was so shameless (*descarado*) that in my presence he would bless them making a sign of the cross with his hand and sprinkling water with these ridiculous words:--*Agua del Jordán* (water from the river Jordan). I could not suffer his impudence (*descaro*) and I began preaching to the people but if I had continued they would have stoned me, and I decided to keep quiet."

The Capellán's concern then, seems to have been centered principally on the almost regal type homage which the people bestowed on Tatita (i.e. his being borne on people's shoulders seated in a chair and their kissing his feet and hands), who after all was simply a Mexican Indian. While it is not altogether certain whether Tatita was indeed racially or ethnically an Indian, we believe the priest used the term more in the pejorative sense—uncultured ignorant, backward dirty, etc. This usage or meaning of "*indio*" was as common then as it is today in Mexico. Being astounded by such a "shameless" reversal of the social order in the case of Tatita was a common reaction among *la gente decente* of the region who witnessed these spectacles. For example in a letter (dated February 20, 1861) to the editor of the *Boletín Oficial de Monterrey* (February 27, 1861), signed by eleven prominent citizens of Ciudad Guerrero (upriver from Mier), where Tatita appeared for a brief period he is described with the following words: "*la astucia de esta mondado y despótico viejo que no debe ser más que un mocho profugo de alguna carcel criminal porque haci lo demuestra sus modales, ha infatuado tanta gente*" (The slyness of this dirty and despotic old man, who must be nothing more than a hypocritical fugitive from some criminal jail, as demonstrated by his manners has infatuated so many people...). An editorial on his death, also published in the *Boletín Oficial* (March 21, 1861. no.17). exclaims "*Jamás el fanatismo hizo tanto efecto por medio de un hombre rustico como era el indígena Rojas.*" (Never has fanaticism made such an effect by means of a rustic man as was the Indian Rojas) But the good Capellán had not seen the last of Tatita, "When it returned from Saltillo

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<sup>27</sup> Roel, p.169-170, 1938.



(his letter continues) by misfortune I found him here and then I commenced to preach against the old man, but I assure you that I have been in danger of being assassinated because of this false prophet. Finding myself in much trouble I asked the companions ("*Los Companeros*") for help and Thursday of last week came two priests, the Father Pabillo of Brownsville (Father Parisot?), and Father Peña vicar of Camargo."<sup>28</sup> After prayers and preparing themselves with confession and holy mass, the three went to the house where Tatita was lodged, armed with *estola y manual* (vestment and prayer book). Tatita received them. The Capellán, then wrote, "*yo tomé la palabra en este modo: En el nombre del Redentor de quien somos ministros, digamos U. Porque da bendiciones y se deja adorar?*" (I spoke to him in this way: In the name of the Redeemer, whose ministers we are, tell us why you bestow blessings and allow yourself to be venerated?). Tatita did not answer but only looked upward. After repeating the question many times and receiving no answer but silence from Tatita, the Capellan and his two companion priests began to exhort Tatita with the prayers of exorcism of the Catholic church.<sup>29</sup>

When they began intoning these prayers in unison, Tatita, "*bajó los ojos y la cabeza y comenzó a llorar*" (he lowered his eyes and his head and he began to cry). The Capellán wrote that Tatita responded by saying that his cures were admirable because he was possessed by the Devil, and that he bestowed blessings to fool the people. Furthermore, he stated that he was going to give up that way of life and promised to go to confession (or confess his sins) and to hear mass. The Priests then gave an account of all of this to the Judge and the "Pueblo". A commission then went to Tatita to ask him about the Priests testimony or account, which Tatita denied, saying that the Priests were raising false testimony against him. At this point, writes the Capellán, "*se formó tal barullo en el populacho, que si salgo con los padres nos matan.*" (There was formed such a tumult amongst the rabble, that if I had gone out with the priests they would have killed us). He continues, "here you have us that they have put more credence in a devil-possessed old man that in three priests who had no reason to lie, and I am in such a position that to go about I have to have guards, because the old man has a *sequito* (retinue) of 500 men." It could be assumed that he was including the Judge and the commission in this lament, if not actually the Judge and the commission itself. Furthermore, as in Fr. Parisot's version, this "retinue" was constituted by the armed *Hermanos* or Brothers of Tatita.

## THE TWO VERSIONS: A COMPARISON AND CONCLUSIONS

As stated at the beginning of this case study, we believe that despite significant differences in some of the details described in these two accounts of an encounter with Padre Rojas (alias "El Santo Tatita"), both are accounts of a single event that took place in Mier, in late January 1861. If it is possible that the history an Santiago Roel had the correspondents reversed, i.e. that the letter he reproduced in his historical notes was actually from the Priest at Mier to the Capellán of Sabinas Hidalgo, our assertion is strengthened. The similarities in what transpired are too great to be simply co-incidental. There is, first of all, the presence of a priest from Brownsville who accompanies the

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<sup>28</sup> There was no Oblate from Brownsville named "Pabillo" (See Doyon, Op. Cit. 238).

<sup>29</sup> In letter from Manuel E. Rejon, Sr. Secretario del Estado, to Juzgado Primero Constitucional de Cadereyta Jimenez, Diciembre 31, 1861. (Reprinted in Boletin Oficial de Monterrey, Marzo 21, 1861, #17.

