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Hablando De Negocios: Three Rio Grande Valley Businesses during the Great Depression, 1929-1939

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HABLANDO DE NEGOCIOS: THREE RIO GRANDE VALLEY BUSINESSES DURING
THE GREAT DEPRESSION, 1929-1939

A Thesis

by

KARLA AISEN LIRA

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Major Subject: History

HABLANDO DE NEGOCIOS: THREE RIO GRANDE VALLEY BUSINESSES DURING
THE GREAT DEPRESSION, 1929-1939.

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December 2017

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ABSTRACT

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The Rio Grande Valley is in the South most tip of Texas and borders Northern Mexico, it includes Willacy, Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr Counties. Scholars have focused on gender, agriculture, and labor of the area. However, historians have failed to research the region through a business perspective during the Great Depression. This thesis then seeks to analyze ways in which the Great Depression affected the Rio Grande Valley through the research of two stores and one business in the area: The Manuel Guerra Store, Edelstein's furniture store, and John Shary's land selling business. Its objective will fill an existing gap in research, as there is no complete study of the area in reference to the economic turmoil.

DEDICATION

“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops, then your barns will be filled with overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

Proverbs 3:9-10.

Throughout this project, God tested me in multiple ways which almost left me to quit along the road, but God tests us to build character, and I came out of this project victorious. All my dedication goes to the Lord because he gave me the strength to withstand and triumph over the challenges of life and death.

Muchas gracias a mi ama y a mi apa, Roberto Camacho y Julieta Lira por los tantos sacrificios que an tomado para que yo pudiera salir adelante, por las muchas conversaciones y regaños que me dieron cuando pensaba en dejar todo, este libro es para ustedes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A promotional pamphlet from the 1920s opens with the following biblical scripture: “He that tilleth his soil shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough.”¹ Embedded in the pamphlet’s background is a picture of wide sunny heavens covering the sky and a modern home in a grassy field. In front of the house is a citrus meadow and, to the side, palm trees as tall as the sky provide cool fresh shade. A paved road features a man riding one horse while walking another, each horse peacefully striding across a calm afternoon. This was the image illustrated to mid-western Americans in the early 1900s: The Rio Grande Valley, a blessed, peaceful, warm, and fruitful region—a paradise.² These portraits, as well as other pamphlets, were used to lure Anglo Americans from northern locations into a romanticized area that was fruitful year-round in the early 1900s (see Appendix 1).

This project defines the Rio Grande Valley as the southern tip of Texas stretching into Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron counties. It is separated from northern Mexico by the Rio Grande and it features the Gulf of Mexico to its east. The history of the Rio Grande Valley begins with Colonel José de Escandón’s excursions into the area in order to protect Spanish territory from intruders such as attacks from French colonists or violent Indians. On March 5,

¹ Proverbs 28:19

² The Gulf Coast Country 1922, Box 1 of 2, Rio Grande Valley Promotional Literature Collection, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

1749, the first colony on the Lower Rio Grande Valley was settled in Camargo. As the land began to thrive, the King of Spain gave *porciones* or land grants to settlers beginning in 1764. Each land grant was cut vertically so the owners received access to the Rio Grande.³ Ownership of land moved hands from Spain to the Mexican government after Mexican independence in 1821. During this period, a free trade economy where there were no tariffs or involvement from the government was in place. In Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, sister city of Brownsville, Texas, there was a population of 16,372 people, out of which 300 were entrepreneurs and foreign merchants. Historian Irving Levinson argues that these entrepreneurs had a positive impact on the economy as they aided in financing and, as a result, brought growth to the region.⁴ Following the period of Mexican Independence was the Republic of Texas, spanning from 1836-1845; however, the socio-economic dynamics remained the same. The next significant episode in the history of the Rio Grande Valley was the Mexican-American War and it proved to be more chaotic as the Anglo settlers who lived in the area went to extreme and cloudy measures to steal land from Mexicans. In many instances, the Anglos fought against Mexicans in court and made them sign away their lands through legal documents written in a language different from their native Spanish.⁵

The key period important for setting the backdrop for this project was the arrival of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexican Railroad in 1904, a period unofficially identified as “Invention of the Magic Valley.” The railroad connected Brownsville to Corpus Christi and additional lines later linked the region to Houston, Texas. During the same time, Mexico also had a railroad connecting Matamoros to Monterrey, Mexico. Scholar Edwin J. Foscoe argues that the

³ Edwin J. Foscoe, “Agriculture History of The Lower Rio Grande Valley Region,” *Agriculture History*, Vol.8 No.3 (July 1934) 125-129.

⁴ Irving W. Levinson, “The Contours of A Very Special Border,” *Journal of the West*, Vol. 53, No.3 (2014) 69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

railroad did not deliver positive economic results right away and it took at least fifteen years before the lines really became productive.⁶ Still, the railroad brought an economic boom and the main industry transitioned from ranching into farming because now shiploads of crops could reach American markets easily. Concurrently, irrigation systems were being upgraded to meet the demands.⁷ The prominent crops cultivated in the 1900s in the region were cabbage, tomato, Irish potatoes, cotton, and citrus. Secondary crops included carrots, lettuce, onions, beets, string beans, and watermelon. The industry's most prominent and vital crop was grapefruit.

As was the case in the early twentieth century, grapefruit was and continues to dominate crops in the region. One of the supportive factors for this is the climate. Historically, fewer freezing temperatures occur in Brownsville in comparison to Redlands, California or Eustis, Florida, the two leading cities for citrus in the United States. The water supply is a secondary factor as to why this crop is successful in the area, as the delta provides sufficient water to irrigate all the industry without having to jeopardize the other crops previously mentioned.⁸ The land qualities of the Valley were marketed through heavy advertisement campaigns by the land developers and other businesses to lure commercial movement and people to the area.⁹ (See Appendix 2).

These special land qualities enticed boosters, who included people from various subfields whose interest were to see the area flourish, such as magazine, and newspaper owners,

⁶ Edwin J. Foscoe, "Agriculture History of The Lower Rio Grande Valley Region," *Agriculture History*, Vol.8, No.3 (July 1930) 136.

⁷ William T. Chambers, "Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas," *Economic Geography*, Vol.6, No.4(October 1930) 365, and Christian Brannstorm and Matthew Neuman, "Inventing the "Magic Valley" of South Texas, 1905-1941," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 2(April 2009) 126.

⁸ William T. Chambers, "Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas," *Economic Geography*, Vol.6, No.4(October 1930) 367-369.

⁹ "John H. Shary Excursion," Photograph, May 18, 1935, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, Crediting the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, webpage, texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph17249/, Accessed: March 21, 2017.

as well as railroad managers who used different types of media and strategies to lure Anglos into the region. The railroad industry usually brought a bandwagon of potential buyers from midwestern states to the Valley. Upon their arrival, luxurious commodities were offered to the visitors, showcasing the image of paradise as they toured the Valley in Lincolns, Packards, and Cadillacs. Scholar Matthew Neuman coined this term “choreographed farm tours.” The glorious façade was designed to influence and amuse the guests. The only reason they returned home was to get their families to the Valley.¹⁰ Images, such as the one described in the opening pamphlet, and others, like the cover of “True Story of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas,” featured a collage of alluring images enticing the viewer to come to the area. A palm tree providing shade to a field of crops, while fruits and vegetables were grouped together: watermelons, lettuce, corn husks, potatoes, all symbolizing crops that are grown year-round with the motto “Crops Never Fail.” This pamphlet also included a small patch of land used for ranching small animals and warm skies hugging the Rio Grande Valley emphasized living the life in the area.¹¹

The hard work put into these promotional campaigns led to positive results, as there was a rise in population in census records. In 1920, the Hidalgo County population was 38,110; ten years later it reached 77,004. With an increase in people, there was also new developments in business. Unfortunately, there is lack of literature on different types of businesses in the Valley other than agriculture. For example, Timothy Paul Bowman’s *Blood Oranges: Colonialism and Agriculture in the South Texas Borderlands* deals with themes of Mexicans and Anglo interaction and the discrimination faced by Mexicans through colonialism and expansion of

¹⁰ Christian Brannstorm and Matthew Neuman, “Inventing the “Magic Valley” of South Texas, 1905-1941,” *Geographical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 2(April 2009) 125-127.

¹¹ “True Story of The Rio Grande Valley, TX,” [Viewbook] Jackson- Vreeland Co. Kansas City, MO, Box 2 of 2, Rio Grande Valley Promotional Literature Collection, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

citrus agriculture. Businesses often left out in historic analysis are general stores, furniture stores, and saloons in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. An interdisciplinary study of these types of stores is necessary because only two historians have thoroughly explored Texas general stores: Linda English at the state level and Alicia Dewey at the regional level.

The research objectives of this thesis are to examine consumer demographics from three Rio Grande Valley general stores and businesses, specifically the Manuel Guerra Store in Roma, Texas, the real estate ventures of John H. Shary in Mission, Texas, and Morris Edelstein's Furniture store in Brownsville, Texas. The two businesses and land ventures were chosen because they are other businesses outside the citrus and agricultural industries which historians primarily focus on in the region. Secondly, these businesses were chosen because of the vast array of existing records not previously examined by scholars. To explain further, Manuel Guerra and Morris Edelstein had on-site businesses that sold general merchandise and furniture, while John H. Shary had a land selling venture. By looking into his land selling development, the research captures an aspect of his business enterprises outside the scope of agriculture. Lastly, there is a geographical reason for this study: these businesses incorporate a distinct region in the Rio Grande Valley from Roma in Starr County, passing through Mission in Hidalgo County, and ending in Brownsville in Cameron County.

To complete the study, the following research questions will be addressed in this project: What was the Depression like in the United States? What was the history of the cities in the Rio Grande Valley? What was the history and location of stores? The research questions get into more detail by asking who were the businessmen? What was their racial background? What the Great Depression was like for the businessmen? Lastly, what type of customers were buying at local stores during the decade? Were they making big purchases? How were they listed in the

census? Where did they live? This study seeks to analyze ways in which the Great Depression affected the Rio Grande Valley through the research of two stores and one land venture in the area: The Manuel Guerra store, Edelstein's Furniture Store, and John Shary's land selling business. Its objective will be to fill an existing gap in the field of economic research as there is no complete study of the Rio Grande Valley in reference to stores during the Great Depression.

The methodologies taken are to examine ledger records and find out who the customers were and what type of purchases they were making. This involves investigating the customers through the census records of the decade, digging deeper into what type of jobs they had, how many members were in the family, if they had proper education, what their socio-economic background was and where they lived. This study will collect both qualitative and quantitative data. For quantitative data, ledgers, census records, newspapers, and telephone records will be used. As for qualitative data, trends, socio-economic statuses of individuals, and interviews will be used. Looking at newspaper advertisements to analyze what type of products these stores were promoting at the time will also contribute to the qualitative data. Other issues will include who had the bigger advertisements, as well as if they were sexist or racist in their tone. After gathering this information, the study will compare it to the national level. The question is, did the Rio Grande Valley have a similar history as the rest of the United States in the period of the Great Depression?

This thesis will be divided into four sections going from the macro history of the United States to the micro regional history of the Rio Grande Valley, it will be organized thematically and chronologically. The first chapter introduces the topic and the reasoning and importance as to why these businessmen were chosen. The second chapter, *Historiography and Review of Literature* will expand on the scholarly debate of businesses, gender, and Rio Grande Valley

History. The third chapter, *The 1930s Great Depression and History of Cities*, introduces the Great Depression and the impact it had nation-wide in the United States. After this, the research moves into the regional history of the cities where each businessmen had their business. While at the same time expanding on more narrow perspective, the history of the physical building. The following chapter, *The Businessmen and The Great Depression* explains who the entrepreneurs were and the role they took as the economic turmoil swiped through the valley and the measures they had to take to stay a par. Chapter five, *Who Are the Customers*, analyzes the types of customers buying from each of the businessmen, it looks at gender, social, and class dynamics. The conclusion, closes the research with a comparison of the United States and The Rio Grande Valley, and ends with the coming of World War II.

There are potential limits on the research as not a lot of investigation has been done up to this point, thus, not many sources have been uncovered, making it a challenge to truly write a complete economic and social history of the south Texas region. At the same time, this weakness could be an opportunity to uncover these sources and share them with other historians, thus, adding to the historical record.

CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“The Magic Valley” was the name given to the area located at the southern tip of Texas to lure Anglos from the north into a romanticized area that would be “fruitful-figuratively” year-round in the early 1900s. This section will review the literature on the topic consisting of books on work, labor, economics, and gender dynamics in the Valley.

In *Pesos and Dollars*, historian Alicia M. Dewey presents “the story of how people created and navigated changing business opportunities in the South Texas borderlands between 1880-1940.”¹² Her book is divided into three parts, each covering a different section. Part one, “Commercial Society in the Lower Rio Bravo/Rio Grande Borderlands,” contains a subsection titled “Borderlands in Transitions” (1820-1880) which lays out the foundation for the book. It explains, in depth, why the scope of the book is 1880-1940, such as the introduction of railroads along the Rio Grande Valley, the *Porfiriato* and its modernization, explained through a business and economic perspective.

Part two titled “Texas Borderland Entrepreneurs,” includes, “Seizing Opportunity,” a chapter which analyzes the development and promotion of the region by Anglo Americans. In this chapter, Dewey explains the migration of Anglo Americans to the region and the outcome it

¹² Alicia M. Dewey, *Pesos and Dollars: Entrepreneurs in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1880-1940*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015), 02.

had on the community. For example, it created racial tensions due to an increase of Anglo domination in the urban and rural economy.¹³ Dewey furthers her study to explain the growth in businesses along the Rio Grande Valley in different sectors. Chapter four, “Searching for the American Dream,” emphasizes on the arrival of European, Canadians, Jews, and Syrians to the region and how they influenced commerce. “Navigating Change” examines ethnic Mexican entrepreneurs and the mark they left on the local economy. Also, Dewey takes the opportunity to describe race relations and the role of the League of United Latin American Citizens and its business stance.

Her third and final part, “The Elusiveness of Success,” focuses on “Accessing Credit” as this chapter examines the credit system, national banks, and the Great Depression’s impact on the area. Her next chapter, “Facing Failure,” gives a historic analysis of bankruptcy and failure in business. She credits these failures to bad circumstances, including economic downturns and climate dynamics like hurricanes. In chapter eight, “Starting Over,” she shows the different ways in which people tried coming out of bankruptcy and attempting to start over.

The parameters or the limits of Dewey’s study are completed through a topical, chronological, and socio-economical focus. These are appreciated by readers as she breaks the book topically by dividing the book into three sections: the introduction and structure of the study, the examination of entrepreneurs, and lastly, the discussion of topics surrounding credit and bankruptcy. She examines topics in a chronological order, starting from the development of the area, Mexican Independence, and the Mexican-American War, reaching all the way to the 1940s. Her explanation of history is covered through a socio-economical perspective when she presents data to cover entrepreneurs in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. Dewey’s purpose in

¹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

writing this book is to look at the Texas-Mexico Borderlands economic history with sources not usually examined by historians such as bankruptcy records, bank accounts, R.G Dun Records, and census records. Her secondary sources feature prominent scholars' work like Armando Cantú Alonzo, Arnoldo de León, Linda English, LeRoy P. Graf, and David Montejano. This book is important to my research as it lays the foundation for the time that is the focus of my thesis, providing the history of retail in the 1930s within the region.

In *By All Accounts*, Linda English seeks to “explore similar transactions carried out at general stores across Texas and Indian territory and places these exchanges in the content of late-nineteenth-century America. Examining persons on both ends of sales transactions –merchants and consumers-[providing] valuable insight into the complex relationships and power dynamics that develops in local communities.”¹⁴ English carefully arranges her book into six chapters. Her first chapter, “Who’s Minding the Store,” is the description of dry goods store owners and the role they take in the community; for example, their influence on churches and schools. “Regional Particularities: Cotton, Cattle, and Coal” is the transformation of economy in different fields such as cotton, cattle, and coal mining. The chapter, “In the Presence of Ladies,” focuses on the role of women in relationship to the way they contributed to the economy. She finds that not only did women take part in the economy, but their presence differed by locations as did the reasons behind their employment. “Recording Race” focuses on African American customers during Reconstruction and the way ledger records provided racial distinctions. In this chapter, Native Americans were also part of the study. In the chapter, “The German Imprint,” English mentions that there was a high number of German immigrants in Texas and provides the history behind these immigrants as consumers and retailers. Her final chapter, titled “Commodities From Local,

¹⁴ Linda English, *By All Accounts: General Stores and Community Life in Indian Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 7-8.

Regional, and Natural Perspectives,” adds a holistic component as she evaluates some of the local ads to describe what the public consumed during the period, like laudanum or cocaine. English organizes her book chronologically and topically when she tackles race, consumerism, and gender during the Reconstruction period. This book is important to the research since the author examines general stores in Texas, a subject that this thesis will be covering. The way English writes her last chapter, using newspaper ads to find out about the type of consumption products the public had access to, is something that will be utilized in the research of the retail products throughout the Rio Grande Valley.