Capellán, along with the priest of Camargo. Father Parisot too had two companions in his version of the encounter, although he does not tell us the identity of his two acquaintances. In both accounts, the Tatita states that he plans to change his ways, which he later denies. In both versions local authorities are consulted and they conduct their own investigation, and, in both cases, their judgment is that the priests are responsible for the tumult, and intervene to save the priests from the mob. The principal difference is that both Parisot and the Capellán each claim to be the one who directly admonishes the “impostor.” Here we are inclined to believe it was the Capellán. After all, Father Parisot constructs his account from memory (we presume), three decades later, while the Capellán is describing what took place the week before. Further research into the correspondence of these two priests may help clear up this point, but we may never know which one was the real inquisitor. What is more significant, however, are the different attitudes towards the saint and his followers demonstrated by the two priests. Father Parisot’s main concern seems to have been that the saint was misleading the masses and reinforcing their unorthodox beliefs and practices, something he was familiar with, and as a missionary, he had been working long and hard to correct.<sup>30</sup> He seems not to have taken notice (or cared about) the fact that the “believers” kissed Tatita’s hands and feet, and carried him about on their shoulders, seated on a platform or “*anda*.” As a matter of fact, he tells us that Tatita’s wanderings were constantly performed on foot. He pleads with the crowd of followers to not follow or believe this man, without any commentary on their intelligence or social standing. The Capellán, on the other hand, seems to have been as greatly scandalized seeing these forms of homage being paid to a person who was no more than a “Mexican Indian” as he was by the creed he espoused, if not more so. He is upset that the authorities would believe a “devil-possessed” old man but not believe priests. For him this was a scandalous and dishonorable breach of the established social order--actions symbolic of a world turned upside down.<sup>31</sup> When he refers to the followers as a “*populacho*” (which can be translated as mob or rabble) he is betraying a disdain for the uneducated, rural poor working people of the region, if not of Mexico--the primitive and uncivilized segments of Mexican society. Father Parisot, on the other hand, simply refers to them as “...the innocent and the credulous...” Ironically, the Capellán’s reactions and views were shared by local authorities in this region, who themselves (as Liberals) saw the Church and clergy as a source of fanaticism, superstition and a obstacle to nation building. For example, in early 1861 the authorities of Camargo, upon hearing rumors that Tatita was headed in their direction, approved an official petition banning his presence in their community which stated: “...*algunos ignorantes se preparan a celebrar su venida con estrépito de fuegos artificiales y otras demostraciones de veneracion lo cual pasando del ridiculo a lo escandaloso y perjudicial a la sociedad lo hacia presente (la petición) a fin de que esta villa no se sufra un descrédito como en la villa de Mier ha sucedido porque la hipócrita mision del expresado Roja no es otra cosa que una farza ridicula que propaga más las ideas del fanatismo en el vulgo necio*” (translation: “some ignorant people are

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<sup>30</sup> Father Parisot, along with Frs. Clos, Olivier and Maurel, were zealous “rancho” missionaries. When his Superior (Fr. Gaudet) considered abandoning the ministry of the isolated ranchos, the four protested vehemently and forced Fr. Gaudet to abandon his idea. (See Juarez, 1973: 224).

<sup>31</sup> This interpretation is supported by the fact that the people of the “ranchos” often showed their reverence and respect for the priests by kissing their hands and feet and addressing them as “Santo Padre” or “Su Majestad.” (See Doyon, Op. Cit. 26).

preparing to celebrate his coming with the clamor of fireworks and other demonstrations of veneration, which passing from the ridiculous to the scandalous and prejudicial to the society, he presents his petition so that this community not suffer the discredit as has happened in the villa of Mier because the hypocritical mission of the named Rojas is nothing other than a ridiculous farce that propagates more the ideas of fanaticism in the stupid (or idiotic, foolish) multitude or crowd.”<sup>32</sup> Mier's “discredit” was, indeed, widespread. The letter to the editor from the citizens of Guerrero (cited above) was in response to an editorial “scoffing” of Mier and Guerrero, for having pertained the presence of Tatita, written by the editors of “*El Progresista*” of Matamoros (February 6, 1861). Likewise, the editorial on the death of Tatita (also cited above) starts out, “*Sabe ya el público hasta que grado llegó el escandalo de Pedro Rojas, que diciéndose hijo del padre eterno alcanzó lo que no hubiera alcanzado un verdadero santo. Que se le adore y se le rinde culto, colocándosele en andas, besándole los pies y considiéndosele una mision celestial que le ha dado celebridad entre la gente fanática que forman numerosas reuniones.*” (The public now knows to what extent the scandal of Padre Rojas has gone, who, proclaiming himself the son of the eternal father, has achieved what no true saint could achieved. That he is venerated and is shown reverence, placing him on a platform or litter, kissing his feet and attributing to him a celestial mission, has made him a celebrity among the fanatic people that form his massive reunions or meetings). In a letter (dated March 11, 1861) included in the same editorial the writer states that Tatita scoffed at the beliefs of his followers who were “....*personas que no tienen idea de la educación y que no están al son de la religión que profesan.*” (persons who have no education and are not in tune with the religion they profess).<sup>33</sup> Finally, another letter (dated December 31, 1860, also included in the editorial) requested, from the Governor (Vidaurri), official action against Tatita “...*para evitar tan vergüenzoso escandalo, que le hace tan poco favor al heroico estado a quien tenemos el honor de pertenecer*” (to avoid such shameless scandal that does little favor to the heroic state to which we have the honor of belonging).<sup>34</sup>

Father Parisot's account and that of the Capellán also demonstrates another very significant difference between these two catholic priests. In Father Parisot's account he tells us that shortly after returning to Reynosa he received the news that Tatita had been killed the day after his departure.<sup>35</sup> “Had I been consulted,” he adds, “my advice would have been: Let the man go back quietly to the mountains, gather herbs and use his knowledge for the benefit of mankind...” The Capellán's view of Tatita's curing powers is radically different he states, “*Las curas son admirables y tengo 19 declaraciones de personas a quienes ha curado lobanillos y ni sienten operación, siendo esta con una navaja que le da filo con un eslabón. Por esto creo que está poseido del demonio.*” (His cures are admirable and I have 19 declarations of persons whom he has cured tumors that they did not feel the operation, this being done with a knife he sharpens with a whetstone. This is why I believe he is

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<sup>32</sup> This document is a typed copy from Libro de Sesiones Extraordinarias: Libro #7, Año 1861 (n.d.), provided by the authors by Don Gustavo Garza Saenz, Cronista de Camargo, Tamaulipas.

<sup>33</sup> In letter from Manuel E. Rejon, Sr., Alcalde Primero de Cadereyta Jimenez, to Secretaria del Estado. March 11, 1861. (reprinted in Boletín Oficial de Monterrey, Marzo 21, 1861, #17).

<sup>34</sup> In letter from Juan Quintanilla, Sr. Secretario del Estado, to Juzgado Primero Consticional de Cadereyta Jimenez, Diciembre 31, 1861. (Reprinted in Boletín Oficial de Monterrey, Marzo 21, 1861, #17).

<sup>35</sup> Fr. Parisot's account of Tatita's death is at odds with official accounts found in the State Archives. He was killed by the Cadereyta Police and Posse acting under the direct orders of the Governor of Nuevo Leon and Coahuila, Santiago Vidaurri.

possessed by the devil). Father Parisot's attitude toward the healing powers of Tatita (and perhaps folk curers in general) are very similar to the attitude of another American priest toward another famous folk saint/healer in South Texas, around the turn of the century--Don Pedrito Jaramillo. Hudson relates an incident where an Anglo altar boy was mocking Don Pedrito, only to be admonished by the parish priest, Father Bard. Father Bard explained to the altar boy that God, knowing of the great need of the people where there are few doctors, saw fit to bestow on this humble man the power of helping these people.<sup>36</sup> The Capellán's attitude toward the folk healer Tatita, on the other hand, seem to come straight out of the Spanish Inquisition.