Professor of history at Texas A&M University, Sonia Hernandez wrote *Working Women into the Borderlands* “to detail the story of women’s place in the rise of industrial capitalism and widespread commercial agriculture by stressing three themes as necessary points of investigation: the concept of region (the northeast) and its function as borderland, the role of women in it, and the various ways in which workers engaged the state to negotiate labor relations.”¹⁵ Hernandez breaks *Working Women* into six chapters. Chapter one, “Norteño History as a Borderlands History,” introduces the history of modernization brought by Porfirio Diaz to northeast Mexico, touching on subjects of elimination of uncooperative Indians, selling land to foreign investors, surveying lands, the arrival of the railroad, and the economic boom. In the following chapter, “Peasant Women’s Work in a Changing Country Side During the Porfiriato,” Hernandez explains that women’s labor has been largely ignored which is surprising since they did form a significant part of the labor force. She expands and examines rural women’s labor at *haciendas* and factories in the country side within a historical context. The chapter examines female-owned, agro industries as well as race relations between *campesinas* and foreigners in

¹⁵ Sonia Hernandez, *Working Women into the Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 7.

haciendas within the larger context of women's working conditions during *Porfiriato*.¹⁶ To complete this, she covers working conditions in *ixtle*, women's wages in the labor forces needed for hat making, candle making, perfume making, or cigar making, and lastly, she compares unjust payments of Mexican versus Anglo workers. Chapter three, "We cannot Suffer Any Longer From The Patron's Bad Treatment," describes the way in which peasant women, in particular, had a voice in harsh and unfair working conditions. The women pushed people to unionize in mutual aid societies such as *Gremio Unido de Alijadores*, *Gran Círculo de Obreros*, *Sociedad Mutualista de Señoras y Señoritas*, *Sociedad Union Regiomontana* or *Sociedad Hermana Obrera de Linares*.

Hernandez chronologically builds her chapters on the events that led to the Mexican Revolution. "(En)Gendering Revolution in the Borderlands" details uprisings along the Northern Mexican Border in regards to the revolution. In this chapter, the historian highlights the role "Norteñas" played in the revolution. "Women's Labor and Activism in the Greater Mexican Borderlands 1910-1930" covers the aftermath of the revolution in the borderlands and Hernandez explains: "The revolution did no alter gender relations significantly; gender iniquities continued in the workplace and beyond."¹⁷ Living conditions, migrations, and vigilante groups were common themes explored in answering how the revolution impacted gender inequities. Her final chapter, "Class, Gender, and Power in Post-Revolutionary Borderlands," details how working women were perceived after the revolution.

Working Women examines a different type of labor force from the retail labor force that this thesis will be focusing on, however, it is important since Hernandez is one of the first historians to fully and comprehensively look at women's labor along the Texas and Mexico

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷ Sonia Hernandez, *Working Women*, 108.

borderlands. Hernandez takes a chronological and thematic approach in her research as she starts her book during the *Porfiriato* and ends in the late 1930s, all while touching on issues of the arrival of railroads, wages among different jobs, uprisings along the border because of the revolutions, and the post-revolution environment with an emphasis in women.

Published in 1917, *A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley* by Frank C. Pierce provides the first survey of the Rio Grande Valley. His employment along the border and his acquaintances with valley people started when he first worked for Morgan Steamship Company in Port Isabel, serving as an assistant agent. Next, he assisted as a seaman on the boat, *U.S.S Rio Bravo*. He moved to Dallas where he was admitted to law school. Four years later, in 1895, he moved back to Brownsville, TX. There, he practiced law and became a genealogist. By 1916, Pierce had published his first book, *Colloquial and Idiomatic Mexico*, and later, *A Brief History*. The book was built on the descriptions provided by acquaintances who lived in the border region. His research interest also pushed him to work hand-in-hand with military authorities in marking historical sites, such as Resaca de las Palmas, Fort Brown, and Palo Alto, giving him experience with the history of the region.¹⁸ The author was not a trained historian, therefore, the text does not have a formal argument; rather, it is a survey of the underlying topics that surround Rio Grande Valley history, such as the Mexican Revolution, town buildings, military movements, and the Texas Rangers.

Pierce does provide his interpretation of economic reasons for settling in the Valley. The region was shifting away from steamboats and moving forward with railroad lines. Originally, the lines connected Corpus Christi to Laredo and then to Monterrey, eventually reaching the Mexican National Railroad Company. This caused a business downfall in the region since it left

¹⁸ Floreine Pierce Faulk and Grace Edman, *Frank Cushman Pierce*, The Handbook of Texas Online, webpage, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fpi09> , Accessed: November 7, 2014.

Brownsville, and its port, out of the loop. Subsequently, the St. Louis Brownsville and Mexico Railroad Company in June 1905 finalized the line from Matamoros back to Monterrey, leading to a gradual but productive economy. In Pierce's interpretation of the topic, there was an economic boom because of the arrival of railroads. Although he does not include sources, he ties the cause of prosperity in commerce to railroads. Pierce looks at the prices of buying an acre during late 1889, prices were no more than one to two dollars per acre, and compares them to fifteen years later in 1904, just after the establishment of the railroad, where prices reached anywhere from 100 to 500 dollars per acre.

Pierce addresses the geographical aspects of the land which contributed to economic progress, such as temperature, climate, fertility of soil, and influx of water from the river used to irrigate. The fertility of the land promoted the arrival of Northerners who looked for a warmer climate, and thus, ended up in the lower Rio Grande Valley, populating it by building homes and cities.¹⁹ These are the reasons he provides for people populating the Valley, which, in turn led to the beginning of economic prosperity.

He is the first to sketch out the understudied subject of a social perspective in developing the area. Pierce sets out three reasons for social development: "to end that they might avoid Indian uprisings, in order to neutralize the propositions of the French colonist of Louisiana, and for the purpose of civilizing the numerous tribes of Indians."²⁰ Out of the three reasons, he concluded that the Native Americans caused the most mayhem. On September 3, 1746, King Ferdinand VI ordered Colonel José De Escandón to develop the area. Even after Spanish

¹⁹ Frank Cushman Pierce, *A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley*, (Edinburg, TX: New Santander Press, 1998), 126-129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

settlement in 1792, the Mesacaleros, Comanches, Apaches, and Kickapoos continued Indian raids and terrorized the colonists.²¹

The reason behind why the author wrote this book is because he felt a complete history of the Valley should be written from the perspective of Texas when it was Mexico, specifically the actions, characters, and events which happened in the Valley. Pierce lacked historic research skills, he was a lawyer, genealogist, and had acquaintances all over the region, collecting knowledge of the area everywhere he went. However, the scope of people he interviewed for economic development were sailors, military authorities, and lawyers. In his choice of interviewees, he left out the business owners and entrepreneurs. As stated above, his lack of proper knowledge in critical thinking about historical actions weakens his scholarly presentation. The sources he used in creating this project were military records, hospital records, rosters, maps, the Monroe Doctrine, and photographs. Through these sources, he created a book divided into fifteen chapters, each looking into aspects of the region. For example, “Civil War Activities 1861-1863,” “Border Violence: 1915-1916,” or “The Texas Rangers and their Service of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.” His book contributes to our understanding of the historical events in the Valley because he produced the first general study of the area. In his perspective, he focused on the economic prosperity brought by the railroads and examined an understudied factor which was geography. Pierce’s book is a classic book for the Rio Grande Valley history and should be referenced by any historian focusing on the region.

Former Harvard Professor, Leroy P. Graf wrote *The Economic History of The Lower Rio Grande Valley- 1820-1875*, opening he book by stating: “no systematic historical study has

²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

before been made of the lower Rio Grande Valley during the nineteenth century,”²² arguing that he is the first to do so. Consequently, the dates in the title are important to mention because it is the scope of Graf’s analysis of the region. He starts in 1820 because marks the end of the Spanish Era and the beginning of the new nation of Mexico, ending his study with the conclusion of the Civil War. He logically breaks it up like this because, once Mexico started functioning as an independent country after 1821, it was able to open the port to other countries, bringing commerce to the region. Similarly, the ending of the Civil War brought the return of a prosperous economy. However, what about the people who lost money during these times? He failed to cover the point of view of any Spanish people who had businesses tied to the who were demolished economically, because of the Mexican American War. He also neglected to write about the losers of the Civil War. Were there any farmers or ranchers who suffered consequences? He omits speaking about the losing sides.

He writes his book with a focus on total history, breaking away from traditional political history. To accomplish this, the scholar breaks the book into four volumes. Inside the volumes, he includes a summary, introduction, and preface that outline the different chapters he addresses. Among them are “Commercial Penetration 1820-1835 Trade,” “1850-1860 or Secondary Economic Activities, 1820-1875.” He separates the economy of the Valley chronologically. In his first chapter, he dedicates a section on the economy before 1820, where he explains the economy before the nineteenth century and what made it unique. In his interpretation, commerce in the region did not have well established connections with North America or Europe, but it did emphasize trade with Mexico. Consequently, following the nineteenth century, businesses saw an increase in the economy as trade routes began to open. Because the ports could now be legally

²² Leroy P. Graf, *The Economic History of The Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1820-1875*, (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1942) 1.

opened, it meant that Valleyites and citizens of Northern Mexico could now trade directly without high tariffs. Instead of having one or two reasons for economic growth factors for the Rio Grande Valley, like Pierce details, he emphasizes many reasons, including the opening of ports. Another factor he examines from an economic view of the area is the Mexican-American War. During the war, American commerce was restored in Matamoros because the United States was protecting the ports and because of the exchange of military provisions. This is important to note because Graf not only looks at the American side of the conflict, but also includes the Mexican side. He grasps the total picture and understands that one cannot happen without the other. In his argument, he also addresses the downside or a negative effect of the war in conjunction to commerce, having the Rio Grande Valley as a new separation post escalated racial tensions and problems with trade. This dissertation is vital to the review of literature because it provides scholarly interpretation and of the Rio Grande Valley economy.

A native of the Rio Grande Valley, Armando Alonzo completed his Master's degree with his thesis, *A History of The Mexicans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas: Their Role in Land Development and Commercial Agriculture. 1900-1930*. Eight years later he received his Ph.D. at Indiana University where he wrote *Tejano Rancheros and Changes in Land Tenure, Hidalgo, County, Texas, 1850-1900* with Professor George Jurgens as his dissertation chair. His education shows that he had already had his feet wet in writing Valley history. The pros of his experience is that he was a native of the region and had a clearer understanding of the area, not just through books like scholar LeRoy P. Graf.

Alonzo developed his dissertation into a book titled, *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900*. In it, the author focuses on the reasons for populating the Valley in the first half of the period, 1730-1848, which was due to ranching and commerce or

trade. In its early history, the land was perfect for ranching, because of the open fields and availability of water. But, according to Alonzo, after the opening of the Matamoros port in 1820, the migration of Americans and European businessmen in the later decade transitioned the life of ranching to trading, and even some fishing.²³ In the second part of the period, which he organizes from 1848 through 1900, there is a boom in ranching again for two reasons: “an increase in local sales and exports of livestock, and livestock products...the returns of Mexican Rancheros to the Northside of the Rio Grande to reclaim their lands and reorganize their ranching enterprises”²⁴ bringing an influx of people or colonization. Although there was economic prosperity in the Rio Grande Valley, Alonzo also details the other side of the spectrum where the economy declines. In his book, historian Armando Alonzo asserts in his thesis, “This is a history of the lower valley of Texas from its Spanish colonial roots to 1900... The history of Spanish expansion in to Nuevo Santander... This study focuses on the continuities and changes that occurred in one specific region.”²⁵

This book is very complete; Alonzo focuses on various understudied factors such as sociology, particularly in reference to race relationships between Anglos and Tejanos. Other understudied factors are in demographics and land grants. The factors are also examined in other books he has written such as, *Tejano Rancheros and Changes in Land Tenure, Hidalgo, County 1900-1930*. In short, the history of the ways lands have been divided is his strength and his book is well demographically organized.

The reason this book was chosen is because Graf's book is quite dated and Alonzo is the next scholar to provide a well-written book about economy on the area. His study as pointed out

²³ Armando C. Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas 1734 – 1900* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico press, 1998),67-68.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

before, deals with land grants and, therefore, most of his approach in *Tejano Legacy* has references to land and demographics as agents of change. Interestingly, he focuses on social history throughout his book, especially when speaking about Anglos, Mexicans, and Native Americans. However, this approach is not as prominent as the agricultural theme.

He divides his book differently than his predecessor, Leroy Graf. Alonzo divides his book into two parts: the period of 1730 through 1848 and from the years 1848 through 1900. Why these two periods? He suggests the 1700s are the years of early life under Spanish-Mexican rule. What he explains here is the early life of ranching, problems with Anglos and Native Americans, economic prosperity of farming, and trade. As for the second part, 1848 through 1900, the early American period, Alonzo covers new challenges faced by the Tejanos, including different ideas, accommodations, the social problems Anglos and Tejanos faced and their growing tensions. In the end, the historian concludes they needed one another to settle the area.²⁶

Alonzo's approach is different than his predecessors, Pierce or Graf. When compared to *A Brief History*, his scholarship has an advantage because he is more thorough in analyzing the understudied topic of Indian relationships. Alonzo has two subsections in the book focusing on Indians: "Indians of the Seno Mexicano" and "Spanish Indian Relations in the Frontier of Nuevo Santander: A Legacy of War." When comparing to Graf's *The Economic History*, Alonzo's book systematically covers more; it is better detailed in the description of economic, agriculture, and sociology topics in the Rio Grande Valley. One reason for this is that Graf's book was written in 1942 and sources were not available. Writing in 1998, Alonzo had an advantage with more modern sources. Some of these primary sources include interviews in the 1980s and ecological

²⁶ Armando C. Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy*, 10-12.

studies. His secondary sources are books written in the 1960s, 1980, and 1990s. It is also a stronger book because Alonzo is a trained historian and developed a historical argument. When comparing to author LeRoy P. Graf, Alonzo and Graf are both Ph.D. graduates with a focus on Rio Grande Valley economics. Yet, as mentioned above, Alonzo's book is more comprehensive because time is on his side regarding secondary sources. Still, scholars should not discredit Graf's book because it was the first economically-focused book published by an academic press.

Furthermore, Graf credits the Mexican War of Independence and American Civil War for a boom in economic prosperity in the Rio Grande Valley. Graf fails to explain the perspective of the losing side of both wars, making his argument biased or in favor of traders, merchants, and other businessmen who benefitted from the winning of the wars. Seeing the problems with the literature, Alonzo, a modern scholar, organizes his book by periods: ranching and commerce from 1730-1848, and then a rebirth in ranching from 1848-1900, balancing the discussion.

These few scholars in one way or another created and shaped the history of the area with a focus on different aspects of the economy, including gender dynamics, race, and different types of businesses. Although not many historians have visited these aspects of history, a part of this thesis plans to further close the gap in economic and social history. The project's scholarly value will be its most comprehensive study of the effects of the Great Depression on the Rio Grande Valley. The following section will highlight what America was going through during the Great Depression and narrows into the history of the city, and then the history of each building where the entrepreneurs conducted their business.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

The Great Depression in the United States

Known as both a significant and prosperous decade, the Jazz Age, brought America flappers, jazz, and a market revolution that included, for the first-time, home appliances. However, American affluence took a turn in the 1930s. The American public increasingly stepped into the Great Depression from the decade between 1929-1939, a period in which there was a decline in stock prices and many in the nation fell into extreme poverty. This crisis would impact people across the United States, including those living and opening businesses in the Rio Grande Valley. This chapter will address the history of the United States during the Great Depression of the 1930s providing further analyses of its impact on cities and stores.

Unfortunately, once the Depression began, Americans could no longer pay for those refrigerators, automobiles, and vacuums that they acquired through credit purchases which, in turn, increased the economic mayhem. Complicating matters further, companies continued to produce these items and they were not being sold. A second factor leading to the economic disorder was agriculture. Because of World War I, farming in the United States was a booming market as America provided farm goods to European markets. After the war ended, agricultural products were not needed as much to feed Europe and America, thus farm production declined drastically. This new trend left farmers unable to pay back loans for land and equipment, leading to foreclosures since they were incapable of paying back their loans to banks.