In her book *Idols Behind Altars*, Anita Brenner succinctly describes Mexico's passion and longing for a messiah: "Mexico has a messiah who dies, yet always lives; who has so many names and forms that he is never graspable in one; who has humility and strength, who kills and heals, blasts and kindles, suffers and rejoices. He is the image of his people. He is a dark master of himself, and prodigal to the rest of the world. The prophecy that bears him is a prophecy that needs no future, but is constantly fulfilled; that needs no faith but vision. It is the brown hand, color of the earth, shaping a round bowl color of the hand."<sup>37</sup>

Like Tatita before him, in the middle nineteenth century, the persona and demeanor of El Niño Fidencio fulfilled the Mexican image of a redeemer and much more. Like the archetypal messiah Brenner describes, Tatita and Fidencio are perfect images of the simple people of Mexico. In Tatita and Fidencio, Mexico's messiah was a peasant as poor as the people who sought deliverance at his hand. They both claimed power derived from God, through the soil and through the native plants of the desert. In both cases, their spiritual gift or *don* had been granted them through a direct revelation by Christ and the Holy Spirit.

In the early twentieth century, Fidencio adhered to a simple credo: "Those who suffer have the Grace of God. By suffering, health is reached, and it is necessary that this should be so, because those who desire to be well, should be strengthened by sorrows and pain."<sup>38</sup>

Oblivious to his celebrity and like Tatita before him, Fidencio became a living folk-saint during his lifetime. In the 1930's the media lost interest in Fidencio who showed no more interest in loss of newspaper attention than he had in his celebrity of the early years. Fidencio, after all, stated often that his mission on earth was not to be famous, but to ease the pain of the suffering. In the end, numerous attempts to exploit him failed, and he died as he had lived, a simple barefooted peasant. This is his story.

## CASE: EL NIÑO FIDENCIO (1928)

There are only sketchy facts known about the early life of José Fidencio from the time of his birth, in 1898, until his appearance in the village of Espinazo in the northern state of Nuevo Leon in 1921, when he was twenty-three years of age. A birth document filed on November 18, 1898, in the small town of Iramuco, Guanajuato, recorded his birth as November 13, 1898. Fidencio was the son of Socorro Constantino, a forty-year old day laborer, and María Tránsito Sintora, thirty-one years of

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<sup>36</sup> Wilson, Hudson, *The Healer of Los Olmos*, S.M.U. Press, Dallas, Texas, 1951.

<sup>37</sup>Anita Brenner, 1929.

<sup>38</sup>Anita Brenner, 1929.

age. Interestingly, his birth certificate indicates that his parents were not Indians, as indicated earlier, an important issue of social class in Mexico.<sup>39</sup> While the date and location of Fidencio's birth and his parents' names are certain, our concrete knowledge of his childhood remains sketchy. For example, it is commonly stated in the Mexican popular literature that Fidencio was the fourteenth born of twenty-five children. This fact is doubtful and has never been documented. It is certain, however, that his younger brother, Joaquin, spent most of his life close to Fidencio's side. It is believed that the two young brothers were contracted to work in the henequen fields of Yucatan around 1909.<sup>40</sup> A world away from the traditional village life of early twentieth century Guanajuato, the harsh existence of Yucatan would have been a traumatic experience for the young boys. Fidencio re-appeared in the area of Iramuco and Yuriria approximately two years later. Personal interviews with his cousins, who still live in Yuriria, place the young Fidencio there in 1913, at about eleven years of age. We know, moreover, that he assisted the local priest, serving as an altar boy and working around the church at that time. From an early age Fidencio showed great fascination for religion.<sup>41</sup>

At about the age of thirteen, Fidencio was contracted to work as a kitchen boy in the household of the López de la Fuente family, with whose son, Enrique, Fidencio had gone to school. As an adult, Fidencio was semi-literate. He only briefly attended elementary school in Guanajuato and in Nuevo León, never showing much interest in formal schooling. It was not common nor was it expected, in the early part of the century, for a peasant boy to attend school beyond the age of puberty. Able to perform work, he would have been expected to help support his family. However, Fidencio was orphaned at an early age. What does seem curious is that he would be selected for household work as opposed to field work, which, would be more common for a young Mexican boy at time. His cousins indicate that Fidencio suddenly left Yuriria, sending no word of his whereabouts, and that they did not hear from him again until approximately fifteen years later when his name began appearing in the Mexican press in 1928.<sup>42</sup>

In all probability, around 1913 Enrique López de la Fuente recruited Fidencio to move northward from Guanajuato to Nuevo León to work on a ranch near Sabinas Hidalgo (note that this is the same area in which Tatita existed some 75 years earlier). In 1915 Fidencio worked briefly in the San Rafael mine near Espinazo, which is located on the main Mexican national railroad line that runs from the northern border with the U.S., down the center of the country toward Saltillo, and continues southward to San Luis Potosi and eventually Mexico City. Today this rail line is a primary route for NAFTA, linking the major industrial supply cities of the American Midwest with the Mexican heartland. Espinazo remains an insignificant outpost in the mountainous deserts of northern Mexico. This semi-abandoned whistle stop still springs to life twice a year, every year, in October and March for the Niño's fiestas which recall to mind the peak of his popularity in the 1920's.

During the time between 1915 and 1921, Fidencio's whereabouts is uncertain. However, always in the company of Enrique López de la Fuente, Fidencio finally settled in Espinazo around 1921. Until the end of his life in 1938, he never again left the area of Espinazo. Fidencio would have been approximately twenty-three years of age when he settled in Espinazo and about thirty years of age

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<sup>39</sup>Garza Quiros, 1991

<sup>40</sup>David St. Clair, *Pagans, Priests, and Prophets*, (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1976).

<sup>41</sup>Garza Quiros, 1991

<sup>42</sup>*El Universal Ilustrado de Mexico*, February 17-18, 1928.

when he gained national recognition as a healer. He worked as a healer for ten years, dying a few days before his fortieth birthday. Employed on the ranch as a goatherd and kitchen worker, under normal circumstances Fidencio would have lived out his years as a simple, nondescript peasant, but that was not to be.