Lastly, and quite significantly, there was the stock market crash. On October 23, stock market prices fell 20 points. The following day prices continued to decline dramatically. To avoid the continuation of the crash, investors gathered sources to raise the value on stock. This proved to many be a temporary fix. On October 29, 1929, otherwise known as Black Tuesday, stocks became worthless, leading to the period known as the Great Depression. The *New York Times* described the chaos as a “Nation-Wide Stampede.”²⁷

Nevertheless, President Herbert Hoover assured the American people it was just a little hiccup and the economy would once again flourish. However, socially and economically things began to get worse. There was a heavy loss of jobs that started first with racial minorities and women and, eventually, caught up to white males. Consequently, many lost their homes, ultimately moving to Hoovervilles or make-shift shanty villages made from left over scrap material. It seemed that not only was the economy working against the United States. The environment was too, as the “Dustbowl,” or dust storms swarmed through Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Nebraska, and pertaining to this research, Texas. Another devastating event affecting the population of the United States during the 1930s was the deportation of Mexican-Americans and Mexicans from the United States. However, this project will focus on the effects of the Great Depression on three businessmen of the Rio Grande Valley: John H. Shary, Manuel Guerra, and Morris Edelstein.

Hoover’s administration failed to fix the economic problem. The President only masked it by promoting failed policies, including asking the public to volunteer their time and food to the help charities; this concept is known as volunteerism. American citizens were not satisfied with the approach the President was taking towards the Great Depression. Hoover’s body language

²⁷ “Stock Prices Slump 14,000,000,000 In Nation Wide- Stampede to Unload; Bankers To Support Market Today”, *New York Times*, October 29, 1929.

and expressions seemed to show that he was not invested in dealing with the crises. His actions towards the public were cold and vague and he did not give that radiance of hope people expected during a crisis. The American public even criticized him physically claiming he looked like a pig. The dissatisfaction stretched as far as blaming him for ecological damages such as the drought and the Dustbowl. All together Hoover seemed like a man who did not care and Americans were ready for another president.²⁸ In 1932, New York Governor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected as the thirty-second president of the United States, winning the presidency with over seven million votes. At the other end of the spectrum, Roosevelt differed vastly from Hoover; his approach was hands-on and his purpose was to do something, anything to deal with the crises. His first three months in office were known as the “first one hundred days.” During this period, he proposed a myriad of programs, some of which are still in place today.

Franklin D. Roosevelt surrounded himself with an entourage of men known as his “Brain Trust.” His unit of fellow men were law experts, university professors, former army officers, and administrators who helped him select a cabinet. His advisors pushed him towards fixing the bank panic. He listened to his economic advisors and, on March 4, 1933, Roosevelt closed all banks and used the federal government to oversee and draw up reports on all banks. Consequently, people stopped withdrawing money so that when the bank would be reopened. Federal money would back those banks, which per the advisor reports, had a successful outlook. The President named this act a “Bank Holiday.” Three days later, the banks reopened. This was a fresh start for the banking system and the American people gradually began to restore all faith in the economic system by putting their money back into the banks again.

²⁸ Charles A. Jellison, *Tomatoes Were Cheaper: Tales from the Thirties* (Syracuse University Press, 1977) 6-7.

Along with successful acts, like the banking holiday, there were a string of other programs, such as the Public Works Administration (PWA), that aided the public in hiring and promoting jobs to build schools, hospitals, and highways. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), or Three Cs, helped by putting unemployed young men between the ages of 18-25 year olds to work. Altogether, and in a span of nine years, the program put 2.5 million men to work. The type of labor consisted in aiding in developing flood control, creating wild-life preservations, improving national parks, and promoting forest conservation. Laborers were given housing near their place of work and thirty dollars a month. A condition of this employment was for men to send most of their paycheck or 22-25 dollars back home.²⁹

Another round of programs called the “Second New Deal” kicked off in 1935. While the focus on the First New Deal was economic recovery, the Second New Deal was focused on economic security. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) employed people who needed aid and gave them a full-time job. Similar to the PWA, the WPA worked on building schools, roads, and hospitals. Its successes included 500,000 miles of roads, stadiums, pools, sewage, treatment plans, and 600 airports. In addition to the highway service, actors, artists, and musicians were employed by the WPA for their artistic talent. In 1936, election year hit on the United States again, but the people had faith in Roosevelt; he won a one-sided race as he had 523 electoral votes to 8. The New Deal did not end all problems caused by the Depression as a recession hit again in mid-1937. The WPA even had to put people out of work. Three years later, the economy improved again. It is important to mention the New Deal programs primarily benefitted white males, leaving women and African Americans, and other racial minorities often disregarded. Relief programs in the South were biased against African Americans and when cuts

²⁹ Mary L. Wilson, “Texans and Civilian Conservation Corps: Personal Memories, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol.117 No 2 (October 2013) 145-146.

had to be made in the workforce, minority groups were the first to be let go. During these difficult times, women were forced to work any industry available to them and were often accused of stealing jobs.

The United States was going through an economic and social illness. The most basic human needs in Maslow's hierarchy are physiological needs: food, water, warmth, and rest could not be fulfilled throughout the economic devastation.³⁰ Milk was poured down drains, while fruits and vegetables were spoiling because the American public could not afford to buy basic items. Even rest was challenged as the population could not sleep well because they had to worry about paying debts and losing their belongings. In the spring of 1930, it is estimated that one out of ten people were unemployed or almost four million workers went out of work. While it is difficult to gage the exact number of people out of work, scholars guess it was one-third of the workforce or 15 million people were out of jobs.³¹ Unemployment released a wave of disasters and negative effects.

Men during the Depression depleted their savings, this precipitated the push for women and children to find gainful employment. When they could not find jobs, they moved into borrowing money. Many families went through drastic measures just as these changes occurred. Just like farmers, who could not afford to make mortgage payments, other peoples' homes were taken away. As a result, there were multiple families in one apartment. What used to be grandiose parties during the jazz age, died in the 1930s. Families could no longer invite guests for dinner and three daily meals came down to two.³² One experience, a Mexican American woman, Tina Ruiz, faced in relation to food was the fact that she did not have a father to support

³⁰ Janet Poppendieck, *Breadlines Knee-Deep in Wheat: Food Assistance in the Great Depression* (California: University of California Press, 2014) XVI-XIX.

³¹ *Ibid.*,19.

³² *Ibid.*,18-20.

her and her family during the Great Depression. Thus, she had to work in the produce market where she would get paid in vegetables and her grandmother, Juana Verdugo, asked Tina to go to the butcher shop and buy whatever she could afford with 15¢ of *costillas* or ribs. Tina remembers those daily meals which were narrowed down consisted of a diet of soups and recalls eating a lot of soup growing up.³³ In Arizona, the Department of Social Security and Welfare had a Surplus Commodity Division which shared almost 300,000 pounds of food in 1938, these products included canned peas, potatoes, dried prunes, dried skim milk, flour, or beans. Even though this was a humanitarian act of kindness from the state, it proved to be problematic as a Mexican American woman, Annie Garcia Redondo recalls her father being in line for long hours and when coming home, there were issues with the food. Redondo remembers her mother straining the flour and rice multiple times as there were maggots floating around. The beans also had to be washed several times because they were too dirty and old.³⁴

Suicide stories were also common among successful individuals. Such is the case of Yale graduate, World War I veteran, and Manhattan stock broker, Lee Adam Gimbel. On New Year's Eve, a time of new opportunity, the businessman jumped off the sixteenth floor of a skyscraper. Gimbel had his life ahead of him; he was the grandson of the founder of the Gimbel Brother's department store. The businessman along, with his brother, were left millions of dollars from the will his father left to the sons. One can only imagine the hopelessness of the Depression. If the intensity of the war did not affect him, the economic turmoil sure did.³⁵

³³ Jean Reynolds, "Mexican American Women in the 1930s' Phoenix: Coming of Age During the Great Depression," *Arizona Historical Society*, Vol 47. No. 3 (Autumn 2006) 220.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Charles A. Jellison, *Tomatoes Were Cheaper: Tales from the Thirties* (Syracuse University Press, 1977) 4 and "Lee Gimbel Victim of High fall," *Wilkes-Barre Times Reader, The Evening News*, "October 11, 1931, 2.

History of the Three Rio Grande Valley Cities and Physical Location of Stores.

The following section studies the history of three cities in the Rio Grande Valley, Mission, Roma, and Brownsville, Texas. They are important because these cities house the place where transactions of the entrepreneurs took place.

The history of Mission parallels to the history of other Rio Grande Valley cities. The community's history starts with the story of José De Escandón and branches out to its own unique story. Mission's story begins around 1849, when priests under the name "Oblates of Mary Immaculate" arrived in Port Isabel. Fifteen years later, their ministry flourished from Brownsville, Texas to other side of the Valley in Roma, Texas. Meanwhile, in Reynosa, Mexico's entrepreneur Rene Guillard bought the fifty-seventh *porción* in 1842, and nine years later, he bought *porción* 55. Within these two large grants, there were 10,000 acres and Guillard was able to employ a vast amount of families. A man of the Roman-Catholic faith, Guillard build a chapel so that workers and their families could have service, the oblates were to lead the service. The entrepreneur gave tracts of land to Friar Pierre Y. Keralum and Friar Pierre F. Parisot, the land transfers became official in 1877. In 1883, the religious leaders purchased the middle tract of land, *porción* fifty- six, having in total more than 5,700 acres of land. This tract of land stretched "two miles along the river and fifteen miles inland"³⁶ nicknaming the land "La Lomita," a community flourished around the chapel.

During the period of land development just before the railroad, James W. Hoit and John J. Conway saw profit in south Texas lands. As the priests were having trouble economically, they sold 17,000 acres to the duo and the oblates kept 400 acres. As far as the duo, they purchased 10,000 additional acres and had a total of 27,000 acres. As mentioned earlier on, they saw value

³⁶ Karen Gerhardt Fort and the Mission Historical Museum, Inc., *Images of America* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2009) 7.

in land and quickly began to develop it. Initially, on July 1907, they hired a land surveyor, Sidney J. Rowe, to cut the land into 40 acre pieces. Then, in August of that year, they constructed irrigation canals. Hoit and Conway began selling these plots of land. At first, the plots sold anywhere from 35 to 60 dollars and their prices gradually increased from 100 to 125 dollars. Just three years later, the business had sold 15,000 acres. To attract the St. Louis Brownville, and Mexico railway, Conway built a depot station and pioneers named the area "Mission." The depot station opened in doors on December 1908. By February of the following year, Mission had grown into thirteen streets, running horizontally and thirteen streets running vertically. Mission was officially declared a city on December 9, 1910.³⁷

Mission's story then unwinds further as, in 1914, construction of the little white house, or John H. Shary's home began. It is important to this research to study fully the little white house, as it is the place where Shary conducted business. While his other two establishments actually had a physical address, Shary took business matters in his own home. In 1917, the little white house was finished. And just as land developers are associated with having a hidden agenda, one can argue the little white house also had a hidden agenda, as it held lavish parties to prove to his guest, that Sharyland estate was state of the art, and they could own something with great magnitude. The original house was a two-story home and the bottom floor, consisted of a ballroom, office, bowling alley, while the library, and the top floor featured bedrooms, including the master bedroom. In the 1930s, a porch was added and in 1959-1960, the house added bathrooms and air conditioning.³⁸ Most of the furniture in the ballroom was acquired from Royalty Street in New Orleans, a street dedicated to selling world-class antiques and extravagant

³⁷ Karen Gerhardt Fort and the Mission Historical Museum, Inc., *Images of America* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2009) 7-8.

³⁸ *Shary-Shivers Estate* (The University of Texas Pan American Foundation) 4.

art. The sellers would call Shary upon the arrival of a new collection and describe the collection to him. If the businessman liked the description, Royal Street would send him the items. One of the lavish parties that the ballroom witnessed was the marriage of Shary's adopted daughter, Mary Alice, to future governor, Allan Shivers. Another part of the estate, more connected to this research, is the home office where Shary did business. The home office furniture was donated to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, formerly, University of Texas at Pan American. (See Appendix 3,4, and 5) The desk, lamp table, and black leather sofa were brought for 1,500 dollars from Omaha, Nebraska, Shary's birthplace. Other amenities featured in the mansion had were a bowling alley and game room.³⁹ (See Appendix 6).

Roma's history goes back further back in times than Mission's history. A portion of Mier, Mexico was the location in which Roma surfaces and was established on March 6, 1753. Families came during the Spanish years to protect and colonize the area from hostile natives and other explorers. Gutierrez, Ramirez, Guerra, Salinas, Hinojosa, and Chapa were among the nineteen families who originally formed Mier. Years later, in 1765, those families relocated west. Initially, they named the place *Buena Vista* meaning "good scene," as the scenery was pleasing to the eye, a "high hill, overlooking the Rio Grande."⁴⁰ A change of name happened in 1836 to Garcia's ranch and once again by priests to Roma, Texas, in honor of the Holy City where the pope resides. After the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Roma became the official name.⁴¹ However, historians debate this history and some promote an alternative narrative where eventually Mier, Mexico was broken into *porciones*. The land tracts

³⁹ *Shary-Shivers Estate* (The University of Texas Pan American Foundation), 7., and "John H. Shary Home Photography #1. Photograph, Date Unknown, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, Webpage, texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph442528/, Accessed: March 20, 2017.

⁴⁰ "Our City Is Your City Pamphlet," F381-Roma- History, Reference Files F381 Starr County, Roma, Salileno, and San Isidro, Box 2 of 2, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

seventy, seventy-one, and seventy- two were given to Juan Angel Saenz, Juan Salinas, and Joaquin Salinas. Saenz, who owned seventy-two, purchased the other two gentleman's lots, each lot selling for fifty pesos each and Roma was created out of these *porciones*.

From an economic perspective, ranching and cotton cultivation became important in the region and, like many other towns in the area, on November 1881, the Mexican National Railway line was added.⁴² The local population found that the Rio Grande could be navigated by steam ship and vessels in 1850. Steered by captain Jessie Thorton, the last steamboat to sail across the Rio Grande was "The Bessie" in 1907, embarking a route for students from Roma to Brownsville, Texas.⁴³ The city has always had a strong Catholic presence and attracted many priests, many of who were of French origin such as Regent Eugene, a Catholic priest. Eugene came from France in 1903, he served in World War I and also had another Catholic Priest partner, Andrew Douche who migrated from France fourteen years after Eugene. As Texas became a state, the city became a custom inspection station. Roma, like Brownsville, is a port of entry as people cross the Rio Grande. Although not much history is available on its early history, except it was a suspension bridge, or a bridge where the walkway or deck is hung through vertical wires or suspensions, which was built in 1928. This bridge connects Roma to sister city, Miguel Aleman, in Mexico. To keep up with demand, the Starr County International Bridge was built in 1979 on the right of the original suspension bridge. Today the new bridge totals 810 feet,

⁴² José E. Zapata, *A Historical Archaeology of Texas* (Master's Thesis, University of Texas at San Antonio, 2002) 24, 26, 31, 50.

⁴³ "Roma, Texas: Shortest Route to the Interior: 100 Miles to Monterrey, 713 Miles to Mexico City, F381-Roma-Description and Travel, "Welcome to Roma National Historic Landmark District," Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

is operated twenty-four hours, and commercial cargo operates Monday through Friday 10:00 am to 6:00 pm with the current toll for pedestrians is 50¢.⁴⁴

The Guerra store itself shares an unfortunate history. Manuel Guerra's grandson, Virgilio Guerra, went to the Manuel Guerra store office to do business as usual. Grandson Guerra decided to take his two daughters, Maria and Elizabeth, to the office. They went upstairs to dance. It had been raining a lot and it is likely, that water gathered in the ceiling, which likely loosened some frames. And like a freak accident, the mirror that was hung from the frame came off and killed Elizabeth instantly. The public claims they saw the little girl with golden hair and white dress come out of the old store and vanish away in the shadows; of course, this story adds to the community lure of the building.⁴⁵ On January 20, 1964, Virginia Cox and the Guerra family filed an application for the Manuel Guerra and Sons building to have the Texas historical marker. It was important to preserve the early colonial building built on October 1, 1885, by Heinrich Portscheller. The materials used to build the establishment were salmon-buff colored bricks from the local brickyard: "Templates of exterior and brick profile all prepared by hand."⁴⁶ Not only was the general store the only business the building housed, but the building at one point or another was the business place for the selling of buggies, wagons, ranching, banking, and oil. The historic value of the structure is indebted to political leaders associated with the old Democratic party. It served as a place of gathering for organizations such as good neighbor policy, and various cattlemen association where these groups affected everyone in the region.

⁴⁴ "Roma-Ciudad Miguel Aleman Bridge," in *Texas –Mexico International Bridges and Border Crossing, Existing and Proposed 2015*, Texas Department of Public Safety, Webpage. <file:///E:/1%20THESIS/Sources/international-bridges.pdf>, Accessed: September 11, 2017. Pages 29-30.

⁴⁵ "Leyenda de trágico accidente," in *Revoltillo Ribereno*, August 2002, F381- Roma- History, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Page 13.

⁴⁶ "Historic Marker Application: Manuel Guerra Home and Store," The Portal to Texas History, webpage, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth435169/m1/33/>, Accessed: September 11, 2017.

Interestingly in an effort to recreate a Mexican setting, it was used as the set for the film, *Viva Zapata!*⁴⁷

The story of the city of Brownsville goes hand-in-hand with the story of its border the twin-city, Matamoros, Mexico. When José de Escandón was exploring in 1744, Spain promoted ten families to settle Matamoros, Mexico. The name was given to commemorate Mariano Matamoros, a war hero. The economy began to develop and Matamoros gave early signs of what it would be like as a port city as illegal and legal trade began to occur. This caught the eye of many investors and, as a result, many migrated to the area. One immigrant was Charles Stillman, who is credited as the founder of the city. However, due to its location, the area was always a hot zone for military conflict. Initially, it was Texas independence that caused a stir in the area and, of more importance to this research, the Mexican-American War. President James K. Polk sent General Zachary Taylor and the military to the area in 1846. According to the story (and depending on what side you take,) in this case, Americans claimed that Mexican troops sent a force and “attacked” American troops causing an uproar of “American blood on American soil.” The president issued a war declaration. Fearful that Americans troops would further advance, Mexican troops signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo making the Rio Grande the separating landmark between the two countries. Charles Stillman, along with two other men, gathered titles of acres and formed the Brownsville Land Company and like Shary, and other land developers, sold land. The town grew to 3,000 people just two years later. Brownsville’s history also includes the “Cortina Wars” where native Juan Cortina, after the Mexican-American, War moved North of the Rio Grande to inspect on his lands. The Texas government refused to acknowledge the properties belonged to him. Tired of injustices against him to the Mexican

⁴⁷ “Historic Marker Application: Manuel Guerra Home and Store,” The Portal to Texas History, webpage, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph435169/m1/33/>, Accessed: September 11, 2017.

population by Anglos, Cortina gathered a small force and seized Brownville. The Brownsville Tigers, a counter brigade, attacked and chased Cortina out of the city. During the Civil War, economic and military movement in Brownsville reduced until Brownsville scholar, Anthony K. Knopp, suggested irrigation and railroad came and turned things around. Because of irrigation, produce could be planted and because of the railroad, these goods could be transported.⁴⁸

Edelstein's physical building started in 1914 when he rented the building \$500.00. In 1920, he paid \$18,000 for the building making it a hallmark for the city.⁴⁹ Again, sources for the building are under archival review and part of this research is unavailable.

In conclusion, buildings add a historic value as they are physical spaces where the businesspersons conducted their business transactions. John Shary conducted his business in the home and why would he not? His home itself represented a hook to lure Anglo Americans into the beautiful Rio Grande Valley, where they could imagine having a mansion just like his from the lots of land he was selling. The Manuel Guerra store itself has historic value. After all, it was the setting for film, *Viva Zapata!* But most importantly to this research, political negotiations, economic bargaining, and financial success came out of this building. Lastly, Morris Edelstein made his business a city landmark.⁵⁰ (see Appendix 7). It is significant to look at aspects of the physical space for the business such as accessibility and location. It is important for the customers to have easy access to the store, specifically by proximity and distance. Location is also essential since there could be local competition from other businesses. By examining the history of the store and its respected city, now scholars have organized information on the city

⁴⁸ William L. Adams and Anthony Knopp, *Portrait of A Border City: Brownsville, Texas* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1997) 13-17.

⁴⁹ Ruben Edelstein ed. By Javier R. Garcia, Julie Edelstein-Best, and Denise Joseph, *A Life and History* (TX: Ruben and Berenice Edelstein, 2010) 1,2,9., Ben Edelstein, *Some Tales of Early Rio Grande Valley History with Memories of My Father, A Valley Pioneer* (TX: 2010) 40, 44.

⁵⁰ "Three Modern Edelstein's Stores Serve the Valley," *The Valley Morning Star*, Sunday October 31, 1937, 5.

and the physical location of the store, adding to the historical value of the U.S./ Mexico borderlands.

CHAPTER IV

THE BUSINESSMEN AND THEIR EXPERIENCE DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

As noted, this project examines the businesses of three merchants along the Rio Grande Valley from Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron counties. This chapter will introduce the lives of three businessmen important to the Rio Grande Valley. It will follow their lives, accomplishments, and give them a voice. It is important to recognize the character of these individuals to see a humanitarian aspect of them during the economic turmoil.

First on the list is business mogul, “King of Citrus,” and “Father of the Citrus Industry,” John H. Shary. Shary’s family migrated from Prague, Bohemia, now Czech Republic. Originally, the name was “Sary,” but it was Americanized to “Shary.” The family moved to Saline County, Nebraska, where Shary was born. His parents were, Robert Shary and Rose Wazob. In his family, John Shary was the youngest of four boys and one girl.⁵¹

As far as education goes, Shary finished high school and eventually entered college. While in high school, he picked up a job to bring in extra cash to help his family at a nearby drugstore, working after school and Saturdays. At the end of the week, the teenager would leave with \$1.50. Mr. Whittlesey, the drugstore owner, started Shary as a bottle washer, and, overtime, he was promoted to work on the counter or cash wrap. Experience meant a lot to Shary who saw

⁵¹ S. Zulema Silva Bewley, *The Legacy of John H. Shary: Promotion and Land Development* (Edinburg, TX: The University of Texas at Pan American Press, 2001), 41.

how productive his mentor was and he wanted to do the same; thus, he took and passed the Nebraska state pharmacy test, becoming a pharmacist at the young age of eighteen. He enrolled in Doane College in Crete, Nebraska for two brief years and then had to drop out to aid his family economically. Since Shary had a pharmaceutical background, he could legally practice medicine and joined in a partnership using the name Clayton and Shary. His business began to prosper and he was able to open another drugstore in Rocksport, Missouri. Unfortunately, the young entrepreneur could not keep both pharmacies running and had to sell his first store.⁵²

The entrepreneur took a sharp career turn in 1894 when he became a salesman for the Korbl brothers who owned a redwood lumber company in San Francisco, California. As a salesman, Shary's job allowed him to travel and he got to know the United States. It was through this opportunity that he came up with the idea of developing and selling land. In 1904, Shary completed his first effort at land development when he, along with some partners, purchased a ranch valued at \$30,000 and sold it for a profit of 1,000.00 pesos while still working in the lumber company.⁵³ He moved to a different company that came with a \$2,500 raise but quit these kinds of jobs to continue his dream of land development. The entrepreneur continued progressing as he helped develop land in the Texas towns of Corpus Christi and Robstown, eventually working his way down to the Rio Grande Valley.

Shary's first impression of the Rio Grande Valley in 1912 was not great. However, he, marveled at the fact that crops could be produced year-round. Grapefruit was the apple of his eye

⁵² S. Zulema Silva Bewley, *The Legacy of John H. Shary: Promotion and Land Development* (Edinburg, TX: The University of Texas at Pan American Press, 2001), 42, S. Zulema Silva Bewley, *John H. Shary and the Promotion and Development of Hidalgo County Land 1912-1930*, (Master's Thesis, University of Texas at Pan American, 2001) 48, Denise Kemp, *Historic Mission and Surrounding Areas*, 1995, 13 and Weldon Hart, Shary, John Harry, Texas State Historical Association, Handbook of Texas Online, webpage, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fsh08> Accessed July 11, 2016.

⁵³ S. Zulema Silva Bewley, *The Legacy of John H. Shary*, 42.

and when he saw how productive it could be, he bought 10,000 acres in the Pharr-San Juan area from Judge Brooks before leaving to Nebraska. The original lots sold *Como Pan Caliente*, or like hotcakes. Motivated by the outcome, the businessman bought 7,000 additional acres in 1913, where McAllen, Texas is today. Once again, he bought the strip of land on the west side of McAllen, now known as Sharyland. In 1915, the entrepreneur got straight to business. Out of the recent purchase of 16,000 acres, he used 360 acres to plant citrus, making it the Valley's first commercial citrus field. The entrepreneur managed his land by twenty-acre farm sections and roughly planted 15,000 acres of citrus. He continued to live the American capitalist dream and again purchased 17,000 more acres west of Sharyland and in 1922, another 16,000 North of Sharyland.⁵⁴ Shary understood the importance of business and took advantage of all the resources, creating the Shary Products Company in 1930 as an economic strategy. He bottled the juice of the grapefruits, that were not in prime state, naming the juice Rio Rey.⁵⁵

The business mogul chose to stay in Sharyland, building his famous home, "The Little White House" which was anything but little. His opulent home had a view of an artificial lake and all the commodities a person could want. This mansion is important, for it is a symbol of status and power of Anglo-American with ties to the Rio Grande Valley. Elaborate parties were held in the mansion to lure Anglo Americans into buying land and settling in the Valley. Some influential and notable figures stayed at Little White House, including William Jennings Bryan, who had a home in Mission, Texas and stayed during the cold months. Franklin D. Roosevelt's second term vice president John Nance Garner, stayed at the Little White House as well while he

⁵⁴ S. Zulema Silva-Bewley, *The Legacy of John H. Shary: Promotion and Land Development* (Edinburg: University of Texas Pan-American Press, 2001) 42- 43 and Weldon Hart, Shary, John Harry, Texas State Historical Association, Handbook of Texas Online, webpage, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fsh08> Accessed July 11, 2016, Denise Kemp, *Historic Mission and Surrounding Areas, 1995*, 13.

⁵⁵ Karen Gerhardt Fort, *Mission* (South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 88.

served as one of the directors of First State Bank in Mission, of which Shary was president, a more thorough analysis of the “Little White Mansion,” Another project the two collaborated on was the Intra Coastal Waterway Project into the Rio Grande Valley. Later, in 1953, former President Dwight D. Eisenhower was a guest as a result of the Falcon Dam dedication; however, this was under the Shivers, Shary’s daughter and son-in-law. Today, parts of Shary’s business office is located in the library of the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley-Edinburg Campus in the John H. Shary Room.⁵⁶ (See Appendix 3, 4, and 5).

Shary’s interest in other types of businesses were not limited to land development but also included political and civil involvement, some for which he did voluntarily without pay. For example, some of his activities included establishing the Sharyland school district, serving as editor of the Mission newspaper, board member or president of banks, Intercoastal Waterways, creator of Texas Citrus Exchange (TCX), and building the Yacht Club in Port Isabel.⁵⁷ In 1921, he set up a school district which he named after himself, Sharyland Independent School District, and served as school board president for eighteen years from 1921-1939. In his role as school board president, he was able to oversee the construction of the high school building in 1924.⁵⁸ Through heavy marketing and advertising campaigns, John H. Shary revolutionized the citrus, land developing, and water gate system, among other industries in the Rio Grande Valley.

A second entrepreneur who contributes to the thesis is Manuel Guerra. Guerra was one of the most prominent figures in the history of Roma, Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. His value is seen as he was among the most influential persons in the region and, unlike Shary, he was a local. Guerra’s story begins on December 1856 in Mier, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Guerra’s family

⁵⁶ Denise Kemp, *Historic Mission and Surrounding Areas*, 1995, 13, 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁸ Karen Gerhardt Fort, *Mission* (South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 84, 85.

ancestry comes from José Alejandro Guerra who had two *porciones* or land grants in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas which were not taken by Anglo Americans. He was privileged and went to primary school in Mier. After finishing his secondary education, he continued school at Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, at *El Colegio Civil De Monterrey* and focused on business in an effort to be trained as a merchant, a profession the family had practiced. Business management was not only the reason he went to school, but he also needed an education to understand and continue to defend the land his family owned from Anglos. In an opportunity to learn the merchant trade, Guerra moved to Corpus Christi, Texas. In Corpus Christi, Guerra gained firsthand experience at Geo F. Evans' mercantile business. Mr. Evans appreciated the young entrepreneur's passion for the field. Guerra later moved to Mexico serve at the *Guardia Civil* for two months and then commissioned architect, Heinrich Portcheller to build a Florentine Renaissance style store. In 1877, Guerra settled in Roma, Texas and married Virginia Cox. The home became M. Guerra & Sons Co. and was one of the most successful stores in Starr County.

He was also a philanthropist. For example, his good deeds include giving to Adolfo Duclos- Salinas in 1884 so that he could start a newspaper, but he lacked the necessary funds to do so. Duclos-Salinas spoke to Guerra who in no time wrote him a 1,000,000 pesos check to establish *El Espectador Mexicano* in Austin, Texas.⁵⁹ The entrepreneur was a influencer and respected and he knew people from all kinds of social statuses; at the time of his death, a total of sixty-nine people sent his family special telegraphs as remembrance and condolences of the great appreciation they had for the merchant. Like the Spanish proverb says *no era monedita de oro*, meaning he was not liked by everyone. Guerra was accused of sordid affairs such as murder,

⁵⁹ *Corona Funebre: Dedicada a honrar la amada memoria del hon. Manuel Guerra banquero, comerciante, ganadero, y agricultor.* (Kingsville: El Popular, 1915), 07.

having vast enemies, and being a corrupt politician, but these affairs are outside the scope of this study.⁶⁰

A third entrepreneur this thesis looks into is Morris Edelstein. The businessman was the owner of Edelstein's Furniture Store. His humble beginnings did not start in the United States. Originally, he was from Kalvaria, Lithuania, which was part of Russia at the time. He was born on February 14, 1889 and not much is known about the young life of Edelstein other than he grew up on a farm that cultivated wheat and potatoes. To avoid being dragged into the Russian army, the young boy's mother took him to Germany to be brought to Ellis Island, New York on the "Stattendam" ship on May 2, 1906. Edelstein learned his merchant trade skills after settling in Eagle Pass, Texas, at the young age of sixteen. He helped his brother Abraham as an itinerant salesman crossing between Eagle Pass and the Mexican border town, Piedras Negras, Coahuila. The young entrepreneur's luck seemed to change as a railroad conductor advised him to put his savings into the flourishing city of Brownsville, Texas. With the \$350.00 he saved from helping his brother, Edelstein moved to Brownsville in 1912. In his new town, Edelstein practiced his sales skills and continued his job as an itinerant salesman. Another service the businessman offered to supplement to his primary trade was the enlargement of photographs. He sent them to New York and got them enlarged. Once established economically, he acquired a horse and a wagon for \$65.00. After he paid his debt, he then rented a twenty-five-foot space on a downtown store front and started selling furniture in 1914. The success did not stop there; the businessman needed more room and took advantage of old United States customs building on the

⁶⁰ *Corona Funebre: Dedicada a honrar la amada memoria del hon. Manuel Guerra banquero, comerciante, ganadero, y agricultor.* (Kingsville: El Popular, 1915), 2,6,9,34-70., Jesus Perez, *Manuel Guerra and the Politics of Starr County, Texas 1880-1920*, (Master's Thesis, University of Texas at Pan American, 2014) 57., Evan Anders, *Guerra, Manuel*. Texas State Historical Association, The Handbook of Texas Online, webpage, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fgu14> accessed March 20, 2016.

corner of 13th and Elizabeth Street. He rented the space for \$500.00 later in 1914 and six years later acquired the building for \$18,000 on February 21, 1920.⁶¹ As business continued to expand, the entrepreneur bought a delivery wagon and had painted it yellow with the logo used to this day. These wagons were a staple of the city of Brownsville, as everybody knew them.

Something that all three of the entrepreneurs in this research had in common was they gave back to the community. Edelstein donated land to build a park in which children, especially the Mexican children could play as a token of his appreciation to the community that helped him flourish. Edelstein was such of good character, in another instance, Edelstein bought cloth from a company called Le France. Noticing they had made a mistake in the billing, Edelstein made the manager aware of the mistake. The manager denied that La France made a mistake and assured Edelstein there was no error. Edelstein persisted and again the manager replied “Look Mr. Edelstein, just send me a couple of more boxes of those Texas grapefruits that you send me for Christmas and we will call it even.” Months later, the manager realized Le France did in fact make a mistake by not billing Edelstein correctly and wrote to him assuring the businessman that he did not have to pay. Edelstein, being an honest man, paid Le France. As a result, he received whatever he wished for in the mill.⁶²

Another occurrence happened on late hours on October 17, 1915 as bandits from Mexico removed spikes from the train derailing it and all the train flipped except the passenger’s coach. The entrepreneur happened to be in the coach with other locals. The bandits began to question the passengers and if they spoke Spanish, they were left unharmed. The next man questioned was

⁶¹ Ruben Edelstein ed. By Javier R. Garcia, Julie Edelstein-Best, and Denise Joseph, *A Life and History* (TX: Ruben and Berenice Edelstein, 2010) 1,2,9., Ben Edelstein, *Some Tales of Early Rio Grande Valley History with Memories of My Father, A Valley Pioneer* (TX: 2010) 40, 44., and “Began Career in an Era When Bandits Held Up Railroad; Saved Life of A Traveler,” *Valley Morning Star*, Sunday May 15, 1955.