## EL NIÑO FIDENCIO THE HEALER

The seven years between 1921 and 1928 provide only sketchy details about Fidencio's development as a folk-healer. However, enough is known about his life in Espinazo to describe Fidencio's probable emergence as a *curandero*. Fidencio's first attempt at healing had come many years earlier, in the spontaneous act of setting his mother's arm, broken in a fall. While the act of splinting an arm hardly seems remarkable, this occurred when Fidencio was only eight years old.<sup>43</sup> On the ranch at Espinazo, Fidencio developed considerable acclaim in treating animals and especially in assisting at their births. It was not until he was called upon to assist with a human birth, however, that his ability and fame as a healer, *curandero*, and midwife, *partero*, began to unfold.

During the course of his lifetime El Niño Fidencio had several supernatural experiences in the form of revelations or visions in which he claimed to have been visited by Jesus Christ. In a vision which occurred early in his childhood, Fidencio was visited by a strange bearded man who imbued him with the spiritual gift or *don* of healing which included profound knowledge of medicinal plants (could this bearded man been Tatita?). While Fidencio never had any formal training on the properties of medicinal plants and home remedies, he was expert in the use of their properties.

A second and very significant supernatural visitation occurred on August 15, 1927. Fidencio related the story to his followers: at three o'clock in the morning at the sacred little tree, I was praying to the celestial father and contemplating on the bitterness and suffering that my life had been and all that I had suffered for the love of God and concern that his love reach humanity. On this holy day my celestial father ordered me to begin the preparations for the Cerro de la Campana on March 19, 1928, because the Divine Providence prepared me to have a large gathering to see if in this multitude of hearts they could understand that the author of peace has been born on March 19, 1928. The divine prophesy gathered the hearts of man but no one understood that the son of justice had arrived in the form of a divine spirit in the body of Fidencio Constantino.<sup>44</sup> This mystical event played a significant role in the life of Fidencio since it licensed him to share his gift of healing with the masses of needy and to begin his earthly mission. From this time Fidencio adopted the persona of a holy man and lived the life of an ascetic.

## EL CAMPO DEL DOLOR: THE MEXICAN PRESS 1928

In the early days of 1928, Mexico was in the throes of the Cristero revolt and the post-revolutionary government persecution of the Catholic Church. The headlines in the Mexican press announced the confiscation of church property and the expulsion, imprisonment and execution of the Catholic clergy. During these troubling days, Mexico turned her eyes to the desert north as the first

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<sup>43</sup>Garza Quiros, 1991

<sup>44</sup>*Anonymous Scripture*, August 1927.

reports of miracles began to emerge: "*Como el Niño Fidencio no se Hace Llamar Medico, no Intervendrá el Departamento de Salubridad Publica*," the headlines read. Because the Niño Fidencio Does Not Claim to be a Doctor, the Health Department Does Not Intend to Intervene.<sup>45</sup> In 1928, no laws prohibited the common Mexican practice of folk-healing called *curanderismo*.<sup>46</sup> The earliest news coverage of the strange young curandero, José Fidencio Constantino, described a miracle worker who neither claimed to be a doctor nor ever prescribed any of the popular patented medicines, but who nevertheless performed healing miracles, including making the blind to see and the dumb to speak. Talk of the young healer had previously been confined to northern Mexico, but that year virtually all the major dailies in Mexico City carried articles on the miraculous cures in Espinazo. Throughout 1928 and 1929, weekly articles, supported by dozens of eyewitness testimonies, touted Fidencio's healing abilities. News of El Niño Fidencio spread rapidly, and soon his fame extended throughout Mexico and beyond, to the United States and Europe.<sup>47</sup>

*El Universal*, one of the leading Mexican papers and among the first to give national exposure to the phenomena in Espinazo, sent its top reporter, Jacobo Dalejuelta, and photographer, Casasola, for a first hand look. In February 1928, the paper reported that the demented, the paralyzed and the leprous, a thousand strong, now formed a little town of make shift huts and tents around the home of Fidencio and that more than a hundred small wooden huts had been rapidly erected to rent to the growing crowd of miracle seekers. According to articles in *El Universal*, El Niño Fidencio worked near a sacred tree, and the ill gathered around him for public healing sessions that ran day and night for several days at a time. This scene eventually became a familiar trademark known as the healing circle or "*El Circulo de Curación*".<sup>48</sup>

*El Universal* described Fidencio as a "young man of few words, muscular with a sort of yellowish color and very simply dressed".<sup>49</sup> According to these and subsequent reports, day after day and year after year, the thousands of people who formed the Niño's healing circle saw him barefooted and dressed in a simple tunic. His room consisted simply of a crude wooden bed, a table, and a chair, though, according to reports, he used these infrequently, preferring to sit or sleep on the floor. He did not eat or drink with regularity, and mostly consumed only liquids. In spite of these abstemious habits, the Niño worked for days and nights without interruption, seemingly unaffected by fatigue.<sup>50</sup>

Significantly, from the earliest days of his fame as a healer, El Niño Fidencio was a public man: he performed his cures in the midst of thousands of onlookers, always allowed photographs, and gave numerous interviews. During one of the public healing sessions described above, the Niño reportedly turned to the reporter Dalejuelta and said: "Open your eyes, go wherever you want, tell the people what you have seen, and be sure to tell the truth." To the photographer, Casasola, the Niño quipped: "Take pictures of whatever you like, but be sure to give me copies, because if you don't, none of them will come out." As a result of this openness, hundreds of photographs exist, documenting his life and

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<sup>45</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 17, 1928, p.1

<sup>46</sup>Robert Trotter and Juan Chavirra, *Curanderismo*, (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1978).

<sup>47</sup>*El Excelsior*, February 21, 1928, second section, p. 1. and *El Universal de Mexico*, February 20, 1928, News of the World section.

<sup>48</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 16, 1928, p.1

<sup>49</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 16, 1928, p.1

<sup>50</sup>*El Excelsior*, February 14, 1928, p.4

work between 1925 and his death in 1938.

With the national press focused on El Niño Fidencio, a massive response was predictable. In the early months of 1928, the needy, the sickly, the terminally ill, people from every walk of life and social class, began converging on the little desert town of Espinazo, a place characterized both now and then by its remoteness and harsh environs. The precious little water that existed in Espinazo could never support more than a few extended families in eking out a subsistence living. For the majority of the year, the town baked in an unrelenting heat; when there was not a killing heat, a desert chill descended upon the landscape and its inhabitants. Today, in the middle 1990's, comfort in Espinazo is still impossible, and survival requires careful preparation, modern equipment, and brief visits.