⁶² Ben Edelstein, *Some Tales of Early Rio Grande History*, 44.

a salesman. The young Edelstein intervened on the salesman defense, explaining to the bandits that he was German.⁶³ He was also a humorous man. In a playful manner, he always asked male customers about their family size. When the customers responded, he threw a curve ball with a follow up question “*Y por afuera? ¿Cuántos tiene?*” meaning how many outside of wedlock. The customers would reply, “*Don Moisés, Si yo tuviera su dinero, quién sabe cuántos más tuviera por afuera, pero yo soy pobre y apenas alcanzó, así como estoy. ¡Si quisiera, pero no se puede,*” in other words, “Oh! Mr. Morris, If I had your kind of money I would, but I am poor, would love to, but can’t.” In the Rio Grande Valley region, this was a lively way to connect to the culture, as it is an area dominated by a *Machista* culture and comments like these were often celebrated.⁶⁴ This is similar to what Alicia Dewey observed in her book, *Pesos and Dollars*, as the Jewish businesses established solid and daily interactions with Mexicans. Another case where this comradery could be seen is the interaction of Selig Deutschman and the Mexican locals. Deutschman, an attorney, had advised and assisted the Mexican community for years in bringing them forward and helping them with their legal questions. He loved the Mexican community so much, that he learned Spanish and established a lasting friendship with the community. When the attorney’s wife passed away, a Hispanic Catholic, he unbiasedly buried her in a family plot (a Jewish plot) in Agudas Achim Cemetary which as a result, caused a commotion among the Jewish community.⁶⁵

The chapter tells the story of three businessmen and their beginnings in mercantile field. John H. Shary, a Nebraska native who learned his merchant experience at a pharmacy and later

⁶³ Ruben Edelstein ed. By Javier R. Garcia, Julie Edelstein-Best, and Denise Joseph, *A Life and History* (TX: Ruben and Berenice Edelstein, 2010) 1.

⁶⁴ Ben Edelstein, *Some Tales of Early Rio Grande Valley History with Memories of My Father, A Valley Pioneer* (TX: 2010) 46.

⁶⁵ Alicia Dewey, *Pesos and Dollars*, 130.

moved his career path into retail at a lumberjack company, and then, later again, as a land developer. However, this was not the last job Shary would hold. As a modern renaissance man, he was involved in other affairs such as schoolboard president, bank president, citrus seller, and creator of Texas Citrus Exchange. Secondly, Manuel Guerra was a Mexican-American *Macho*, whose merchant training was acquired in Corpus Christi under Geo F. Evans. Guerra's beginnings were not hard; he was already considered elite even before his birth as his family belonged to the group of first individuals who settled the Rio Grande Valley through *porciones*, or land grants. Guerra was a character, the general public tended to love him or hate him. He expanded his influence into politics and was accused of being a corrupt politician, but above this, he still helped his community by giving credit in his store to the Roma School District and the Sisters of Mercy in Roma, Texas, discussed in the later chapters. Lastly, Morris Edelstein's story begins with him immigrating into the United States from Lithuania, Russia. He struggled not only making ends meet, but also had a language barrier. Edelstein's business knowledge came by helping his brother Abraham and by a stroke of luck came after as a railroad conductor advised him to invest in Brownsville. Morris' focus stayed in retail as he developed twelve other stores throughout the Valley. He was a sweet and humorous man, always helpful to the locals in need.

The section of the chapter will describe each individual's financial status during the Great Depression in the 1930s. It examines their larger financial situations, and how they dealt with the economic turmoil, detailing what each individual did to climb out of the Great Depression. This includes a discussion of the way John Shary had a "Social Stabilization Plan," Manuel Guerra's wife had to take reign of the business, and Morris Edelstein had to pay extra money and attention to marketing.

The Great Depression for The Businessmen

While at the national level, the public was going through difficult times, not all businessmen and entrepreneurs failed. On July 26, 1933, at 11:18 a.m., President Roosevelt sent a special request to John H. Shary in the Rio Grande Valley: "I have appointed you member advisory committee of four for your state under public works organization. I hope you can accept."⁶⁶ Shary was to be paid ten dollars per day and five dollars for traveling expenses. In his position as a member of the advisory committee, he was accompanied by Colonel Ike Ashburn from Houston, Texas, R. M. Kelly from Longview, Texas, S. A. Goeth from San Antonio, Texas, and Regional Advisor, Clifford Jones from Spur, Texas. It was a great honor to be among four other men appointed by the President. Close family members, friends, and other businessmen congratulated Shary. The congratulations came as far as Los Angeles and from high city officials such as the Houston Mayor, Oscar Holcombe, "Permit me to congratulate you on your appointment to the Texas Board of Division of Public Works...I think the government should be complimented on obtaining your services."⁶⁷ (See Appendix 8).

His job with the board was to look through project proposals, both locally and throughout the state. The project proposals included the building of new community structures or renewing buildings that needed work. The committee was to reject or approve such projects. Those

⁶⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt to John H. Shary, July 26, 1933, Western Union, Telegram, Folder: P.W Appointments and Recommendations 1933 [Public Works Administration-State Advisory Committee] #1, Box: John Series Collection Series 7: Personal Subseries 2: Political/Community/Clubs/Organization Folders 1-34, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and Franklin D. Roosevelt to John H. Shary, July 26, 1933, Correspondence, Folder: P.W Appointments and Recommendations 1933 [Public Works Administration-State Advisory Committee] #1, Box: John Series Collection Series 7: Personal Subseries 2: Political/Community/Clubs/Organization Folders 1-34, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

⁶⁷ Oscar Holcombe (Mayor of Houston) to John H. Shary, August 1, 1933, Correspondence, Folder: P.W Administration Congratulations 1933[Public Works Admin. Congratulations 1933 to Shary] #14, Box: John Series Collection Series 7: Personal Subseries 2: Political/Community/Clubs/Organization Folders 1-34, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

approved were to be forwarded to the Federal Administration of Public Works for funding. In charge of this group was the Regional Advisor, Clifford Jones. In his position, the regional advisor did not have veto power over the committee. Instead, he only served as a leader charged with keeping the momentum of projects going and aid in whatever help was necessary. As President Roosevelt's words to Shary were, "I believe that you will guard the public interest as carefully as you would protect your private interest" this was the reasoning for choosing Shary into the committee.⁶⁸ For example, On December 15, 1933, application 565 was approved for \$52,000 for the building of an auditorium in Harlingen, Texas. In another instance, on December 28, 1933, application 767 for La Feria, Texas was approved in the amount of \$24, 242 dollars for the improvement of their sewer system and a water tower.⁶⁹ (See Appendix 9 for a complete list). It is important to recognize the committee's projects to highlight the movement of the region where scholars have not fully or extensively researched and to promote significance on the area.

Shary also promoted his very own plan for "Social Stabilization." As a social activist during the Depression, he had three steps for the nation to climb out of the Depression. Shary stated, "First, the removal of the unemployed from the cities to the farms, by this means, increasing the percentage of employed people. Second, to increase the consumption of agricultural commodities. Third, financial relief to the overburdened farmer."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt to John H. Shary, July 26, 1933, Correspondence, Folder: P.W Appointments and Recommendations 1933 [Public Works Administration-State Advisory Committee] #1, Box: John Series Collection Series 7: Personal Subseries 2: Political/Community/Clubs/Organization Folders 1-34, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

⁶⁹ "Minutes of Meetings," December 15, 1933, Folder: PWA Minutes of Meetings [Public Works Administration; State Advisory Board Minutes of Meetings 1933-1934] #2 Box: John Series Collection Series 7: Personal Subseries 2: Political/Community/Clubs/Organization Folders 1-34, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and "Minutes of Meetings," December 28, 1933, Folder: PWA Minutes of Meetings [Public Works Administration; State Advisory Board Minutes of Meetings 1933-1934] #2 Box: John Series Collection Series 7: Personal Subseries 2: Political/Community/Clubs/Organization Folders 1-34, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

⁷⁰ John H. Shary, Oral History 00898 "Social Stabilization", January 23, 1933, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Shary identified the central problem to be the influx of population in cities and not enough concentration in farms. A reason for this, according to the entrepreneur, was that after World War I, four million boys returned to cities and not to farms. This new population confined to cities was problematic because absorbing the increased number of population, upset the peaceful government. He stated that consumption of food and agriculture products was reduced under the Great Depression, but Shary continued with a solution to fix things. In his speech, Shary explained that the United States would not have a grave problem if the return of the soldiers and population was evenly distributed among cities and farmland. There are also medical reasons why the government should decentralize the mass population. The method that he suggested was similar to the “back to the farm movement.” Shary criticized FDR’s superficial programs which only put men to work on improvement plans and did not thoroughly put an end to the issue. He also criticized machines and technology which undermined employment opportunities for many men. The program would work as follows: An indebted farmer would sell his farmland to other families. By doing this, the farmer would be relieved of debt and foreclosure and the government would be the one who would fund this project. He acknowledged his plan as radical, but also questioned the government by stating that if the government raised vast amounts of money through the selling of war bonds, the government should also support his plan. In this regard, the Depression could also be viewed as an economic war. The only difference was that, in the Great War, people died from gunfire, and during the Depression, they were killed by extreme poverty.

In the 1930s, there were numerous committees, bureaus, and boards, to address the crises to the point that the general public would be sick of the bureaucracy; still, it would be important to have a board. The board’s set of duties included surveying all unemployed people and

establishing the requirements for the eligible; of course, they should be American citizens. The board would also oversee appraising and selling farmlands. Furthermore, the Department of Agriculture should teach new farmers methods of instruction to survive their new trade. Shary did not forget about the government. In return, the farmer will repay the government a payment plan involving annual payments and interest. These payments would begin two years after original purchase date and would last for the following twenty years. According to Shary, his method was a “humanitarian step” to put an end to the Depression and put thousands of jobless and hungry men back to civilized life to “enjoy the rights and privileges guaranteed by our constitution.”⁷¹ He closed his speech by acknowledging that there may be flaws in the plan, but it is definitely a project to take forward.

In the worst period of the economic turmoil, the Depression’s unemployed rate rose to its highest point which was 25 percent, forcing the public to drastic measures. Many lost their homes and had to move to “Hooverilles” and, unfortunately, others had to make “Hoovers blankets,” which were blankets made from newspaper. Flour and feed sack companies had their bag packaging used to make clothing and dresses.⁷² And during this crisis, Shary’s power and influence was so immense, Roosevelt asked for him personally to join State Advisory Committee of Texas in the same 7th district of Louisiana and New Mexico. Shary, among four other individuals, chose projects to be funded by the PWA. While historians focus on metropolitan cities such as New York, NY, Chicago, Illinois, or Los Angeles, California, they often fail to look at the programs at the micro-level. The Rio Grande Valley is an important region because it is a critical zone between United States and Mexico borderlands, which is often left out of

⁷¹ John H. Shary, Oral History 00898 “Social Stabilization”, January 23, 1933, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

⁷² “Feedback Dresses,” Smithsonian: The National Museum of American History, webpage, http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1105750. Access: May 20, 2017.

research. It is an area talked about in present day, but very little research has been done about it. It is also important to mention the influence it had during the Depression with the business mogul running a project with great magnitude. A list of approved programs is attached (see appendix 9) to show that not only big player cities were receiving funding, but also the smaller underdog cities as well.

Shary was not only involved in one specific civic duty, but also had his own plan to bring the nation out of unemployment. He called his plan “Social Stabilization.” He explained that his plan was similar, but different than the “back-to-farm movement”. In his strategy, he planned to move all congested and populated cities to buy farmlands from indebted farmers. This was relieving the farmers from their economic burden. The next consequence of this was that the unemployed new farmer was going to be able to plant and sell, causing the agriculture business to flourish. The new farmer was to be taught how to farm and use farming tools. His or her responsibility to society and the government was that the new farmer was to pay the government a small fee for the next twenty years.⁷³ There is one particularly racist moment in his speech in which John Shary states that he only wanted American citizens to benefit from this opportunity. Excluded from his program would be immigrants, such as the Irish, Italians, Chinese, and Lebanese, to name a few. John Shary, who lived in the Rio Grande Valley, was fully aware of the number of Mexican immigrants living in the area and in the United States. He wanted to make this a humanitarian cause and it proved to be only humanitarian to a few, selected by race and nationality. During the 1930s, John Shary was a businessman and social activist representing the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and, at the same time, he came up with a plan to change the system in the United States and bring the nation out of unemployment.

⁷³ John H. Shary, Oral History 00898 “Social Stabilization”, January 23, 1933, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

The interest of Manuel Guerra would also be affected by the Great Depression. Guerra passed away in 1915 at the age of fifty-eight, leaving in question who would tend for his business from an extensive family. The last census he participated in before his death was in 1910. The census before that in 1900, showed his wife Virginia, first born son Horacio P. Guerra, born in 1883, followed by his other sons Federico Guerra in 1888, Gustavo Guerra in 1890, Reynaldo J. Guerra in 1894, Emilio J. Guerra in 1895, Julio Guerra born in 1896, and Fabian Guerra in 1900.⁷⁴ By the 1920s, all of his sons moved out of their home and only two sons stayed with their mother, Virginia. Reynaldo was in charge of bookkeeping for the store while Santiago worked as a clerk. Virginia, at the time, was doing general housework at home as was expected during times of prosperity.⁷⁵ This did not stay the same in the 1930s, she was listed as proprietor of the general store and her only son left residing with her, Santiago, listed as James, was the manager of the store. Perhaps as the rate of poverty went up, Virginia had no other choice but to start working. Although letters, advertisings, and all other mail was addressed to the boys, specifically to Horacio Guerra, the authoritative figure signing the bill of ladings, invoices, and receipts was Virginia in the 1930s. Virginia, although she had to step into the workforce, was very fortunate as historian Jean Reynolds explains there was a range and hierarchy upon Mexican American women in occupations. At the lowest point or in the bottom of the pyramid were the agricultural jobs, for example jobs in citrus, carrots, or onions. On the next tier were domestic workers or laundry occupations. Climbing up the social pyramid was women employed in sales or clerical positions, followed by typists or stenographers. On top of

⁷⁴ “1900 United States Federal Census for Manuel Guerra,” Year: 1900; Census Place: *Justice Precinct 2, Starr, Texas*; Roll: 1670; Page: 13A; Enumeration District: 0077; FHL microfilm: 1241670, Internet Accessed: May 15, 2017.

⁷⁵ “1920 United States Federal Census for Virginia C Guerra D,” Year: 1920; Census Place: *Justice Precinct 2, Starr, Texas*; Roll: T625_1847; Page: 18A; Enumeration District: 155; Internet Accessed: May 22, 2017.

the social hierarchy in regards to occupation and industry for Mexican American women, were business owners, like Virginia Guerra. Adding to this information is the fact that skin color also played a role in the social dynamics. For example, in a store, lighter Mexican women worked the counter and the sales floor while darker skinned women worked in the back receiving merchandise and processing shipment.⁷⁶

The Depression also affected workers. In the 1920s census, Fadrigue Barrera was listed as a servant living in the Guerra's household doing clerk work and ten years later, he was not listed as living in the household.⁷⁷ Newspapers reported a different story, though. They stated that after the death of Manuel Guerra in 1915, the matriarch, "Mrs. Guerra took up reigns of his large business and ranching business and had continued to hold them up until a few weeks before her death."⁷⁸

The store itself continued running. Ledger records show business continued with the only difference being that some items were paid using vouchers and extended credit reoccurred.⁷⁹ The store continued to place orders and stock up on business regardless of the financial crises. Manuel Guerra and Sons. was the most successful mercantile store in Roma, Texas, although sometimes they owed money to other distributors; like all businesses, even to this day, they tried to find ways to economize expenses. For example, the Broad Way Neck Wear Company in New

⁷⁶ Jean, Reynolds, "Mexican American Women in the 1930s' Phoenix: Coming of Age During the Great Depression," *Arizona Historical Society*, Volume 47. No3. (Autumn 2006). 223.

⁷⁷ "1920 United States Federal Census for Virginia C Guerra D," Year: 1920; Census Place: Justice Precinct 2, Starr, Texas; Roll: T625_1847; Page: 18A; Enumeration District: 155; Internet Accessed: May 22, 2017 and "1930 United States Federal Census for Virginia C. Guerra, Year: 1930; Census Place: Precinct 2, Starr, Texas; Roll: 2391; Page: 7A; Enumeration District: 0007; FHL microfilm: 2342125, Internet Accessed: May 22, 2017.

⁷⁸ "Pioneer Dies," *Valley Morning Star*, January 26, 1937, 142.

⁷⁹ Manuel Guerra Account Order Books 1924-1931- Box 10 of 29, All Folders, Manuel Guerra Collection, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

York City wrote on December 29, 1930 to Manuel Guerra and Sons asking them to pay \$2.07 of postage and insurance which other companies did not do.⁸⁰

Manuel Guerra had an extensive family and his passing led to the question as to who would run the store. Newspapers reported his wife Virginia took over the reins right after in the 1920s; however, other sources like census and mailings challenged this by acknowledging several sons like Horacio and James (Santiago) as the principal managers of the business. In the 1930s, this all changed as Virginia could no longer afford the housewife role and had to tend the store. As for the store, the magnitude and strength of the business allowed them to navigate through the Depression. Their daily transactions remained the same with the exception that customers were paying with vouchers and the store had issued credit. It is not to say the Guerra store did not owe or have any problems because invoices tell us, that in fact, they owed money to other companies. The influence of Manuel Guerra had could be seen in the 1930s as Manuel Guerra's name continued to be honored as project 327 was approved for 56,000 for a new high school in Roma, Texas. In honor of the businessman, the high school was named Manuel Guerra High school.⁸¹

During the Depression, difficult times were especially hard for merchants as they had to find creative ways to sell their items one way or another. Edelstein Furniture Store advertised household items at the reasonable low price of 25¢ down and 25¢ a week payment options. Among these items was particularly an 18-piece Japanese tea set valued at \$1.95 and these tea sets sold quickly. As he began buying them in 12 dozen sets, the shipper was amazed as these

⁸⁰ Manuel Guerra Account Order Books 1924-1931- Box 1 of 29, folder: Misc Correspondence a/b, Manuel Guerra Collection, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, Texas.

⁸¹ "Dedication of Starr County's New Public School Building, A 35,000 Structure at Roma Slated Friday," *Valley Morning Star* December 12, 1935, 3.

sets were selling quickly in an unknown place. The shipper jokingly responded “Mr. Edelstein, with the number of sets you have been selling, we would like to offer you the Brooklyn Bridge to buy.”⁸² Another item Morris Edelstein was selling extensively during the Depression was a childrens’ rocker. These homemade items were easy to make with simple woodcuts as well as fabric from the store. At \$1.95 asking price, customers could only access these rockers through credit payments of 25¢ down and 25¢ a week. When the 1930s hit, Edelstein tried to find more ways to increase sales. Morris asked a salesman to go to the *Colonias* and try to sell bedding to the public in the hopes that the customers would like the merchandise and buy it for the small price of \$39.95 with a dollar down. They could get a double deck coil Spring along with mattress protectors by company Valley best. In the first house, an older Hispanic lady told the salesman after listening to his pitch, “*Bueno, quiero que sepas que Moisés no da ni una chingada*”⁸³ meaning, “Well, I want you to know, that Morris doesn’t give a fuck.”

The Depression took a toll on the Edelstein family. In 1932, the entrepreneur filed for bankruptcy. As a result, he moved his family near to their ranch that was close to Hunt, Texas to alleviate the pain the turmoil had caused them and brainstorm ways to settle the problem. They eventually found a way to resolve the issue paying creditors 40¢ on the dollar.⁸⁴

The Great Depression came in unexpectedly and created a wave of instability across cities, the nation, and eventually the globe. It was like a human body where all organs are connected and the failure of one causes the failure of another. Businesses fell apart left and right. As a point of fact, President Hoover’s lack of action did not help. However, programs initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave hope and a new prosperity to the public. During these

⁸² Ruben Edelstein ed. By Javier R. Garcia, *A Life and History* (TX: Ruben and Berenice Edelstein, 2010) 46.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

difficult times, John H. Shary was asked to be part of a selected and prestigious committee where he pushed projects to Washington to be financed anywhere from building schools to upgrading older or damaged buildings. Both unfortunate and fortunately, Manuel Guerra's life was cut short fifteen years earlier prior to the Depression. As a result, in the 1920s, two of his sons took the reign of the business while his mother was relegated to the house as a homemaker with a servant. Things quickly changed in the 1930s as Virginia was running operations and being a hands-on working woman. Although the Guerra Store & Son Company was the most successful mercantile store in Roma, Texas, the Depression did hit them with mild challenges. When compared to Morris Edelstein's economic situation, the entrepreneurs' story differed vastly. Edelstein exhausted all efforts in any and every way to stay afloat and had creative ideas which, at times, backfired. Other times, Morris was successful selling the most unimaginable and random objects imagined. Yet, this was not enough to keep the entrepreneur afloat during the economic turmoil and he declared bankruptcy. He was an honest man and paid back creditors.

CHAPTER V

WHO ARE THE CUSTOMERS

Understanding customer's needs is important so that business owners can provide the adequate merchandise to sell, and be successful. The bulk of this chapter examines the type of customers with whom the businessmen under analysis interacted. It further analyzes the relationship each businessmen had with his clientele and investigates their racial, educational, class, and gender dynamics.

John H. Shary kept a special ledger book, custom-made, with his name right in the middle in gold letters. The cover of the book is what once was a tan colored corduroy material with the corners lined with red leather. The extravagance of the book suggest that Shary had expensive taste; significant, given, that this was the 1930s. The corduroy is now falling apart and the leather cracking, the gold letter is now a shade of black. As previously mentioned, Shary was a master at advertising. He used his resources to wine and dine the customers to the region. His ledger book reveals there was a total of 465 customers in the 1930s. Most of his customers came from midwestern states. Of the majority of his customers, a total of 156 came from Oklahoma, followed by 81 clients coming from Arkansas, Indiana, or Nebraska. However, he only sold to one client from a southern border state, Tennessee. It is also important to say out of the 465 customers, none were Mexican, Mexican-American, Latino, or African-American. This demonstrates that Shary sold to a racially homogenous clientele, midwestern whites.

When continuing to analyze the customers, a trend emerges of who he preferred to sell land to. If he just sold land to the general public throughout the United States, we would not see a pattern, just statistics. However, the data analyzed in fact shows a pattern. Out of the 465 total customers, unfortunately data was only available of 155 persons. One of the reasons for this was because, John H. Shary was not precise in his note taking in his ledger book. For example, his ledger book had a name recorded and the person had an address on file, but when looking through census records, neither the name of the person nor the address were found. When looking for “John Smith” from Kansas, there was no entry for him in Kansas, but thirty-five other John Smith’s appeared in the census for Texas. Another problem was his record annotation. Instead of writing “John Smith from 313 Magnolia St. in Kansas City, Kansas,” he would write “J.S from Kansas City, KS” and over 2,500 results turned up for this name. However, the data that was available showed a great amount of information, and connections.⁸⁵ (See Appendix 10).

He catered prominently to male rather than to female customers. Out of the 155 customers, there were 127 were males, but that does not mean he did not have female customers. There were twenty-seven women listed as customers either in conjunction with their husbands or listed alone. Some married women purchased items by themselves, such is the case of Edith Blaes, a thirty old married woman. Even though she did not have an occupation to pay what she had purchased, she was listed as the customer, and not her husband.⁸⁶ Age was just a number and Shary did not have a particular bias towards age. He sold to customers aged seventeen all the way to customers aged seventy-eight. The seventeen-year-old customer, Della E. Lodge. She was a servant to Raymond W. Eastman and his family of three. Census records show that this

⁸⁵ To create this map, I used a map customizer website, courtesy of <https://www.mapcustomizer.com/>.

⁸⁶ Customer Ledger: John H. Shary, 1926-1937, Box 16, John H. Shary Collection, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

teenage girl was from Oklahoma, she attended school, and knew how to read and write. The seventy-year old customer was James F. Statser. Statser was married to his wife, Mary, who was fifteen years younger than him. They lived with their daughter, Vera, who was twenty-eight. He was not employed, but in his occupation slot, he was listed as a farmer. Interestingly, it then scratched off signifying that he was previously a farmer. The average age for John Shary's buyers was forty-six.

Of particular interest to this research was the question of housing and how many customers actually owned their homes. Another factor was the hurdle for them to leave their homes in the North and come to the Rio Grande Valley during the 1930s. Home ownership provides some insight into the class dynamics of Shary's clientele. Unfortunately, data does not show whether they left their homes or not, but record census does show if they owned their home. There were 111 customers who owned their own home from means outside of the Rio Grande Valley. Thirty-five people rented and six were lodgers, and there is no data available for three customers. It would be easier for the renters and lodgers to attain land and start fresh in an area versus those customers who already had a home established elsewhere, especially during the Depression.

Shary primarily did business with customers who were professionals. This is another indicator of class. One of the occupations listed were doctors in various subfields of the medical profession. Doctors ranged from dentists, surgeons, to chiropractors. Albert E. Bonnebell Jr., for example, was a twenty-three-year-old single male dentist. He came from a family of educated individuals. His father was also a dentist. His two sisters were both teachers, along with his brother, who worked in the refineries. Eight other customers worked as salesmen of gas stations.

Other industries represented in the ledger records were railroad workers, groceries, and even a popcorn vendor who bought land from Shary during the 1930s.

Upton Umphenour was a fifty-nine-year-old man from Asher, Oklahoma who was married to Grace Umphenour, and they had a thirteen-year-old daughter. Ten years earlier, during the “Roaring Twenties,” Umphenour set up his popcorn cart in Bellingham, Washington. On May 11, 1924, his popcorn cart exploded as there was a problem with the pressure gauge. The malfunction caused steam to accumulate in the boiler, thus causing the explosion. His wife and daughter (who was three at the time) were next to the explosion and were seriously burned, requiring them be in the local hospital, St. Luke’s, for a week. This was not the only trouble Umphenour experienced. Three years later, he returned to his old business spot and found it had already been taken. He moved to a new spot where the “unofficial owner,” Louis Franks, and the landlord, Thomas Luther, took the problem to the City Council. The City Council dismissed the case and the police allowed Umphenour to stay. Both Franks and Luther filed a lawsuit against Umphenour and he ultimately moved his cart in front of the local library. Business was going well throughout the Depression, enough to allow him to buy land from Shary, as popcorn, apparently, fed the mouths of many. However, another tragedy happened as one Saturday on July 1934, someone stole from the cart four dollars’ worth of gum and candy which would be a significant loss during the Depression.⁸⁷

In addition to the popcorn vendor, there were eight other types of businesses that customers operated; and the type of businesses they owned were grocery stores, tin shops, cleaning, and drying and oil distribution. Overall, the type of customers John Shary had sold land to primarily were farmers. This could be because Shary himself was engaged to agriculture and

⁸⁷ Administration, “City’s Popcorn Sellers Were Elite Salesmen,” *BBJ- The Bellingham Business Journal*, Webpage, <http://bbjtoday.com/blog/citys-popcorn-sellers-were-elite-salesmen/733/> ,Accessed: September 8, 2017.

had a vast influence on them. He sold to a total of thirty-seven farmers with positions as a foreman farmer, farm managers, and general farmers. There were five lawyers and three engineers also listed among the list of occupations his customers practiced. Only two customers were listed as laborers or servants in a household. Other occupations included superintendent, baker, laundry man, rancher, barber, and bookkeeper.

Another fact worth mentioning is that a large population of Shary's customers were immigrants or had immigrant parents. The places of immigration were European countries such as the case of Germany, England, France, Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland. One of the initial questions during this part of the research was, did Shary choose only wealthy customers? The answer is no. Yes, there was a tendency towards customers who were better off financially because of their occupation, but Shary sold to customers he could relate to, had similar upbringing, or shared a similar socio-economic situation as himself. Although, he sold to doctors, engineers, and lawyers, he also sold to farmers, and also to one household servant and a feed and seed laborer.

Again, he did have a bias as he sold to majority of male customers, but his ledger consisted of 18% females. There was no age discrimination bias. The businessman sold across the board, the youngest customer was seventeen and the oldest was seventy-seven. Housing went hand-in-hand with occupation and a significant number, 111, of the customers owned a home, meaning they had some wealth. This was a double-edged sword as it was harder to leave everything behind and sell their homes during the economic turmoil. Thirty-five renters, six lodgers, and three of unknown status had more ease to just move to the Rio Grande Valley and make a living. Evidence showed that the majority of buyers were married and with families. There were fifteen singles, seven widowed, and three divorced. Generally, it was customers with

families being drawn the most to the idea of the Magic Valley, rather than bachelors and bachelorettes.⁸⁸ It is important to remind the reader that there were still many customers who were not found. The data provided was only from 155 out of 465 customers. Yet, the data showed consistency as far as following a specific trend. In conclusion, John Shary sold lots of land to customers whom shared a similar story as he did. There was only one area where we can see a bias and that was the fact that he did not sell to any other ethnicity except to Anglos. Out of the total 465 customers, 100% were Anglos of European ancestry. There were no African Americans, no Latinos, no Asians, and no Mexicans this critical given the area is predominantly Mexican.

While John Shary focused on selling land to elite whites during the 1930s, the Manuel Guerra store customer data reveals another story. Manuel Guerra's business is 180 degrees different compared from John H. Shary's. Rather than being operated bi-weekly or monthly, transactions in the store happened daily; in one case, two times a day by the same customer. Because of this, ledger records are extensive and thorough. Manuel Guerra had a vast amount of customers. Customers who frequently bought items were only seen once. To write about every single customer would require a book and not a thesis, so the parameters of the chosen consumers were frequent customers appearing in the ledger books in the 1930s.

Unlike John Shary, who was selective with his customers, the Manuel Guerra store abided by the "everyone welcome" motto. During the 1930s, they had at least 20 ledger books which recorded daily transactions, what the customers paid, which items they purchased, and their total. Not only did the Guerra store sell to the average customer of the area, but their business also sold to the school district, the city, the county, and the Sisters of Mercy from the

⁸⁸ Customer Ledger: John H. Shary, 1926-1937, Box 16, John H. Shary Collection, Edinburg Campus, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, Texas.

local church. This study looks at data from one hundred customers, not including the businesses and religious organizations mentioned above.

Despite the wide array of customers, gender was not as proportioned as one would envision. Ninety-four of the one hundred customers were male and only six were female. Regarding those six females, they were predominately white women and very few Mexican women. It is important to remember, that these women were not the only customers buying at the Manuel Guerra Store in the 1930s, but rather the customers described here are the ones with accessible information. For example, Molly, was a twenty-three-year-old during the Depression and both her and her husband, William Clary, bought items at the Guerra store. During the economic turmoil, she did not have formal education, but she was literate. During the census, she was pregnant with her first son, William Leland Clary Jr., who was born October 19, 1930 and she also had a second child, Martha Clary Dickens.⁸⁹

The second female shopper buying at the store was Lionila Reyna who was a twenty-six-year-old public school teacher and lived with her sister, Liboria Arce, and their mother Refugio, who was widowed. In the census, her brother, Pedro, was the head of the household working as a manager in a service station. Another teacher at a public school, Liocadia Zavaleta, was thirty-five when the 1930s census was taken. She was single, however, she had a son, Armando who was seventeen and he did odd jobs as a laborer. Bartolo Zavaleta was the head of the household and worked as a pipeline worker at the age of sixty-two. In the household also lived Liocadia's mother, Eufania, was a stay-at-home mom, as well as Maria, Liocadia's sister, and lastly, her nine-year-old brother Enrique. Ana Moraida, lived in a home with a large family. Moraida was

⁸⁹ "1930 United States Federal Census for William and Molly Clary," Year: 1930; Census Place: *Justice Precinct 2, Starr, Texas*; Roll: 2391; Page: 3A; Enumeration District: 0007; FHL microfilm: 2342125, Internet Accessed: September 7, 2017, and "William Leland Clary," Porter Loring Mortuaries, webpage, <http://porterloring.tributes.com/obituary/show/William-Leland-Clary-102530472>, Accessed: September 7, 2017.

also thirty-year-old school teacher and lived under the household of her father, Prisciliano, a widowed blacksmith. Moraida's family who lived in the household during the Great Depression included Eva, Noé, Prisciliano, Eulalio, José and Óscar. Extended family members were also in the household, her cousin Rosa Peña, Aunt María Peña, and other cousin, Josefina. Interestingly, in 1935, Moraida was hired by the city of Roma to work in the school dedicated to Manuel Guerra.⁹⁰ Public schools during the Depression had numerous obstacles, for starters, the community could not afford to pay taxes and as a result, the districts paid their teachers minimally and low wages. The teachers mentioned in the list of customers even challenged the norm as female teachers were usually laid off because of funding. Secondly, schools also had to shorten the school year and cut education programs. The school curriculum which Ana, Lionila, and Liocadia probably taught in their classes involved the three C's: character, culture, and citizenship. The three C's emphasized in students' culture with school and home life, it prepared students to be involved in a democratic society, taught them about conservation, and course, taught them about the banking system.⁹¹ The next female listed on the Manuel Guerra store records was Gladys Crow. Mrs. Crow was twenty-eight and did not have a job. Her husband, Dewey Crow, was a pumper at an oil well during the Great Depression.

The female customer who shopped alone in the Manuel Guerra store, during the Great Depression was Rafaela Treviño. At forty-four, she was the wife of Lino Treviño, a retail merchant operating a grocery store. Rafaela had a daughter, María, thirteen, two sons, Bruno, eleven, and Manuel Ángel, nine. The economic turmoil was not going to stop families in the Rio Grande Valley from being happy. Rafaela placed an ad in the local newspaper, *Valley Morning*

⁹⁰ "Teachers Assigned to Starr County Schools," *The Monitor*, Friday September 20, 1935, 2.