As hundreds and then thousands of sickly and dying people arrived in Espinazo in 1928, this desolate and unforgiving spot turned into the Camp of Pain, *El Campo del Dolor*,<sup>51</sup> where the hopeful created their own accommodations by forming impromptu shacks made by stacking the brush of thorny desert plants into the shapes of huts and lean-tos. There the crowds suffering from insanity, paralysis, cancer, leprosy and syphilis were so large that the sick might have to wait for weeks, or in some cases months, to be seen and, thus, virtually became residents of Espinazo.

## FAMOUS CURES

The newspapers' accounts contained many case histories of El Niño Fidencio's miraculous cures. One famous case, retold many times, involved a young blind boy, the son of a Spanish emigrant.<sup>52</sup> The boy, age two, had suffered a firecracker accident that caused him to gradually lose his sight until he became completely blind. The doctors in his hometown had given him no hope of recovery; and after tales of the miraculous Niño filtered throughout Mexico, the child's parents decided to take him to Espinazo, an arduous journey that took them two weeks to complete. The family lived in a brush shack that they constructed using their clothing to cover the many openings. Weeks passed as they patiently waited to see the Niño.

When the day finally came for Fidencio to see their son, the Nino did not allow the mother to explain the cause of the boy's blindness. "It is not necessary that you explain it to me," he said. Asking them to be patient, the Niño applied his fingers to the boy's eyes, massaging them for a few minutes. Then for several more minutes, Fidencio lifted his eyes to the heavens in an ecstatic state as if he were having a vision. When some time had passed, the Niño lowered his head, continued to massage the boy's eyes, and said finally, "*Ya estás curado* . . . You're healed; bring me a handkerchief to cover his eyes and be sure not to remove it until the early morning light."

The family returned to their shack. Early the next morning, as the day was breaking and as the mother carefully removed her son's bandage, the boy exclaimed, "*Ya veo*. I can see." This documented case of restored sight was later judged to be an extreme case of autosuggestion, which it may very well have been. This famous case and many other like it accounted for the Nino's rapidly growing fame and popularity and for the frenzy of this followers.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 17, 1928, second section, p.1

<sup>52</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 16, 1928, p.1

<sup>53</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 16, 1928, p.1



Another interesting case typified the cures for which El Niño Fidencio was famous. A woman reported that her husband, who suffered chronic dyspepsia, had consulted numerous doctors and had eventually undergone surgery, which had not been successful. His condition was so extreme---even the smell of food made him sick---that he was expected to die. With no other hope available, the couple decided to go to Espinazo. The Niño came into their tent and without asking any questions about the man's illness began to massage his stomach. When he departed, Fidencio, who often used fruit as a medicine, left a large bunch of bananas for the patient to eat. The wife remarked that her husband could not eat them because fruit made him very sick. However, having begun to feel a little better, the patient asked for a small piece of banana and, to his wife's great surprise, asked for more a short time later. After two hours, he had eaten four bananas and finally vomited violently. Fidencio returned the next day and continued to massage the patient's stomach with a medicine paste made from fruit, soap, and medicinal plants. By the second day, the man had improved remarkably, and by the fourth, he was able to walk for the first time in months.<sup>54</sup>

Among the early curiosity seekers was a medical doctor from Torreón who arrived in Espinazo, according to reports, afflicted by a paralysis. Fidencio cured him after only one week of treatments; but while in Espinazo, the doctor witnessed many cures, which he later reported, including a notable cure of a young man from Monterrey who had gone insane. The doctors had declared the boy's insanity incurable, so his father had brought him to El Niño, who immediately began to extract the young man's teeth. Following this procedure, the youth rapidly regained his lucidity. The young man's insanity, the doctor from Torreon reasoned, had been due to an infection in his teeth that had affected his nervous system. The young man, grateful for his cure, stayed on to work in the Niño's household. It was a familiar pattern in Espinazo for the healed to volunteer service to the community.<sup>55</sup>

The newspaper reports that flowed out of Espinazo in the early months of 1928 carried the reputation of El Niño Fidencio out of Mexico and into the world at large. The Spanish language newspaper, *La Prensa*, in San Antonio, Texas,<sup>56</sup> and the premier North American daily, *The New Times*<sup>57</sup> reprinted stories that eventually traveled to other Spanish speaking countries such as Cuba and Spain.<sup>58</sup> In a remarkably short time, El Niño Fidencio had become a world figure. Then the ill and incurable from around the world set out for Espinazo.

## THE MYTH OF EL NIÑO FIDENCIO

If the press played a large role in spreading the news of the Niño's cures, it may have played an even larger role in promulgating the myth of El Niño. El Niño Fidencio was said to have had special powers from childhood, particularly clairvoyance. According to some reports, when an incurably ill person would approach, Fidencio would remark to the crowd, "A person is coming who is wasting his time; tell him to go off and prepare for his death; I can't help him except to pray for him." And through Dalejuelta, *El Universal* reported that a well-known General Peraldi came to

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<sup>54</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 18, 1928, p.1

<sup>55</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 18, 1928, p.1

<sup>56</sup>*La Prensa de San Antonio*, Texas, February 18, 1928, p.3 and April 6, 1928, p.1.

<sup>57</sup>*The New York Times*, February 22, 1928, p.6.

<sup>58</sup>*El Porvenir de Monterrey*, April 2, 1928, p.2

Espinazo with an incurable illness and that the Niño told him to stay if he wanted to, but that he, Fidencio, could not help him. The Niño told him to make peace with God because “Your sufferings are going to take you on an eternal adventure.” According to the report, General Peraldi died before the end of that day.<sup>59</sup>

Followers and observers alike reported that the Niño often seemed to enter a trance while healing. Fidencio denied being part of the spiritist movement that was common in the early part of the century.<sup>60</sup> A very religious person, Fidencio simply asserted that he was communicating with his Heavenly Father who healed through him. While he seldom referred directly to the supernatural, simple comments like the one he made to the photographer Casasola--about the photographs not coming out if he were not given a copy--were passed on by word of mouth and then by the press, greatly adding to and enhancing the myth and lore of the Niño as having the supernatural ability to affect the outcome of events.