⁹¹ M. Elizabeth Bellows, Michelle Bauml, and Shary L Field, "Elementary Schools, Teaching, and Social Studies in Texas: Facing the Great Depression," *American Educational History Journal*, Volume 40. No 2. (November 2, 2013) pages 261 and 270.

Star announcing the marriage of her daughter, “Mrs. Rafaela Treviño announces the engagement of her daughter.”⁹² There are three things that stand out from this ad. In Mexican tradition, it is the father of the bride or both parents together who announce the engagement. Secondly, business for the Treviño was going well during the turmoil as they had money to purchase such an ad. And thirdly, and in connection with the first, Rafaela occupied the role of the matriarch for the family.⁹³ Even though marriage is a Mexican tradition, during the 1930s Mexican American women start thinking against the consensus. For one, they were influenced by great film actresses who were educated, refined, and traveled, they too wanted to go to college. Secondly, these women during the Great Depression wanted to give an education opportunity to their children and the decade was not the right time. Thirdly, the new sense of independence given to Mexican American women by working, rose second thoughts about marriage and family planning.⁹⁴

All different types of ages came to shop at the Guerra store with the youngest being 19 years old while the oldest was 75, and the average age of shoppers was forty-one years of age. The youngest customer of Manuel Guerra’s store during the Great Depression was nineteen-year old Flavio Olivares, who was working as a soda bottler in a soda factory. He also lived with an extensive family. His father, Rufino, was a forty-seven -year old laborer in road construction. His mother, Aurora, was a forty-six-year old housewife. Flavio’s brother, Reynaldo, was a seventeen- year-old working as a tailor in a tailor shop. Flavio’s brothers included Rufino Jr., Gilberto, Felicia, Guillermo, and Rogelio. This family stood out as they were the perfect portrait

⁹² “Rio Grande City Couple Will Wed,” *Valley Morning Star*, Sunday September 19, 1937, 29.

⁹³ “Rio Grande City Couple Will Wed,” *Valley Morning Star*, Sunday September 19, 1937, 29 and “Rio Grande City Couple Will Wed,” *The Monitor*, Sunday September 19, 1937, 39.

⁹⁴ Jean Reynolds, “Mexican American Women in the 1930s’ Phoenix: Coming of Age During the Great Depression,” *Arizona Historical Society*, Vol 47. No. 3 (Autumn 2006) 238.

of a traditional Mexican family; men worked, while women took care of the home and the children. However, even during the 1930s, when women often needed to find jobs and children had to work as well, they still maintained the Mexican family tradition. Like most Mexican families during the Depression in the Rio Grande Valley, Cayetano belonged to a large family. At seventy-nine, he was a proprietor of a cattle ranch. His oldest daughter, Francisca, forty-five, was not working. His eldest son, José, worked as a farmer, followed by his grandson, Fidel Zalazar, was a driller at a water well. Luisa Zalazar, Amalia, Federico, who also happened to be a farmer, Friarco, another farmer, and Edna, his great grand- daughter, three years old.

When analyzing the Guerra store customers, a question arose: what type of educational background did the customers have and were they literate. This was important given that there were many instances where Anglo Americans took their lands by having Mexicans sign faulty contracts all because they could not read. The entire one hundred percent of the customers analyzed showed they were not educated by attending a formal school, but when it came to literacy, only eleven were while, a high eighty-two people were not literate. Language was also a factor under examination. Some of the individuals did not have a language slot filled in the census and data was acquired only from forty-two individuals. In those forty- two, thirty-eight spoke Spanish and three were English speakers and interestingly, one individual spoke French. As far as occupation and industry, information acquired shows farmers that were Guerra and Sons Co. most prominent customers. Fifty-percent of the customers' data shows they were in the farming industry, followed by eight merchants, and six foremen in the farming industry, six laborers in different occupation. Other jobs listed were a Catholic priest, a bottler in soda bottling factory, an editor-in-chief for a newspaper, a café proprietor, and the president of a bank. As far as social status based on occupation, the store had a myriad of customers with different class

backgrounds. There were only two racial groups the Manuel Guerra store catered to in the 1930s, Mexican and Anglos. The white population was a minority with thirty- six of the customers and a large sixty-four of customers Mexican. Another question proposed was the birthplace of the individuals. A large number were born in Texas, sixty-three individuals, thirty-one in Mexico, one in France, and another individual was born in Massachusetts, making the customers of Mexican descent the largest representation.⁹⁵

Overall, rather than being a business only catering to customers biweekly or monthly, the store operated hourly and daily and customers came in and out frequently. The store itself did not target a specific group of individuals as it accepted anybody and everybody. There were, however, more males than females buying at his store, ranging from ages 19-75, and the average of these individuals ages was forty-one years of age. None of them went to formal school, but eighty-nine were literate. They predominantly spoke Spanish and were Mexican, Anglos were the minority race at thirty-six of customers. Again, the customers were mainly born in Texas, then next Mexico. There was only a person from France and the other individual born in Massachusetts.

Unfortunately, this part of the available data is incomplete and missing. There is a rich collection of sources recently donated to the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley campus, where there are ledgers to analyze in reference to Morris Edelstein and his customers, yet, at this moment, it is being processed (meaning sources are not yet available for the public to see at the time.) If this part of the project turns into a dissertation, I can analyze the sources in regards to the customers of the Edelstein store.

⁹⁵ Manuel Guerra Account Order Books 1924-1931- Box 10 of 29, All Folders, Manuel Guerra Collection, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, Texas.

ADVERTISINGS

In lieu of information of customers for Morris Edelstein, this project will look specifically at advertisings. Advertisings can provide details on customer's lives, such as how they were being influenced to buy and what products were marketed to them. By the same token, ads help stores push certain products to sell. This section will include and examine who had the biggest and most complex advertising campaigns, which items were being sold, and who the ads were targeting in regards to age and sex among all the businessmen, specifically Morris Edelstein.

There is another gap in the literature, as there are no available ads for Manuel Guerra Store, so going through his ledger records was the next best option. Data shows what he was selling and comparing prices to other stores in the area. The Manuel Guerra store was the average *tiendita*, or corner store. It had set prices, but customers could barter. Even though it was the most successful store in Roma, the Guerra Store still had competition across the Rio Grande Valley. His ledger records described the average purchases, such as a liter of lard at \$3.84, coffee at \$1.00, or one pair of pants at \$1.50. ⁹⁶ (see Appendix 11).

The Piggly Wiggly was one of the its competitors and it had twelve stores throughout the Valley. The Piggly Wiggly differed from the Guerra Store, as it was a retail store rather than a *tiendita* or corner store, where bartering for prices occurred. However, they were still in competition. At the Piggly Wiggly, coffee was sold by brands. For example, Wonder Coffee was marked at .23¢, Maxwell House Coffee per pound was .28¢, and Redbull Coffee was .10¢ per

⁹⁶ Manuel Guerra Account Order Books 1924-1931- Box 10 of 29, All Folders, Manuel Guerra Collection, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, Texas.

pound.⁹⁷ Jitney-Jungle, another, price set store, sold coffee for sale at .10¢ per pound. ⁹⁸ A third store in competition with the Manuel Guerra store in Roma was City Cash Grocery Store. Coffee was .13¢ a pound. What stands out from this store is the fact that it was located in Brownsville, and was owned by J.R. Guerra, a relative to the Guerra family, making it almost a monopoly in the mercantile business by the Guerra family.

When looking at the physical part of the advertisements, several things seemed to stand out from both the economic and gender perspective, Manuel Guerra and Sons. store did not have advertisements meaning the family was struggling during the Depression, this was also contradicting since City Cash Grocery Store had advertising. It could be that J.R Guerra's store was doing slightly better economically during the 1930s versus his late father's store. Second, the two ads from the newspapers of the Rio Grande Valley area had gender and economic implications. Ads for Jitney Jungle highlighted exposed working women shopping in their aprons in a slightly hunched position, targeting working and lower class women who were in need of buying groceries. The Piggly Wiggly had three women shopping at the same aisle signifying their stores were always busy and business was good. The women were dressed with blazers and mink fur coats, their hair properly adorned with hats and their outfit was layered with soft gloves. Their slogan read, "The pantry of the thrifty housewife where she personally selects her foods" meaning even throughout the Depression, a woman could still shop for her foods and the ad suggested it was as buying something expensive.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ "Piggly-Wiggly Ad," *The Brownsville Herald*, Aug. 5, 1932, 3.

⁹⁸ "Jitney- Jungle Ad," *The Brownsville Herald*. Aug 5, 1932, 10.

⁹⁹ "City Cash Grocery," *The Brownsville Herald*, August 5, 1932, Pg. 5., "Piggly-Wiggly Ad," *The Brownsville Herald*, Aug. 5, 1932, Pg 3., and "Jitney- Jungle Ad," *The Brownsville Herald*. Aug 5, 1932, 10.

Gigantic, massive, colossal, were the sizes of ads which Morris Edelstein purchased from the newspaper on October 31, 1937 because he needed to find creative ways to expose his merchandise; *The Valley Morning Star* printed three pages dedicated to Morris Edelstein. He began his business in 1912 and that year marked his twenty-fifth anniversary sale. The first ad page announced the “Quarter of the Century Sale” and featured a letter to the customers on how carefully Edelstein prepared for the great event. Further, he placed his personal signature on the ad and included in the invitation that there will be cake for the birthday event. The next page could be broken into fourths. Half of the page advertised spring mattresses and studio couches. During the Great Depression, a Simmons Beauty Rest mattress would only cost \$39.50, while the studio couches ran from \$49.50 to \$74.50. The quarter sale aimed to have these products sell quicker by applying “special terms” on the items above. The other one fourth of the page was focused on the businessman, his humble beginnings, and how he “built a single shop to [a] big chain.” The last one fourth of the page was a congratulations section from his employees. Even though other sources tell us he went bankrupt, he still was able to give opportunity to the people across the Rio Grande Valley in the middle of the Great Depression by employing seventy-six associates throughout his stores. The last and final page on this advertising campaign could be divided into thirds. One third of the ad which in fact was gendered and aimed towards women which featured a white woman in an A-line dress and a fashion trench coat. The ad urged women to “Bring along your man tomorrow and let him discover these anniversary values.” Next to her is a sharp-dressed man in a suit donning a fedora hat, all this luxurious style symbolized wealth. One can deconstruct the meaning of the advertising that, if you buy any of the rugs, that were advertised, you can look like the “power couple.” A second message in relation to gender revealed in the ad was the idea that women needed men to buy rugs and furniture as they were

the breadwinners and had the means to do so. The other one third belonged to showcasing the original “Three modern Edelstein’s stores [to] serve the Valley.” The stores described here are the businessman’s most lucrative stores. The first store was the original Edelstein’s furniture store at the corner of 13th and Elizabeth street in Brownsville, Texas. His second store presented was located in 207 W. Jackson in Harlingen, Texas; in 1927, it was turned into the main branch. Lastly, was the 120 South Broadway store in McAllen, Texas built in 1923. The purpose of showcasing their most successful store is to show the public how fruitful his business has been throughout its history and give the public assurance that they could trust his business through the midst of the Depression.¹⁰⁰

This chapter focused customer demographics as well as marketing strategies. The customer base buying from John Shary were predominantly Anglo males from midwestern states. They were mostly second generation American farmers whose parents came from Europe. Manuel Guerra’s customers were predominantly Mexican with a few Anglos who were mainly male farmers, but Manuel Guerra Store also sold to Roma high school, nuns, and other businesses. Unfortunately, for Morris Edelstein, his ledger records are still being processed at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. As far as advertising, Edelstein had three pages across newspapers throughout different Sundays during the economic crises which meant that he had to pay a high amount of money in advertising to bring attention to his business. Additionally, while some historians consider John Shary as the father of advertising, Edelstein was “King of Marketing” as his creative ways of marketing were original and imaginative.

¹⁰⁰ “Edelstein’s Better Furniture Anniversary Sale,” *Valley Morning Star*, Sunday October 31, 1937, 3,4,5.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In 2016, an average of nineteen million Americans suffered from depression. The symptoms include hopelessness, energy loss, low self-esteem, physical pain, and changes in patterns of sleep and eating.¹⁰¹ This disparity was also felt by the American public in the 1930s after the stock market crashed. In fact, the media was highlighting stories that suggested that life in the 1930s was a tainted black and depression was a real sickness. According to Dr. John P. Koehler, a doctor from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in October 1931 alone, sixteen Americans committed suicide, with a hundred more trying and failing. His medical opinion was for the general public to be cheerful and make smart economic moves. He suggested that the public pay their bills on time, but not to worry, because worrying would not pay them. He further said if the general public did not have new outfits, it would be okay. He also suggested for them to look at Mohandas K. Gandhi and the way he had very few belongings. He continued by stating that if someone lost their car, it is fine as they can avoid being in a car crash. The doctor continued his advice by stating a person should not be embarrassed to reach for relief and assistance as it is the same as those who get free schooling, go to the library, or use other public services for free. Ultimately, the things that truly matter are friends, love, health, and beauty of nature, which do

¹⁰¹ Susan A. Randolph, "Depression", *Sage Journals*, (April 6, 2016) 180.

not require money. The smiling doctor recommended for people in the 1930s to have an optimistic vision instead of focusing on the economic environment.¹⁰²

Financial analyst and entrepreneur, Roger W. Babson went further still by comparing the 1930s Depression to pneumonia. He stated that a pneumonia patient's health declines drastically to almost near death, then rapidly gets better. By the same token, writing in 1931, he believed that businesses were not ready to jump out of bed rather, "business and financial lungs are still congested with frozen bank loans...but the contestation is being broken up by stringent measures like the banker's pool, the Hoover-Laval Conferences... and better tone of wheat, cotton."¹⁰³ Little did he know, the Depression would only get worse and last longer.

Resources dwindled quickly and the population was too embarrassed to ask for assistance. However, when Americans overcame their sense of pride, they joined the long breadlines. In his New Deal, President Franklin Roosevelt created a plethora of programs, sometimes known as the "alphabet soup," or the "alphabet agencies the president created like the FDIC, FHA, or the TVA. During this time, the population of the Rio Grande Valley was coming to work again with the help of these implemented programs. In comparison, just as scholars of the era highlight the Depression in the United States much like an economic illness making the population sick, this was the case for the Rio Grande Valley during the Great Depression. it was an illness, but not as strong as pneumonia, like the scholar's quote, rather more like chicken pox. Signs of chicken pox include fever, loss of appetite, headache, tiredness, and bumps. These symptoms were sporadically along the Rio Grande Valley.

¹⁰² "Sees Depression Causing Suicides," *The Post-Crescent*, November 7, 1931, 20.

¹⁰³ Roger W. Bason, "Crises in Depression Past, But Still Confined to Bed", *The News-Herald*, November 6, 1931, 13.

This essay was arranged from macro to micro history and divided thematically and chronologically. The historiography and review of literature analysis prominent books on the subject such as Alicia Dewey's *Pesos and Dollars* and Linda English's *By All Accounts*. These two books, in essence, are the only two major historic books which cover business history of general stores in Texas and regionally in the Rio Grande Valley. Thus, the gap of research brings this project forward as it provides an analysis of the 1930s Great Depression in the Rio Grande Valley with a focus in local stores and businesses. This project then moved to its second chapter. The first section of this chapter, examined the Great Depression at a macro level in the United States. It explained how the stock market crash initiated the Depression and the response and efforts president Hoover and Roosevelt did to end the economic turmoil. The section then investigated an overview of the history of the cities and the physical location of the stores where the entrepreneurs conducted their business. This section laid a foundation and introduction to a regional history of the Rio Grande Valley. The bulk of this research is the introduction of the three businessmen: John H. Shary, Manuel Guerra, and Morris Edelstein. This micro-analysis chapter highlights the experiences each man had during the Great Depression and is a reflection of what the Rio Grande Valley was going through during the economic turmoil. The last chapter, *Who Are the Customers*, explored the customers through a race, gender, and class scope.

In conclusion, John Shary's business continued to stay the same as the previous decade. He was well connected as he was asked he was asked by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to serve in the Public Works Administration in the State Advisory Committee. He also shared his plan for "Social Stabilization."¹⁰⁴ The Manuel Guerra store had been hit by the Depression as his widow, Virginia Cox Guerra, transitioned from being a house wife to having to run the

¹⁰⁴ John H. Shary, Oral History 00898 "Social Stabilization", January 23, 1933, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Manuel Guerra Store. The Manuel Guerra Store was stretching every dollar possible and they did not have advertisements suggesting they there was not enough money to advertise and the Guerra store was also extending credit to customers to make a sale. In Morris Edelstein' case, the Great Depression affected him by going bankrupt.