Not all the effects of notoriety, of course, were positive. The growing reports of miraculous cures enraged the medical community and claims of fraud and deception grew more common. In Mexico City, The Brazilian Dr. Neumayer, a professor at the national medical school, gave a public “demonstration” on the types of psychic cures performed by the El Niño Fidencio. Neumayer claimed that psychic healing could effectively treat any illness, especially those involving paralysis or having neurological or mental origins. Neumayer claimed that Mexico was fertile ground for these types of healings and predicted that the Niño’s ability would soon wane.<sup>61</sup>

The media reports of miraculous cures in Espinazo reached a fevered pitch in the early months of 1928. On February 8, 1928, the Presidential train “Olivo” made a special stop at Espinazo so that Mexican President Plutarco Elias Calles could have a private consultation with the Niño. The Calles visit came at the height of the government’s persecution of the Catholic Church and his visit naturally led to speculation that it was intended to be a further slap in the face of the Church. However, eyewitness reports indicate that Calles suffered constantly from a serious skin ailment and came seeking relief from El Niño Fidencio. Regardless of the speculation on the real purpose of Calles’ visit, it had multiple effects that served to protect the Niño from serious interference from local and state governments as well as from the Church and medical communities.<sup>62</sup>

The state medical associations called for immediate intervention, not on the basis of Fidencio’s practice, but rather on the basis of what was not being done to protect the public health of the community at large. So many seriously sick people had congregated in Espinazo by February of 1928, in a place devoid of any public health supervision, that the fear of contagion became an increasingly valid issue. Many believed that the situation posed a serious health threat to all of northern Mexico.<sup>63</sup>

Among the incurable who journeyed to Espinazo hoping for a miracle, many were reported to have received one. But while those who boasted of miraculous cures added to the Niño’s stature as

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<sup>59</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 18, 1928.

<sup>60</sup>Alan Kardec, “Spiritualist Philosophy:” *The Spirits’ Book*, (The Brotherhood of Life, Inc., Albuquerque, 1989).

<sup>61</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 20, 1928.

<sup>62</sup>Pablo Condal, “Vida y Milagros del Niño Fidencio,” In: *Todo es Historia* (Mexico City: Grupo Editorial, S.A., No. 20, 1977).

<sup>63</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 19, 1928.

a healer, others died waiting for their turn to see the Niño in his Circle. Still others were turned away by El Niño because their illnesses had progressed beyond his ability to help them. With thousands of seriously and incurably ill people flocking to the site of miraculous cures, it was inevitable that the death rate in a small village the size of Espinazo would rise disproportionately. The alarming number of deaths in Espinazo in 1928 and 1929 concerned the authorities, especially in view of the fact that two new cemeteries had to be created. "A new cemetery for the miracles of Fidencio," reported the Monterrey newspaper. "How could the President of the Republic go there and not see the truth of what is happening," the press asked? "Was some deal made to protect Fidencio?" asked the Monterrey newspaper. In a small village where normally one death might be recorded every year, forty-four persons had died in less than one month.<sup>64</sup>

## FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

The focus of the Mexican press turned from reporting the issue to hosting a debate between the medical and the spiritist communities.<sup>65</sup> With such negative publicity, the governments of the northern states of Nuevo Leon and Coahuila experienced extreme pressure to resolve the case of the young thaumaturge.

The early newspaper accounts were also among the first to mention the Niño's cult following that emerged from among the loyal masses of the healed.<sup>66</sup> Between 1928 and his death in 1938, a small army of faithful, called "the red brigade," encircled, sheltered and protected the Niño from the constant attack of the press, the medical community, the government and the Church. When concern arose over the threat to the region caused by the congregating masses of ill and dying persons, Fidencio's inner circle of supporters defended the Niño. Their faith that God would provide protection never wavered.<sup>67</sup>

During the early months of 1928, the Mexican press varied sharply on its opinions of the Espinazo phenomenon. The major provincial dailies in the northern cities of Monterrey, Saltillo, and Torreón agreed with the need for government control and concurred with the outrage of the medical community. "Monterrey is threatened to be converted from a Mecca of Health into one of suffering and death," read one headline, claiming that Monterrey and the entire area of northern Mexico was in danger of a major epidemic with its origin in Espinazo.<sup>68</sup> Health authorities in the state of Nuevo León clamored that all manner of persons had congregated with every possible disease, and that it was now time to end the farce. In all probability, such articles were merely expressing the general embarrassment that the international attention on this barefooted kitchen boy was bringing to northern Mexico. It did not help matters that the area had been plagued by a rash of scandalous curanderos and miracle workers throughout the early part of the century. The headlines read, "A real plague of miracles workers has invaded Coahuila and Nuevo León. The competition between the saviors of mankind intensifies every day, without the caravan of believers knowing who to visit first, since every

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<sup>64</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 10, 1928.

<sup>65</sup>Alan Kardec, *The Book on Mediums*, (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1986).

<sup>66</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 16, 1928.

<sup>67</sup>*El Excelsior*, February 23, 1928, p.1

<sup>68</sup>*El Porvenir de Monterrey*, March 14, 1928, p.2

one of them claims to have derived power from God.”<sup>69</sup> One young girl claimed to be ordained by God. Other so-called “niños” included El Niño Marcialito and El Niño Juanito, as well as others from the area of Monterrey.<sup>70</sup>

The Mexico City press, on the other hand, largely supported Fidencio, if only in a cynical way. The news generated in the north was an appreciated diversion from the serious problems plaguing a country in the midst of civil war. Dr. Charles Morpeau, a French physician in Mexico, speaking in favor of the Niño Fidencio in the Mexico City press stated that it would be medical folly to “negate in the name of science the cures of the spiritual forces of the world.” Morpeau stated that, “Because all of life is based upon illusion or suggestion, we doctors have not tried to completely understand the nature of our successes. There are many things which happen in medicine which are completely unexplainable. If the truth be known, many have died because of our autosuggestion and inability to treat an illness.”<sup>71</sup>

“The peasant poets of Espinazo sing to Fidencio,” the headlines read. In retrospect, it is obvious what was happening; all of the essential elements for the establishment of folk hero status, including folk sainthood, were beginning to take shape. “Lines of hope in search of relief” and tales of the Niño’s philanthropy were becoming folklore as stories about “cures” and “miracles” performed were constantly told and retold. The tales of miraculous cures and healings were transformed into lyrics and from there into folk songs or corridos and religious hymns or *alabanzas* to be sung to and by the faithful. These popular songs sung by common people became the voice of the Niño’s “successes” and the way in which the faithful expressed their thanks to the Niño and to God for their cures. The Mexico City press reported that “the festive songs were sung of the curandero in Espinazo and across the country in all of the little towns and public places.”<sup>72</sup>

Day and night, in the face of adversity, Fidencio continued to personally console the suffering. Fidencio attended to his sick tirelessly. It was his mission. From around the nation thousands came to Espinazo, accepted his medicine and listened to his gentle words of spiritual healing. The thousands returned to their homes without the Niño’s ever knowing their names.<sup>73</sup> The journalists remarked that while the cured might never return to Espinazo, they had been helped by simply looking upon the face of El Niño Fidencio.

Bands of musicians strolled through the dusty streets of Espinazo singing, “Fidencio, the day that you were born, the nightingales sang, because you were chosen by God. You are a doctor among doctors.” Even the story of his election by God and the revelation of his gift was recorded in song. “One day at high noon, while with great hunger, you knelt beneath the tree and cried until your heart ached and you heard a voice. Fidencio don’t cry because very soon you will receive the gift that the heavenly father has given you, and you will become the doctor of doctors; and all of the illnesses that befall man you will cure with plants from the countryside that you like to prepare and that will be the medicine for all the ailments of man.”<sup>74</sup>

Throughout the remainder of 1928, and for several years afterward, the little desert train-stop of

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<sup>69</sup>*El Porvenir de Monterrey*, January 23, 1928, p.7

<sup>70</sup>*El Excelsior*, March 1, 1928, p.10.

<sup>71</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, March 10, 1928, p.1.

<sup>72</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 21, 1928, p.1

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid*,

<sup>74</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 20, 1928,

Espinazo became the single most important train destination in Mexico. During this time more people bought train tickets to Espinazo than to any other destination in Mexico. This tiny desert village, which formerly had no need for a mail service, was forced to establish a post office that processed the approximately twenty-five to thirty thousand letters that had arrived for the thousands of persons who had come to Espinazo in search of a cure.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Telégrafos Nacionales was forced to establish an office in Espinazo. Fidencio himself was the first person to utilize the telegraph services, sending a message of thanks to the national office.<sup>76</sup>

During 1928, newspapers reported that shipments of the Nino's herbal medicine were sent to Spain and to the rest of Europe,<sup>77</sup> and that several millionaires had invited the Niño to come to the United States<sup>78</sup> and to Cuba.<sup>79</sup> The Niño often stated that he would never leave Espinazo and he never did.<sup>80</sup> The Niño accepted neither money nor gifts, stating that his mission on earth was to "serve mankind and not to become rich."<sup>81</sup>

Fidencio's fame continued to grow throughout 1928. Never before had one of Mexico's hundreds of folk healers reached this level of popularity and scandal. Day after day the press followed the story printing headlines such as: "Large Caravans of Sick Leave for Espinazo," "Hundreds of Sick Return to Their Homes Let Down by Fidencio," "Peregrinations to Espinazo Make Followers of Fidencio Rich," "Contradictory News of El Niño Fidencio's Real Ability," "The Healer of Espinazo Continues Miraculous Cures," "The Fanaticism of his Followers Increases," "It's God that Cures With My Hands Says the Miraculous Niño Fidencio,"<sup>82</sup>

Within two years, Espinazo began to recover from the frenzy of 1928-29. By 1930, gone were the tens of thousands of insane, deformed, blind, paralytic, and diseased persons searching for a personal miracle, although a steady stream of the faithful, as well as many newcomers and curiosity seekers, continued to make the difficult trip year after year. And so during the early 1930's Espinazo began to take on a much more routine way of life.

Almost from the beginning of his brief media fame, Fidencio predicted his early departure from this earth. Daily he emulated and acted out the life of Christ. His protectors actively modeled religious symbolism around him, perpetuating the suggestion that the Niño was the Messiah, that he was the Christ. The Nino's life in Espinazo so mirrored that of Christ that he was expected to die at age thirty-three in 1931. In fact, the Niño did not die as predicted, but lived on until October of 1938, dying one month short of his fortieth birthday. When he died, the faithful fully expected him to rise from the dead on the third day.<sup>83</sup> Word of his death on October 17, 1938, traveled as quickly as the telegraph and railroad lines could carry the news.

From beginning to end, El Niño Fidencio had only ten short years of life to serve as a symbol for the poor and to treat the ill and the forgotten of Mexico. Almost immediately after the media frenzy

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<sup>75</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 22, 1928, p.1

<sup>76</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 22, 1928, p.1

<sup>77</sup>*El Porvenir de Monterrey*, March 17, 1928, p.1.

<sup>78</sup>*El Porvenir de Monterrey*, February 17, 1928, p.1.

<sup>79</sup>*El Porvenir de Monterrey*, April 2, 1928, p.1

<sup>80</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 20, 1928, p.1

<sup>81</sup>*El Excelsior*, February 17, 1928, p.1

<sup>82</sup>*El Excelsior*, February 21, 1928, p.1

<sup>83</sup>*El Universal de Mexico*, February 20, 1928.

of 1928 and 1929, his popularity in the media began to decline sharply. During the early 1930's, the Niño was almost constantly under fire by the agents of public health and medicine; and in later years, he was attacked by the Church. He was arrested and brought before tribunals in Monterrey on two occasions.<sup>84</sup> This period of relentless attack was unquestionably the most important period of his life because while his celebrity in the media declined, his fame and popularity with the common people continued to soar. It must be recalled that Fidencio Constantino was a simple man who never sought celebrity, who shied away from the dotting crowds of admirers, and who rarely would look directly into the eye of a camera. From the outset he declared that his purpose and mission on earth were to care for the ill who came to him and that he had no interest in fame or wealth.

## ESPINAZO: UTOPIA ON THE DESERT

In 1930, Dr. Francisco Vela, the vice-president of the State of Nuevo Leon's committee on public health, secretly visited Espinazo. The throngs of the waiting and the curious were gone: the spectacle was largely over. Approximately fifteen hundred genuinely sick persons and their families remained, still an enormous number of people compared to the one hundred or so permanent residents. Yet, in the 1930's, Espinazo was a place of serenity. While Vela attempted to portray the setting more as a place inhabited by lunatics and fanatics than a place of organized and effective healing, he inadvertently provided the first glimpses of Espinazo as an emerging utopian society, the New Jerusalem, built around a central cult figure.<sup>85</sup> Long orderly lines of men and women proceeded patiently for their morning drink of hot herbal medicine or coffee. The dirt streets were perfectly laid out, each with a name, with residential sections named after those in Mexico City. Fifty children in a small building received instruction from a teenage girl at The Niño Fidencio School. When Vela arrived, the Niño was seated in a large room called "El Foro" or the little theater, built for the plays and musical events that were popular with the Niño and his followers. Admirers surrounded him, literally hung on him, caressed him, stroked his hair, and kissed his hands and feet when they approached to greet him and seek his advice and counsel. El Niño Fidencio, always attired in a white tunic and barefooted, was described as looking serene and intelligent, he had a "rare" skin color which was a mix between brown and white, almost a yellowish color, with thick lips, a full set of large teeth and light colored eyes that chose to look away from the intruding eyes of visitors.<sup>86</sup>

Upon arrival, Vela was immediately ushered into the presence of El Niño Fidencio, who extended his hand meekly. El Niño asked two of his young helpers to show their guest whatever he wanted to see. Most interesting to Dr. Vela was a room with a large number of bottles filled with tissue and tumors extracted by El Niño. These may still be seen in Espinazo today. El Niño Fidencio performed operations without using anesthesia, using only a broken piece of bottle glass as a surgical instrument. Vela claimed to identify many as "obviously" benign tumors and commented that the most highly trained surgeons of the day would not have dared attempt those extraction's in their offices, implying something remarkable about an untrained curandero performing such surgeries.