In this regard, the Great Depression affected the Valley differently. Valley native Cosme Cásarez Muñoz explains that in the years before the Depression, there existed an abundance of money flowing among people. In five working days, he and his brother earned one hundred dollars, and Munoz details how he remembers those years. It was difficult for the working class and everybody to sustain life. Workers got paid rather low and, at times, there was no money to pay them. Months would pass before finding any job that would pay minimally 50¢ or 60¢ a day. The effect is clearly seen as 1922 as prices for beef were thirty to 35¢ per pound, whereas during the depression, beef cost 4¢ per pound. The price of soda before the crisis ranged at 5¢ and, after the economic crisis, it cost 3¢. A pint of milk during Depression was valued at 3¢ and 6¢ per quart. Finally, restaurants sold a simple coffee and *pan dulce* meal for 5¢ during the Depression.¹⁰⁵ Depression times in the Rio Grande Valley were felt by Mission residents at all socio-economic levels. Eddie Clarence remembers finishing Mission High School and joining Texas A&M to become an engineer. However, he would only last one year at the University because there was not enough money for him to continue. He came back to the Valley to help his family out and the first job he took was in his words, “Rough necking at a water well machine”¹⁰⁶ digging water wells throughout the country.

¹⁰⁵ Cosme Cásarez Muñoz , interviewed by Leticia Miroslava Gamboa, Oral History 00654, Rio Grande Oral Histories, The University of Texas at Pan- American, 1987, Webpage, <http://cdm16775.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16775coll1/id/271/rec/1>, Accessed: March 12, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Eddie Clearance, Oral Interview 00458, March 8, 1990, University of Texas- Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, Campus.

Pertaining to John Shary, he was asked by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to serve in the Public Works Administration in the State Advisory Committee. The economic situation was very much heated and swollen that aside from this civic duty, the entrepreneur had his own plan of “Social Stabilization” where he had a three-step system to climb out of the Depression: to move employment from the cities to the farm, to increase agriculture consumption, and consequently, aiding farmers financially.¹⁰⁷ In this stage, the Manuel Guerra Store was stretching every dollar possible. They did not have advertisements suggesting they there was not enough money to advertise and the Guerra store was also extending credit to customers to make a sale, while Morris Edelstein went bankrupt during the heated year or bumps of the Depression. Vaccination against the pox happened and it was World War II.

Franklin D. Roosevelt came into office with a new approach and mentality. Unlike Hoover, Roosevelt, along with the help of Congress, passed a set of beneficial programs from 1933 through 1938 to aid public relief and create a plethora of jobs across the United States to minimize unemployment. Roosevelt also began to give money to small communities so they can employ and put people to work. Everybody was working from *ancianos*, (elderly) to young people. Types of work included building parks, cleaning lots, and canals. With the rise of employment, there was also a rise in wages where workers’ pay climbed from 10¢ to 35¢ under Roosevelt’s New Deal.¹⁰⁸ As for food aids, the government gave the people a vast amount of supplies and food such as bacon, ham, flour, and soap, under shipment crews. Little boys received marbles and toy tops, and girls received *muñequitas*, or dolls.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ John H. Shary, Oral History 00898 “Social Stabilization”, January 23, 1933, Edinburg Campus, Special Collections and University Archives, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

¹⁰⁸ Cosme Casarez Munoz, interviewed by Leticia Miroslava Gamboa, Texas, 1987.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

As previously mentioned, the Depression in the Rio Grande Valley was harsh, but not as harsh as what the United States experienced more broadly. People in the Rio Grande Valley tried to continue a normal life. An example of this could be seen in an ad where the Valley Tourist Committee was continuing to have their socials despite the Depression. The ad invited winter visitors or now known as Winter Texans, and all Valley tourists to the local McColl clubhouse where music by Peg Longon's orchestra would be playing, the gathering was to endorse "plans to organize a Valley tourist' forum and arrange for semi-weekly social gatherings."¹¹⁰ In Harlingen, Texas, neighbor city of Brownsville, where Morris Edelstein had his primary business, Mayor Hugh Ramsey published a public service announcement. He advised for the city to have their dogs vaccinated, registered, and to have vacant lots cleaned in an effort to keep the city clean from mosquitos and avoid madness in dogs. This was to point out that the sickness of the Depression was not so harsh that the general public could think of the health of pets. However, this does not necessarily mean the public had enough money to think of their pets, but the idea of being able to provide for them was surfacing.¹¹¹ In closing, this suggests, that the Rio Grande Valley was better off during the Great Depression than the broader United States, through the investigation of three Rio Grande businessmen who were affected by the economic downturn.

¹¹⁰ "Attention, Valley Tourist," *McAllen Daily Press*. 1 Jan 1933.

¹¹¹ "Dog Owners Warned to Vaccinate Their Pets," *Rio Grande Daily Farmer*, July 2, 1937.

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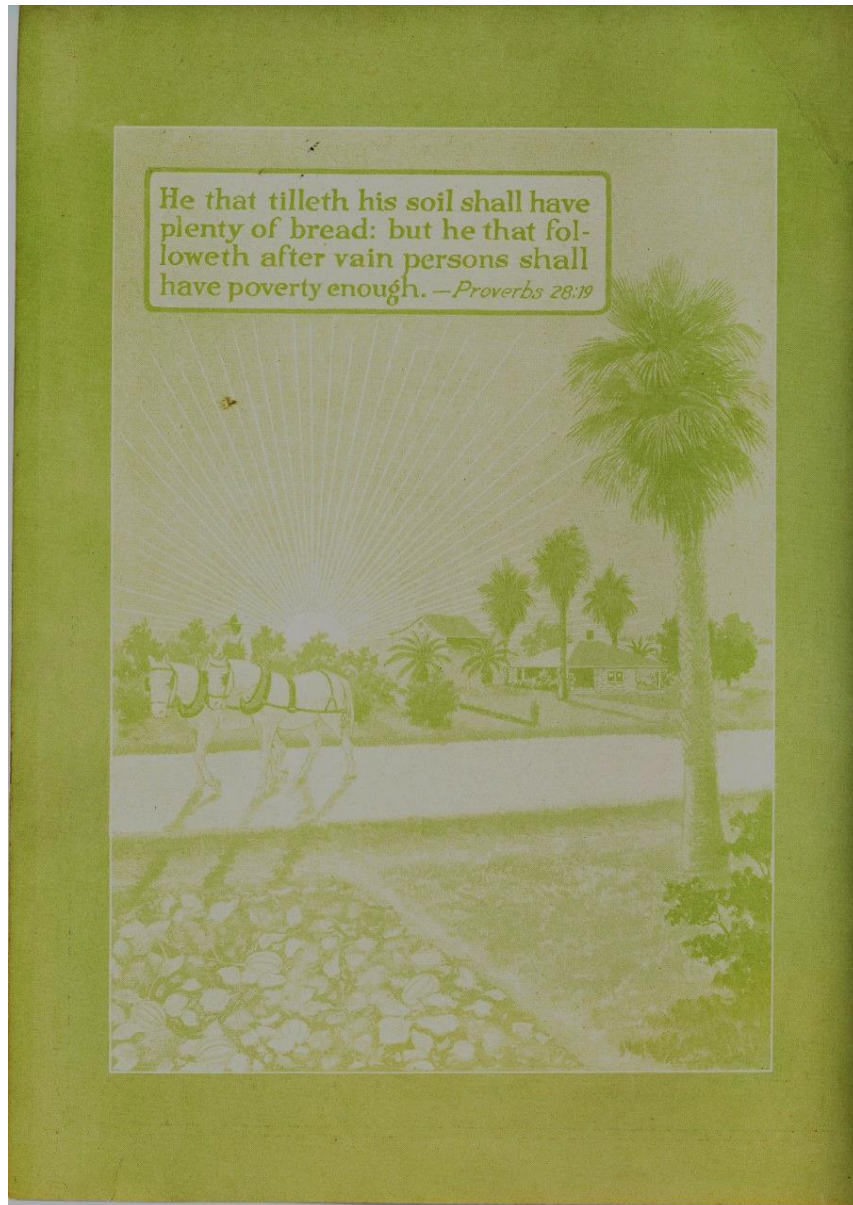
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APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1

THE GULF COAST COUNTRY 1922. PROMOTIONAL ADVERTISING.



APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2

JOHN H. SHARY EXCURSION. MAY 18, 1915.



APPENDIX 3

APPENDIX 3

ORIGINAL FURNITURE OF JOHN H. SHARY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-RIO

GRANDE VALLEY



APPENDIX 4

APPENDIX 4

PANORAMIC PHOTOGRAPH OF JOHN SHARY OFFICE



APPENDIX 5

APPENDIX 5

ENTRANCE INTO THE JOHN H. SHARY OFFICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-RIO
GRANDE VALLEY



APPENDIX 6

APPENDIX 6

JOHN H. SHARY HOME PHOTOGRAPH #1. LITTLE WHITE HOUSE.



APPENDIX 7

APPENDIX 7

ORIGINAL EDELSTEIN HOME IN BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS.



APPENDIX 8

APPENDIX 8

OSCAR HOLCOMBE MAYOR OF HOUSTON TO JOHN H. SHARY

OSCAR HOLCOMBE
MAYOR
CITY OF HOUSTON, TEXAS

August 1, 1933

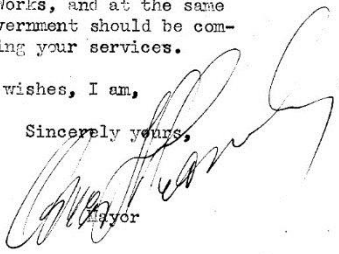
Mr. J. W. Shary,
Mission, Texas.

My dear John:

Permit me to congratulate you on your appointment to the Texas Board of the Division of Public Works, and at the same time I think the Government should be complimented on obtaining your services.

With best wishes, I am,

Sincerely yours,



Oscar Holcombe

Mayor

lh

APPENDIX 9

APPENDIX 9

LIST OF PROJECTS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY.

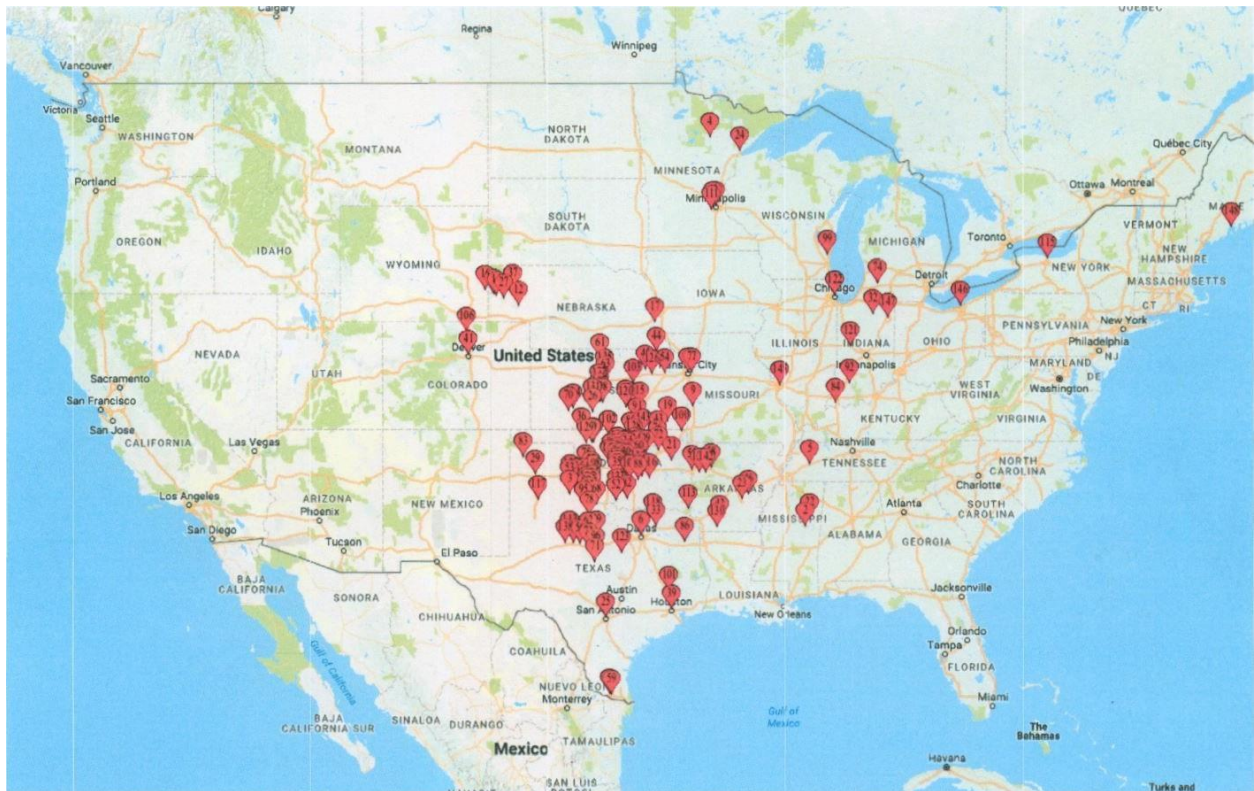
PROJECT #	APPLICANT	DESCRIPTION
	Port Isabel	Waterworks and Sewage System
6	McAllen	Abattoir
13A	Donna I.D No. #1	Canal Improvements
27	Hidalgo C.W C.and I.D No. #6	Canal
36	Hidalgo County Water Control Dist. No. #6	Canal Improvements
38	Hidalgo	Drainage
37 and 37A	Edinburg	Sewer System
74	Cameron County	Irrigation
86	Rio Grande City	Water control
87	Brownsville	Water improvement district #8
95	Weslaco	Sanitary Sewer System
117	Port Isabel	Municipal Auditorium
149	Harlingen	Municipal Recreational Center
183	Cameron	Sewer Improvement
185	Cameron	Sewer system
230	McAllen	Municipal Market
231	McAllen	Municipal Irrigation System
300	Brownsville	Bldg. and Lt. Plant Rep
306	Mercedes	Repairs and City Sewers
317	Mercedes	Municipal Market
327	Roma	Roma School Building
328	Starr County / Rio Grande City	Courthouse
359	Mercedes	Repairing storm damage to city hall
363	San Benito	Woman's Club
431	Brownsville	Repair Pump pit
465	Cameron School Dist.	Stadium and Auditorium
500	City of Donna	Waterworks Improvements
501	City of Donna	Storm Sewers
503	City of San Benito	Store damage building repairs
505	La Joya	Repair street dam schools
509	County of Zapata	Courthouse building
525	Hidalgo County Water Control and Improvement	Irrigation Improvement

545	Cameron County Emergency Relief Corp	Financing Relief Work
560	Harlingen District	Building
565	Harlingen	Auditorium
569	Edinburg	Hospital Repairs
574	Mission United Irrigation Company	Irrigation Improvements
601	San Benito	Building Repairs
602	Olmito	School building repairs
603	Santa Rosa Independent School District	Repairs to storm damage buildings
604	El Jardin Independent School District	Repairs to storm damage buildings
605	Los Fresnos	School building repairs
607	Brownsville	School building repairs
615	San Benito Independent School District	Repairs to storm damage buildings
646	Port Isabel	Water
647	Port Isabel	Sewers
689	Cameron County School District #15	Building Repairs
698	City of Elsa	Street Paving
705	Brownsville Navigation District	Ship Channel and Terminal
706	Rio Hondo Ind. School District	Building Repairs
708	Rio Hondo School	Repairs to building
709	Raymondville Irrigation District #1	Irrigation
747	City of Alamo	Filtration Pit
767	City of La Feria	Rehab Sanitation Sewer System
776	Mission	Library
832	Edcouch Elsa	Construction of High school

APPENDIX 10

APPENDIX 10

MAP OF ORIGINS OF JOHN H. SHARY CUSTOMERS.



APPENDIX 11

APPENDIX 11

EXAMPLE OF MANUEL GUERRA AND SONS CO. LEDGER RECORD.

1 Lt. of Lard	\$3.84
Coffee	\$1.00
1 Box of Cigarettes	\$.15¢
1 Loaf of Bread	\$.10¢
1 Pair of Pants	\$1.50
Butter	\$.38¢
Soap	\$.25¢
Potatoes	\$.25¢

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Karla A. Lira was born in Reynosa, Mexico. She migrated to Hidalgo, Texas for an education opportunity. She finished an Associate's degree in History at South Texas College as well as a Bachelors of Arts and Master of Arts in History at University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Lira would like to further her career with a Ph.D. in history. Throughout this time, Miss Lira found it important to serve God and has dedicated her time feeding the poor. A fashion enthusiast, she finds her time herself every weekend styling customers at Express. She currently resides in 2303 Datil St. Hidalgo, Texas, 78557 and lives with her parents Roberto Camacho and Julieta Lira along with her siblings, Kristopher and Karen Camacho and her three dogs Nala, Oliver, and her favorite, Max.

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