Vela was escorted to all of the places described in dozens of newspapers that had appeared during

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<sup>84</sup>Fernando Garza Quiros.

<sup>85</sup>Euclides Da Cunha.

<sup>86</sup>*El Porvenir de Monterrey*, May 27, 1930.

the previous two years: the corral where the demented were kept, the place where the lepers were treated, the maternity ward, the post-operative room, the swing used to treat the mute, the large containers where the fresh herbal medicine was cooked every day, the flower garden and the famous healing mud pond. The visitor was stunned by the orderliness of the place and by its childlike simplicity. He reflected that "was like a child was playing hospital in a life-size place." None of this could possibly work, none of this could possibly be effective, he thought, as the first, and then the second and finally third funeral procession of the day filed by. Someone remarked proudly, "Only two years ago there had been hundreds of lepers here; today there are only twenty," implying that the others had been successfully treated and had returned home.

The different treatment venues were hundreds of yards apart, and as Fidencio made his daily treks to see his little sick ones or *enfermitos*, he was followed on foot by a parade of the faithful. The *peregrinos* sang religious hymns as they walked barefooted through the dusty streets of Espinazo. Later Vela would say: "Fidencio is an innocent, who is not even aware that he suffers from a mental illness that causes him to believe that he has been appointed by God to heal the sick. Those who are not innocent children are those who encircle him and promote his incredible abilities to the masses of suffering people who do not know any better."<sup>87</sup>

During the years, numerous attempts were made to call El Niño Fidencio before a tribunal, as he was constantly being accused of violations of public health laws. None of the changes was ever taken seriously, and Fidencio was never imprisoned or forbidden from performing his healing. Although a "serious embarrassment" to the State of Nuevo Leon, Fidencio continued working until his death in 1938.

El Niño Fidencio's rise to the national scene coincided with Calles' persecution of the Catholic Church between 1929 and 1931.<sup>88</sup> In 1932, the Archdiocese of Monterrey, having returned to power, sent two emissaries to Espinazo specifically to ask the Niño to refrain from administering the sacraments. The prelates were received respectfully by Fidencio, who agreed to cease from the administrations of the sacraments. However, at the insistence of his followers, he continued this act to the end of his life.<sup>89</sup>

## LAST DAYS ON EARTH

The final national media glimpse of Espinazo and El Niño Fidencio came in 1937, one year before his death. The Mexican photographic magazine, *Hoy*, Mexico's equivalent of *Life Magazine*, offered an analysis of the events at Espinazo ten years or so after the media blitz of 1928. This valuable expose provides an intimate view life of the Nino's last year of life. This important photojournalistic account depicts scenes that are familiar even today, since Espinazo has changed little since 1937. Only dozens of persons are reported to disembark from the trains. Gone are the mail office and the telegraph office of eight years earlier. The desperately ill, stripped of hope by their doctors or with no doctor at all, continue to come to Espinazo in search of a personal miracle; however, many return home each day disappointed. "I do not even know how to write, sir," El Niño Fidencio remarked to

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<sup>87</sup>*El Porvenir de Monterrey*, June 4, 1930.

<sup>88</sup>Wilfrid Parsons, *Mexican Martyrdom*, (Rockford: TAN, 1987).

<sup>89</sup>Fernando Garza Quiros, 1991.

the reporter. "I only use the gifts of healing that God has given me to help these suffering people." One of his young helpers remarks, "El Niño knows all of the medicinal plants that are used for healing; too bad he never studied medicine." One photograph declared, "Behind him, the life size statue of Christ from whom he claims his power; before him, the suffering people who will leave with cures that defy medical explanation as well as those who will never leave." Some leave perfectly healed, others only feeling better, some worse, but all leave believing that Fidencio does for them what no doctor can do. Almost all consider him to be a priest, and they beg for his blessing as he raises his crucifix to the heads of his followers for a blessing.

"What sort of man is this, who easily could have been one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Mexico?" "What sort of man gives away more than one million pesos?" "What sort of man is this who prefers to live a peasant's life, who shuns even a bed to lie on and who walks barefooted through the dusty streets of Espinazo in care of the suffering?"<sup>90</sup> The enigmatic paradox that Fidencio's life presented to the Mexican people further served to support his legitimacy as a beneficiary of supernatural abilities sent to earth by god to heal the sick and to spread the word of the New Jerusalem.

This last major article written about El Niño Fidencio during his life did not speculate about Fidencio's sanity or whether the government should step in to save the region from epidemic. Fidencio, now aging, tired, and disheveled, simply and humbly attributed his success to God and reiterated that he had not chosen to be selected for this life. He stated that God, having selected him, required him to fulfill his destiny in the service of the poor and suffering. "I am, in fact, nothing more than a simple peasant following the will of God."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>*Hoy de Mexico*, October 1937.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid*, 1937.



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# Playa De Matamoros

por

Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda

Playa arenosa donde el mar bullente  
con un sussurro de canción de cuna,  
viene a morir y a revivir continuo  
en cambio eterno.

Cuando amanece en la serena playa  
surge del mar con refulgentes rayos  
fúlgido sol que rebrillando tiñe  
de oro las olas.

A mediodía cuando el sol esplende  
sobre el cenit con esplendor magnífico,  
brillan espumas del oleaje y brillan  
conchas de nácar.

Si suave llega la apacible hora  
del vespertino agonizar del día.  
el sol occíduo de violeta pinta  
playa y espumas.

En ciertas noches del agosto cálido  
brillan las olas con espuma ígnea,  
y es mar de luz aqueste mar sereno  
que fosforece.

Y en otras noches que la luna riela  
son como plata bailadora y líquida,  
olas y espumas de este mar sonriente  
de Matamoros.







